

COLLYRIDIAN DÉJÀ VU

The Trajectory of Redaction of the Markers
of Mary's Liturgical Leadership

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In 1902, British Syriac scholar Agnes Smith Lewis published the oldest Dormition manuscript, a narrative about the death of Jesus's mother. Its fifth-century text described scenes where Mary exorcised, healed, sealed, sprinkled water, preached, and led the apostles in prayer. Later copyists, however, independently redacted these heterodox markers of Mary's ecclesial authority, and Dormition homilists went further, adding orthodox markers of female respectability to their texts. Supplementing the traditions about female priesthood in the Dormition narrative, other early Christian writings about Mary the mother, or a female protagonist named just "Mary," contain literary artifacts indicating that their authors believed she had been a Eucharistic priest. The heterodox nature of these writings suggests their composition belongs to the second century at the latest, along with the *Protevangelium* and the *Gospel of Mary*. As such, they may contain first-century oral traditions about a Jewish woman named Mary, the historical mother of Jesus.

The oldest surviving Dormition manuscript, a text about the death of Jesus's mother, depicted Mary as bolder than even the heterodox Christian women whom, in the late second or early third century, Tertullian criticized: "The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold

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enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—it may be even to baptize.¹ According to the oldest Dormition manuscript, Mary taught, disputed, enacted exorcisms, undertook cures, and sprinkled water—plus preached the gospel, led the male apostles in prayer, and sent women with writings to cities around the Mediterranean. This paper will show not only that some early Christian authors depicted Mary as a woman who held many markers of the priesthood, but also the profound trajectory of redaction regarding those markers.

The traditional view of Dormition narratives, which all contain some version of the death of Mary, is that they were composed after the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), a position still fiercely defended in some circles, most recently by Simon Mimouni.² Dormition manuscripts, however, were popular and are extant in nine ancient languages, and some of these manuscripts retain heterodox elements that suggest their original composition took place very early in the Christian era.³ The early gnostic concept of angel Christology, for example, is found in the *Liber Requiei* Dormition text tradition, which said that after his ascension, Christ appeared to Mary as the Great Angel and gave her a secret book of mysteries. Although literary artifacts of this scene are found in older manuscripts, the most original *Liber Requiei* text is retained in a fourteenth-century manuscript of a faithful Ethiopic translation.⁴ In the last decade Marian scholar Stephen J. Shoemaker has taken the lead in arguing that if Dormition texts were dated in the same way as other texts with heterodox elements (such as the Nag Hammadi texts), then the composition of the Dormition narratives could likewise be dated at least to the fourth century, if not earlier to the third or perhaps second century.⁵

¹ Tertullian, *On Prescription against Heretics* 41, trans. Peter Holmes, in “The Prescription against Heretics,” in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, Vol. 3, *Tertullian* (1994; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 263.

² Simon Claude Mimouni, *Les traditions anciennes sur la Dormition et l’Assomption de Marie: Études littéraires, historiques et doctrinales* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

³ Michel van Esbroeck, “Les textes littéraires sur l’Assomption avant le Xe siècle,” in *Les actes apocryphes des apôtres*, ed. François Bovon (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 265–68.

⁴ Because a palm branch replaced the book in most manuscripts, the *Liber Requiei* text tradition is sometimes called the “Palm” tradition. Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary’s Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6–7, 32–46, 232–56, see Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* at 290–350; W. H. C. Frend, “The Gnostic Origins of the Assumption Legend,” *Modern Churchman* 43 (1953): 23–28; Stephen J. Shoemaker, “New Syriac Dormition Fragments from Palimpsests in the Schøyen Collection and the British Library,” *Le Muséon* 124 (2011): 259–78; and Philip Sellew, “An Early Coptic Witness to the *Dormitio Mariae* at Yale: P.CtYBR inv. 1778 Revisited,” *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 37 (2000): 37–69.

⁵ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 238–45; Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Jesus’ Gnostic Mom: Mary of Nazareth and the Gnostic Mary Traditions,” in *Mariam, the Magdalen, and the Mother*, ed. Deirdre Good (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 162, and Shoemaker, “New Syriac Dormition Fragments,” 266.

A number of other scholars have reached similar conclusions about the early composition of Dormition texts.⁶

In 2006, following this methodology of dating from heterodoxy but applying it to the heterodox element of female leadership, Coptic scholar Hans Förster published a ninth-century Dormition folio from the ruins of the White Monastery in Egypt. He argued that the text of this Coptic fragment retained a second-century Dormition urtext because, in addition to depicting Mary giving birth and dying, its narrative recounted that after the ascension of her son, Mary led the apostles in prayer and went out preaching with them. Förster demonstrates that the language used in this text is likely older than the folio itself and argues that its depiction of a woman leading men in prayer and going out preaching with men suggests that the narrative originated in an era prior to the doctrinal evolution that prohibited such female behavior. Förster concludes that this text's composition therefore occurred no later than the second half of the second century, which, he notes, is consistent with Tertullian's late second- or early third-century proscriptions, such as quoted above.⁷ Förster's thesis that this Coptic Dormition text retains second-century traditions about Mary is buttressed by the second-century *Gospel of Mary*, found in both Coptic and Greek, which similarly depicted a "Mary" leading and preaching with apostles.⁸ The identification of the mother of Jesus in Förster's text with the Mary in the *Gospel of Mary* is reasonable since, despite a popular misconception, the text of the *Gospel of Mary* does not anywhere specify "Magdalene" or Magdala⁹—just

⁶ Hans Förster, *Transitus Mariae: Beiträge zur koptischen Überlieferung mit einer Edition von P. Vindob. K 7589, Cambridge Add 1876 8 und Paris BN Copte 129¹⁷ ff. 28 und 29* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2006), 225–29; Édouard Cothenet, "Traditions bibliques et apocalyptiques dans les récits anciens de la Dormition," in *Marie dans les récits apocryphes chrétiens*, ed. Édouard Cothenet et al. (Paris: Médiaspaul, 2004), 155–75; and Enrico Norelli, "La letteratura apocriфа sul transito di Maria e il problema delle sue origini," in *Il dogma dell'assunzione di Maria: Problemi attuali e tentativi di ricompreensione*, ed. Ermanno M. Toniolo (Rome: Edizioni Marianum, 2010), 121–65. Shoemaker notes additional scholars in "New Syriac Dormition Fragments," 259n1.

⁷ Förster also references Tertullian's *Veiling of Virgins* 9 and *Of Baptism* 17.5 (*Transitus Mariae*, 1–150, 225–29 [English summary], and 15–16 [German translation of the fragment]). For an alternate view, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Mary the Apostle: A New Dormition Fragment in Coptic and Its Place in the History of Marian Literature," in *Bibel, Byzanz und Christlicher Orient: Festschrift für Stephen Gerö*, ed. Dmitrij F. Bumazhnov et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 203–29, 224–25 (English translation of the fragment). Shoemaker's rebuttal, however, avoids discussion of the correspondence between Mary in the Coptic fragment and Mary in the second-century *Gospel of Mary*, whom he elsewhere argues was probably seen as Mary the mother (see below).

⁸ Karen L. King, trans., *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge, 2003), 13–18.

⁹ Adding to the confusion, despite that the text of the *Gospel of Mary* nowhere says "Magdalene" or "Magdala," it is sometimes published as *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene* or *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*. Jean-Yves Leloup, *The Gospel of Mary Magdalene*, trans. Joseph Rowe (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2002); and King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*.

“Mary.”¹⁰ A decade ago, Shoemaker proposed in the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* that some early Christians probably believed the unspecified “Mary” found in the *Gospel of Mary*, as well as in several other writings, was Mary the mother of Jesus¹¹—a thesis now affirmed by the publication of Förster’s Coptic folio, which says that the mother of Jesus led and preached with the apostles.¹²

More than a century ago, Agnes Smith Lewis acquired a palimpsest Dormition manuscript in Egypt and translated into English its lower script, which was old Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic. She published it in 1902, dating it by paleography to the late fifth or early sixth century.¹³ Her dating of this manuscript has since generally been affirmed, and Shoemaker, for example, has begun to refer to it simply as dating from the fifth century. Although a few Syriac Dormition fragments may be slightly older and a set of Syriac *Liber Requiei*-type fragments may be the same age, this manuscript, though missing some folios, is the oldest Dormition manuscript.¹⁴ Its text is in the Six Books Dormition text family,

¹⁰ Or “Mariamme,” as “Mary” is named in the Greek *Gospel of Mary*. Mary the mother of Jesus, however, is also three times named “Mariamme” in the oldest manuscript of the *Protevangelium*, the gospel about her early life. François Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the Acts of Philip,” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. F. Stanley Jones (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 78–79; and Émile de Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques: Recherches sur le papyrus Bodmer 5* (Brussels: Société des Bollandistes, 1961), 315–16.

¹¹ Extracanonical writings with an unspecified “Mary” include *Gospel of Thomas*, *Dialogue of the Savior*, *Acts of Philip*, *Statutes of the Apostles*, and the *Manichaean Psalms*. Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Rethinking the ‘Gnostic Mary’: Mary of Nazareth and Mary of Magdala in Early Christian Tradition,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 9, no. 4 (2001): 555–95, Stephen J. Shoemaker, “A Case of Mistaken Identity? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition,” in *Which Mary? The Marys of Early Christian Tradition*, ed. F. Stanley Jones (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002): 5–30, and Shoemaker, “Jesus’ Gnostic Mom,” 153–82. Recently, however, Mary Ann Beavis proposed that, especially in texts where Martha is mentioned, some early Christians may have understood the unspecified Mary as Mary of Bethany; Beavis also shows that some writings conflated Mary of Bethany with Mary Magdalene. Mary Ann Beavis, “Reconsidering Mary of Bethany,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 74, no. 2 (April 2012): 281–97, and Mary Ann Beavis, “Mary of Bethany and the Hermeneutics of Remembrance,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75 (forthcoming).

¹² Shoemaker, it seems, essentially used his argument to show that the unspecified Mary could not with certainty be identified as Mary Magdalene and that therefore, texts such as the *Gospel of Mary* could not be used to support feminist arguments that Mary Magdalene was a leader in the early church and that the modern church should follow the ancient exemplar; in any case, for the most part, Shoemaker sidestepped the implications of his argument—that Mary the mother of Jesus taught the apostles and went out preaching with them. My goal in this paper is to take his argument to its logical conclusion.

¹³ Agnes Smith Lewis, ed. and trans., *Apocrypha Syriaca: The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae*, *Studia Syriaca* 11 (London: C. J. Clay, 1902), x. Lewis also edited, translated, and published the famous palimpsest manuscript of the old Syriac gospels.

¹⁴ Shoemaker, “New Syriac Dormition Fragments,” 259–78, esp. 264, and Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 33, 46–48.

so called because its introduction says that the apostles wrote six books about the end of Mary's life.¹⁵

The apocalypse at the end of the Six Books text and the manner in which Jews are described in one passage show that the Six Books narrative included some archaic concepts. In his study of Jewish and Christian apocalypses, for example, Richard Bauckham argues that certain theological elements found in the Six Books apocalypse are older than those of any other Apocalypse of Mary including the apocalypse in the *Liber Requiei* Dormition text family that included angel Christology. Bauckham notes that in the Six Books apocalypse, the dead are "in a state of waiting for the last judgment and the resurrection," and he says that no other apocalypse with this view "can plausibly be dated later than the mid-second century."¹⁶

Likewise militating for an early origin of the Six Books tradition, a long passage in this manuscript describes a debate over whether Jesus was the messiah, and appears to retain very early language. The passage appears to predate the naming of "Christians," for the debate is in Jerusalem between the "lovers of the Messiah" and the "unbelievers," and both groups are presented as ethnically Jewish.¹⁷ Unlike better-known conflicts in Dormition texts—especially the infamous story about "the Jews" who want to burn Mary's bier¹⁸—in this debate the words *Jew* and *Christian* are never used. Included in this passage is a final indication that the narrative may have originated within a group that did not have a high Christology. As in Mark 6:3, Jesus is here called the "Son of Mary." Although the beginning and end of this passage contain rather awkward creedal statements that he is also the "Son of God," the lengthy middle section contains only repeated affirmations that he is the "Son of Mary" and "born of Mary," terminology that is repeated six and twelve times, respectively, and attributed to both "unbelievers" and "lovers of the Messiah."¹⁹

As in Förster's Coptic Dormition fragment where the mother of Jesus led the male apostles in prayer, and likewise supporting an early dating of its traditions due to its matter-of-fact depiction of what later came to be considered heterodox female leadership, the text of the fifth-century manuscript Lewis pub-

¹⁵ Agnes Smith Lewis, ed. and trans., "Transitus Mariae," in *Apocrypha Syriaca*, 12–69 (English), esp. 17; and Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 53.

¹⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 332–62, esp. 358–60.

¹⁷ Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Let Us Go and Burn Her Body': The Image of the Jews in the Early Dormition Traditions," *Church History* 68, no. 4 (1999): 775–823, quotations on 814. This primitive language throws into stark relief the passages of imperial anti-Jewish propaganda that subsequent scribes added to Dormition texts.

¹⁸ Interestingly, this perverse scene is almost entirely missing from the oldest Dormition manuscript; as she did for all lacunae, Lewis filled in this gap with text from a much later manuscript ("Transitus Mariae," 51–52).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39–43.

lished depicted Mary leading male apostles in prayer and “serving in essence as their liturgical leader.”²⁰ In this scene, Mary lifts her arms and prays. After she prays, the men prostrate themselves and pray.

And when my Lady Mary heard these things from the Apostles she stretched out her hands to heaven and prayed, saying, “I worship and praise and sing and laud that I am not a mockery to the nations of the Gentiles . . . and I will praise His gracious name for ever and ever. And I cannot glorify His grace sufficiently; that He hath sent His holy disciples to me.” And after Mary had prayed, the Apostles set forth the censer of incense, and knelt with their faces down and prayed.²¹

Mary standing to pray while the men prostrated themselves to pray denoted her authority over them. The depiction of Mary with this level of liturgical authority considerably predates the age of this fifth-century manuscript, as shown by a nearly identical scene in the *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*, which is dated to the third century with little controversy.²² Like the Dormition texts, this gospel contained early heterodox motifs, including a docetic Jesus who vanishes from the cross and Mary giving birth without pain.²³ It also contained a scene where Mary raised her arms and led the apostles in prayer. Here, however, rather than prostrate themselves before her as a sign of her authority over them, the apostles denoted her authority by standing behind her when she prayed and by stating that she had more right than they to lead the prayer. In this text, they say to Mary: “In you the Lord set his tabernacle and was pleased to be contained by you. Therefore you now have more right than we to lead in prayer.”²⁴

Given the theory that the Council of Ephesus in 431 accelerated Mariology by calling Mary *Theotokos*, we might expect to see Mary’s liturgical leadership in this prayer scene blossom even more fully in later manuscripts. The opposite in fact occurred. Later scribes progressively redacted the markers of Mary’s liturgical authority, and they made these changes independently of each other.

These independent scribal redactions can be shown through a close textual analysis comparing the Six Books text of the fifth-century manuscript that Lewis published to the texts of two later Six Books manuscripts. One of these later manuscripts was also penned in old Syriac and translated into English in the mid-1800s by William Wright, who paleographically dated it to the late sixth

²⁰ After Shoemaker, who thus describes a virtually identical prayer scene in the third-century *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew* in “Mary the Apostle,” 217.

²¹ Lewis, “Transitus Mariae,” 32. Shoemaker says a better translation of “my Lady Mary” would be “my master Mary” (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 370n3). I employ existing modern language translations of ancient texts verbatim.

²² Wilhelm Schneemelcher, ed., *New Testament Apocrypha, Volume 1, Gospels and Related Writings*, trans. R. McL. Wilson, rev. ed. (Cambridge: James Clark, 1991); 537–40, esp. 539–51, for the text of the *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*; and Shoemaker, “Mary the Apostle,” 217.

²³ *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew* 1.7–9, 4.61.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.6–14, esp. 2.8 (Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 543–44).

century (other than some fragments, this is the next-oldest Six Books Dormition manuscript so far published).²⁵ The second is an Ethiopic translation of the Six Books in a medieval manuscript.²⁶

The scribes behind these two later Six Books manuscripts each redacted different parts of Mary's prayer scene. On the one hand, the scribe behind the next-oldest manuscript (Wright's translation) redacted the ending of the scene where the male apostles prostrated themselves. They are visualized instead as standing with Mary when they pray, thereby diminishing the impression of Mary's authority over them.²⁷ The scribe behind the Ethiopic translation, on the other hand, kept the apostles' prostration: "And they did as Mary ordered them: they prayed and prostrated themselves upon the earth." This scribe instead changed the *beginning* of Mary's prayer scene, first excising Mary raising her arms, then adding a preface to her prayer so that it begins with: "I bow down before you, my Lord."²⁸ With those two edits, Mary was thereafter visualized on the same level as the prostrate men. Both scribes thus diminished Mary's perceived authority over the men, through almost opposite edits.

Some editors of the homilies on the Dormition further creatively sanitized this scene of a woman displaying liturgical authority over men. A homily attributed to mid-sixth-century patriarch Theodosius of Alexandria said that Mary asked the men to leave her so that she could pray.²⁹ A homily attributed to seventh-century patriarch John of Thessalonica instead said that Mary left the men; in this version, Peter replaced Mary as the public prayer leader, and Mary goes outside to pray alone.³⁰ As if uncomfortable with even the image of

²⁵ William Wright, trans., "The Departure of My Lady Mary from This World," *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 7 (1865): 129–60; and Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 47; in 47n98, Shoemaker mentions another sixth-century manuscript, but it has not been published.

²⁶ Stephen J. Shoemaker, trans., *Ancient Traditions*, see Ethiopic Six Books at 375–96 (English); and Marius Chaine, ed. and trans., *Apocrypha de Beata Maria Virgine* (Rome: Karolus de Luigi, 1909), 17–42 (Latin).

²⁷ Wright, "Departure of My Lady Mary from This World," 140–41.

²⁸ Ethiopic Six Books 33 (Shoemaker, trans., *Ancient Traditions*, 383).

²⁹ *Discourse of Theodosius* 3.9, Forbes Robinson, trans., *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896), 101. On 111–13, at 5.23, see another scene of Mary praying, followed at 6.8 by Jesus himself clarifying the proper social order: "Let the men go before, and the women go behind, as is fitting."

³⁰ John of Thessalonica, *On the Dormition* 12 (Brian E. Daley, trans. and intro., *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1998], 62). Peter also replaces Mary as the prayer leader in *Liber Requiei* Dormition texts. Similarly, in the oldest Gaelic Dormition text, Mary asks Christ questions, but in a later version, Peter asks Christ Mary's questions. Charles Donahue, ed., *The Testament of Mary: The Gaelic Version of the Dormitio Mariae together with an Irish Latin Version* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1942), 10. My thanks to Ann Graham Brock for bringing to my attention the phenomenon of scribes replacing "Mary" with Peter.

Mary raising her hands to pray, most editors of Dormition homilies omitted it.³¹

In another example of Mary's identification in the Six Books text as a "heretic" woman—at least according to Tertullian's definition—the oldest Dormition manuscript contained a lengthy scene where Mary exorcised two demons from a woman named Malchū:

Malchū came also to her, the daughter of Sabinus, the Procurator, in whom were two demons; one that tormented her by night; and the other that came upon her by day, and buffeted her; and she entreated the Lady Mary; and immediately when she had prayed over her, and had placed her hand upon her, and had spoken thus: "In the name of my Master Who is in heaven, I adjure thee at this time concerning this soul, that she may be healed." And straightaway these demons came out of her, and they wailed, and cried out. . . . Then the Lady Mary rebuked them in the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ. And straightaway they departed towards the sea, and fell into it and were choked.³²

The scribe behind the next-oldest Dormition manuscript apparently was not comfortable with this scene; he truncated Mary's exorcism of Malchū so severely that the scene became unrecognizable as an exorcism; in this text, Mary simply "prayed over" Malchū.³³ The scribe behind the Ethiopic, by contrast, retained some of the significant elements of the exorcism, but redacted Malchū's name and family lineage.³⁴

The text of the oldest Dormition manuscript also said Mary undertook the cures of "two thousand eight hundred souls, men, and women, and children."³⁵ A woman named Flavia from Thessalonica had a blind right eye and like Jesus in the gospels, Mary "stretched out her hand and touched it," healing it. She healed Abigail, from Egypt, who had strangury.³⁶ She laid her hand on the head of a boy with elephantiasis and healed him.³⁷ She stretched out her hand to a boy with severe pains, performed the eastern rite of "sealing," and cured him.³⁸

³¹ See homilies of Theoteknos of Livias, Modestus of Jerusalem, Andrew of Crete, Germanus of Constantinople, John of Old Lavra, and John of Damascus in Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 71–248. Notably, the homily of Pseudo-John the Theologian retained the scene of Mary leading the prayer much as in the sixth-century Six Books manuscript. A. Cleveland Coxe, trans., "The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary," in Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 8, *Twelve Patriarchs, Excerpts and Epistles, The Clementina, Apocryphal Gospels and Acts, Syriac Documents* (1994; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 587–91, esp. 589.

³² Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 34–35.

³³ Wright, "Departure of My Lady Mary from This World," 141–42.

³⁴ Ethiopic Six Books 35–36.

³⁵ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 35.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 34.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 48.

In a longer scene, Mary used holy water to heal two women in what sounds much like a baptismal ritual. One woman, Yuchabar, was filled with leprosy, and the other, from Beirut, was possessed by a demon that was always strangling her. Mary “straightaway took water, and sealed them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And she sprinkled (it) upon their bodies; and straightaway they were healed.”³⁹ The scribes behind the texts of the two later manuscripts, however, independently diminished the impression of Mary’s healing powers. The next-oldest manuscript, for example, retains Mary sprinkling water but omits Mary healing with her hands. The Ethiopic, alternatively, retains Mary healing with her hands but omits her sprinkling water. Likewise, the next-oldest manuscript retains the names of the women that Mary healed—Malchū, Flavia, Abigail, and Yuchabar—but the Ethiopic omits each one.⁴⁰

Also, the oldest Dormition manuscript depicted Mary preaching, including one passage in which she commands the governor of Jerusalem to “sit down,” and then preaches the gospel to him.⁴¹ She disputes with priests, telling them, “I will not do your bidding; and I will not listen to your words; and I will not do your will.”⁴² The scribe behind the next-oldest manuscript, however, quieted Mary by truncating or excising blocks of her speech, including the entirety of her preaching to the governor of Jerusalem and her dispute with the priests.⁴³ The scribe behind the Ethiopic likewise cut her preaching to the governor yet for some reason kept her dispute with the priests.⁴⁴

The oldest Dormition manuscript depicts all women, not just Mary, as having agency. Mary’s followers were not enclosed nor did they stay at home. The text describes women traveling to Jerusalem from Rome, Athens, Alexandria, Beirut, Thessalonica, and Egypt in order to learn from Mary, and it says Mary taught them whatever they asked her and that she taught the women who lived with her “everything.”⁴⁵ Most remarkably, especially in conjunction with the *Liber Requiei* Dormition text tradition—where Jesus as the Great Angel gave Mary a book of mysteries and told her to “give it to the apostles”⁴⁶—this text says that Mary gave the women “writings” to take back to their homes so that others might “believe.”⁴⁷ This image of Mary commissioning women evangelists to carry writings to distant cities must have greatly perturbed the scribe behind the next-oldest manuscript, for this agent excised virtually the entire

³⁹ Ibid., 34.

⁴⁰ Wright, “Departure of My Lady Mary from This World,” 141–42; and Ethiopic Six Books 35–36.

⁴¹ Lewis, “Transitus Mariae,” 47–48.

⁴² Ibid., 23.

⁴³ Wright, “Departure of My Lady Mary from This World,” 135, 147.

⁴⁴ Ethiopic Six Books 25, 40.

⁴⁵ Lewis, “Transitus Mariae,” 34, 24.

⁴⁶ Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* 1 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 290).

⁴⁷ Lewis, “Transitus Mariae,” 34.

scene.⁴⁸ The scribe behind the Ethiopic, intriguingly, retained the scene virtually verbatim except for one word—yet thereby illustrated how, by replacing just one word, a scribe could diminish the impression of Mary’s authority as well as that of women: he replaced “writings” with “a sweet and beautiful fragrance.” In the Ethiopic, thus, Mary no longer gave women writings; she instead gave them “a sweet and beautiful fragrance, so that their families would believe.”⁴⁹

This type of scribal liberty is well documented across Dormition text traditions. Shoemaker, for example, has shown how some Dormition editors silenced the women who had the important role of announcing Mary’s death to her son by replacing the women with men. In the original narrative, the male apostles slept while the women told Jesus that his mother had died—then the men woke up. In a later edition, the women are silent and instead the men tell Jesus his mother has died—and then the men wake up.⁵⁰

Most editors of the homilies on the Dormition retained few of the markers of Mary’s ecclesial authority.⁵¹ Often they replaced those markers with markers of female respectability—florid panegyric about Mary’s virginity and motherhood.⁵² In some cases, they were explicit that they were sanitizing their Dormition text of its heterodox elements; for example, John of Thessalonica justified his seventh-century revision by saying that although the story of Mary’s death was written by truthful witnesses, “mischievous heretics later corrupted their accounts by adding words of their own.”⁵³

The three Dormition homilies authored by John of Damascus (676–749), who probably lived near the San Saba monastery outside Jerusalem, are, according to Brian E. Daley, “the most celebrated of all the ancient homilies for the feast of the Dormition.” These homilies were first delivered in an all-night

⁴⁸ Wright, “Departure of My Lady Mary from This World,” 141.

⁴⁹ Ethiopic Six Books 35 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 385).

⁵⁰ Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Gender at the Virgin’s Funeral: Men and Women as Witnesses to the Dormition,” *Studia Patristica* 34 (2001): 552–58. In contrast to most art of the Dormition, a recently discovered early tenth-century Coptic fresco of the Dormition depicts women, not men, surrounding Mary’s deathbed. In this composition, the men sit in the background (sleeping perhaps?). Jesus is seen in his usual central position beside his mother, but he has magnificent wings as if he were the Great Angel in accordance with the original text of the *Liber Requiei*. Whereas in later Dormition art only men carry censers, here three of the women carry censers. Karel Innemée and Youhanna Nessim Youssef, “Virgins with Censers: A 10th Century Painting of the Dormition in Deir Al-Surian,” *Bulletin de la Société d’archéologie copte* 46 (2007): 69–85.

⁵¹ Some Coptic fragments, however, depict Mary with authority over the men. One reads: “We also, the apostles Peter and John, were continuing with her, fulfilling her command and her evangelic laws, whilst she was pilot to us all, like a wise captain.” Theodosius, *On the Falling Asleep of Mary* 2.2 (Robinson, *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels*, 93).

⁵² See the homilies in Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 47–257.

⁵³ John of Thessalonica, *On the Dormition* 1 (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 48). See also Monika Haibach-Reinisch, *Ein neuer “Transitus Mariae” des Pseudo-Melito* (Rome: Pontificia Academia Mariana Internationalis, 1962), 64–65.

vigil for the feast of Mary's Dormition near Gethsemane at the church that was believed to house the site of her tomb.⁵⁴ They illustrate the continuing trajectory of redaction as well as the supplementary trend of editors of Dormition homilies replacing the heterodox markers of Mary's agency with orthodox markers of female respectability. In his homilies, for example, John of Damascus recast Mary as a model of female purity. In just one such passage he said, "She is herself pure, and a lover of the pure . . . she avoids all impurity . . . she flees from our impure thoughts."⁵⁵ The oldest Dormition manuscript, by contrast, did not similarly insist that Mary was pure; the closest it came was to say that when Mary knew her son was coming to earth, she "purified herself from all hateful thoughts"⁵⁶—which established, of course, that she was not always so pure. John of Damascus also recast Mary as a subservient woman; he said that when Gabriel the angel came to Mary, she "uttered her obedient answer in words full of fear."⁵⁷ The narrative of the oldest Dormition manuscript instead implied that Mary had authority over Gabriel, saying that Mary threw incense on the censer and then "came Gabriel the angel to her from heaven, and knelt to worship her."⁵⁸ John of Damascus said Mary "will have no contact with seductive perfumes."⁵⁹ Yet in the oldest manuscript, Mary had a censer of sweet spices and myrrh, and she was four times depicted burning incense.⁶⁰ John of Damascus said Mary "loathes gluttony" and "delights in fasting."⁶¹ In the oldest manuscript, however, Mary ate while those around her did not.⁶² John of Damascus said Mary hated the swelling of pride and quarrelling, loathed an unforgiving mind, and delighted in self-control.⁶³ By contrast, in the oldest manuscript, when the priests called her "obstinate," Mary lit into a tirade against them.⁶⁴ In perhaps the most telling recasting, John of Damascus said Mary remained at home and knew "nothing of what transpired outside her doors."⁶⁵ But the text of the oldest Dormition manuscript said that Mary went by herself twice a day to Golgotha to pray, traveled with other women between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, and appeared to people in Ephesus, Rome, Egypt, and other lands.⁶⁶

Given the trajectory of these redactions, the original Dormition tradition may have depicted Mary with even more markers of ecclesial authority than

⁵⁴ Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 21.

⁵⁵ John of Damascus, *Homily II 19* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 222–23).

⁵⁶ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 15.

⁵⁷ John of Damascus, *Homily I 7* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 191).

⁵⁸ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 20.

⁵⁹ John of Damascus, *Homily II 19* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 223).

⁶⁰ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 20, 24, 25, 46, 47.

⁶¹ John of Damascus, *Homily II 19* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 223).

⁶² Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 24.

⁶³ John of Damascus, *Homily II 19* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 223).

⁶⁴ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 22–23.

⁶⁵ John of Damascus, *Homily I 6* (Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, 190).

⁶⁶ Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 20–25, 16, 49–50.

those found in the fifth-century Dormition manuscript. A look at the orthodox bishop Epiphanius of Salamis's (ca. 310–403) diatribe against women priests bears this out. In his *Panarion*, or “medicine chest,” of eighty “heretical” sects, Epiphanius excoriated these women, whom he called “collyridians.”⁶⁷ There is no evidence that any such group ever existed, and it appears that Epiphanius simply derisively nicknamed these Christian women after the small cakes of bread made of fine flour called *collyris*.⁶⁸ Epiphanius said that from Thrace and upper Scythia to Arabia, these women performed as priests and, in what sounds like a Eucharistic ritual, they offered a sacrifice of bread to the name of Mary on a small altar, and then everyone partook of it.⁶⁹ In a series of recent articles, Shoemaker has persuasively argued that when Epiphanius was complaining about the so-called collyridians, he was likely responding to the Six Books tradition, in either its oral or written form.⁷⁰

The Six Books text in fact has a stunning concordance of Epiphanius's discussion of the collyridians. Most remarkably, the Six Books contains a liturgical manual that details a parallel ritual for offering bread to the name of Mary on the very altar of the church. Shoemaker calls this ritual “almost identical” to the collyridian bread offering ritual.⁷¹ It reads:

The apostles also ordered that any offering offered in the name of my Lady Mary should not remain over the night, but that at midnight of the night immediately preceding her commemoration, it should be kneaded and baked; and in the morning let it go up on the altar, whilst the people stand before the altar with psalms of David, and let the New and Old Testaments be read, and the volume of the decease of the blessed one; and in the morning let it go up on the altar in the church, and let the priests celebrate (the holy Eucharist) and set forth the censer of incense

⁶⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 79.1.1–7, also 78.23.3–4, in Frank Williams, trans., *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis*, 2 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1997, 1994).

⁶⁸ Mimouni, *Traditions anciennes sur la Dormition*, 298; and Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis, the Kollyridians, and the Early Dormition Narratives: The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 16 (2008): 372n1.

⁶⁹ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.23.4, 79.1.7 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:618, 621). In *Panarion* 79.8.1–2, Epiphanius noted the correspondence of this ritual to that of Jeremiah 7:17–18 and 44:1–26. In *Ancoratus*, an earlier writing against the so-called collyridians, Epiphanius did not mention female priests specifically, indicating that both male and female priests sacrificed bread to Mary. Mimouni, *Traditions anciennes sur la Dormition*, 295.

⁷⁰ Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis,” 398, Stephen J. Shoemaker, “Apocrypha and Liturgy in the Fourth Century: The Case of the ‘Six Books’ Dormition Apocryphon,” in *Jewish and Christian Scriptures: The Function of “Canonical” and “Non-canonical” Religious Texts* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 158, and Stephen J. Shoemaker, “The Cult of the Virgin in the Fourth Century: A Fresh Look at Some Old and New Sources,” in *The Origins of the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, ed. Christ Maunder (New York: Burns & Oates, 2008), 82.

⁷¹ Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis,” 387, and Shoemaker, “Cult of the Virgin,” 78.

and kindle the lights, and let the whole service be concerning these offerings.⁷²

Shoemaker points out that the Six Books is the “only known source from the ancient church to actually prescribe regular, ritual offerings of bread on Mary’s behalf.”⁷³

Also corresponding to the Six Books Dormition narrative about the death of Mary, Epiphanius is the earliest-known Christian author to discuss how Mary might have died⁷⁴—and he did so only when writing about these women priests.⁷⁵ In one passage, Epiphanius mused about the possible ways Mary’s life might have ended—and then concluded by saying that no one should make offerings in her name:

The holy virgin may have died and been buried—her falling asleep was with honor, her death in purity, her crown in virginity. Or she may have been put to death—as the scripture says, “And a sword shall pierce her soul”—her fame is among the martyrs and her holy body, by which light rose on the world, [rests] amid blessings. Or she may have remained alive, for God is not incapable of doing whatever he wills. No one knows her end. But we must not honor the saints to excess; we must honor their Master. It is time for the error of those who have gone astray to cease. Mary is not God and does not have her body from heaven but by human conception, though, like Isaac, she was provided by promise. *And no one should make offerings in her name.*⁷⁶

The fact that the Six Books Dormition text contains both a liturgical manual on how to offer bread to Mary’s name and a narrative about Mary’s death provides strong support for Shoemaker’s conclusion that, when complaining about the collyridians, Epiphanius was likely responding to the Six Books tradition.

Another feature of the Six Books provides further support for Shoemaker’s conclusion, and also suggests that the women priests may have been following Mary’s example in the Six Books tradition. The fifth-century Six Books manuscript depicted Mary behaving like a priest—and while complaining about the collyridians, Epiphanius repeatedly denied that any woman could be a priest: “Never at any time has a woman been a priest” and “Nowhere was a woman a priest.”⁷⁷ Only men could be priests and bishops: “Successors to the episcopate

⁷² Wright, “Departure of My Lady Mary from This World,” 153. The parenthetic “(the holy Eucharist)” is Wright’s clarification. Although the manuscript edited by Lewis is missing the folio with this scene, the offerings to Mary are mentioned multiple times in it.

⁷³ Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis,” 397, and Shoemaker, “Cult of the Virgin,” 82.

⁷⁴ Mimouni, *Traditions anciennes sur la Dormition*, 310.

⁷⁵ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.11.2–5, 78.23.3–11, 79.1.7; and Shoemaker, “Epiphanius of Salamis,” 389–93.

⁷⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.23.9–11 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:619), emphasis added.

⁷⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 79.2.3 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:621) and 79.2.6 (2:622).

and presbyterate in the household of God were appointed . . . and nowhere was a woman appointed.”⁷⁸ Nowhere did “the ordinance of the church” prescribe “priestesses.”⁷⁹ And, Epiphanius argued, Mary herself was *not* a priest: “It was not God’s pleasure” that she be a priest.⁸⁰ To cap it off, Epiphanius said that no one should use Mary as an exemplar to justify female priests. God created Himself out of Mary, he said, but not “to have us make offerings in her name, or, again, to make women priestesses.”⁸¹ His repeated denials that a woman could be a priest, along with his admonishing that no one should use Mary to make women priests, suggests that the collyridians were probably using Mary’s exemplar for that very purpose.

Epiphanius undermined his own argument. Earlier in the *Panarion* he had reported on two popular Christian faiths that he said had women priests, including one in Cyprus where he was bishop.⁸² The other called itself the New Prophecy, and even Tertullian had fallen under its persuasive power; its evangelists traveled from Phrygia, which was near Cyprus, to cities around the Mediterranean, and near the end of his life, Tertullian converted to New Prophecy.⁸³ Intriguingly, Epiphanius began his rant against the collyridian female priests with an invective against the three most famous New Prophecy prophetesses, “Quintilla, Maximilla and Priscilla”⁸⁴—a juxtaposition that has led some scholars to conclude that while ostensibly complaining about women priests, Epiphanius was actually once again targeting New Prophecy.⁸⁵ Epiphanius twice complained that New Prophecy “ordained” women priests and bishops, and he recorded their first-century theological justification for gender parity in their churches: “They have women bishops, presbyters and the rest; they say that none of this makes any difference because ‘In Christ Jesus there is neither male nor female.’”⁸⁶ In the Six Books, of course, Mary was depicted behaving like a priest as well as like a bishop when she led the apostles in prayer. Whether called “collyridian” or New Prophecy, these Christians not only may have used their Six Books liturgical manual as an exemplar of how to offer bread to Mary, they also may have used its depiction of Mary as an exemplar of their female clergy.

A key marker absent from the fifth-century Dormition manuscript’s descrip-

⁷⁸ Ibid., 79.3.4 (2:623).

⁷⁹ Ibid., 79.4.1 (2:623).

⁸⁰ Ibid., 79.3.1 (2:622).

⁸¹ Ibid., 79.7.2 (2:626).

⁸² For the Marcionites, whom Epiphanius said permitted women to baptize, see *Panarion* 42.1.1 and 42.4.5.

⁸³ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 48 and 49, esp. 49.2.5 and 49.3.2. See also Christine Trevett, *Montanism: Gender, Authority, and the New Prophecy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14–15.

⁸⁴ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 79.1.7 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:621).

⁸⁵ Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess: Studies in the Pagan and Christian Roots of Mariology* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 191–95.

⁸⁶ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 49.2.2–3.2, esp. 49.2.5 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:22).

tion of Mary, however, is the Eucharistic or sacrificial priesthood. Yet the trajectory of the redaction of Mary's priestly markers suggests that the Six Books narrative Epiphanius knew in the fourth century probably depicted Mary with more priestly markers than found in the fifth-century manuscript. Furthermore, and consistent with the Six Books liturgical manual, the collyridian female priests about whom Epiphanius complained offered bread to the name of Mary at altars and then partook of it in a Eucharistic ritual. They offered, as Epiphanius said, a "sacrifice in her name," performing as Eucharistic priests.⁸⁷ An intertextual analysis shows that the author of the original Six Books narrative reasonably could have depicted Mary as a complete exemplar for these women priests, because a handful of manuscripts of other early Christian writings still retain literary artifacts of Mary depicted as a Eucharistic or sacrificial priest. Some of these explicitly identified their Mary as the mother of Jesus. Others said "Mary" without clearly specifying which Mary, and as Shoemaker has argued and as mentioned above, some Christians almost certainly thought "Mary" was Mary the mother of Jesus. These literary artifacts indicate that some early Christian authors believed that their Mary had been a Eucharistic priest, and in some cases even a high priest, a role consistent with her making the sacrifice, as well as with Mary's depiction in the Six Books as the leader or "bishop" of the apostles.

The first text to suggest that some early Christians thought of Mary as a high priest is the gospel about her early life, the *Protevangelium of James*. This gospel is generally believed to have been penned no later than the middle of the second century, in part because Justin Martyr of Rome (103–165 CE) shows close contact with its traditions.⁸⁸ Recent scholarship indicates that its descriptions of Jewish customs, though not always biblical, are fairly consonant with those described in the second-century Mishnah and other Jewish sources.⁸⁹ A variety of scholars date this gospel, or parts of it, to the first century, and its lack of adverse language about the Jews, especially in comparison to some of the canonical gospels, suggests its very early composition.⁹⁰ In the oldest Six

⁸⁷ Epiphanius, *Panarion* 78.23.4 (Williams, *Panarion*, 2:618).

⁸⁸ Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho* 78 (Mary gave birth without labor pains), 85 (Mary had Davidic descent), 100 (Jesus was born in a cave *outside* Bethlehem), from Roberts and Donaldson, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 1, *Apostolic Fathers, Justin Martyr, Irenaeus* (1994; repr., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004); see also George T. Zervos, "Dating the *Protevangelium of James*: The Justin Martyr Connection," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1994 Seminar Papers*, ed. Eugene H. Lovering Jr. (Atlanta: Scholars, 1994), 415–34; and Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 423.

⁸⁹ Tim Horner, "Jewish Aspects of the *Protevangelium of James*," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 12, no. 3 (2004): 313–35.

⁹⁰ J. K. Elliott, ed., *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, rev. ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 50; David R. Cartlidge and J. Keith Elliott, *Art and the Christian Apocrypha* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 23; George T. Zervos, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," in *Society of Biblical Literature 1997 Seminar Papers* (Evanston, IL: American Theological Library Association, 1997), 686–88; Ronald F. Hock, *The Infancy Gospels of James and Thomas*, Scholars Bible 2 (Santa Rosa, CA:

Books manuscripts, the *Protevangelium* preceded the Dormition narrative and thus would have foretold and informed the Dormition reader's understanding of Mary.⁹¹ According to the *Protevangelium*, Mary's mother, Anna, promised her firstborn, whether male or female, as a sacrifice to God, and thus young Mary was brought up in the Jerusalem Temple.⁹² Most significant, twice in the text a Temple priest noted that Mary was in the holy of holies⁹³—the innermost sacred place that Leviticus 16 and Hebrews 9:7 said only a high priest could enter.

An early Christian understanding of Mary as a high priest also helps explain why the oldest Six Books manuscript said Mary burned incense and “set forth the censer of incense to God.”⁹⁴ Exodus 30 and Leviticus 16:12–14 described this as a sacrifice to be performed by a high priest. Consistent with some later scribes perceiving incense burning as inappropriate female behavior, over time Mary's incense burning and censers tended to disappear from the Dormition literary tradition.⁹⁵

Another text suggesting Mary's high priesthood was the *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew*—the gospel in which the male apostles themselves told Mary that she had more right than they did to lead their prayer. This text was also widely distributed, with extant manuscripts in Greek, Slavic, Latin, and Coptic.⁹⁶ One of its scenes evoked both the Eucharistic and the high priesthood: Mary stood at the Temple altar beside an angel. The angel pulled out a loaf and a cup of wine, and standing at the altar, both partook of this Eucharist.⁹⁷

One copyist of yet another widely translated text, the third-century *Statutes of the Apostles*, assumed everyone knew that its unspecified “Mary,” as well as other women, had been at the Last Supper, for he introduced that fact without comment. He apparently, however, did not agree with one part of the Last Supper tradition he had heard, for his intent was to deny that at the Last Supper Jesus had commissioned the women like the men as Eucharistic ministers. According to this scribe's explanation, Jesus did not also commission the women because he saw Mary laughing.⁹⁸

Polebridge, 1995), 23–25; and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam's Child, Sophia's Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum: 1994), 182.

⁹¹ Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 28–29; and Lewis, *Apocrypha Syriaca*, x.

⁹² *Protevangelium* 4.1, 7.1–8.1.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 13.2, 15.2.

⁹⁴ Lewis, “Transitus Mariae,” 47.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 20, 24, 25, 46, 47; only the scenes on 25 and 46 remain in the late sixth-century manuscript. The homilies in Daley, *On the Dormition of Mary*, typically omit any whiff of Mary burning incense, but the popular homily of Pseudo-John the Theologian retained a scene, as seen in Coxe, “The Book of John Concerning the Falling Asleep of Mary,” 587. See also Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 14–15, 90–98.

⁹⁶ Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 537–40.

⁹⁷ *Gospel (Questions) of Bartholomew* 2:15–21.

⁹⁸ Sahidic *Statutes of the Apostles* 26, in George William Horner, trans., *The Statutes of the Apostle; Or, Canones Ecclesiastici* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1904), 305. See also Karen Jo

A final text with markers of Eucharistic priesthood associated with Mary is the *Acts of Philip* and its martyrdom.⁹⁹ The *Acts of Philip* includes three pairs that expose the ecclesial reality of the author's community: "the eunuchs and the virgins, the deacons and deaconesses, the priests and the priestesses."¹⁰⁰ According to the *Acts of Philip*, "Mary" stood beside Jesus as he assigned missions to the apostles. Because she was strong and Philip was afraid, Jesus sent her to evangelize with Philip. As an evangelist, she had some of the roles associated with Mary in the oldest Dormition manuscript: she exorcised, preached, baptized women, and, through the agency of her saliva in an apparent parallel with Mark 8:22–26, healed the blind.¹⁰¹ According to the *Acts of Philip*, she also had a Eucharistic role. Before Jesus sent the disciples out on their missions, in a scene that evokes the Last Supper, she prepared the bread and salt for the communion, breaking the bread.¹⁰²

Like the Dormition text, each of these texts has a tradition of redaction. The oldest manuscript of the *Protevangelium*, the third- or fourth-century papyrus Bodmer 5, already contains evidence of significant abridgment as well as the "corrections" of a second editor.¹⁰³ Most manuscripts of the *Statutes of the Apostles* contain little hint of the tradition of Mary and other women commissioned at the Last Supper.¹⁰⁴ One redaction in the *Acts of Philip* is particularly poignant because Mary herself was redacted when some scribes replaced her with Peter.¹⁰⁵ The so-called Gelasian Decree anathematized each of these texts,

Torjesen, "The Early Christian *Orans*," in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 49–50. This text refers to Mary and Martha, as if to associate this "Mary" with Mary of Bethany, but Bovon proposes that some scribes added "Martha" to texts about Mary as a strategy to undermine the authority of the original solo "Mary." See François Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, trans. Jane Haapiseva-Hunter (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1995), 150. For an alternate perspective on why Martha is present, see Beavis, "Reconsidering Mary of Bethany" and "Mary of Bethany and the Hermeneutics of Remembrance."

⁹⁹ François Bovon, Bertrand Bouvier, and Frédéric Amsler, *Acta Philippi: Textus* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999). As in the *Gospel of Mary* and the oldest manuscript of the *Protevangelium*, the oldest manuscript of the *Acts of Philip* also called its Mary "Mariamme." See Bovon, "Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*," 78–80.

¹⁰⁰ *Acts of Philip* 1.12. Bovon, "Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*," 88.

¹⁰¹ *Acts of Philip* 8.1–2 (stood beside Christ), 8.3 (sent), 9 and 11 (exorcised), 14.9 (baptized women), 14 (healed the blind) and *Acts of Philip Martyrdom* 9 (preached). Bovon, "Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*," 80–87; and Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 124–27.

¹⁰² *Acts of Philip* 8.2. Bovon, "Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*," 82–83; and Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 125.

¹⁰³ De Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques*, 391; and Zervos, "An Early Non-Canonical Annunciation Story," 686–88.

¹⁰⁴ Arthur John MacLean, *The Ancient Church Orders* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1910).

¹⁰⁵ Brock, *Mary Magdalene*, 127–28.

as well as the Dormition narrative and the books written by the New Prophecy prophetesses Priscilla and Maximilla.¹⁰⁶

In conclusion, during the early Christian era, Christian communities in the eastern Mediterranean potentially had access to multiple oral and written traditions depicting Mary as a leader in the early church. These traditions included Mary leading the male apostles in prayer, the male apostles telling Mary she had more right than they did to lead the prayer, Mary exorcising, undertaking cures, sealing, sprinkling water, baptizing women, evangelizing, teaching, going out preaching, debating priests, entering the holy of holies, setting forth the censer of incense to God, standing at the Temple altar during the Eucharist, attending the Last Supper along with other women, commissioned by Jesus in the Eucharistic priesthood, breaking the communion bread, receiving a book of mysteries, and sending women with writings to cities around the Mediterranean. Later scribes independently but systematically excised these markers of Mary's ecclesial leadership and ultimately replaced them with orthodox markers of female respectability. Given the direction of this trajectory of redaction, we may safely conclude that the original compositions of these texts contained even more markers of Mary's authority than survive in the extant manuscripts. Per Förster and others, the heterodox nature of these markers suggests that these narratives originated in an era prior to the doctrinal evolution that prohibited such female behavior—not to mention, that anathematized books depicting such female behavior. The original narratives depicting Mary with markers of ecclesial authority thus belong to the early Christian era and are most safely dated no later than the second century. These texts comprise a literary corpus consistent with other texts that are with little controversy dated to the second century, such as the *Protevangelium* and the *Gospel of Mary*.

Worthy of consideration, however, is the possibility that first-century female evangelists and founders of house churches composed these narratives. In all probability these compositions were not, as is so often proposed, the fantastical fictions of Christians who had a misguided need to elevate the mother of Jesus. More likely, given the number of independent sources depicting Mary with markers of ecclesial authority, these compositions contained first-century oral traditions about the leadership of a Jewish woman named Mary, the historical mother of Jesus. A woman, after all, can be both a mother and a leader.

¹⁰⁶ Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 38–40. “Acts under the name of the apostle Philip,” “Gospel under the name of Bartholomaeus,” and “Works of Montanus, of Priscilla, and of Maximilla” are on the list and self-explanatory. The Dormition of Mary is called the “Book which is called The Home-going of the Holy Mary,” the *Protevangelium of James* is called the “Gospel under the name of James the Younger,” and *Statutes of the Apostles* is called “Canones of the Apostles.”

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