

MARY OF MAGDALA: FIRST APOSTLE?

Andrea Taschl-Erber

Mary of Magdala is one of the followers of Jesus mentioned most often in the Gospels. However, a history of interpretation determined by androcentric mechanisms and patriarchal projections obscured the significance of this prominent disciple and prophetic apostle. Thus, it is necessary to liberate her specific literary as well as historical role from the shadows of reception history.¹

The literary portrait of a narrative character is in general always to be understood as a narrative construct on the basis of which a historical profile of the person identified by name cannot be drawn immediately, as if it were a mirror image. Nevertheless, in order to be able to derive historical information while exercising every methodical caution, what is particularly necessary is a critical reflection upon the ideological horizon of the respective narra-

1. Regarding the theses summarized in this article, I refer to Andrea Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala—Erste Apostolin? Joh 20,1–18: Tradition und Relecture*, HBS 51 (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2007). A more detailed discussion of the literature than can be offered in this context is to be found there. Several recent monographs and collections include Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority*, HTS 51 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Esther A. de Boer, *The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene*, JSNTSup 260 (London: T&T Clark, 2004); Isabel Gómez-Acebo, ed., *María Magdalena: De apóstol a prostituta y amante* (Bilbao: Desclée, 2007); Holly E. Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004); Erika Mohri, *Maria Magdalena: Frauenbilder in Evangelientexten des 1. bis 3. Jahrhunderts*, MThSt 63 (Marburg: Elwert, 2000); Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus*, trans. Paul Burns (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994); Susanne Ruschmann, *Maria von Magdala im Johannesevangelium: Jüngerin, Zeugin, Lebensbotin*, NTabh 40 (Munster: Aschendorff, 2002); Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002); adapted for a broader circle of readers is the study by Jane Schaberg and Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre, *Mary Magdalene Understood* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

tive world and its androcentric dynamics in accord with the principles of a “hermeneutics of suspicion.” So the varying accents in the differing presentations of the female disciple are to be questioned in regard to their respective sociocultural contexts and in regard to hidden ideological interests.

In the present article, after (1) an investigation of the conspicuous form of the name of “the Magdalene” and an overview of the contexts in which her name is mentioned, the focus is directed (2) toward her role in the pre-Easter Jesus movement and (3) as a witness to the passion. The shifts Luke undertakes over and against Mark 15:40–41 receive special attention since they brought forth consequences in the later image of Mary of Magdala. But, in so far as her outstanding significance is mainly linked with the Easter traditions, (4) an essential focus lies upon her apostolate emerging here, whereby the resurrection narrative in John 20:1–8 offers the most insights. In the concluding remarks (5) follows a short outlook at the lines of connection to her “gnostic”-apocryphal portrayal.

1. FIRST HISTORICAL CONTOURS

1.1. “THE MAGDALENE”

Information for a historical inquiry emerges initially from Mary of Magdala’s name with its designation of her place of origin. The characterization ἡ Μαγδαληνή, “the Magdalene,” derived from *Magdala* (*Migdal*, *el-Medjdel*;² “tower, fortress”) on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, assumes, on the one hand, that Mary had left her hometown. In order to fulfill the function of a distinguishing feature,³ this epithet must have originated outside of Magdala. As a further consequence, her membership in the peripatetic group of charismatics gathered around Jesus can be derived from this circumstance.

On the other hand, it seems unusual that, contrary to the patriarchal customs of the time, she is not identified with reference to a man who represents her according to the conventions of public law (e.g., a father, husband, or son). This indicates a certain independence on the part of this woman: that she

2. The Arab settlement was destroyed in 1948.

3. An additional characterization seems necessary since the name *Maria(m)* (in the long form *Mariamme* or *Mariamne*), to which apparently nationalistic hopes for independence were attached, was one of the most frequent Palestinian female names at that time, above all after the murder of Herod’s Hasmonean first wife (see Schaberg, *Resurrection*, 66–67). The fact that the name makes reference to the prophet Miriam, one of the leading figures in the Exodus (see Exod 15:20–21), also can be interpreted as a political program.

joined the Jesus movement (or βασιλεία movement)⁴ alone and on the basis of her own decision. Of course, we cannot infer from this with absolute certainty whether she is to be considered as unmarried, divorced, or widowed, as well as childless. However, this portrayal in contradiction to the sociocultural code made the later identification of her with the “sinful woman” in Luke 7 easier.

Beyond the mere statement about her origins, we also learn that Mary comes from the sociocultural milieu of a Hellenistic city.⁵ The excavation site, despite its desolate condition today, lets us imagine the significance that Magdala had at that time, which was based upon a certain affluence acquired especially through fishing and fish processing.⁶

1.2. GUARANTOR OF CONTINUITY

The fact that Mary of Magdala is the only New Testament female figure apart from Jesus’s mother who is mentioned consistently in all four Gospels documents her prominence and authority in the post-Easter community. The first mention of her name in each of the Synoptic catalogues of women, which otherwise differ in regard to the number and the names of the female disciples (see Matt 27:56, 61; 28:1; Mark 15:40, 47; 16:1; Luke 8:2–3; 24:10),⁷ testifies

4. Unlike the post-Easter perspective focused upon Jesus, the pre-Easter preaching is directed toward the βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, the “kingdom of God.” Mary Rose D’Angelo sees Mary’s role in the movement “as a participant rather than as a follower only”; see her “Reconstructing ‘Real’ Women from Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene,” in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross Shepard Kraemer and Mary Rose D’Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105–28 (123).

5. On this point, Ingrid Maisch, *Maria Magdalena: Zwischen Verachtung und Verehrung: Das Bild einer Frau im Spiegel der Jahrhunderte* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1996), 14, speculates whether she stands out in the group of disciples by being an urban woman among the rural Galileans.

6. The place presumably is identical with the trading city of *Tarichea* (the name refers to the conserving of fish through salting). Information about its history is provided by Flavius Josephus, who resided there as Galilean commander at the time of the revolt against Rome, in his *Jewish War*. In rabbinic literature, the designation “Fish Tower” can be found (for example, b. Pesah. 46a). To be distinguished from this is, according to Str-B 1,1047, מגדל צבעייה, “Dyers’ Tower,” to which the rabbinic tradition that Magdala was destroyed because of fornication refers. This information was taken up in the later reception history of Mary Magdalene, as well as the Talmudic tradition of a Miriam מגדלא (m^egadd^elā’, “the hair braider”), the unfaithful spouse of Pappos ben Jehuda, that has found some echo especially in novelistic literature.

7. The conspicuous last place in John 19:25, where the list is ordered according to the degree of kinship and Jesus’s mother is named first, is considered to be the second most important position in a list.

to her leading position within the group of women gathered around Jesus, analogous to the preeminent position Peter holds in the circle of the Twelve.

The lists of female disciples gain a special relevance in so far as they appear in relation to the main points of the early Christian confession. The women who accompany Jesus continuously since the Galilean beginnings of his activity (see Luke 8:2–3) are

- ▶ Witnesses of Jesus's crucifixion (Mark 15:40–41 par. Matt 27:55–56; Luke 23:49; John 19:25)
- ▶ Witnesses of Jesus's entombment (Mark 15:47 par. Matt 27:61; Luke 23:55–56)
- ▶ Primary witnesses of Easter, or respectively the first addressees and the first proclaimers of the resurrection message (Mark 16:1–8 par. Matt 28:1–10; Luke 24:1–11; John 20:1–18).

This three-fold form of witness by the women resembles the tripartite early Christian confessional formula, “died-buried-raised” (e.g., 1 Cor 15:3–4). As the only witness consistently named in all of these contexts, Mary of Magdala functions as the guarantor both of the fundamental Christian confession of faith and of the continuity in the transition from the pre- to the post-Easter period.

2. DISCIPLESHIP AND *διάκονια*

2.1. PORTRAIT AS DISCIPLE IN MARK 15:40–41

- (40) And there were also women looking on from afar,
 among whom Mary of Magdala,
 Mary, the mother of James the Less and of Joses,⁸
 and Salome,
 (41) who, when he was in Galilee,⁹ followed him and had “served” him,¹⁰
 and many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

8. Whether one or two women (“Mary, the mother of James the Less, and the mother of Joses”) are meant here, or what family relationship exists between the Mary mentioned here and the first-named man does not follow clearly from the Greek text.

9. Matthew corrects the text to read “from Galilee on” (27:55).

10. The Greek imperfects, to be understood here as antique forms, indicate repetitive action on the basis of their durative-linear, or iterative, verbal aspect. The verb *διακονέω*, traditionally translated “to serve,” describes a relationship of service and commission, with Jesus as the one who serves and who gives the commission (see below).

In the oldest Gospel, Mary of Magdala is mentioned for the first time in a note about women witnessing the crucifixion. Since these followers of Jesus appear in the Markan narrative quite abruptly, a retrospective summary must be employed to reveal who they are and from where they come. Thereby, Mark reworks traditional information according to his redactional concerns.

In the short relative clause that describes the women's discipleship that has been in place since Jesus's activity in Galilee, two central verbs occur. The first, ἀκολουθέω ("follow after"), functions as a *terminus technicus* for discipleship, characterized by an abandonment of previous life contexts and a genuine following after Jesus, even to the cross (see esp. Mark 1:18; 2:14; 8:34; 10:21, 28, 32, 52).

The second verb, διακονέω, also is applied directly to Jesus (see the repeated pronomial αὐτῷ, "him"). The basic meaning of the verb is assumed by many to be "service at table," which focuses above all on the work performed by women and slaves in the household. In this classic androcentric interpretation, traditional conceptions of gender-specific roles with a hierarchical division of power and labor frequently come to light. The well-researched semantic study by Anni Hentschel,¹¹ which investigates the use of the term in secular Greek, emphasizes that the word always implies an aspect or relationship of being commissioned. Accordingly, through διακονέω and its derivatives, diverse courier and messenger services (among which service at table is also included, but by which is not meant the service at daily meals) are expressed¹² without any gender-based distinctions or valuations. The focus can be on the dutiful execution of the commissions and also on the relationships existing between the persons commissioned and those giving the commission or the addressees before which those commissioned appear with their delegated authority.

Paul draws on the spectrum of meaning usual in antiquity for διακονέω and its derivatives by accordingly characterizing important tasks and functions in the spheres of mission and congregational organization as official commissions. The term διακονία appears as a key concept in the defense of his role as a minister of the gospel in his reply to the Corinthians (see 2 Cor 2:14–6:13; 10–13). A striking proximity of the term διάκονος to the title of "apostle"

11. Anni Hentschel, *Diakonia im Neuen Testament: Studien zur Semantik unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Rolle von Frauen*, WUNT 2/226 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

12. In Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott, and Henry Stuart Jones, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 398, the meaning "messenger" is listed for the noun διάκονος after the meaning "servant" (in addition, "attendant or official in a temple or religious guild," and "deacon"). This semantic aspect has been neglected in New Testament exegesis.

especially is to be observed. The term refers furthermore to his collaborators in proclamation as well as to those missionaries working independently of him, whereby no gender-specific restrictions are present.

Thus, the task of the women Mark names does not seem to be simply providing Jesus with meals, all the more so since the context of itinerancy does not suggest table service. Applied alone to the smaller circle of female disciples mentioned by name, the verb takes on the sense of an especially qualified activity. Instead of maintenance activities that are traditionally associated with women (which are interpreted in order to free the men for proclamation),¹³ the issue is the execution of commissions given by Jesus, among which belong witnessing in his name, in analogy to the commissioning/calling of the men in the circle of disciples.¹⁴

Although the women mentioned by name are not explicitly given the title of “disciple” (different is Mary of Magdala in the apocryphal Gospel of Peter, which calls her *μαθήτρια*), they fulfill the relevant criteria in an exemplary manner:¹⁵ they have left everything behind, and they go with Jesus the entire way to the cross, from Galilee to Jerusalem, from the beginning to the end, all the while renewing their discipleship and commission (illustrated in the Greek text by the imperfect verb forms). Their presence at the crucifixion (despite the danger to their own lives) assumes that they, like the “many other women,” went up with Jesus to Jerusalem. According to Mark, genuine discipleship consists in following Jesus to the cross and ministering (see the instructions given to the disciples in Mark 8:34–35; 9:35; 10:43–45)¹⁶ in the

13. So, for example (but applied to the parallel passage in Luke), Martin Hengel, “Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen,” in *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel; Festschrift für Otto Michel zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Peter Schmidt, AGSU 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1963), 243–56 (248), who infers from that interpretation that perhaps Luke desires here, in a way similar to that in Acts 6:2–6, to make visible a paradigmatic preliminary stage to the later office of deacon.

14. See Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 228–31, and 235. Luise Schottroff, “Frauen in der Nachfolge Jesu in neutestamentlicher Zeit,” in *Frauen in der Bibel*, vol. 2 of *Traditionen der Befreiung: Sozialgeschichtliche Bibelauslegungen*, ed. Willy Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann (Munich: Kaiser, 1980), 91–133 (107), speaks of the “commissioning for proclamation.” The fact that textual witnesses C and D omit the phrase *καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ* definitely can be assessed as a relevant indication of this. The Didaskalia later justifies the office of female deacon (*ministerium mulieris diaconissae*) with the parallel list of female disciples in Matt 27:55–56 (see Did. apos. 3.12.4) but denies women the teaching office by making reference to the same female disciples (see Did. apos. 3.6.1–2).

15. See also the characterization of Elisha as Elijah’s *μαθητῆς καὶ διάκονος*, “disciple and commissioned representative,” in Josephus, *Ant.* 8.354.

16. In the face of nascent disputes about rank, the focus is also, especially, upon a new

context of his passion predictions), which the women alone manifest, while it is, after all, the Twelve who (at first) refuse this call.

Thereby, the previous androcentric perspective is broken, and the possibility of reading the whole Gospel with regard to female disciples is presented, even if these women become visible only after the men have dropped out of the community of discipleship (see Mark 14:50). Mary of Magdala is named as the head of the tighter circle of female disciples, which—analogously to the three- and four-man groups among the Twelve—is set apart from a larger group of women (differently in Matt 27:55–56). She is characterized as Jesus's commissioned messenger as a witness in his name.

2.2. SHIFTS IN LUKE'S PORTRAYAL (LUKE 8:1–3)

- (1) And it happened soon afterwards,
and he wandered from city to city and from village to village,
preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God,
and the Twelve with him
- (2) and some women,
who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses,
Mary, who is called the Magdalene,
from whom seven demons had gone out,
- (3) and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's official,
and Susanna,
and many other (women),
who supported them.¹⁷

While Mark draws attention to a special circle of female disciples only within the passion narrative and thus belatedly corrects the perspective concentrated previously on men, Luke introduces a group of female disciples already in the context of Jesus's travels through Galilee (on the principle of a chronological portrayal, see 1:3). Different from Mark's *Vorlage*, Luke's summary, which recapitulates the main characteristic features of Jesus's activity, places the accents elsewhere. For example, the term *ἀκολουθέω* as a specific reference to discipleship is lacking (see, on the other hand, 5:11, 28, and 18:28). Furthermore, the verb *διακονέω* is given a modifying addition and is also applied to a plural quantity. Thereby, radical discipleship becomes mere support of the Jesus movement (which possibly reflects a corresponding practice in the com-

social order for the community that is characterized by a basic renunciation of supremacy in contrast to the usual hierarchical power relationships.

17. This ambiguous term includes material means and possessions as well as personal potentialities and abilities.

munity behind Luke and Acts). The decisive event that provides a basis for the women's discipleship, according to Luke, is a healing.

Luke shapes the traditional connection between Jesus's proclamation and healing activity¹⁸ with a view to the named women, thereby presenting these women in parallel with the Twelve (not with "the disciples"!), as well as with a larger group of women as Jesus's constant escort. Whether the other subjects (beside Jesus) attached to the governing predicate δῶδεν ("wandered") like a list—the Twelve, "some women" healed and mentioned by name, as well as "many other" women (καὶ οἱ δώδεκα ... καὶ γυναῖκες τινες ... καὶ ἕτεροι πολλοί)—also were incorporated into Jesus's proclamation activity,¹⁹ which is expressed through a modal participial construction (κηρύσσων καὶ εὐαγγελιζόμενος τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ: "preaching and proclaiming the kingdom of God"), remains an open question. However, a differentiation in this regard between the Twelve and the two groups of women cannot be justified on the basis of the text as well. The companionship of the Twelve as well as of the women with Jesus is expressed through the prepositional phrase σὺν αὐτῷ ("with him"), which sometimes also conveys the aspect of discipleship (see Luke 22:36). Thus, the text lets emerge an image of women as traveling representatives of Jesus who have left their familial contexts and now find themselves among his followers.²⁰ The analogy to the Twelve is strengthened through the listing of names, comparable in terms of *Formgeschichte* and in significance with the lists of names in Luke 6:14–16 and Acts 1:13.

Since reference is made to a healing instead of a calling of the women, there occurred (at the latest in reception history) a qualitative differentiation devaluing the women's discipleship in relation to that of the Twelve.²¹ Their experiences of being healed, though, also can be understood as a sign of the

18. See the congruities with Matt 4:23 and 9:35; see also Luke 4:18–19, 40–44; 6:17–19; 7:22.

19. So, for example, Schottroff, "Frauen," 102; Walter Kirchschräger, "Eine Frauengruppe in der Umgebung Jesu," in *Die Freude an Gott, unsere Kraft: Festschrift für Otto Bernhard Knoch zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Johannes Joachim Degenhardt (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1991), 278–85 (283).

20. See Sabine Bieberstein, *Verschwiegene Jüngerinnen—Vergessene Zeuginnen: Gebrochene Konzepte im Lukasevangelium*, NTOA 38 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998), 41.

21. For example, François Bovon, *Luke 1: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, ed. Helmut Koester, trans. Christine Thomas, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 2002), 100 says that the service ministry of the women has its roots in miraculous healings, while the preaching of the men finds its legitimation in a calling. Bovon suggests that the limiting of the women's ministry to table service likely originated in the practices of some churches rather than in Jesus's own intention.

nascent realization of God's kingdom (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ), which Jesus proclaims—just as the Twelve are to be interpreted as a sign of the eschatological gathering of Israel.²²

Only in Luke is Mary of Magdala characterized, along with her name and the designation of her place of origin, through an exorcism.²³ In certain socio-cultural contexts, demonic possession functions as a personification of medical conditions (especially mental disorders and those distinguished by loss of control and self-alienation), as well as for modes of conduct deviating from community standards (see on this Luke 7:33; in reference to Jesus see Mark 3:21–22, 30; John 7:20; 8:48–49, 52; 10:20).²⁴ The symbolic number seven indicates a particular gravity, perhaps also a persistence of the symptoms (see Luke 11:24–26). Whether the information refers to an actual illness or not,²⁵ Luke achieves a certain effect by mentioning it. Accordingly, Luke's portrayal, which aroused the fantasy of later interpreters, led to considerable distortions in the image of the female apostle.²⁶

The concluding relative clause also allows a certain latitude in interpretation. Here, Mark's διακονεῖν is given a new meaning through the prepositional phrase ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς. Interpreted in most cases in the narrow sense as material and financial support, in accord with the significance attached to the just use of possessions in Luke's concept,²⁷ the activity also can be understood in a further sense as commitment "according to their means and abilities."²⁸ In addition, it is unclear whether the feminine relative

22. See Bieberstein, *Jüngerinnen*, 44–45; Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, "Mary Magdalene and the Seven Demons in Social-scientific Perspective," in *Transformative Encounters: Jesus and Women Re-viewed*, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger, BibIntS 43 (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 203–23 (216–23). Bernabé Ubieta's sociological perspective also makes reference to the transformation of the social order.

23. The note in the secondary ending to Mark (16:9) appears to be directly or, in the sense of a "second orality," indirectly dependent upon it.

24. Bernabé Ubieta, "Mary Magdalene," 205–15, on the basis of her sociological approach, includes the effects of social power structures and gender roles, and interprets the symptoms as an expression of an internalized conflict as well as an unconscious protest strategy.

25. So, for example, Schaberg, *Resurrection*, 77, 232, 234–35.

26. While Mary's demons were interpreted to indicate an immoral life ruled by sin at least since the Magdalene homilies of Gregory the Great, mental-health problems easily can be associated with mental incapacity (already Origen, *Cels.* 2.55). Accordingly, Kurt Marti in his poem "Prophetin" turns in a creative wordplay "visionary" into "visio-närrin."

27. See the parallel examples of τῶν ὑπαρχόντων in Luke 12:15; 19:8; Acts 4:32.

28. See Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *Lexicon*, 1854: "according to one's means." Luise Schottroff, "Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of the History of Early Christianity," in *Feminist Interpretation: The Bible in Women's Perspective*, ed. Luise Schottroff, Silvia Schroer,

pronoun αἴτινες refers to all women or merely to the last-named larger group, whether the plural pronoun αὐτοῖς²⁹ indicates only Jesus and the Twelve as addressees of the activity or includes the smaller group of women—and thus, whether there exists a gender-based division of tasks,³⁰ or whether the larger group of women merely takes over the designated function for the entire community.³¹

The overlaying of the concept of the peripatetic messengers of Jesus with elements from the context of the settled followers and sympathizers leads to ambivalences in Luke's image of the female disciples, the more so since they again remain invisible on the surface of the text up until the passion.³² Through the reference to independent women travelling with Jesus, the traditional gender roles are, to be sure, broken. But, at the same time, this perspective is not continued; it is rather infiltrated in concrete characterizations with conventional role expectations. Thereby, the question arises to what extent Luke's portrayal is consistent with sociohistorical facts. Instead of the reconstructed historical realities of the Jesus movement, Luke's image corresponds more to the situation assumed for Luke's community in urban, Roman-Hellenistic society, a situation that is projected back into the time of Jesus³³ in order to establish exemplary models for the well-to-do addressees in the community. Thus does Mary of Magdala become a rich sponsor of the Jesus movement in the course of the reception of the text, although Luke's portrait of an unclean, seriously ill person precisely contradicts a well-situated status.

and Marie-Theres Wacker (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), 179–254 (188), emphasizes in analogy to Mark 14:8 (ὃ ἔσχεν: “what she could”) that they supported them according to their abilities.

29. On the other hand, the singular pronoun αὐτῷ used by a series of prominent textual witnesses relates the διακονία of the women exclusively to Jesus—presumably an adaptation to the well-known tradition certified by Mark. Or, are the women supposed to be subordinated to the Twelve only in the later history of the text?

30. So Hentschel, *Diakonia*, 220–35.

31. So Bieberstein, *Jüngerinnen*, 38; de Boer, *Gospel*, 141–42, 193, as well as Marinella Perroni in this volume. The answers also vary according to whether they make reference to the reconstructed intention of Luke or they desire to exploit possibilities of reception of the open text, whether they scold Luke for marginalizing women or make his reception responsible for this.

32. On this, Bieberstein, *Jüngerinnen*, 68, 75.

33. So Schottroff, “Frauen,” 101. See also Helga Melzer-Keller, “Maria Magdalena neu entdecken,” *Geist und Leben* 72 (1999): 97–111 (105).

3. WITNESS TO THE CRUCIFIED

That Mary of Magdala and the other women, according to Mark 15:40 par. Matt 27:55, look on from afar at the crucifixion appears to be the more likely variant when compared with the scene, beloved in iconography, in John 19:35, since the place of execution was guarded by Roman soldiers. When a political rebel was executed, the relatives of this person, as well as obvious sympathizers with the condemned, exposed themselves to mortal danger when present at the execution.³⁴ Since the note describes the situation realistically, the viewing of the scene from some distance proves to be in no way just a theological creation that alludes to the *passio iusti* tradition (see Ps 38:12).³⁵ Thus, the public display of solidarity by Jesus's female followers, who thereby risk their lives, testifies to their courage and unshakeable loyalty.

Luke 23:49 amplifies the scriptural motif heard in Mark with a clearer allusion to Ps 38:12 (37:12 LXX). "All those acquainted with him" (see Ps 88:9 [87:9 LXX] for the term *γνωστοί*) are mentioned even before the women as witnesses of the crucifixion, so the possibility of the witness of the Twelve is kept open (see the criteria for an apostolate in Acts 1:21–22), contrary to traditional knowledge about their flight (which is not recorded in Luke). However, the feminine participle *ὄρωσαι* ("seeing"), which refers only to the women and more precisely qualifies their standing at the cross, recalls the exclusive eyewitness of the female disciples not explicitly named in this passage (who merely had "accompanied him"³⁶ since Galilee).

In John 19:25, the list of female witnesses varies more in comparison with the Synoptic lists. Yet beyond the differing individual traditions, the name Mary of Magdala appears to be connected the most firmly with the testimony to the crucifixion so that here she, too, is mentioned and in the conspicuous end position. Her abrupt appearance at the hour of Jesus's exaltation and glo-

34. See, for example, Tacitus, *Ann.* 6,19,3; Philo, *Flaccus* 70–72; Suetonius, *Tib.* 61. Josephus (*J.W.* 2.252–253) reports on mass crucifixions under the Roman governor Felix. Women, too, were executed: see also *J.W.* 2.305–308.

35. See Monika Fander, *Die Stellung der Frau im Markusevangelium: Unter besonderer Berücksichtigung kultur- und religionsgeschichtlicher Hintergründe*, MThA 8 (Altenberge: Telos, 1989), 139.

36. Here, Luke also appears to avoid *ἀκολουθέω* as a *terminus technicus* and to weaken it by using the composite *συν-ακολουθέω* (so Helen Schüngel-Straumann, "Maria von Magdala: Apostolin und erste Verkünderin der Osterbotschaft," 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], 9–32 [15]). See in 23:55, αἰτινες ἦσαν συν-εληλυθῖαι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας αὐτῶ: "who had come with him from Galilee."

rification without a detailed introduction presupposes a respective traditional knowledge among the implied readers so that her name alone is sufficient.³⁷ While the narrative role of Jesus's mother, who is mentioned first in the list, is fulfilled with the symbolic scene in 19:25–27, Mary of Magdala's path in John's narrative world only begins here. In contrast to the Synoptic parallels, which in each case leads from the death of Jesus to the burial accounts, she is in John, as a disciple “standing close to” Jesus, a witness to his final instructions: in that Jesus consigns his mother to his Beloved Disciple as her new son and his successor, he finds in the course of his death the Johannine model *ἐκκλησία* as a new *familia dei* (see Mark 3:34).³⁸ So does Mary of Magdala also in John set her foot on the narrative stage at the threshold between the pre- and post-Easter period, and she assumes here her essential function: to establish the connection between the crucified and the resurrected Jesus.

4. EASTER APOSTOLATE

4.1. EASTER VISIONARY EXPERIENCES

The Easter morning stories present two different concepts in terms of tradition history (within the framework of Jewish-Hellenistic apocalyptic literature, particularly the rapture narratives³⁹) for conveying narratively the Easter “visionary experiences” of Mary of Magdala as well as of other female witnesses. Thus, the tradition of the christophany to Mary of Magdala in John 20 presumably derives from a different tradition-historical circle than the parallel account of the discovery of the empty tomb by women with a subsequent angelophany, which—as the only Easter story—is related in all four canonical Gospels (Mark 16:1–8 par.).⁴⁰

37. This communication with the readers is analyzed by Judith Hartenstein, *Charakterisierung im Dialog: Die Darstellung von Maria Magdalena, Petrus, Thomas und der Mutter Jesu im Kontext anderer frühchristlicher Traditionen*, NTOA 64 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2007), 154–55.

38. For example, Ruschmann, *Maria von Magdala*, 107; Jean Zumstein, *Kreative Erinnerung: Relecture und Auslegung im Johannesevangelium* (Zürich: Pano-Verlag, 1999), 176–77.

39. See the stereotypical motifs of the open/empty tomb, the search for the missing body, as well as the certification through witnesses or divine messengers. Schaberg, *Resurrection*, 304–52, on the basis of an intertextual comparison with 2 Kgs 2:1–18 (Elisha as the prophetic successor of Elijah) reconstructs an original Magdalene tradition. Though, Mary of Magdala in John 20 does not function as a direct witness of Jesus's ascension (in contrast to the Eleven in Luke 24 and Acts 1).

40. Susanne Heine assumes that Mary of Magdala is found in both circles of tradition

4.1.1. Metaphor for an Experience of Personal Encounter in John 20:1–18

In order to track down Mary of Magdala's special authority, John 20:1–18 offers the most illuminating narrative.⁴¹ In several respects, Mary proves here to be the first: she comes as the first one to the tomb on Easter morning, discovers that it has been opened (v. 1), and reports to Peter and “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (v. 2). She is the first to “see” the resurrected Jesus (v. 14), to be called by him (v. 16), and to be sent by him (v. 17). She is the first to proclaim to the community of female and male disciples—not to the Twelve—the Easter message (v. 18). Essential trajectories of meaning culminate in the first Easter confession of the gospel she articulates: *ἑώρακα τὸν κύριον*, “I have seen the Lord.” This statement stands in the tradition of prophetic (call) visions.⁴²

If we look at the various concisely placed verbs from the semantic field *to see* in John 20:1–18, then the text can be described as a theological meditation on this theme: the path to Easter faith follows from an initially superficial perception, which, in part, mistakenly interprets the signs,⁴³ to the final understanding of faith. Thereby, the narrative figures of Mary of Magdala, on the one hand, and the Beloved Disciple, on the other, who assume parallel positions through literary arrangement, represent in each case different models of the Easter experience of “seeing” and coming to faith in the resurrection of Jesus.

Because of the embedding of the scene in regard to Peter and the Beloved Disciple into the strand of tradition concerning Mary's visit to the tomb, two competing scenes revolving around the tomb, each with a differing imaginative horizon and with a different intent, emerge on the diachronic level. For the Beloved Disciple, the empty tomb, in the revelatory space of which he enters ever more deeply, forms the starting point of his understanding. By, at second glance, transcending external reality and interpreting the “sign” in the Johan-

because of her prominence and authority (on the basis of the christophany); see her “Eine Person von Rang und Namen: Historische Konturen der Magdalenerin,” in *Jesu Rede von Gott und ihre Nachgeschichte im frühen Christentum: Beiträge zur Verkündigung Jesu und zum Kerygma der Kirche; Festschrift für Willi Marxsen zum 70. Geburtstag*, ed. Dieter-Alex Koch, Gerhard Sellin, and Andreas Lindemann (Gütersloh: Mohn, 1989), 179–94 (193).

41. For a more detailed exegesis, see Taschl-Erber, *Maria von Magdala*, 47–322; a narratological reading, in addition, is found in Taschl-Erber, “Erkenntnisschritte und Glaubenswege in Joh 20,1–18: Die narrative Metaphorik des Raums,” *Protokolle zur Bibel* 15 (2006): 93–117. See also Ruschmann, *Maria von Magdala*.

42. See Isa 6:1, 5; in addition, Amos 9:1; 1 Kgs 22:19; 2 Chr 18:18 (Micaiah).

43. The signs are at least meaningful for the readers: the stone that has been taken away points to the miraculously open tomb; the linen wrappings left behind and the angels signify the divine cause for the body's disappearance.

nine sense (*σημεῖον*) constituted by the tomb scenery⁴⁴ with deeper insight, his exemplary faith gives readers a perspective for the interpretation of the findings in the tomb, which are in this narrative not self-evident (see the climax in this scene with [the almost formulaic v. 8: εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν, “he saw and believed”]); that is, he came to insight and to faith).⁴⁵ In this way, he for a second time surpasses Peter, whose reaction to his inspection of the tomb, described in detail and, for this reason, especially weighted, is left open (see vv. 6–7).

For Mary’s path of faith, on the other hand, the personal encounter with the resurrected Jesus represents the decisive turning point (which is consummated in v. 16). Her “seeing” describes in a metaphorical way her Easter experience that is narrated as a gradual process of recognition culminating in a personal encounter.⁴⁶ So, in the form of a dialogical narrative, a reality that goes beyond the everyday horizon of expectations is conveyed. In contrast to the Beloved Disciple, who on the *internal* textual level does not appear as a witness, she communicates her Easter experience to the other male and female followers (v. 18). After she at first did not know how to interpret the symbolic presence of the heavenly messengers (*ἄγγελοι*),⁴⁷ she now herself becomes the first messenger proclaiming (*ἀγγέλλουσα*) the resurrected Jesus.

While the focus on the narrative level is on Mary’s path to knowledge, Johannine Christology is conveyed on the level of discourse: so that the promises made in the farewell discourses (John 14–17; for example, the sending of the Paraclete) will be realized, Jesus goes to the Father,⁴⁸ and Mary of Magdala takes over the unique function of imparting the message to the community of

44. The wrappings still lying there, or even neatly rolled up, exclude a theft or a moving of the body; Mary’s misunderstanding in John 20:2, 13, 15 lets us hear a corresponding anti-Christian polemic.

45. The focus on the tomb as a full-fledged witness to Jesus’s resurrection, which is given an authorized interpretation by the Beloved Disciple (and not by an angel; instead, the scriptural motif in v. 9 conveys the early Christian proclamation), could, as an emphasis upon the bodily resurrection of Jesus, be directed against purely pneumatic notions of exaltation and thus be a suppression of the visionary element.

46. The path from misunderstandings to believing insight, typical for John’s narrative technique and often in ironic interplay with the readers’ advance knowledge, is displayed in the macrocontext also by other feminine and masculine identification figures.

47. The Synoptic function of the angels in interpreting what is found in the tomb as a raising of the crucified Jesus from the dead is reduced in John to a merely minor role. Typical elements of a genuine angelophany are lacking, for example, the fear motif with the corresponding word of comfort, but also and above all the revealed message.

48. In contrast to the spatial conception of the Synoptics of Galilee-Jerusalem-Galilee (Luke 24:6, though, changes Mark 16:7 and the parallel Matt 28:7 in a back reference), the Johannine Jesus performs a vertical movement with his return to the Father.

disciples who are now called his “brothers and sisters” (ἀδελφοί). According to John’s Christology, in the ascent of the exalted Jesus (who cannot be grasped by any who seek to hold him) to the Father common now also to these “brothers and sisters,” the new covenant is constituted as a family of the children of God (v. 17).⁴⁹

On a typological level, Mary of Magdala, whose exemplary Easter experience is stylized as the first instruction from the resurrected Jesus in correlation to the call stories in John 1 (especially vv. 38–39), above and beyond represents this post-Easter community. Corresponding to the preceding reflection in John 14:18–24 (see also 16:16–22), where Jesus, taking his farewell, promises to those who love him that they will “see” him returning, her experience in encountering him becomes the paradigmatic model of loving Easter faith. On the basis of intertextual relations between John 20 and the Song of Solomon (especially 3:1–4), as well as Hellenistic fictional literature approximately contemporaneous with John, allegorical overtones⁵⁰ can be heard in the multilayered narrative when Mary of Magdala, representing the Johannine community, seeks her beloved (see John 20:15; 13:33).⁵¹

In view of the experience of the absence of the beloved (see also the “darkness,” σκοτία, in 20:1), which reflects the discontinuity of the earlier communion with Jesus,⁵² the community of disciples has to recognize Jesus’s presence

49. Especially on John 20:17 (with the repeatedly discussed *Noli me tangere* motif), see Andrea 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 and Contemporary Interpretations*, ed. Reimund Bieringer, Barbara Baert, and Karlijn Demasure, BETL (Leuven: Peeters, 2015).

50. Likewise, Mary’s “confusion” of Jesus with the “keeper of the garden” (κηπουρός, v. 15), an example of Johannine irony, points to an allegorical level (on this, Nicolas Wyatt, “Supposing Him to Be the Gardener” [John 20,15]: A Study of the Paradise Motif in John,” *ZNW* 81 [1990]: 21–38).

51. See, on this, Sandra M. Schneiders, “John 20:11–18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene; A Transformative Feminist Reading,” in “*What Is John?*”: *Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia, SBLSymS 3 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996), 155–68 (168): “She is symbolically presented, by means of Old Testament allusions, as the beloved of the Lover in the Canticle, the spouse of the New Covenant mediated by Jesus in his glorification, the representative figure of the New Israel which emerges from the New Creation.” Adeline Fehribach, “The ‘Birthing’ Bridegroom: The Portrayal of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel,” in *A Feminist Companion to John*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine with Marianne Blickenstaff, FCNTECW 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 2:104–29 (117), concludes from her intertextual comparison with late antique romance novels, “Mary Magdalene represents the community of faith through her symbolic role as the bride of the messianic groom.”

52. Accordingly, in the plural form used by Mary in v. 2, οὐκ οἶδαμεν, “we do not

anew after his departing (see the recognition motif). Becoming the witness of the living Jesus requires letting the earthly Jesus go. Thus, Mary's two-fold turning from the tomb to the resurrected Jesus (see *στρέφομαι*, "to turn around/ towards," in vv. 14, 16)⁵³ traces the way from *κλαίειν* ("weeping," vv. 11, 13, 15; see also 16:20) to *ἀγγέλλειν* ("announcing," v. 18). But when Mary of Magdala in the multidimensional Johannine narrative represents the ideal type of Johannine discipleship (see the central elements *coming-seeing-believing-testifying*) and, therewith, of the Johannine circle, then this rereading as a "creative memory" presupposes an underlying traditional basis for this first witness of the resurrected Jesus.

4.1.2. The Revelatory Experience in Mark 16:1–8 and Parallels

In the congruent core, the Easter morning stories are a narrative staging of the Easter experiences of women, which are attributed to divine revelation by means of the usual topoi in the linguistic and narrative world of the time. At the center stands the first-hand witness by explicitly named women regarding the early Christian confession *ἠγέρθη* ("he has risen") conveyed in Mark 16:1–8 by an *angelus interpres*.

On the other hand, in male-dominated historical-critical research, attention was concentrated on the question of the historicity of the empty tomb. The narratives about the female Easter witnesses were classified as late apologetic creations without any historical value, whereas only the appearances before Peter and the Twelve as mentioned in 1 Cor 15:5 were considered historically authentic.

Even though the tradition underlying Mark 16:1–8 par. is augmented with legendary motifs and displays liturgical and apologetic overtones, this does not mean that the narrated revelatory experience of several women listed by name (!) is pure invention. Against this speaks the persistence of such a narrative given the androcentric processes of both preserving tradition and redaction. The development in the history of tradition shows that this kind of narrative definitely provoked anti-Christian polemics (see, for example, the traces of the idea of a deception in Matt 27:64; 28:13, 15; John 20:2, 13, 15), which in turn was supposed to be neutralized through secondary apologetic accents. The fact that, for example, in later tradition history Peter must con-

know" (interpreted in most cases diachronically), the level of the narrated world seems to be overlaid by the situation of the community.

53. Since in John's symbolic portrayal the category of space points to a dimension of depth going beyond the superficial level, Mary's inner path to understanding is reflected in her external movements.

firm the finding of the—with the exception of the linen wrappings—empty tomb (see Luke 24:12 as well as the Johannine version in John 20:3–10) may point in this direction, just as the mention of Peter in Mark 16:7 could serve to guarantee the Easter faith by attributing the decisive experiences to the male apostles.⁵⁴

4.2. THE TRADITION OF THE PROTOPHANY TO MARY OF MAGDALA

Only in John 20:14–18 is a christophany to a single person unfolded narratively within the canonical Gospels. In addition, the *first* appearance (*protophany*) of the resurrected Jesus to Mary of Magdala testifies to her central role in early Christianity. At the same time, a reflection of this tradition is found in the Easter account in Matt 28, where she, as a result of the close connection of the scene in verses 9–10 with the preceding tomb story, meets Jesus together with the “other Mary.”

By means of the assumption of a literary dependence of John’s christophany upon the Matthean account, which for its part is assumed to represent a secondary development of the angelophany in Mark,⁵⁵ the tradition of the (first) appearance of the resurrected Jesus to Mary of Magdala was, however, called into doubt, or degraded to an appearance of an angel. But, although such Easter experiences transcend an intramundane historical framework, and although strict differentiation is not possible within a *historical* perspective, a feminist-critical suspicion is advised here, in so far as particular claims that are reserved for men are legitimated by a christophany (especially the protochristophany). On the other hand, there arises the question about the interests, on the basis of which a christophany should be secondarily attributed to women where an upgrading of their Easter experiences would, after all, contradict the usual trend of the increasing suppression of feminine claims. Accordingly, the most plausible solution is that Matthew and John drew from the tradition of a christophany to Mary of Magdala that existed in parallel with an angelophany tradition.⁵⁶

54. On the silence of the women due to the Markan redaction (Mark 16:8), see, for example, Luise Schottroff, “Maria Magdalena und die Frauen am Grabe Jesu,” *EvT* 42 (1982): 3–25 (20–21).

55. See, for example, Frans Neiryck, “John and the Synoptics: The Empty Tomb Stories,” *NTS* 30 (1984): 161–87 (166–71).

56. See, for example, Heine, “Person,” 186–87, 193; Hengel, “Maria Magdalena,” 253–56; Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel according to John*, AB 29a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 1003. Schaberg reconstructs from Matt 28 and John 20 (as well as from Mark 16:9–11) an old appearance story with the empty tomb as the original context, which is

Beyond this, the longer ending of Mark (16:9–20), a later addition, which became nevertheless part of the canon, explicitly emphasizes that the resurrected Jesus appeared “first” to Mary of Magdala (16:9: ἐφάνη πρῶτον Μαρία τῇ Μαγδαληνῇ). The late note in Mark 16:9–11 gives the impression of being a harmonizing compilation of pieces from John (Mary’s first witness and her message) and Luke (especially her demons and the disbelief of the disciples), whereby the linguistic deviations suggest rather an independent summary of traditions already in circulation. But, even if the longer ending of Mark is not an independent textual witness for the protophany to Mary of Magdala, the explicit adherence to her status as first witness (intended as a correction, for example, to 1 Cor 15:5–8?) shows that the memory of it was vivid even later.

The leading position of the Magdalene in Synoptic lists of female disciples, which mention her first in each case—corresponding to the preeminence of Peter in the circle of the Twelve—and so document her standing in the post-Easter community, can be interpreted in this sense. Thus, the repeated testimony to the protophany to Mary of Magdala indicates the age and significance of this tradition, which left its traces in the Easter narratives of the Gospels, although it encountered resistance within patriarchal contexts.

4.3. COMPETITION WITH PETER AS FIRST WITNESS

The narratives that let Mary of Magdala appear as the first witness of the resurrected Jesus compete, though, with New Testament witnesses that grant this primacy to Peter.

4.3.1. Formulas of Apostolic Legitimation in 1 Corinthians 15

In the list of witnesses that Paul presents in 1 Cor 15:5–8, Peter is placed first, whereas Mary of Magdala is not (explicitly) mentioned. But even if Peter’s leading position testifies to his preeminent status in the early Church on the basis of his post-Easter involvement, no explicit evidence of a *protophany* to Peter is found here (while Mark 16:9 expressly retains such a protophany for Mary of Magdala). The linguistic elements used for the structuring of the list do not compellingly suggest a *chronological* arrangement of the appearances.⁵⁷

suppressed in Mark and played down in Matthew and John (*Resurrection*, 293–98, 304, 318, 321–24).

57. See Walter Bauer, Kurt Aland, and Barbara Aland, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur*, 6th ed. (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 471, 576. See also 1 Cor 12:28.

As the parallel structure of verses 5 and 7 shows, the *competing leadership claims* between Peter and James as the decisive authority⁵⁸ in Jerusalem at the time of Paul come into view. Only these two are marked out by name and certified in their leading position by the formula of apostolic legitimation, ὡφθῆναι (“was seen, let himself be seen, appeared,” with the person receiving the appearance in the dative). All others are subsumed under the Twelve, the ἀδελφοί (“brothers and sisters”), as well as the ἀπόστολοι (“female and male apostles”).⁵⁹ The focus of the argument lies upon the presentation of a common “basic gospel” proclaimed by prominent witnesses (see v. 11) in order to overcome the division in the Corinthian community in regard to belief in the resurrection. A claim to completeness is not assumed in this list.

The marginalization of the female witnesses emerging in this confessional formula was continued in the later reception. In historical-critical study, the Easter stories in the Gospels, which narratively convey the experiences of women, were characterized as secondary legendary creations in comparison to the original proclamation that 1 Cor 15 as the older text witness represents. Thereby the Petrine primacy transmitted in the formula tradition (see also Luke 24:34) could be sustained over against the protophany to Mary of Magdala in the narrative tradition—degraded thus to a *mere* (fictitious and insignificant) legend.

However, if in the Easter stories the same kerygma forms the basis as the common *that* from which the narrative elaboration with its legendary elements (the *how*) is to be distinguished, then the two genres of confessional formula and narrative text cannot simply be played off against each other in terms of their historical value. The concurrence between formulaic and narrative tradition (as reflective and narrative theology) that presumably originated in parallel lies in the revelatory experiences of “receiving an appearance” (“Erscheinungserfahrungen”) or “seeing” (“Sehenswiderfahrnissen”). Just as the confessional formula in 1 Cor 15 in its transmitted form does not reproduce the oldest interpretation of the Easter events but mirrors an advanced level of reflection, so also is it likely in the narrative traditions used in the Gospels that the reflection of a very old tradition based on historical reminiscences appears.

58. See the mention of James in Gal 2:9 as first in the list before Cephas and John; in 2:12, Peter defers to James's party in the Antiochene conflict.

59. The fact that this term, too, is to be understood inclusively in Paul and, in contrast to the conception of the twelve apostles in Luke/Acts, is conceived more broadly is shown by Junia in Rom 16:7.

4.3.2. Redactional Interests in Luke 24

In Luke's Easter cycle, the note about the christophany bestowed on Peter (Luke 24:34) after the Emmaus pericope obviously is intended to set straight the question of the protophany. In this Gospel, there is no word about an appearance of the resurrected Jesus to women, more exactly to Mary of Magdala. Instead, the relevance of her Easter experience and witness for the post-Easter community clearly is played down in Luke's redaction of the tomb narrative. First, the angels give the women no commission to proclaim the Easter message;⁶⁰ later, "the apostles" disqualify their message as nonsense (see Luke 24:11), while the community comes to believe on the basis of a christophany to Peter (of which, on the other hand, no narrative tradition exists). It is also Peter who first must confirm the report of the women (see 24:12). In contrast, the narrative line in Matt 28 accentuates "the Church constituting role of the female disciples,"⁶¹ a role manifested in the gathering of the scattered community of the disciples (cf. the double commission of the two Maries, the execution of which 28:16–20 presupposes), even if they leave the narrative stage after surmounting the critical phase after Jesus's crucifixion and concede primacy to the Eleven.

Beyond this, Luke shows a tendency to upgrade or to rehabilitate the male disciples in comparison with the other New Testament passion and resurrection traditions, in so far as their flight remains unmentioned, an exclusive witness to the crucifixion is denied the women, and, finally, a christophany is bestowed explicitly only on men, above all Peter. Further modifications in Luke's portrait of Peter over against the Markan *Vorlage* also are intended to emphasize his primacy. The continuity of the Jesus movement is authenticated in Luke above all through the witness of Peter and of the Eleven. In Acts 1, accordingly, only the men are considered as witnesses of the resurrection in the casting of lots to fill the apostolic position (τὸν τόπον τῆς διακονίας αὐτῆς καὶ ἀποστολῆς, v. 25) vacated by Judas, although the women—in contrast to Paul, for example—fulfill the criteria formulated by the Peter figure in verses 21–22.

4.3.3. Interim Result

A certain ambivalence emerges in the New Testament in the fundamental question concerning the paschal primacy. Still, it can be shown that legitima-

60. Anyway, their "remembering" (Luke 24:6–8) points to their continuous witness.

61. Hubert Frankemölle, *Matthäus: Kommentar*, 2 vols. (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1997), 2:530. See also PHEME PERKINS, "'I Have Seen the Lord' (John 20:18): Women Witnesses to the Resurrection," *Int* 46 (1992): 31–41 (37); SCHOTTROFF, "Maria Magdalena," 23.

tion interests led to a suppression of the tradition of the protophany to Mary of Magdala. With a christophany, after all, claims to apostolic authority and leadership positions were justified.

We should also bear in mind that, due to apologetic tendencies, the subversive tradition of the first appearance of the resurrected Jesus to a woman was not given a broad reception. Founding the Christian faith on the witness of a woman would have complicated its acceptance in many circles. So, for example, Origen, *Cels.* 2.55, cites contemporary polemics: “Who has seen this? A demented woman, as you say.” Yet it is exactly the contrariety to prevailing tendencies in a patriarchal environment that speaks for the trustworthiness of the tradition that centrally places a woman as the guarantor of continuity at the transition from the period of the historical Jesus to the period of the church.

4.3.4. John’s Rereading of the Tradition: Shifts in Paschal Primacy

In the Johannine community, a different approach that places female role models at the side of Peter and the circle of the Twelve becomes visible. If Peter proves to be the “Beloved Disciple” of the Synoptic tradition, then the Petrine primacy appears in John, in a correction of the traditionally preeminent position of the leader of the Twelve, to be distributed among different figures: the Beloved Disciple functions as the guarantor of the Jesus tradition; Martha articulates the messianic confession of the Johannine community (see John 11:27; different is Mark 8:29 and its parallels Matt 16:16 and Luke 9:20); John 20 tells of the protophany of the resurrected Jesus to Mary of Magdala and of how she receives from him the first commission to proclaim the Easter message. In John 21, a pastoral primacy is granted to Peter.

The Johannine redaction of Peter’s visit to the tomb (John 20:2–10; cf. Luke 24:12) stages narratively the competitive relationship between Peter and the “other disciple” who represents the Johannine circle. Since these two representative characters stand for different groups, the text speaks to the problem of the relationship of the Johannine community to other communities that see their leading figure in Peter. In contrast to the (so to say) “official” inspection of the tomb by Peter, the primacy of “the disciple who Jesus loved” is shown here clearly in his understanding faith in view of the signs.

However, in this rereading of the original Easter story with its prefixing of the scene with the competing disciples, the priority in faith gained by the Beloved Disciple over against Peter is reached at the cost of Mary of Magdala.⁶²

62. As a literary construct representing the Johannine circle, the Beloved Disciple actually has no sex—but the masculine forms used in the narrative suggest a male figure.

Were the emancipatory awakenings in the Johannine movement sacrificed to a compromise political solution in order to achieve the acceptance of the Gospel and the witness of the Beloved Disciple?

4.4. FEMALE FIRST APOSTLE?

As Mary's commission (John 20:17) and its fulfillment by her proclamation of Jesus's resurrection (v. 18) clearly show, her christophany is not to be assessed simply as a private revelation. Her church-constituting role should be recognized: she has a task regarding the (further existence of the) community of Jesus's followers.⁶³ Yet, while in the history of reception the same "seeing of the Lord" in the case of Peter and Paul formed the basis for a universal and permanent apostolate, Mary of Magdala's apostolic function was limited to a short-term messenger service.

Conversely, Mary of Magdala could be titled (first) apostle according to the Pauline criteria, the more so since Paul in 1 Cor 9:1 legitimates his authority as an apostle (see also 1 Cor 15:8–9; Gal 1:10–17) with the same short early Christian formula for the Easter experience of seeing and being called that is found in her mouth in John 20:18. Although Mary's role as an apostle cannot be derived directly from John's textual world, since John avoids the term "apostle" used as a *terminus technicus*,⁶⁴ this portrayal still allows conclusions in regard to the historical reconstruction of early Christianity—and it has opened up corresponding receptions. In patristic and medieval witnesses, Mary of Magdala is titled explicitly as *apostola* (see also her Eastern Church title *ισαπόστολος*, "apostle-like").⁶⁵

63. When John 20:1–18 frequently is classified as a recognition narrative (in distinction to the group appearances in Matt 28:16–20; Luke 24:36–43; John 20:19–23), the element of the commission is overlooked in most cases. The formulaic imperative "go" (*παρεύου*) can be interpreted in terms of a (prophetic) mission, following the linguistic usage of LXX.

64. Regarding the only occurrence in John 13:16, the meaning "messenger" or "envoy" has to be considered, although, in correspondence to the ambiguity to be discerned frequently in John, a certain criticism of claims to an apostolate also could resonate here. The basic Johannine category is discipleship (see Raymond E. Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Loves, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 1979], 86–87, 191).

65. On patristic receptions and on the question of how the apostle became the well-known sinner, 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. See also Taschl-Erber, "Between Recognition and Testimony."

However, even though the testimony of the Gospels presents Mary of Magdala as the only constantly named witness from the beginning of Jesus's activity in Galilee until his death on the cross and, beyond this, at the threshold to the post-Easter period, she is excluded from the apostolate, according to the conception in Acts 1:21–22, on the basis of her sex. Luke's restriction of the originally more open understanding of the apostolate to the circle of the Twelve as the only guarantors of the continuity, authenticity, and legitimacy of early Christian proclamation decisively determined the historical image of early Christianity.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The witness of the group of women accompanying Jesus since Galilee with Mary of Magdala as the leading figure is depicted according to the Gospels' testimony as the connecting link between the pre-Easter Jesus and the resurrected Jesus, in correlation with the basic points of the early Christian confession of faith: crucified, buried, resurrected. In the question concerning a congruent core of the stories of Easter morning, we can take as the starting point the experiences of visionary revelations by women who made a decisive contribution to the building of the post-Easter community, so that the Jesus movement could continue in the critical phase after the crucifixion.⁶⁶ In this regard, it is Mary of Magdala who is mentioned first, whose special role is reflected by the prophethood tradition.⁶⁷ Even if her portrait differs in the individual Gospels according to their respective theological concerns, these portraits still unanimously attest to her outstanding discipleship. We can draw a line from her pre-Easter discipleship and *διακονία* to her Easter commission and witness, comparable to Paul as *διάκονος* and *ἀπόστολος*.

Presumably, there existed a wider tradition in regard to Mary of Magdala, of which only a few reflections are found in the New Testament, the most significant being John 20:1–18. Only here does she get a chance to engage

66. On this, for example, Schottroff, "Frauen," 109–10; Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 138–39.

67. In Ps 187 of the fourth-century so-called Manichaean Psalm Book II, Jesus sends her as messenger to the Eleven, who, instead of being "fishers" of men and women, pursue their old profession of fishing. She is to bring these sheep gone astray back to the shepherd. In a similar manner, she is presented in another passage, in a catalogue of disciples, as a "net-caster hunting for the eleven others that were lost" (192:21–22). See Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents*, NHS 40 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 213.

in direct speech in the canonical Gospels⁶⁸ and is, in contrast to the Synoptics, not located within a group of women. Compared with this, in so-called gnostic and gnostic-related texts, she appears as Jesus's dialogue partner not exclusively in the context of the Easter events. On the basis of the traditional knowledge about her primacy as the first witness of the resurrected Jesus, she advanced to become one of the most important bearers of apostolic tradition in Christian gnostic circles. The Gospel of Mary draws most clearly on John 20, develops Jesus's (re)ascent to the Father in John 20:17 into a long visionary account of the (re)ascent of the soul into the heavenly spheres, and speaks explicitly about Mary's apostolic competition with Peter. Here, as in other texts that became apocryphal, the Spirit-filled beloved female disciple is confronted with the jealous representative of male primacy who contests her leading position, the legitimacy of her proclamation, her right to speak, and even her membership in the circle of disciples, while Mary of Magdala, as the representative of women in the Jesus movement, as well as also of the women in the actual communities, embodies the feminine claim to authority. Perhaps it was precisely many of *her* followers who, as the result of a general marginalization of women-centered traditions, as well as of an increasing expulsion of women from leadership positions (see 1 Tim 2:11–12), found a new home in early Christian groupings traditionally characterized as “gnostic,” groupings that preserved the original significance of the Magdalene as a witness of the resurrected Jesus and as a recipient of his revelation.⁶⁹ But there remains the fundamental hermeneutical question if and to what extent the blank spaces in the New Testament portrait of Mary of Magdala can be filled from the later apocryphal texts in order to recover the historical figure.⁷⁰

68. In contrast to the two silent male disciples, she speaks with all characters appearing here.

69. Here we could speculate further in view of Johannine Christianity whether the mitigation by the Johannine redaction of Mary of Magdala's primacy as first witness already represents a reaction to the beginning gnostic reception or whether Mary's displacement from her original role caused the migration of the tradition into gnosticizing and gnostic streams.

70. Jane Schaberg tends to assess the apocryphal portrait of Mary of Magdala as the original Magdalene tradition: “The Gospel of Mary and other works may preserve very early tradition that has been filtered out of the canonical materials” (*Resurrection*, 202). Mary Rose d'Angelo, “‘I have seen the Lord’: Mary Magdalen as Visionary, Early Christian Prophecy, and the Context of John 20:14–18,” in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 95–122 (112–17), sees in the visionary Mary a close continuity between John and the Gospel of Mary, and she sketches out a historical image of Mary of Magdala as a female prophet still known to a great extent as such as late as the second century.