James H. Charlesworth
editor

The Tomb of Jesus
and His Family?

Exploring Ancient Jewish
Tombs Near Jerusalem's Walls

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raised would have spiritual bodies undifferentiated as male and female (Luke 20:34-36). The book of Revelation speaks of the "sea" giving up the dead that is in it — indicating the former physical body is completely lost and destroyed (Rev 20:13). The earliest testimony to the resurrection of Jesus comes from Paul writing in the 50s CE (1 Cor 15). He writes that Christ "appeared" to him, but he distinguishes between a "natural" or physical (psychikos) body and what he calls a "spiritual" (pneumatikos) body, which he attributes to Christ, whom he says was raised as a "life-giving spirit." When Paul describes death in general, he speaks of "putting off" the body like a tent or garment, and "putting on a heavenly dwelling" or new body (2 Cor 5). When he describes the future resurrection of the "dead in Christ," he says they will be raised with incorruptible bodies, and there is no implication that the physical components of their physical bodies, now turned to dust, will be literally raised.

Mark, the earliest Gospel, has no "appearances" of Jesus, while the account in Matthew takes place in Galilee and has a "visionary" quality to it. Although it is true that Luke and John, as our latest Gospel records, written in the 90s CE, picture Jesus eating food after his resurrection, that view does not necessarily imply a physical body. Angels in the Bible are often portrayed as eating with physical mortals, but remaining nonetheless in a spiritual form (e.g., Gen 18). When Jesus speaks of the future resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he pictures them as "sitting at table" in the kingdom of God, but clearly they are in a new and transformed state — not a physical body of flesh and bones (Matt 8:11).

One might even see the discovery of the tomb of Jesus as a boon to faith in that it serves to ground his life and death in the very real history of the times. Such tangible evidence of Jesus and his family, buried together in death as in life according to the common Jewish custom of the times, provides a real "time-space" context for the Gospel stories that some might otherwise take as mythological.

The Memorial Mary Meets the Historical Mary: The Many Faces of the Magdalene in Ancient Christianity

April D. DeConick

Introduction

Mary of Magdala: Who was she, memorialized for us in the Bible as the woman who stood at Jesus' cross and visited his tomb, the woman who saw Jesus shortly after his resurrection? From the pulpit, we might hear of her as the sinful woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her tears and wiped them away with her hair, the repentant prostitute and exemplar of the reformed sinner. Feminist voices today laud her as a prophet and visionary, a woman leader among equals, a beloved disciple, the Apostle to the Apostles. Her pop image has been cultivated as the outspoken demon-possessed whore. Who can forget that provocative scene of the Magdalene from Cecille B. DeMille's famous film, *King of Kings*, when Jesus stares at her haughty figure and the seven deadly sins emerge from her body as ghostly apparitions? Or Martin Scorsese's tattooed temptress, naked behind the gauzy veil, hurling insults at Jesus for his voyeurism? Then there is the Magdalene as wife of Jesus and mother of his dynasty, most recently popularized by Dan Brown in the bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*.

What is difficult to distinguish among all these faces of Mary is the his-

torical from the rest, especially when we are operating in the realm of pop culture, where references in ancient manuscripts are so easily mistaken to be historical facts about Mary. This common mistake arises from an uncritical attitude about the written word, likely derived from Christian conviction in the givenness of the factuality of the biblical narratives. As scholars, we approach both the subject and literature much more skeptically and critically. Because an ancient text identifies her as a visionary or Jesus' lover does not mean that she was so. In fact, we know that the old literature that mentions Mary was produced by ancient Christians with their own special interests. They used the Magdalene's image in much the same way as pastors, priests, and pop writers do today — to support and forward their own convictions, platforms, and agendas.

Such a re-creation of her persona, however, need not be considered deliberate falsification on the part of the ancient authors. More often than not, it occurred as the result of the normal operation of communal memory, which inevitably renews and refurbishes older traditions in light of a new generation of people and its needs. Earlier memories and received traditions are reframed to coincide with contemporary experiences and attitudes of the group. The result is the safekeeping and preservation of traditions that might otherwise fade into oblivion, but in a new remodeled format that is pleasing and relevant to the fashions of the community involved.[1]

In the case of Mary Magdalene, we find in the early Christian literature the emergence of several memorial Marys from the bones of older collective memories. Building communal memory, like individual memory, is a reconstructive process, resulting in an ideal memory of the past, not a simple retrieval of what actually happened. So the connection between the memorial Marys in the ancient literature and the "historical" Mary Magdalene may be impossible to determine. It is more apparent why a particular community memorialized her in a chosen manner than whether its memory of her was "historical."

Recognizing this, however, does not mean that communal memories are simple fabrications with no connection to what actually happened. We do not construct our models from nothing but our imagination. Rather we tend to idealize certain people because they already were our models, and they were our models because of real, not imaginary, traits and accomplishments.[2] Indeed, Barry Schwartz argues, "Given the constraints of a recorded history, the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited."[3] Yael Zerubavel points out that communal memory "continuously negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas." It is in this process of "referring back to history" that our collective memory "shifts its interpretation, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects of those records."[4]

Like our own personal memories, the communal memories we hold in common with others are built from bits and pieces of our past, from our collective remembrances of what actually happened. Yet they do not recount what actually happened, but what we think happened, what we heard happened, even what we would like to have had happen. So there is an uneasy tension between the actual past and how we remember it. There are fragments of history there, but the history is subservient to the processes of human recall and its tendency to memorialize, explicate, and contemporize.

In some societies, multiple, even contrasting, collective memories can exist side by side without dispute.[5] But often this process of adjusting our memories within the social frames of each new generation is a political process, and such was the case in pre-Constantinian Christianity, where countermemories competed on common ground. Countermemories do not usually emerge out of "new" data. In order for the countermemories to be acceptable, they need to be considered legitimate. They cannot diverge wildly from the older traditional memories. The creation of countermemories is done by reconfiguring the older received memories, focusing on less prominent features of those memories, while rekeying them with new reference points and reframing them into new contexts.

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1. Seminal studies on social memory include Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. and ed. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich: Beck, 1992); idem, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism: A Case of Distorted Memory," in *Memory Distortion*, ed. Daniel L. Schachter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 365-78; Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

2. Barry Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System: Abraham Lincoln in World War II," *American Sociological Review* 61 (1996): 922-23.

3. Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory," *Social Forces* 61 (1982): 393.

4. Yael Zerubavel, "The Death of Memory and the Memory of Death: Masada and the Holocaust as Historical Metaphors," *Representations* 45 (1994): 73.

5. Doron Mendels, "Societies of Memory in the Graeco-Roman World," in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Stephen C. Barton, and Benjamin G. Wold (WUNT 212; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), pp. 143-62.

Eventually a master collective memory emerges, reflecting the stance of the dominant group and marginalizing the competing memories. Groups in power tend to use their collective memories to support the maintenance of their own hegemony.[6] But it is also a fact that certain memory reconstructions by communities are countermemories, serving to subvert the official memories of the dominant group. In the case of collective memories of religious traditions, the counternarratives often will introduce deliberate inversions into the official commemorative narratives, a move that violates their previously sacred character, as Zerubavel has shown was done with the subversive narratives about Masada that arose in the 1970s and 1980s.[7] These countermemories sometimes are put into place by intellectuals and scholars who return to the ancient texts and archaeology, attempting to reintroduce "history" alongside memory, challenging the master commemorative narrative that has dominated the communal landscape.[8]

The Talpiot tomb has been a lightning rod for such memorial activity. It evokes not only the dominant commemorative narrative of Mary Magdalene, but a subversive narrative too. The image of the Magdalene as Jesus' wife has been enjoying a historicization of sorts. The focus of attention has been three inscriptions found on different Talpiot ossuaries said to read, "Jesus, son of Joseph," "Judah, son of Jesus," and "Mariamene, who is Mara." From this reexamination of the tomb's ossuaries, a counternarrative has emerged in the media and in scholarship that Jesus indeed was married to Mary of Magdala and fathered a son named Judah. This narrative has inverted the official communal memory of Jesus. Because it violates the sacred master narrative that knows Jesus of Nazareth as a celibate single man, the backlash from the public and scholars alike has been severe.

The object of this paper, however, is not to examine this contemporary backlash, but to consider whether ossuary 701 may have contained the bones of Jesus' wife, Mary Magdalene. My charge is to determine from the ancient literary evidence, with special attention to the extracanonical, whether Mary Magdalene may have been married to Jesus. In order to meet this challenge, Mary Magdalene's story must be explored as a "site of memory."[9] What of

6. Schwartz, "Memory as a Cultural System," p. 909.

7. Zerubavel, "Death of Memory," pp. 89-91.

8. Ibid., pp. 83-84.

9. On the coinage of this phrase, see Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire,* 3 vols. (Paris: Gallimard, 1984-1986); English translation, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Arthur Goldhammer, 3 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996-1998).

her history, if anything, can be recovered from the writings of early Christian communities who memorialized her?

Foundational Memories of Mary

It is not an easy task to be true to the historical developments of early Christianity, because these developments have been framed for centuries in anachronistic terms as a fight between the "orthodox" or apostolic catholic church and the "heretics" who broke away to form deviant cults. The heretics were responsible for writing the literature that was not accepted into the New Testament canon, and therefore their testimonies are late and fabricated. What they say has no theological, let alone historical, value.

This anachronistic frame has deteriorated under the pressure of information that we have gleaned from newly found texts from the Dead Sea, Nag Hammadi, and El Minya. The difficulty we face is that we, as an academy, have yet to put into place a new historical paradigm with better language that grants noncanonical texts the same respect as canonical ones. If we did so, we would have to say that the development of early Christianity was not linear and dependent on an orthodox perspective from an early date. The catholic perspective, which was grown in the apostolic churches, came to dominate as the "orthodox" perspective by the fourth century when it thrived under the auspices of Constantine. But prior to this, many Christian traditions competed for supremacy and framed their own perspectives as "orthodox" and their detractors' as "heretical."

The real historical situation is very complex, but one in which we can say with certainty that various Christian churches in the second century inherited cycles of oral and written stories from the Christian communities in the late first century. I call these stories the foundational memories. Some have been lost because they only remained in oral circulation. Some are recoverable because we have written versions of them. The foundational memories in the Gospels were not written down until at least forty years after the historical events. So even the foundational written stories are communal adaptations of older received oral stories.

Holly Hearon has explained that Mary Magdalene's story can be found in at least three different independent written versions preserved in the canonical Gospels. Although there are shifts in the details and special interests, all three versions are aware that Mary was Jesus' disciple and primary witness to his resurrection. Hearon explains that the written versions of her

story were adapted by three authors from a larger complex of oral stories about Mary that circulated in the Christian communities and continued to circulate even after the Gospel versions were recorded. The authors reframed elements from the oral Magdalene cycles. In all cases, the reframing of Mary's story by the evangelists limited or subordinated her discipleship by shifting elements of her story to men who are clearly delineated as "disciples." Hearon concludes that this reframing was done to engage the evangelists' own special interests about their named leaders, who were competing in particular congregations with charismatic prophets and teachers, some of whom were women.[10]

· Sociologically this mirrors a shift. Paul, who is writing at least twenty years before the evangelists, tells us that women were both praying and prophesying in the church at Corinth, a practice he is concerned about and attempts to limit.[11] He also is aware that Phoebe was a leader of the church of Cenchraea.[12] We know from Acts that Philip the evangelist had four daughters who were prophets.[13] So what we are seeing in the reframing of the story of Mary Magdalene in the Gospels is a swing in policy and politics, from an early unconventional movement where leadership was not limited by gender, to a later development in some churches that were beginning to authorize that only the twelve male disciples, the apostles, could be authentic bearers of the Christian traditions.[14]

10. For a detailed analysis of these three stories, see Holly E. Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2004).

11. 1 Cor 11 and 14.

12. 1 Cor 11:4; Rom 16:7.

13. Acts 21:9.

14. In addition to Hearon, *Mary Magdalene Tradition,* discussions of various aspects of this swing can be found in Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Mary Magdalene: Apostle to the Apostles," *Union Theological Seminary Journal* (April 1975): 22-24; idem, "Word, Spirit, and Power: Women in the Early Christian Communities," in *Women of Spirit,* ed. Rosemary R. Ruether and Eleanor McLaughlin (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), pp. 51-56; idem, *In Memory of Her* (New York: Crossroad, 1984), pp. 304-9, 332-34; François Bovon, "Le privilege pascal de Marie-Madeleine," *NTS* 30 (1984): 51-52; Mary Catherine Carson, "And They Said Nothing to Anyone: A Redaction-Critical Study of the Role and Status of Women in the Crucifixion, Burial and Resurrection Stories of the Canonical and Apocryphal Gospels" (Ph.D. diss.; University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1990); Susanne Heine, "Eine Person von Rang und Namen: Historische Konturen der Magdalenerin," in *Jesu Rede von Gott und ihre Nachgeschichte im frühen Christentum,* ed. Dietrich-Alex Koch, Gerhard Sellin, and Andreas Lindemann (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn,

By the end of the first century, Christian churches were split on the question of gender and leadership. The "proto-orthodox" or apostolic churches were closing down the old prerogative of Christian women to be prophets and teachers. They began simultaneously to close women out of these leadership roles while also insisting on their marriage. In fact, the early-second-century author of one of the Pastoral Letters in the New Testament claims that, because a woman (Eve) was a secondary creation and the one who transgressed in the garden, women must be subordinate to men, and unconditionally refrain from teaching men. The author of the letter commands, "Let a woman learn in silence with all submissiveness. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men. She is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor."[15] Women's salvation, according to this author, can only be attained through marriage and bearing children from that union. So he writes, "Yet woman will be saved through bearing children, if she continues in faith and love and holiness, with modesty."[16]

But not all churches at this time held this perspective. Indeed, some churches argued voraciously against this position, wanting instead to maintain the old ways of the early charismatic unconventional movement. In order for these second-century churches to keep their clergies open to women, they developed countermemories about Mary to support their view.

Countermemories of the Encratic Mary

Countermemories of Mary Magdalene as Jesus' "male" disciple emerge in a set of texts that scholars call "encratic" (from *encrateia,* "self-control") because the heroes are radical renunciates. In the past, encratic Christianity has been confused with gnostic Christianity because it was thought that both encratites and gnostics degraded the world and spurned marriage. This opinion is no longer au courant since we have now realized after studying

1989), pp. 187-91; Claudia Setzer, "Excellent Women: Female Witnesses to the Resurrection," *JBL* 116 (1997): 260-71; Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, the First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Harvard Theological Studies 51; Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

15. 1 Tim 2:11-14.

16. 1 Tim 2:15.

the Nag Hammadi texts that not all gnostics degraded the world or spurned marriage. In fact, we will meet pro-marriage gnostics in the next section.

The cluster of encratic texts I will be referring to in this section were written in east Syria in the second century, and reflect normative ideals and practices in early Syrian Christianity. To be baptized into the east Syrian church meant that the convert had vowed to forsake the matrimonial bed. It is not until the fourth century that Syrian Christianity begins to conform to the beliefs and practices of the Roman West, when the Syrian churches begin to allow baptized members to marry.

The most famous reference to Mary is found in the encratic text, the *Gospel of Thomas*: "Simon Peter said to them, 'Mary should leave us because women do not deserve life.' Jesus said, 'Look, in order to make her male, I myself will guide her, so that she too may become a living spirit — male, resembling you. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.'"[17] The meaning of this saying reflects the view of early Syrian Christianity that marriage must be renounced in favor of a single life once the convert became a full member of the church following baptism.

The reason that this sort of lifestyle was expected of Christians was tied to the metanarrative that the Syrian Christians had developed to explain salvation. Their understanding of the meaning of the Genesis story was key. They were careful exegetes and noted that the reference to the simultaneous creation of the human being in Gen 1:27 as "male and female" beings differed substantially from that in Gen 2:22, where Eve is created out of Adam as God's afterthought. In order to harmonize these two stories, they argued that, in chapter 1, the primordial human being was an androgynous "man," a "him" consisting of male and female aspects: "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."[18] Then, in Gen 2:22, this primordial androgynous "man" fell asleep and God cut into his side and took the rib out and made woman.

These encratic exegetes concluded from their study of these verses that the ideal state that all humans beings should strive to attain is the primordial androgynous one described in Gen 1. It was the state of "man" before he sinned, when Adam was created in God's image with the female, Eve, concealed inside him. This was a paradisiacal time when the first "man" was "a living spirit."[19] This theology in practice meant that the encratic Christians strove to recreate a sexless Eden within their churches, to live their lives in imitation of the primordial Adam. To imitate this androgynous "male" ideal, both male and female members of the churches renounced marriage, became single, and lived as celibates. This ideal state the encratites described as becoming "neither male nor female" as well as "male."[20] It is an interpretation of the Genesis story that appears quite old, known also to Paul: "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus."[21]

Stories like those found in the *Acts of Paul and Thecla* suggest that some women took this metaphor quite literally. They chopped off their hair and donned pants, and then headed out on the road with the men as missionaries. Detailed studies of this corpus of literature have suggested that its encratic message was particularly appealing to women because they were given an opportunity in encratic communities to be something other than wives and mothers. Once women converts refused marriage, they were baptized and became honored as "virgins" and "brides" of Christ. By refusing the sexual advances of their betrothed and their husbands, these women ceased childbearing. In this capacity, they shed "femaleness" and became "male," which allowed them to take on leadership roles.

As we learned in the last section, this openness to women as leaders and celibates was not universally accepted among Christians even at an early date. Many apostolic churches were shutting women out of leadership roles while also insisting that women marry based on their reading of the Genesis story in which woman is a secondary creation responsible for sin. Her only salvation is acceptance of her perpetual punishment — to submit to the totalitarian rule of her husband and to painful childbearing. In no case should she be permitted to teach men. Following this line of interpretation, Simon Peter in the *Gospel of Thomas* insists that Mary should leave the company of the male disciples, the male leadership, because women are not worthy of salvation. This Genesis-inspired teaching appears to have been a well-known

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17. *Gospel of Thomas* 114 (my trans.).

18. Gen 1:27.

19. Gen 2:7 LXX.

20. April D. DeConick, *Recovering the Original Gospel of Thomas: A History of the Gospel and Its Growth* (London: T&T Clark, 2005), pp. 187-88. Cf. K. Vogt, "'Becoming Male': A Gnostic and Early Christian Metaphor," in *The Image of God: Gender Models in Judaeo-Christian Tradition*, ed. K. E. Børresen (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995), pp. 170-86. For androgyny language see *Gos. Thom.* 22; 2 *Clem.* 12.2; *Gospel according to the Egyptians*, according to Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.13.93. For "male" language see *Strom.* 6.12.100; Hermas, *Vis.* 3.8.4; *Acts of Paul and Thecla* 40; *Acts Phil.* 44.

21. Gal 3:27-28.

appeal by authorities in churches wanting to discredit and invalidate women's leadership roles.

The encratic community wholeheartedly disagreed with this interpretation of Genesis, understanding it to be an abuse of the text. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, the encratic author cleverly brings forward his own appeal to Genesis, a saying of the "living" Jesus to counter the apostolic position voiced by Peter. According to the encratic position, women are worthy of life. Women too can become "living spirits" like the original Adam. How? To become the primordial Adam, the first man, they believed that women had to reject "femaleness," which they understood to be marriage and procreation, just as they thought Mary had been able to do as Jesus' "male" disciple.

This memorial Magdalene is the celibate disciple Mary, a student Jesus favors for her chastity. She stands up in encratic texts to combat apostolic teachings that were being used by some church leaders to subordinate and silence women by reducing them to temptresses, tricksters, and transgressors. This combat over the worth of women is nowhere more visible than in the *Dialogue of the Savior*, an encratic Syrian Christian text from the early second century. The text quotes a sexist saying, which it attributes to Jesus: "Pray where there is no woman."[22] This saying is in line with the words of Peter in the *Gospel of Thomas*, "Mary should leave us because women do not deserve life," and the words of the author of 1 Timothy, "I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over men. She is to keep silent." The Christians who were touting this sexist saying as Jesus' must have been using it as leverage to deny women access to their traditional roles as Christian leaders.

The authenticity of this saying in the ancient world appears to have been undisputed since the author of the *Dialogue of the Savior* assumes its veracity. He knows the saying as one that has been brandied about as Jesus' own, and he does not like how other churches are using it to subjugate women. So to defuse it, he does not address the authenticity of the saying itself, only its meaning. Immediately he offers a corrected interpretation of it. "Pray where there is no woman," he says, means that we must "destroy the works of femaleness," that is, women "should stop [giving birth]."[23] So the author reframes the saying by inverting its meaning. The erasure of "woman" should not be understood as the rejection of women from the churches' body of clergy. Rather, he says, it refers only to the cessation of female activity. The saying is rekeyed to promote encratic ideals rather than

22. *Dial. Sav.* 144.15-16 (my trans.).
23. *Dial. Sav.* 144.19-21 (my trans.).

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church sexism. A troublesome teaching about women's subjugation in the apostolic churches becomes a commandment from Jesus to stop having sex and children in the encratic churches.

In this context, Mary asks Jesus if procreation will ever be destroyed. Jesus tells her that she knows that this will be so. His statement assumes that Mary herself is an exemplar of the celibate woman.[24] Her responsibilities do not include traditional marriage, procreation, and childrearing. In her capacity as the woman who has put off the "female," Mary is the ideal disciple who says to Jesus, "I want to understand everything [as] it is." Jesus responds by telling her to seek "life" rather than the wealth of the world.[25]

She is granted a vision of the future along with the male disciples Matthew and Judas (Thomas), who was the apostolic hero of Syrian Christianity.[26] She is described by the encratic author as the "woman who understood everything," and consequently is confident to teach Jesus' words to others.[27] So, in the course of the dialogue between Jesus and his inner circle of disciples, it is the disciple Mary who orates three sayings of Jesus: "'The wickedness of each day.' And 'laborers deserve their food.' And 'the disciple resembles the teacher.'"[28] When she speaks, she does so with the authority of a teacher, and Jesus responds by telling her that her remarks show "the greatness of the revealer."[29]

What inspired encratic communities to form this particular memorial Magdalene? They linked their knowledge of Mary from the old oral memories of her as a disciple and leader with their interpretation of the written foundational stories about her preserved in the canonical Gospels. The written narratives present her as a woman alone, far away from her home in Magdala. In these stories, she is the woman without a husband or children. Unlike Joanna the wife of Herod's steward Chuza or Mary the mother of James and Joseph who appear beside her, Mary's name does not connect her to a husband, or suggest any other familial associations.[30] The encratic Christian may have wondered whether it was her willingness to renounce her traditional female roles that earned her Jesus' favor. Had she given up her home in order to become Jesus' favored student?[31]

24. *Dial. Sav.* 144.22–145.2.
25. *Dial. Sav.* 141.12-19 (my trans.).
26. *Dial. Sav.* 134.24–137.3.
27. *Dial. Sav.* 139.8-13 (my trans.).
28. *Dial. Sav.* 139.8-13 (my trans.); cf. Matt 6:34; 10:10, 35; Luke 10:7; 1 Tim 5:18.
29. *Dial. Sav.* 140.17-19 (my trans.).
30. Luke 8:3; Matt 27:56.
31. John 20:18.

Such an understanding of the foundational written stories about Mary would easily result in memorializing this woman as the encratic Magdalene who had renounced her traditional roles as wife and mother to attend to the teachings of Jesus, and carry them on after his death as an apostle herself. Mary's "maleness" in fact derived from her refusal to marry and take on the traditional roles of the female, including procreation. This is a subversive memory, undermining the conventional picture of women in the ancient world. Because the women have become "men," however, it is a powerful argument that allowed women to continue to operate as public Christian leaders.

Countermemories of the Gnostic Mary

Gnostic Christian churches in the second century were diverse, and not all were interested in Mary Magdalene. The type of gnostic Christianity that was interested in her story we call by convention "Valentinianism," although they called themselves "Christian." They were esoteric Christians who attended apostolic churches while also attending gnostic lodge meetings where they were instructed and initiated into the mysteries of God. The Valentinians developed a mythology with a creator god who was not evil but inferior. So the cosmos was not a dark evil place that opposed the divine world, but an inferior one that shadowed it.

The memorial Magdalene in the Valentinian gnostic literature is quite different from the Magdalene found in the encratic literature. One might even say that the countermemories developed by the Valentinians rendered her into her doppelganger. She is memorialized in the *Gospel of Philip* as Jesus' partner: "And the partner of the [Savior] is Mary Magdalene. The [Savior loved] her more than all of the disciples, and often he kissed her on her [mouth]. The other [disciples . . .] said to him, 'Why do you love her more than all of us?' The Savior answered and said to them, 'Why do I not love you all like her?'"[32] The English translation "partner" for the noun *koinōnos* is a bit deceptive, since its verbal form, *koinoō*, can mean "to have intercourse with." In this sort of context, the noun *koinōnos* can refer to "spousal partner." Their spousal partnership is quite clearly indicated in another passage from the *Gospel of Philip*, which reflects on three women in Jesus' life: "There were three walking with the Lord all the time. Mary his mother and her sister

32. *Gos. Phil.* 63.30–64.6 (my trans.).

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and Magdalene, the woman who was called his partner. For 'Mary' was his sister and his mother and his partner."[33]

Jesus married, and to the Magdalene nonetheless? Where does this idea originate? It reflects Valentinian theology thoroughly.[34] In Valentinianism, God is not just a Father in heaven. He is a Father-Mother, a god with male and female complements that function like a married couple, what they call a *syzygy*. The Godhead or Pleroma consists of thirty Aeons who were perceived to be similar to glorified angels. Like the Father-Mother, the Aeons are wedded couples, male-female syzygies. The sole purpose of their marriages is a type of procreation that resulted from mutual reflection upon the Father. Even though there is a contemplative component to their intercourse, an active eroticism is not missing. Each new syzygy is created through an act of lovemaking when the male Aeon deposits seed in the womb of the female Aeon, a process begun by the unknown Father himself.[35] The Godhead falls apart when a single Aeon, the female Sophia, decides to procreate passionately and independently.

Aeonic marriage is the ideal that humans are to strive for. The Valentinians considered human marriage a sacrament deriving from the divine Aeons above.[36] Even the Valentinian vision of eternity focused on the matrimonial bed. The saved would marry guardian angels at the end of time when a communal wedding would occur. The Pleroma would open its doors to the newlyweds as their bridal chamber.

The Valentinians, however, are careful to distinguish between two types of human marriage. There is a lower form of marriage that they call the "marriage of impurity." It is characterized by carnal desire, what is called in their texts *epithymia* or lust. The Valentinians taught that people generally are involved in impure marriages, because they treat lovemaking and procreation as an orgy of flesh, as a fulfillment of their lust. This passion, the Valentinians said, impacted the conception of the child negatively, resulting

33. *Gos. Phil.* 59.6–11 (my trans.).

34. This following description of Valentinian marriage and the sacraments is based on a series of articles that I have written and published elsewhere: "The True Mysteries: Sacramentalism in the Gospel of Philip," *VC* 55 (2001): 225–61; "The Great Mystery of Marriage: Sex and Conception in Ancient Valentinian Traditions," *VC* 57 (2003): 307–42; "Conceiving Spirits: The Mystery of Valentinian Sex," in *Hidden Intercourse: Essays on Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism,* ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff and Jeffrey J. Kripal (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 23–48.

35. Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1.1.

36. *Gos. Phil.* 64.31; Clement of Alexandria, *Misc.* 3.1.

in a child with a weakened "female" spirit, which would have trouble thwarting the passions of his or her soul. If the spirit was so weak that the person was not able to overcome the passions, the child would be doomed. If the spirit could gain enough fortitude to rule the emotive self, and if it chose to be baptized in the Christian church, it could become "male" and be worthy of salvation.

The ideal marriage, however, has nothing to do with *epithymia*. Pure marriages, which the Valentinians trained themselves to enjoy, were believed to reflect the ideal Aeonic marriages. Instead of a lustful focus, the partners were supposed to include in their lovemaking contemplation of God and prayer, raising the sex act from a hedonistic affair to an intellectual and spiritual orgasm in harmony with the physical. This resulted in the conception of children with strong "male" or "elect" spirits, which would be able to easily strengthen their souls and be saved without a moment's hesitation.

The only Aeon who comes into being outside a syzygy or a marriage is the Aeon Jesus. He comes into being after Sophia falls and her negative aspect is expelled from the Pleroma as Achamoth. All of the Aeons pray to the Father to save her. The result of their union is the production of the Aeon Jesus. His job is to descend out of the Pleroma, redeem Achamoth, and restore to God our spirits, which had become trapped in matter. Since it is Achamoth's independent procreative activity outside marriage that resulted in sin, her salvation is her marriage. Jesus is single. Achamoth is single. What could be more convenient than their marriage? So they become betrothed, awaiting matrimonial consummation at the end of time when the Pleromic bridal chamber will receive the newlyweds. The Aeon Jesus descends to earth to redeem our spirits. He is born as the human being, Jesus of Nazareth. There was no doubt in the mind of the Valentinians that this Jesus was married too. And the wife they betrothed to him was Mary Magdalene.

But she was remembered by the Valentinians not only as Jesus' wife. Mary was also his favorite disciple who carried on Jesus' esoteric teaching after his death as a leader among the apostles. This iconic portrayal of her is very prominent in the *Gospel of Mary*, a Gospel that is a Valentinian "midrash" on John 20:18: "Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, 'I have seen the Lord.' And she told them that he had said these things to her." The *Gospel of Mary* reveals her teaching to the male disciples, a teaching that the Valentinians believed she had received earlier from Jesus in the garden. What did the Valentinians think this esoteric teaching was? It was a Valentinian homily on the Eucharist delivered by Mary Magdalene.

To set up her delivery of this homily, the Gospel opens with a discus-

sion between Jesus and the disciples about the nature of sin. Mary is present as one of his disciples. Jesus explains that sin has arisen because the soul has become embedded in matter. When the soul descended into the material body, it descended into a condition of disturbance and temptation. This disturbed condition of the soul leads us to commit sins like adultery. The only way that this situation can be resolved, he says, is with the descent of the Savior, when he unites with our souls. So Jesus exclaims: "Watch out that no one leads you astray, saying, 'Lo here!' or 'Lo there!' For the Son of Man is within you. Follow him!"[37] When he finishes speaking, Jesus leaves the disciples, who begin to grieve.

Mary steps forward and consoles them, reminding them that Jesus' "grace" is with them. She tells the other disciples not to despair, but to "praise his greatness, for he has made us ready. He has made us men."[38] And with this, she turns the hearts of the disciples to God. This language resonates liturgy. The word normally translated as "praise" in Coptic is *cmou*, which means "to give thanks." In many cases, it can mean "to take" or "give a sacrament." The "thanksgiving" sacrament is the Eucharist, and this is what is referred to here. Mary is leading the disciples in a Eucharist ceremony, beginning by lifting their hearts to God just as is done in the modern-day Catholic mass. What does the ceremony do according to the *Gospel of Mary*? It is a ritual that brings about the descent of the Son of Man within the person, or as Levi says at the end of the Gospel, it enables the person to "put on the Perfected Man and have him for ourselves."[39]

This is technical language. Like many other Valentinian texts, "putting on the Perfected Man" refers to receiving the body of Christ by participating in the Eucharist ceremony.[40] According to the Valentinians, Jesus the Perfected Man is the reflection of the primordial Man, who is the androgynous Man before Adam's sin. It is this body that we acquire in the Eucharist. They believed that, when the faithful ate the divine man Jesus, his body would work internally like medicine, healing our brokenness. By eating and drinking the Perfected Man, our fallen bodies are rebuilt or resurrected into glorious bodies. This is a reference not to a new fleshly body, but to a spiritual or angelic one that will be able to ascend through the spheres of heavens undetected by the vicious celestial guardians, a topic that Mary

37. *Gos. Mary* 8.15-20 (my trans.).
38. *Gos. Mary* 9.19-20 (my trans.).
39. *Gos. Mary* 18.15-18 (my trans.).
40. *Gos. Philip* 55.11-14; 73.27.

preaches about throughout the rest of the extant *Gospel of Mary*.[41] So redemption by participation in the Eucharist is characterized as the recovery and transformation of the woman Eve into the primordial man, Adam. As Mary says to the male disciples in the *Gospel of Mary*, in this way Jesus "made us into men."

But that is not all. The transformation into the primordial man is also connected to marriage. Twice referencing Eve's movement back into Adam, the author of the *Gospel of Philip* teaches that the return to the prelapsarian unity is the joining of husband and wife in marriage.[42] So what we have in the Valentinian gnostic community is the argument that through marriage, women are able to achieve the primal androgyny of the first "man," thus becoming "male." This "male" conversion allowed the women gnostics to stand up as church leaders alongside the men, giving sacraments and delivering homilies like the "male" Mary Magdalene.

Given this interpretation of the Genesis story, we should not be surprised that in the *Gospel of Mary* Mary's leadership role is threatening to Peter and Andrew, who represent the opinion of the apostolic church. Mary is in direct conflict with Peter and Andrew, who challenge her opinions as "some other ideas."[43] They question whether Jesus taught esoteric things to a woman, while leaving themselves, the male disciples, out of the conversation. Didn't he speak openly to us? Does he want us to listen to her? Did he prefer her to us? These are all social questions that have arisen as a result of the gender debate that gripped Christianity.

Mary responds by asking whether Peter thinks that she is lying. Levi, an advocate for the gnostic position, jumps in and tells Peter to be quiet. "If the Savior made her worthy, who are you to cast her out?" Levi says. "Certainly the Savior knows her very well. This is why he loved her more than us. Let us be ashamed, put on the Perfected Man, and have him for ourselves as he commanded us. Let us preach the gospel, and stop laying down rules that are beyond what the Savior said."[44] These words are telling, revealing a social situation in which the Valentinians, like the Syrian encratites, are arguing that some of the apostolic churches are institutionalizing rules that exclude women from pulpit activities when Jesus never meant or said any such thing. Instead, the Valentinians argue that women, like Mary Magdalene, do have a

41. Cf. *Gos. Phil.* 76.23-30; 86.6-11.
42. *Gos. Phil.* 70.10-22; 68.23-26; cf. *Interp. Know.* 10.24-36.
43. *Gos. Mary* 17.15 (my trans.).
44. *Gos. Mary* 18.10-21 (my trans.).

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route to "maleness." It is achieved sacramentally, mainly through their participation in the Eucharist and marriage.

Why did the Valentinians choose Mary Magdalene as Jesus' *koinōnos?* Like the encratic Christians, the Valentinians based their countermemories on universal givens about Mary, elements such as her discipleship and leadership that transcended the written narratives but were generally accepted by Christians as genuine. They also appear to have been very familiar with the canonical narratives, favoring the version of Mary's story found in the Gospel of John because of the intimacy featured between Jesus and Mary. From these narratives, the Valentinians also seem to have recognized her as a single woman. This, however, did not mean that she had renounced marriage and procreation as the encratic Christians claimed. This meant that she was available for marriage. Jesus is single. Mary Magdalene is single. What could be more convenient than their marriage?

The countermemories of the Valentinians are not so much subversive as they are adaptive. Socially, the Valentinians considered themselves to be members of the apostolic church until the mid-third century. So they accepted the apostolic pro-marriage argument, but they refocused it. They agreed with the other apostolic Christians that the marriage of the female to the male is salvific, but they disagreed about what type of relationship it should be. They argued that it is not a relationship of subordination, but one of harmonious cooperation between partners mirroring the Aeonic syzygies. Marriage is a unification of the divided primal androgyny, before Eve became separated from Adam. This primal Adam, the androgynous "male," was their redemptive goal, and had to be achieved sacramentally through the Eucharist and marriage. Because women could recreate this primal androgyny by participating in the Eucharist and marrying, they could return to the garden as the prelapsarian Man. They could become "men" as Mary Magdalene did. On this basis, they concluded, women should be allowed to stay in the clergy.

Master Narratives of the Apostolic Mary

The apostolic church emerged as the orthodox tradition by the fourth century, and when this happened women definitively were locked out of the clergy. Mary's memory as a powerful leader could not survive within the apostolic environment. In order to control her memory, two different master narratives about Mary Magdalene arose in the Western and Eastern apostolic churches.

Western theologians realigned her with the stories of Mary of Bethany and the prostitute from Luke's Gospel who wept on Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. This new counternarrative transformed the foundational stories of Mary by confusing them with stories of other Marys and women, casting Mary as a prostitute.[45] This countermemory appears to have been fairly well known already in the mid-second century, since the pagan philosopher Celsus refers to it when he insinuates that Jesus and his disciples were supported by certain women whom Jesus healed, and that this support was garnered through "a disgraceful and importunate way."[46] Tertullian calls Mary Magdalene "the woman who was a sinner," a clear reference to her conflation with the sinner woman in Luke.[47] In a sermon once attributed to Hippolytus, Mary and Martha, Lazarus's sisters, seek Christ in the garden. Martha's sister is confused with Mary Magdalene. Hippolytus considers her a second Eve whose obedience to Jesus compensates for the sin of the first Eve.[48]

Mary as the repentant whore becomes the official master narrative of the Roman Church by the sixth century. In a sermon delivered on September 14, 591, Pope Gregory the Great seals her fate. He definitively transposed the story of the Magdalene into the stories of Mary of Bethany and Luke's sinful woman who used her flesh "in forbidden acts."[49] In so doing, Gregory was able to successfully suppress the earlier contrasting memories of Mary as a powerful woman leader, memories that had the potential to continue to threaten the hegemony of the patriarchal order. What is most disturbing about this recreation was that Gregory did not just lock women out of the clergy. He cemented a memorial bridge that would connect all women with Mary the repentant whore.[50] As the redeemed whore, she became the character model for women, a manageable and controllable woman whose "new" story would be used as propaganda to subjugate women on divine writ for hundreds of years.

45. For a good overview of this process, see Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1993), pp. 3-97; Schaberg, *Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, pp. 65-120.

46. Origen, *c. Cels.* 1.65.

47. Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 4.18.9, 16-17.

48. Hippolytus, *Comm. Cant.* 8.2; 24.60.

49. Gregory the Great, *Hom.* 33.

50. On the types of bridges, see Yael Zerubavel, "Antiquity and the Renewal Paradigm: Strategies of Representation and Mnemonic Practices in Israeli Culture," in *On Memory: An Interdisciplinary Approach*, ed. Doron Mendels (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007), pp. 331-48.

Interestingly, the apostolic churches in the West were silent when it came to memories of Mary's discipleship and her leadership. When the Western apostolic churches created their countermemories of Mary the prostitute, they did not invoke memories of either her discipleship or her leadership. They did not dispute them nor agree with them. Their silence is telling. If these two memories were universally accepted givens about Mary, to deny them would sabotage the countermemory that the apostolic community is producing because it would be openly defying accepted knowledge about Mary. So to subdue these threatening but accepted memories of Mary, the Western apostolic churches overwhelmed them by confusing Mary Magdalene's story with the story of other women found in the Gospels. Furthermore, they focused on her singleness at the expense of all other memories of her. In the ancient world, where unmarried public women were stereotyped as prostitutes, Mary's public singleness was her greatest liability and the Western apostolic churches used it against her. Once her name was linked with the image of the Lukan prostitute, her good reputation was irrevocably damaged. Mary Magdalene was brought to her knees along with all women leaders in the West who emulated her.

In the Eastern apostolic tradition, a different memory shift takes place. By the fourth century the hierarchies in the Syrian churches had become male-dominated and, under pressure from Rome, the Syrian churches had begun to accommodate married members into its congregations. When this happened, the memory of the "male" Magdalene became less and less necessary. Memories of Mary in the fourth-century Syrian literature become eclectic and confused. Her image erodes when she is superimposed with other characters, oftentimes male, but most prominently the Virgin Mary. This further exaggerated the suppression of women's leadership, because women were faced with a paradox, a woman model who was both a virgin and a mother, a Mary they could never emulate. The result of this shift in communal memory is a Syrian tradition that the resurrected Jesus appeared to Mary his mother first. Other than her name "Mary," the memory of the Magdalene all but disappeared from the garden.[51]

In other Eastern traditions, she is neither confused with the Virgin Mary nor amalgamated to Luke's prostitute or with Mary of Bethany, as she is in the West. Rather, in later Eastern Orthodoxy she remains her own

51. Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, pp. 123-42; Robert Murray, *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 144-50, 329-35.

woman. She is depicted in late legends as so chaste that the devil sends seven demons into her because he mistakes her for the Virgin Mary and wants to hinder the incarnation. She is given the honorable title "Apostle to the Apostles" and is considered an "Equal to the Apostles." Although this might seem like an acknowledgment of her old apostolic prominence, it does not work that way in the Eastern Orthodox tradition itself. The title "Equal to the Apostles" is given to Mary because she was the first messenger commissioned by Jesus to announce his resurrection.[52] "Apostle to the Apostles" is her title because she proclaimed the resurrection to the apostles, who then proclaimed his resurrection to the whole world.[53]

What happened to Mary when this master narrative formed in Eastern Orthodoxy? The later Eastern traditions may be aware of Mary's prominent reputation in the early church as a single woman who was commissioned by Jesus as an apostle. Yet in their official master narrative there is a reliance on the canonical Gospels to restate her narrative as it is told by the evangelists, where earlier memories of her prominence are recontextualized in a hermeneutic that subordinates her to the male apostles whom she entrusts with her vision and its dissemination. The male apostles are reconfirmed as the official bearers of the Christian traditions in the east, and apostle Mary is effectively silenced.

The Historical Mary

In the ancient Christian literature, many faces of Mary Magdalene emerge, all of them countermemories formed by early communities. These contrasting memories of Mary emerge at a time when the demotion of women was the norm in many apostolic churches. When apostolic churches began to restrict access to the clergy to men and teach women that their salvation is to be found in their matrimonial submission and fecundity, both the encratites and the Valentinians challenged them with memorial Marys who were "male." In the second-century West, the apostolic churches had begun to spin their own countermemory of Mary Magdalene as a whore, albeit a repentant one. In Syria she is eventually amalgamated with the Virgin Mary,

while in Eastern Orthodox traditions she is made subordinate to the male apostles by returning to her canonical story and underlining the Johannine interpretation of her apostleship as a commission to Jesus' male disciples only.

With so many competing memories, how can we ever determine which pieces of these memories reveal information about the historical Mary Magdalene? There is no definitive answer to this question. But we can draw some conclusions about her that are more likely than others. What premises might aid our reasoning?

First, we must recognize that the creation and maintenance of communal memory is complicated. It is both a creative process *and* a retentive process, although always a distortive one.[54] Jan Assmann notes that the past is never preserved "in a pure, complete, and authentic form" but is always reconstructed from the viewpoint of the present.[55] However, Yael Zerubavel reminds us that when the past is updated, in order for the updates to be credible, the present version requires a close resemblance to the older version; otherwise society will reject it.[56] Creative adaptations of our past are successful only to the extent that we can accept them as legitimate based on what we already know to be true.

So this suggests that historical reality may limit what any given generation can say about Mary Magdalene. The memories that survive depend on their acceptability, on how well they support what we already know to be true. It is therefore more likely than not that the earliest memory formations of a historical person or event are not wholly fabrications with no root in reality. It is equally likely that those memories that have passed through fewer interfaces and interest groups are those that have retained a better connection with the historical reality itself, even though this reality is distorted and constructed. Furthermore, since successive memory formations survive because they rely on linking to accepted aspects of memories already in circulation, some of these links may be relying on creative memory adaptations that had become mainstream, rather than the retention of historical information.

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52. *Holy Myrrh-Bearer Mary Magdalene: Equal of the Apostles: Life, Liturgical Service, & Akathist Hymn,* trans. Isaac E. Lambertsen (Liberty, Tenn.: The Saint John of Kronstadt Press, 1999), p. 14.

53. Ibid., p. 15.

54. Anthony Le Donne, "Theological Memory Distortion in the Jesus Tradition," in *Memory and the Bible in Antiquity,* ed. Loren T. Stuckenbruck, Stephen C. Barton, and Benjamin G. Wold; WUNT 212 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), p. 166.

55. Jan Assmann, "Ancient Egyptian Antijudaism: A Case of Distorted Memory," in *Memory Distortion,* ed. Schachter, p. 366.

56. Yael Zerubavel, "The Historical, the Legendary and the Incredible: Invented Tradition and Collective Memory in Israel," in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity,* ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 106.

A good contemporary example of this tension between the retention of historical realities and their distortion can be seen in the memories that circulated a decade ago about Elian Gonzalez, the five-year-old boy who survived a sea journey on a homemade raft from Cuba to Florida. By the second day of reporting, it was being repeated that Elian was in perfect physical condition because a school of dolphins had protected the child from sharks. We may never be able to determine whether dolphins swam around him during the ordeal, although while being interviewed by Diane Sawyer, he did draw a picture of himself on the ocean with a dolphin swimming next to him. His physical condition was better than the other two survivors, although it was by no means perfect. He was treated for minor exposure to the elements. His better physical condition can be attributed to his mother's actions. She wrapped him in her coat before lashing him to an inner tube and giving him a bottle of water. As the days passed, stories about Elian became more and more complicated, yet each one linked to some aspect of the older stories about him that were already in circulation. Quickly his story took on religious meaning as it passed through various interest groups. Santerian priests linked Elian to a prophecy that Castro would be overthrown by a child who had been saved by "angels at sea." How could they make this link work? In earlier reports, Elian is said to have remembered that an angel kept him company at night. Very rapidly he became labeled *El Niño Milagro*, "The Miracle Child," and his story was keyed to the biblical one by a Catholic priest. Castro became Herod, Clinton became Pilate, and Elian became the Messiah.[57]

This process of memory formation suggests that the memories about Mary Magdalene contain aspects of her history, although it may be difficult to tease them out. To do so, we may find it helpful to start by eliminating the least likely aspects. What are these? They are the biases that reframe the material to support the special interests of the new community or generation that has received the earlier information as well as any hermeneutical associations. In the case of the Elian story, the Santerian association of the child with the prophecy would represent the reframing of earlier reports that Elian said that an angel appeared to him.

What are the special interests in the case of Mary Magdalene? The canonical authors want her to be subordinate to the twelve male disciples, a special interest that later Eastern Orthodoxy reaffirms. The encratites and later Eastern Orthodox Christians want her to be celibate. The Valentinians

57. For information about Elian, I relied on Jeff Elliott, "Debunking Elian," *Albion Monitor* (issue 74), www.monitor.net/monitor/0004a/elian.html.

want her to be married. The apostolic Christians in the West want her to be a prostitute. All of these aspects are biases that reframe her story to support the special interests of each individual community. In all cases, the communities do this to engage the gender debate that was tearing apart the early Christian churches. Does this mean that Mary was not subordinate, not celibate, not married, or not a prostitute? Not necessarily. But what it means is that because these memories support the special interests of these groups, they cannot be trusted without further evidence that would allow us to preference one memory over the others. So we are justified to bracket them and set them aside.

What about hermeneutical connections that make her "male" by keying her story to the early Christian interpretation of the Genesis story? Although the hermeneutic itself should be discarded — Mary was no man — the hermeneutic is being linked to explain something that was known to be true about her. What is that? I suggest that the encratic and gnostic communities know that she was an unusual woman for her time, with a public persona and authority that the ancient people usually associated only with men. The Western apostolic churches seem to know this too, since they link to the fact that she was a public woman, but degrade this by confusing her hermeneutically with Luke's prostitute. Unmarried public women were often stereotyped as whores in the ancient world, so this hermeneutical link was easily forged and sustained.

Once we have adjusted for the generational effects of memory by removing the biases, special interests, and hermeneutics from Mary's story, we are able to identify which memories are the older memories that the communities have adapted to formulate their special interest Marys. Three older memories emerge, forming a triangulation of information: Mary was a single woman; Mary was one of Jesus' disciples; Mary was a prominent public woman leader in the beginning years of Christianity. What makes this triangulation particularly interesting is that knowledge of this information was shared by all of our constituents. These three pieces of information appear to be commonly accepted knowledge that the communities knew to be true.

Does this triangulation represent genuine independent knowledge about Mary, or is it dependent on a common interface that all these communities shared, like the canonical stories about Mary? While knowledge of Mary's singleness may have been inferred by each community from the scriptural interface, it is much less likely that her discipleship and prominence as a leader were too, because the canonical stories exclude her from Jesus' disciples and subordinate her leadership to theirs.

So the oldest recoverable memories of Mary Magdalene know her to be an important woman disciple in Jesus' movement who was a public Christian leader after his death. The public nature of her mission and the authority that she commanded as a woman disciple of Jesus became a real liability for her memory in a movement that was initially unconventional and that gradually conformed to the norms of its society, norms that often stereotyped public women as prostitutes and closed public offices to women. We know that the shift to limit the roles of women and their access to positions of authority within the churches began within the first twenty years of the movement because Paul faced it in his Corinthian correspondence.

Twenty or thirty years later, the pressure to conform to societal norms increased as the movement became predominantly a Gentile movement. In this environment, the Gospel evangelists provide our first three testimonies about Mary. But they are testimonies that downplay her discipleship and prominence by placing her story into a context that allows her to remain important while also being subordinated and controlled by the men in the movement. Although the three evangelists never explicitly say that Mary was single, they all independently assume it when they attach other women to husbands and sons, while leaving Mary with none. This appears to be a detail that is older than their independent written accounts, and generally accepted knowledge about her at the time they wrote their accounts. So her singleness is a detail that we can return, with a good deal of certainty, to our list of her oldest memories.

So I have little doubt that the oldest memories of Mary recognized her as a single woman who was among Jesus' disciples. This connection to Jesus gave her the authority to go on after his death as a prominent public Christian leader. Are these old memories historical facts about her? They are the closest we are going to get. So if the Talpiot tomb turns out to be an early Christian clan tomb (rather than the Jesus family tomb), and the reading of the ossuary inscription turns out to be "Mariamē and Martha" (rather than "of Mariamēne, who is [also called] Mara"), it may be that we, like Hippolytus and Gregory, have confused the Magdalene with Mary of Bethany whose sister was Martha.

Mary Magdalene as Mara, Honorable Teacher

Jane Schaberg

My contribution to this discussion comes from the field of historical-critical, literary-critical biblical studies, which subject the text to series of questions designed — in this case — to help reconstruct aspects of history, aspects of the biblical writers' perspectives, and use of earlier sources. My interpretive framework and my presuppositions are feminist. In this framework, it is possible to place women as agents at the center of historiography,[1] and to understand them as makers as well as bearers of meaning — a point that is extremely important for analysis of the role of Mary Magdalene. Feminist analysis is grounded in wo/men's[2] experience of oppression and historical agency, that is, in wo/men's participation in and contribution to struggles for justice. Our educated assumption is that androcentric recounting and stereotypes and centuries of androcentric interpretation have garbled and diminished and all but erased the presence of wo/men[3] and silenced their voices, a process that continues to occur (as at this Jerusalem conference, in my opinion, and that of Simcha Jacobovici in his summary statement at the last meeting). This directs us to read gaps and slippages in the texts, to map out ancient and contemporary strategies of suppression and resistance in an attempt to uncover wo/men's history, making for a fuller hu-

1. See E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus and the Politics of Interpretation* (New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 35, 51-55.

2. Schüssler Fiorenza's term for all women and nonelite men is widely used.

3. Tal Ilan, *Integrating Women into Second Temple History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), p. 5.