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Founding Women and Their Fate:
Mary Magdalene and La Malinche in the History of Interpretation

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An abstract of
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the
James T. Laney School of Graduate Studies of Emory University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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in the Graduate Division of Religion
New Testament
2019

Abstract

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This study critically compares the histories of interpretation of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche, also known as Malintzin or Doña Marina. Both of these women played important roles in foundational events and narratives: Magdalene in the events surrounding the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and La Malinche in the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica that led to the establishment of modern Mexico. And both women have been variously reinterpreted over the centuries, including as female archetypes based on popular understandings of them as whores. Previous studies have critically reassessed each individual woman's interpretive history, especially to challenge the women's negative portrayals. There has not, however, been a comprehensive study of the striking similarities between the interpretive trajectories of these two women who lived in distinct times and places. This study undertakes this comparison in order to provide a new lens for viewing the interpretive trajectories of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche and to address broader hermeneutical and ethical issues that arise from attempts to reinterpret people from the past to address new contexts.

The study begins by analyzing the primary sources for each woman's life, and then how the women are subsequently interpreted according to changing social, political, and theological concerns. The final chapter critically compares Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs. This includes analysis of more recent scholarly efforts, especially by feminist and Chicana interpreters, to challenge earlier interpretations of the women that are deemed to lack historical basis and objectify both the women of the past and those living in the shadow of their stereotypes in the present. Responding to these concerns, the study demonstrates how its comparative analysis of the women's interpretive arcs further disrupts their prominent stereotypes as whores. It then argues that this analysis reveals the ambiguous relationship between history, myth, ideology, and ethics, making any attempt to use foundational narratives or figures to address present-day concerns potentially problematic. The study concludes by putting forward strategies to negotiate these concerns.

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Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the support of the many individuals and institutions that made this dissertation possible. First among these is the Laney Graduate School of Emory University, which gave me the opportunity to study in the Graduate Division of Religion with the support of many wonderful professors, staff, and colleagues. Great thanks are due to my advisor, Luke Timothy Johnson. His careful reading and critical insights strengthened my work, and his wise counsel and encouragement were invaluable throughout the dissertation process. I am also grateful for the support of the members of my committee, professors Susan Hylan, Steven Kraftchick, and Pamela Scully. Professor Kraftchick played a crucial role in helping me turn my initial interests into the present project. Professors Yanna Yannakakis and Jeffrey Lesser also provided valuable direction during the early stages of this project, as did Phil MacLeod of the Woodruff library. I also thank Richard Adams and Sarah Bogue of Pitts Library for their assistance throughout this project.

Thanks are also due to Luther Seminary and the University of Minnesota for granting me access to their libraries while I finished this dissertation in the Twin Cities. During this time I also taught as an adjunct professor at Augsburg University, and express my gratitude to the Religion Department faculty for their support of my scholarship. I am also grateful to the professors I had as an M.Div. student at Luther Seminary who not only helped pave the way to my doctoral studies, but also provided ongoing support as I completed them.

Finally, I express my deep gratitude to my family for their unfailing love and support.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

What could Mary Magdalene, a first century follower of Jesus, possibly have in common with La Malinche, a sixteenth century Nahua woman who assisted the Spaniards in their Conquest of Mesoamerica? As this study demonstrates, the interpretive histories of these two women from distinct geographical, cultural, and temporal settings bear remarkable similarities—most notably, in their popular portrayals as archetypal whores that are used to negotiate communal identity and values. The evidence also shows, however, that each woman’s interpretive trajectory is more varied and nuanced than popular portrayals of the women suggest. This study puts these trajectories in conversation with each other in order to shed new light on these contours and provide additional resources for challenging the hegemony of the stereotypical images of the women as whores. By examining how similar interpretive tendencies occur with two women who appear in foundational narratives from distinct contexts, this study also highlights and addresses key hermeneutical and ethical issues that one may encounter with any attempt to make foundational narratives or figures relevant to changing contexts.

Mary Magdalene and La Malinche: Real Women, Contested Symbols

This study assumes that both Mary Magdalene and the woman who is commonly known as La Malinche were real women who lived in the past.¹ The New Testament Gospels, which are

¹ “La Malinche” is also called “Doña Marina” and “Malintzin.” For explanations of these names, see Francis E. Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1994), 6; Camilla Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices: An Indian Woman in the Conquest of Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 12–13, 55. La Malinche’s birth name is unknown. The Spanish named her Marina when they baptized her, and this became the source of her other known names. Sometimes the respectful Spanish title *doña* precedes *Marina*. Nahuatl speakers adopted *Marina* into their own language, replacing the *r* with *l*, making her name *Malina*. They also dropped the final *a* and added the honorific suffix *-tzin* (which functions similarly as the Spanish *doña*), resulting in *Malintzin*. The Spanish in turn picked up this name, replacing the *tz* sound with *ch* to form *Malinche*. Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 6 explains the loss of the

among the foundational texts for Christianity, are the earliest written sources on Magdalene (see chapter 2). They generally depict her as a faithful follower of Jesus who witnessed his crucifixion, burial, empty tomb, and, in some accounts, the resurrected Jesus himself. Some of the Gospels also portray her as among the first to tell others about Jesus's resurrection in obedience to his command, and thereby depict her as an early evangelist, or even as an apostle to those who would also become apostles. In these regards, Magdalene is portrayed as having a significant role in the events that became foundational for Christianity.

Similarly, La Malinche plays important roles in the foundational events of modern Mexico, according to the earliest accounts of these events (see chapter 4). Born around 1500 to a Nahuatl community in what is now central Mexico, La Malinche was reportedly sold as a slave to another native group when she was a child. This group later gave her as part of peace offering to Hernán Cortés and his invading Spanish army when they arrived on the Gulf Coast to colonize Mesoamerica in 1519. Cortés initially gave La Malinche as a servant to one of his soldiers, but when he learned of her skill with multiple indigenous languages he took her as his own interpreter, cultural intermediary, and mistress. The earliest accounts of the Conquest depict La Malinche as a reliable interpreter and intermediary, and thus as playing a key role in the Spaniards' colonization of the land that would become modern Mexico.

final *n* sound from *Malintzin* as the Spanish being unable to hear it, since it was often whispered in Nahuatl. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 242, n. 1 explains instead that *Malinche* was how the Spanish heard the irregular Nahuatl vocative form *Malintze* of *Malintzin*. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 12–13 suggests that *Malintzin* may have had several different names before being given to the Spanish, since it was common in her indigenous context for people's names to change as their situations and relationships altered. Townsend (along with Karttunen) also counters the common conception that the Spanish named her Marina as a rough translation of her supposed indigenous birth name, *Malinalli*, which is an indigenous day sign that some suggest corresponds to when *Malintzin* was born. Townsend argues that it was highly unlikely that anyone would give their child this ill-omened name, and that it was not Spanish practice to ask their newly acquired slaves their names in order to find an appropriate Spanish counterpart. I will refer to La Malinche/Marina/Malintzin by whatever name is used of her in the particular source I am discussing. When speaking of her more generally, I use the name La Malinche, since it is the name she is most widely known by today, and it reflects aspects of both her Spanish and Nahuatl names.

As chapters 2 and 4 detail, the earliest sources for both Magdalene and La Malinche's lives are relatively sparse. They do not provide complete biographies of the women, but rather only glimpses of their perceived characteristics and activities as they relate to the foundational events of Christianity or of Mexico. On one hand, some consistent images of each woman are found across the earliest sources, so that the above summaries of their depictions in these sources can be reasonably constructed. On the other hand, the large gaps in the early data for Magdalene and La Malinche, and the differences among their portrayals even here, mean that no single, unambiguous portrait of the women emerges from this data. Over the centuries, interpreters have filled in these gaps in different ways, resulting in multiple portraits of the women that have varying degrees of historical plausibility and resonance with the earliest sources.

Some of these portraits develop when the foundational narratives in which the women appear are variously reshaped according to changing contexts and concerns. The ongoing power of foundational narratives, in fact, seems to lie largely in their capacity to be reinterpreted in ways that meaningfully address new audiences and circumstances. Without this malleability, founding narratives—including the people that appear in them, such as Magdalene and La Malinche—may be largely confined to a past that interests historians but holds little relevance to most people in the present. Consider, for example, Alexander Hamilton. Although he played a key role in founding the United States and his portrait passes through people's hands daily on the ten dollar bill, until recently, many Americans likely did not know much about him, or have interest in learning more. This changed with the vast popularity of the 2015 musical, *Hamilton*.² The musical's interpretation of Hamilton's life draws on historical data about him and other figures that played roles in establishing the United States, but its use of contemporary music

² For the libretto and commentary on the work, see Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter, *Hamilton: The Revolution* (Grand Central Publishing, 2016). For a review of the musical and its popularity, see Ben Brantley, "Review: 'Hamilton,' Young Rebels Changing History and Theater," *The New York Times*, August 6, 2015.

genres and non-white actors to play the founding fathers, for example, helps present-day audiences recognize their own experiences in this narrative. *Hamilton*'s great success stems in part from this ability to contemporize the founding story of the United States in such a way that audiences see it not just as a story about the nation's past, but also about its present. It is not surprising, therefore, that interest in Alexander Hamilton as a figure from the eighteenth century has also grown since the release of the musical—an interest that is fueled by a sense that his life is somehow relevant to people's own lives today.³ Similarly, the earliest narratives of Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, as well as the first accounts of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, have been variously interpreted and appropriated over the centuries to address new audiences and concerns. Because Magdalene and La Malinche play important roles in these founding narratives, it is only natural that understandings of them would also shift. It is, arguably, such transformations that help prevent these women from slipping into obscurity.

Over time, however, interpretations of both women develop that go well beyond their roles in the founding narratives of Christianity or of Mexico. The women become legendary figures that take on lives of their own in texts, dramas, visual art, and popular imagination (see chapters 3 and 5). The fact that Magdalene and La Malinche are known from foundational narratives makes them attractive figures to use to address various concerns in diverse contexts. And a paucity of historical data about the women facilitates interpreters filling in the gaps in this data to create biographies of their lives and to speculate about their thoughts and motives, beyond what the primary sources clearly substantiate. The women come to function as malleable symbols through which various interpreters—historians, theologians, biblical scholars, artists,

³ E.g., the United States Department of the Treasury decided to reverse its initial plans to take Alexander Hamilton's portrait off of the front of the ten dollar bill in part because of the backlash created by fans of the musical *Hamilton*. See Ana Swanson and Abby Ohlheiser, "Harriet Tubman to appear on \$20 bill, while Alexander Hamilton remains on \$10 bill," *The Washington Post*, April 20, 2016.

and others—wrestle with diverse issues such as gender roles, transgression, and communal identity. Some portrayals of Magdalene and La Malinche bear little resemblance to the women depicted in the earliest sources, and both become ubiquitous figures in popular culture.

Likely the best-known image of both women is that of an archetypal whore that represents the deviant female. Magdalene's image as a whore stems from pope Gregory the Great's sixth century identification of her with the unnamed penitent woman of Luke 7:36–50, whose former sin is thought to be promiscuity (see chapter 3). Subsequent medieval interpreters develop full legends that describe Magdalene's supposed fall from virtue into a life of lust, and in some cases, prostitution, before she meets Jesus and turns from her sin to become one of his closest followers. Many of these works employ this image of Magdalene as exemplary of true repentance, God's transformative grace, and sincere devotion to Jesus. The image became widespread in medieval Europe, and, despite the seemingly positive function it was intended to fulfill, portraying Magdalene as a reformed whore made female sexual transgression paradigmatic of the worst type of sin in Christendom. The penitent Magdalene also became a figurehead for movements aimed at reforming prostitutes and other women perceived as transgressing societal norms. As chapter 3 details, however, other images of Magdalene persisted in medieval Europe and beyond, such as a successful preacher and evangelist, apostle-to-the apostles, and contemplative ascetic. Even so, the understanding of Magdalene as a reformed whore remains prevalent in modern Western societies, influencing many popular depictions of her that emphasize her purported sexual activity more than her activity in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus (see chapter 3).

La Malinche's reputation as a whore developed in the years following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821 (see chapter 5). In the sixteenth century accounts of the

Spanish Conquest of Mexico, and in three hundred years of subsequent interpretations, La Malinche is portrayed mostly positively as an intelligent, courageous interpreter and cultural intermediary between the Spaniards and various native groups. Little is said of her personal relationship with Cortés, other than that she was his mistress and bore his first son. This changed when Mexico's independence from Spain precipitated need of a revised foundational narrative that would distance the new nation from its Spanish roots and assert its own autonomous identity, in part by portraying modern Mexico as a continuation of the great indigenous civilizations that flourished before the Spaniards' arrival. In order to do this, previous depictions of the Spanish Conquest as the heroic event that founded colonial New Spain—which eventually became modern Mexico—had to be tempered, and the defeat of thousands of indigenous people by the relatively small Spanish army had to be explained in a way that did not suggest the inferiority of the indigenous people.

A common strategy for accomplishing these goals was to portray one native woman, La Malinche, as representative of all the native people who assisted the Spaniards in their Conquest, and her work interpreting and negotiating on behalf of the Spanish as a betrayal that was crucial to the Spaniard's subjugation of all native peoples. La Malinche thus became a scapegoat whose treachery explained the Spanish defeat of the majority of patriotic native people, who had nobly resisted Spanish domination. Her sexual relationship with Cortés, along with the son that she bore to him, became paradigmatic of her treachery, since it was seen as her submission to, and preference for, the foreign invader over her own people. Such reinterpretations of the Conquest have popularized the image of La Malinche as Mexico's archetypal whore who betrayed its native inhabitants not primarily through her interpreting work during the Conquest, but even more so through her deviant sexual activity with the captain of the Conquest. To this day in

Mexican, Chicano/a, and Latino/a cultures, the term *malinchismo* means to prefer foreign cultures to one's own, or to somehow betray one's own people.⁴

History of Research

Much has been written on Mary Magdalene and La Malinche, on both the popular and academic levels. In the past century, several works on each woman have used historical methods to reassess their lives and roles in important events in the contexts in which they lived. Some of these studies respond at least in part to the prominence of the popular interpretations of each woman that many scholars argue have little or no basis in the earliest sources. Interest in more historically grounded investigations of the women expanded in the 1970s, and beyond, as feminist concerns influenced academic studies of women in history, biblical interpretation, and theology. Several works emerged that critically reassess not only Magdalene and La Malinche's roles in past events, but also their long interpretive histories, which many female scholars in particular find to be problematic. The popular image of each woman as a whore, and in Malinche's case, also as a traitor, becomes widely challenged both as lacking historical support and as an ideologically fueled misrepresentation that suppresses the women's real, important roles in past events and continues to stigmatize women into the present. Although not all of the more recent works that raise such concerns explicitly characterize themselves as feminist, many of them do assert, along with feminist interpreters, that constructing more historically accurate interpretations of Magdalene and La Malinche can positively impact understandings of women's

⁴ For details on the usage of the terms *Chicano* and *Chicano/a*, see note 1 in chapter 5.

roles in the present.⁵ In other words, there is a sense of urgency about reclaiming the real women from beneath centuries of seemingly inaccurate, or even harmful, misinterpretations.

The present study builds off of these critical reassessments of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories that are concerned on some level with the ethical implications of how the women are interpreted, including how understandings of the women shape life in the present. The following summary of research, therefore, focuses on representative examples of this type of work on each woman. Some of these works will be addressed in more detail in chapters 3 and 5.

Critical Reassessments of Magdalene's Interpretive History

Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's 1975 article, "Mary Magdalene, Apostle to the Apostles," presents a call to critically reassess the church traditions about Magdalene that cast her as a sinner and penitent, and to reclaim her as a positive model for women in the present.⁶ This pioneering feminist biblical scholar and theologian argues that Magdalene's distorted image as a penitent sinner is the product of patriarchal historians, and that Christians must revise their history in order to recover Magdalene's true roles as early witness and proclaimer of Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection—the foundational events for Christian faith. The tendency to downplay Magdalene in these roles is already apparent in parts of the New Testament Gospels, according to Schüssler Fiorenza, such as in the ending of Mark, which states that Magdalene and

⁵ E.g., Ann Graham Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (HTS 51; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003). Although this work focuses on understandings of Magdalene in early Christianity, Brock notes on page 16 (including n. 47) that historical questions about women's apostleship have ongoing relevance today, since women are still denied preaching roles in some Christian circles. Cf. Holly Hearon, *The Magdalene Tradition: Witness and Counter-Witness in Early Christian Communities* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 17–18.

⁶ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Mary Magdalene: Apostle to the Apostles," *UTS Journal* April (1975): 22–24.

the other female resurrection witnesses did not tell anyone about it, or in Luke 24:11, when the male disciples dismiss the women's proclamation as an idle tale. Schüssler Fiorenza argues that this tendency reflects a competition in early Christian communities between the leadership of Peter and of Mary Magdalene, as she more fully develops in her landmark 1983 book, *In Memory of Her*.⁷

Although Schüssler Fiorenza focuses on Magdalene's roles in early Christianity and does not present a critical reassessment of Magdalene's entire interpretive trajectory, her work provides the historical, ideological, and practical motivation for others to do so.⁸ She argues that the Western church's traditional images of Magdalene are not only historically inaccurate and patriarchally-biased, but that they also negatively impact women's self-perception because women see their own marginalized status in church and society reflected back to them through these distorted images. Schüssler Fiorenza is, therefore, an early voice calling upon women to reclaim Magdalene in her roles as resurrection witness and apostle-to-the-apostles—not just because they are historically accurate, but also because they can empower women today to take

⁷ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983).

⁸ Other works that deal substantially (although not necessarily exclusively) with Mary Magdalene as portrayed in the New Testament Gospels and/or other early Christian texts and traditions include: François Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, trans. Jane Haapiseva-Hunter (Allison Park, PA: Pickwick, 1994); Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*; Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women in Gospel Literature: The Case of Mary Magdalene," in *Women and Christian Origins*, ed. Ross S. Kraemer and Mary Rose D'Angelo (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 105–128; Bart Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, & Mary Magdalene: the Followers of Jesus in History and Legend* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Hearon, *The Magdalene Tradition*; 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, 1989), 179–94; Martin Hengel, "Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen," in *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel*, ed. Otto Betz, Martin Hengel, and Peter Schmidt (Leiden: Brill, 1963) 243–45; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *The Women Around Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1982); Gerald O'Collins, "Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection," *TS* 48 (1987): 631–646; Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus*, trans. Paul Burns (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994); Luise Schottroff, "Maria Magdalena und die Frauen am Grabe Jesu," *EvT* 42 (1982): 3–25; Claudia Setzer, "Excellent Women: Female Witnesses to the Resurrection," *JBL* 116 (1997): 259–272; Mary R. Thompson, *Mary of Magdala: Apostle and Leader* (New York: Paulist, 1995); Carmen Bernabé Ubieta, *María Magdalena: Tradiciones en el Cristianismo Primitivo* (Navarre, Spain: Editorial Verbo Divino, 1994).

on important roles in church and society, beyond those to which they have been traditionally confined.

In the years since Schüssler Fiorenza's 1975 article, several monographs have been written that further explore Magdalene's myriad portrayals over the centuries. Many of these works are at least partly motivated by a concern to counter her dominant image as a penitent whore—an image that gained renewed popularity in the latter half of the twentieth century through works such as Kazantzakis's novel-turned-film, *The Last Temptation of Christ*, and the rock opera *Jesus Christ Superstar*, which also became a film.⁹ Several works also put forward a portrait of the “historical” or “real” Mary Magdalene that has been buried beneath supposedly mythical portrayals. Many of these also aim to show how supposed misinterpretations of Magdalene have affected the perceptions and roles of women in church and society, as well as how more appropriate understandings of her can serve as inspirational models for women in the present.

Marjorie Malvern's 1975 book, *Venus in Sackcloth*, does not aim to determine who the historical person of Magdalene was, but rather to examine how various myths have attached to this woman to form a complex, fictionalized figure that has served as a useful vessel for transmitting contradictory ideas.¹⁰ The title of the book points to this dynamic, since Magdalene has been cast over the centuries as both an ancient goddess and as a paradigmatic penitent sinner. Malvern argues that the fictionalized Magdalene developed not because of any malicious intent, but because such mythical figures are able to preserve ideas that are considered too dangerous or

⁹ Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Last Temptation of Christ* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960). The book was first published in Greek in 1955, and the film adaptation was first released in 1988. Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice's *Jesus Christ Superstar* was first released as a rock opera album in 1970. It became a Broadway musical in 1971, and was made into a film in 1973. For more on popular works on Mary Magdalene, see chapter 3.

¹⁰ Marjorie M. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth: The Magdalen's Origins and Metamorphoses* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), xii, 2–15.

impossible to speak about openly.¹¹ Although Malvern's work shows that a wide variety of Magdalene interpretations have emerged over the centuries, it is not an exhaustive, systematic study of all of these. The work instead focuses on five plays from the Middle Ages, three popular twentieth century works, and twenty-four artistic representations of Magdalene.¹²

A comprehensive study on Magdalene interpretations from the first through the twentieth centuries came in 1993 with British art historian Susan Haskins's book, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*.¹³ Haskins deals aptly with a wide variety of texts and artistic representations of Magdalene, from the New Testament and early extra-canonical texts to patristic authors; from medieval legends, art, and social institutions inspired by Magdalene to twentieth century pop culture depictions of her. Organized according to various images that have emerged of Magdalene, such as apostle-to-the-apostles and blessed sinner, Haskins's work argues that Magdalene's "chimera-like existence has reflected the exigencies of the periods in which she has flourished."¹⁴

Even so, Haskins claims that modern biblical and theological scholarship (especially that which is done from a feminist perspective) has succeeded in uncovering a "real" or "true" Mary Magdalene from beneath her many mythical and metaphorical interpretations, above all, as a paradigmatic whore.¹⁵ The more historically accurate portrait of Magdalene is as Jesus's chief female disciple, apostle-to-the-apostles, and first resurrection witness.¹⁶ In contrast to Malvern, who claims that Magdalene was not intentionally maligned by interpreters, Haskins asserts precisely that Gregory the Great's conflation of Magdalene with the penitent sinner of Luke 7

¹¹ Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 14–15, 180.

¹² Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, xii. She also examines Magdalene in second century gnostic texts.

¹³ Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (London: HarperCollins, 1993).

¹⁴ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 391.

¹⁵ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 392, 399.

¹⁶ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 392.

reflects willful misinterpretation that has negative consequences not only for Magdalene, but also for women in general.¹⁷ Motivated by the needs of a patriarchal and ascetic church, Haskins argues that transforming Magdalene from a proclaimer of the resurrection into an exemplary penitent who had been a whore both deeply associated her with sin, represented by woman's sexuality, and made her into a figure that the church could more easily control and use as propaganda against other women.¹⁸ For Haskins, Magdalene's victimization at the hands of patriarchal interpreters serves as a metaphor for women's historically subordinate position in Christianity, so that reclaiming her more historically accurate portrait could empower women who seek greater participation in church leadership—especially as ordained ministers (when this book was published in 1993, the Church of England had only recently voted to ordain women as priests).¹⁹

Ingrid Maisch's 1998 work, *Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman Throughout the Centuries*, likewise traces the development of diverse images of Magdalene, including analysis of several German texts, poems, and plays.²⁰ Maisch argues that over time, Magdalene went from a historical figure known from the Bible to “a myth of the feminine” that reflects any given context's image of women in general.²¹ She asserts that it is necessary to strip away the layers of images that have attached to Magdalene—including those that show her on the ground in a submissive posture, such as the penitent sinner kneeling at Jesus's feet—in order to rediscover her as the courageous first century disciple of Jesus who taught others based on her experience of

¹⁷ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 96–97.

¹⁸ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 96–97.

¹⁹ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 392, 400.

²⁰ Ingrid Maisch, *Mary Magdalene: The Image of a Woman Throughout the Centuries*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998). The book was originally published in German as *Maria Magdalena: Zwischen Verachtung und Verehrung* (Verlag Herder GmbH & Co. KG, 1996).

²¹ Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, ix.

the risen Christ.²² This recovered image reflects modern values that can cast a prophetic vision for life, such as “*solidarity with the dying, sympathy with the tortured ... imagination that helps in overcoming personal resignation and global fears*” (italics original).²³

Published in 2002, Jane Schaberg’s *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* presents what is perhaps the most thorough critical analysis to date of both the vast array of Magdalene interpretations and of who the real first century woman may have been.²⁴ Schaberg’s work responds to Schüssler Fiorenza’s earlier call to move away from Magdalene’s distorted images by searching for their roots and rediscovering, or resurrecting, the Magdalene of history.²⁵ To do so, Schaberg works through the data in the opposite direction of many studies on Magdalene, starting with present-day reflections on how Virginia Woolf’s thoughts on topics such as sexism help illuminate key issues involved in studying Magdalene. Schaberg then critically analyzes the available archaeological evidence for Magdalene’s life, her interpretive trajectory, extra-canonical texts that point to her significant role in early Christianity, modern scholarly treatments of Magdalene’s roles in the foundation of Christianity, and finally, the canonical New Testament texts that attest to Magdalene.²⁶

²² Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 179–181.

²³ Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 181.

²⁴ Jane Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene: Legends, Apocrypha, and the Christian Testament* (New York: Continuum, 2002).

²⁵ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 7–8.

²⁶ Magdalene’s role in early extra-canonical texts, commonly referred to as *gnostic*, will be discussed in chapter 3. Some major works that address this topic include: Richard Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition* (EUS 457; Berlin: Peter Lang, 1993); Bernabé Ubieta, *María Magdalena: Tradiciones en el Cristianismo Primitivo*; Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*; Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*; Karen King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 2003); Antti Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved: Mary Magdalene in the Nag Hammadi Library and Related Documents* (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies XL; Leiden: Brill, 1996); Marvin Meyer, *The Gospels of Mary: The Secret Tradition of Mary Magdalene, The Companion of Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 2004); Christopher Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary* (Oxford Early Christian Gospels; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

With regard to Magdalene's interpretive history, Schaberg holds a similar view to that of Schüssler Fiorenza and Haskins that patriarchal forces are largely responsible for suppressing Magdalene's historical roles in the origins of Christianity and the development of legends that cast her as the epitome of sinful, sexualized *woman*.²⁷ Even though such legends have purportedly diminished and silenced the historical Magdalene, Schaberg sees some value in sifting through them as a way for women, who have also been maligned by Magdalene's harlotization, to reclaim their sexuality and redefine themselves.²⁸ Schaberg is forthcoming about her feminist commitments and about how these shape her interest in Magdalene as both an important figure from Christian history and one that can positively impact women's lives in the present. She ends her work with her own imaginative reconstruction of Magdalene's role in the foundations of Christianity, arguing that John 20, in allusion to the Elijah-Elisha narratives, presents her as Jesus's successor.

A final representative study on Magdalene interpretations and their implications for real women that I will mention here is Esther de Boer's 2007 book *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*.²⁹ Although it only addresses in-depth Magdalene interpretations from the first through the sixth century, the work responds to images of her that have flourished in subsequent eras as well,

²⁷ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 8.

²⁸ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 8–9.

²⁹ Esther de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up: The Sources Behind the Myth*, trans. J. Bowden (London: T & T Clark, 2007). The book was first published in Dutch as *De geliefde discipel: vroegchristelijke teksten over Maria Magdalena* (Zoetermeer: Meinema, 2006). De Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, ix states that this book is a sequel to her "first quest for Mary," *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth* (London: SCM Press, 1997). She has also authored *The Gospel of Mary: Beyond a Gnostic and a Biblical Mary Magdalene* (London: T & T Clark, 2004). Cf. Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition* for another study that focuses primarily on Magdalene's roles in the New Testament texts and in patristic interpretation, but that concludes with some thoughts on how understanding Magdalene in her historical context could meaningfully inform feminist theology. Other works that deal with aspects of Magdalene's interpretive history include Helen M. Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1950); Hans Hansel, *Die Maria-Magdalena-Legende. Eine Quellen-Untersuchung* (Greifswald: H. Dallmeyer, 1937); Urban Holzmeister, "Die Magdalenenfrage in der Kirchlichen Überlieferung," *ZKTh* 46 (1922): 402–421; K.L. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000). Aimed at a more general audience is Lesa Belleve, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Mary Magdalene* (New York: Alpha, 2005).

including in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.³⁰ Like most of the works discussed above, de Boer's book asserts that Magdalene and other women had important roles in the foundational events and subsequent development of Christianity, but that patriarchal forces in church and society suppress this reality. They do this in part by promoting legendary images of Magdalene such as the penitent prostitute, which equates her and all women with a dangerous sexuality that must be controlled.³¹ De Boer argues that this image has ruined lives and is not worth salvaging.³² She disagrees, however, with Haskin's assertion that Gregory the Great intentionally maligned Magdalene by conflating her with the penitent woman of Luke 7; his focus was instead on creating an inspirational model of penitence.³³ He and other male interpreters, however, have been influenced by their male-dominated cultures, leading them to "cover-up" portraits of Magdalene or other women that show them to be instructing men, such as Magdalene proclaiming the news of Jesus's resurrection to the male disciples in John 20, or her teaching these same disciples in the *Gospel of Mary*.³⁴ De Boer concludes her work by putting forward her understanding of a historically reliable portrait of Magdalene that can be inspiring for women—and others—today. Drawing largely on the Gospel of John and the *Gospel of Mary*, this Magdalene is a key disciple of Jesus who witnessed his death and resurrection and became a teacher of the meaning of these events. As such, Magdalene's life and teachings challenge orthodox Christian doctrines and practices, including male-dominated ecclesiastical hierarchies that limit women's roles in the church.³⁵

³⁰ de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, ix.

³¹ de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, 182.

³² de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, 183, 193.

³³ de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, 183.

³⁴ de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, 184, 192–193.

³⁵ de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*, 192–194.

Critical Reassessments of La Malinche's Interpretive History

The past fifty years or so have also seen the development of a significant body of critical scholarship on La Malinche that, similar to more recent Magdalene scholarship, is often fueled by concerns that her popular portrayals have little basis in the earliest sources for her life. Because La Malinche's image as a whore is linked to her roles assisting the Spanish during their Conquest of Mexico, challenging this image often goes hand-in-hand with challenging the interpretation of her as paradigmatic traitor to the indigenous peoples of Mexico who is blamed for their subjugation by the Spanish. The following review of scholarship will only address some representative examples of works that challenge long-held views of La Malinche, and/or that seek to reclaim her as a figure who can meaningfully represent women's experiences in the present, since chapter 5 addresses these works in more detail.

Since the 1970s, Chicana writers have played a significant role in challenging popular understandings of La Malinche as a traitor, whore, or love-struck mistress of Cortés who had no control over her own destiny.³⁶ They object to these portraits as not only lacking support in the earliest sources, but also on practical and ethical grounds because of how they have been used to stereotype Chicana and Latina women, as well as indigenous people. Like much of the more recent scholarship on Magdalene, therefore, Chicana writers also raise ethical concerns about

³⁶ E.g., Adelaida R. Del Castillo, "Malintzin Tenepal: A Preliminary Look into a New Perspective," in *Essays on La Mujer*, Anthology No. 1, ed. Rosaura Sánchez and Rosa Martínez Cruz (Los Angeles: Chicana Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 1977), 124–149; Debra J. Blake, *Chicana Sexuality and Gender: Cultural Refiguring in Literature, Oral History, and Art* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008). For overviews of Chicana works on La Malinche, see Norma Alarcón, "Chicana's Feminist Literature: A Re-vision through Malintzin/or Malintzin: Putting Flesh Back on the Object," in *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*, ed. Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (Watertown, MA: Persephone, 1981), 182–190, and Norma Alarcón, "Traduttora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism," *Cultural Critique* 13 (1989): 57–87. See chapter 5 for a more detailed analysis of Chicana treatments of La Malinche and for further bibliography.

how interpretations of a prominent woman from foundational narratives can impact women in the present.

In particular, Chicana writers describe how Chicano men have used some of the popular portraits of La Malinche to negatively characterize Chicana women—for example, by labeling them as *malinches*, or traitors to their own culture, for pursuing relationships or educational opportunities in the dominant white culture.³⁷ Moreover, La Malinche is often seen as the controversial mother of the *mestizo*, or racially mixed, Mexican and Chicano/a people because she bore Cortés’s first son, adding another layer to her symbolic value that affects perceptions of women in these communities. Many Chicana writers consider the negative portraits of La Malinche by generations of male interpreters to be the product of patriarchal bias that promotes stereotypical roles for women and reflects something of their own mistreatment by men in their own communities.

In response to such interpretations, Chicana writers reclaim the figure of La Malinche as an inspirational exemplar who, like them, moved adeptly between different languages and cultures. Over the decades, Chicana writers have put forward a variety of interpretations of La Malinche that, at least in part, help them to negotiate aspects of their own experiences and identities. Reassessing some of the earliest historical sources for La Malinche’s life aids these efforts. Chicana writers challenge, for example, the idea that La Malinche was a traitor to “the” pre-Hispanic indigenous people of Mexico by noting that there was no single, unified native group at the time that she could have betrayed, and that as a slave, she had limited options when it came to assisting the Spaniards. Beyond merely seeing La Malinche as a victim, however, Chicana writers also note how she exercised her intelligence and agency even in captivity by

³⁷ See chapter 5 for a detailed explanation of this point.

successfully negotiating between the Spaniards and native peoples, perhaps preventing even more bloodshed.³⁸

Sandra Messinger Cypess's 1991 book, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth*, presents the first comprehensive study of La Malinche interpretations in literature and drama, from the sixteenth through the twentieth century.³⁹ Cypess argues that the most prominent images of La Malinche as a traitor or prostitute are largely products of fictional works in Mexico's literary tradition, and therefore can be studied as literary constructs.⁴⁰ She examines portrayals of La Malinche in the earliest sources, then delineates "the transformation of the historical figure into a literary sign with multiple manifestations" across the centuries, assessing the effects of sociopolitical events and ideology on these manifestations.⁴¹ Cypess puts forward the view, adopted in this study, that the earliest sources on La Malinche generally depict her as a competent and well-respected interpreter and intermediary for the Spaniards, without any clear indication that she acted treacherously. The drastic shift in La Malinche's image came, Cypess argues, in Mexico's post-independence period when a scapegoat was needed to explain the defeat of indigenous peoples at the hands of the Spanish. This is when La Malinche began to be portrayed as a promiscuous, paradigmatic traitor whose sexual preference for the Spanish conquerors facilitated the subjugation of the native peoples of Mexico (see chapter 5 for details).

Writing from a feminist perspective, Cypess sees the prevalent casting of La Malinche as a treacherous whore as symbolic of women's experience in patriarchal culture. She agrees with many Chicana writers that La Malinche has become a negative archetypal female figure in Latin

³⁸ E.g., Del Castillo, "Malintzin Tenepal," 127.

³⁹ Sandra Messinger Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature: From History to Myth* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991).

⁴⁰ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 2.

⁴¹ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 2.

America whose long-standing mythical image is an unfair distortion.⁴² By defining common characteristics of this mythical Malinche and analyzing in detail how this figure developed and manifests in different contexts, Cypess's work also helps clarify who the real sixteenth century woman may have been.

Cristina González Hernández's 2002 book, *Doña Marina (La Malinche) y la Formación de la Identidad Mexicana*, similarly asserts that La Malinche has been transformed from a historical figure into omnipresent myth in Mexican consciousness.⁴³ It particularly assesses how understandings of La Malinche have shifted according to changing constructions of Mexican national identity, resulting in a wide variety of portrayals that both exalt and denigrate her.⁴⁴ Although this work, like that of Cypess, examines images of La Malinche in literary works, drama, and popular culture, it also analyzes her portrayals in a wide variety of Mexican historical works from different epochs. It ends with an assessment of who the historical person of La Malinche may have been.⁴⁵

Perhaps the most thorough analysis to date of La Malinche in her own context is Camilla Townsend's *Malintzin's Choices*.⁴⁶ While the goal of the work is not to trace the complex development of La Malinche's many images over the centuries, it responds to this phenomenon

⁴² Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, ix, 6.

⁴³ Cristina González Hernández, *Doña Marina (La Malinche) y la Formación de la Identidad Mexicana* (Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro, 2002), 11–12.

⁴⁴ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 12–13.

⁴⁵ Frances Karttunen has also written two excellent book chapters that critically reassess who La Malinche as a person from the past was in light of her many subsequent interpretations. See chapter 1 of Karttunen, *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors*, and Frances Karttunen, "Rethinking La Malinche," in *Indian Women in Early Mexico*, ed. Susan Schroeder, Stephanie Wood, and Robert Haskett (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 291–312. Cf. Rebecca K. Jager, *Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea: Indian Women as Cultural Intermediaries and National Symbols* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2016); Pilar Godayol, "Malintzin/La Malinche/Doña Marina: Re-reading the Myth of the Treacherous Translator," *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Studies* 18 (2012): 61–76; Anna María Fernández Poncela, "Malinali: Discursos y Creación Cultural," *La Ventana* 28 (2008): 88–125. For a thorough German language work on La Malinche's various images across the centuries, see Claudia Leitner, *Der Malinche-Komplex: Conquista, Genus, Genealogien* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2009).

⁴⁶ See note 1 for the full citation.

by seeking to construct an accurate account of her life in a way that humanizes both La Malinche and other indigenous women that also found themselves caught up in the Conquest.⁴⁷ Townsend admits that there is not enough direct evidence to write a compelling biography about La Malinche, since she left no known writings of her own, and states that many attempts to do so end up further objectifying her or slipping into the realm of fantasy.⁴⁸ She believes, nonetheless, that it is important to try to understand La Malinche and her inner life as best as possible to prevent others from using her as a blank slate upon which to project their own assumptions.⁴⁹ To do this, Townsend draws on a wide range of historical and ethnographic evidence to carefully reconstruct the contexts in which La Malinche lived and to critically analyze the events that impacted her in order to arrive at a reasonable understanding of who she was and how she would have made her decisions. The resulting story of La Malinche's life provides a powerful counter-narrative to the prominent interpretations of her as a treacherous whore.

Links Between Mary Magdalene and La Malinche

Some scholars have noted a connection between Mary Magdalene and La Malinche that has developed in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures based on their popular interpretations as whores (see chapter 5).⁵⁰ They state that the women function together as the negative female archetype whose perceived promiscuity stands in sharp contrast to the chastity of the positive

⁴⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 4–5.

⁴⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 5, 281. Townsend cites Ricardo Herren, *Doña Marina, la Malinche* (Barcelona: Planeta, 1992), as the best earlier attempt at a serious biography of La Malinche. Other more recent biographical treatments of La Malinche in the context of the Conquest include: Luis Barjau, *La Conquista de la Malinche: La Verdad Acerca de la Mujer que Fundó el Mestizaje en México* (Mexico City: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 2009); Juan Miralles, *La Malinche: Raíz de México* (Mexico City: Tusquets, 2004).

⁴⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 5–7.

⁵⁰ E.g., Alicia Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*, ed. Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris (Houston: Arte Público, 2005), 44–57; Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the "Bad Woman": Sor Juana, Malinche, Coyolxauhqui and Other Rebels with a Cause* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 116–117, 158–162; Sergio de la Mora, *Cinemachismo: Masculinities and Sexuality in Mexican Film* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006), 21–33.

female archetype, the Virgin of Guadalupe (i.e., the Virgin Mary). They do not, however, present a detailed examination of how each woman acquired the whore label or precisely how the two women first became linked in popular imagination.

The most developed Magdalene-Malinche comparison I found is in Rita Eder's art history article, "*El Sueño de la Malinche* de Antonio Ruiz y María Magdalena: Algunas Afinidades." It argues that a twentieth century painting of La Malinche may be based on a sixteenth century painting of Magdalene in order to draw out certain similarities between the two women.⁵¹ Both paintings portray the women lying down with long, flowing hair and a map or topography placed upon their bodies. Based on the conventions of visual representation in each painting's context, the author argues that Magdalene and La Malinche are being compared in the more recent painting in terms of their shared interpretations as being simultaneously sinners and saints, as foundational figures for Christianity in their respective contexts, and as figures with complex identities that have gone from history to legend.⁵²

Purpose of the Present Study

The above summary of research on Mary Magdalene and La Malinche shows that these women have fascinated interpreters not only in centuries past, but also into the twenty-first century. Given the ongoing power of Magdalene and La Malinche's stories individually, as well as the basic connections that have already been made between them, the present study aims to show that valuable insights about both the women and their many interpreters emerge from

⁵¹ Rita Eder, "*El Sueño de la Malinche* de Antonio Ruiz y María Magdalena: Algunas Afinidades," in *La Imagen Política*, ed. Cuauhtémoc Medina (Mexico City: UNAM; Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, 2006), 93–112. The twentieth century painting (1939) is *El Sueño de la Malinche* ("The Dream of Malinche") by Antonio Ruiz; the sixteenth century painting (1538) is *Mapa de la Provenza en forma de mujer* ("Map of Provence in the form of a woman") by Nicolas de Lorraine.

⁵² The author draws on the depiction of Mary Magdalene from the *Golden Legend*, which recounts Mary's evangelistic activities in Provence and her retirement to a cave.

putting their interpretive histories into conversation with each other—a task that has not, to the best of my knowledge, been undertaken in a comprehensive way. The following study, therefore, provides a detailed, comparative analysis of the women’s interpretive trajectories.

While this study could yield valuable findings for several areas of academic inquiry, the conclusions I will draw from it focus on some of its implications for my discipline of Biblical Studies, and for the general use of foundational narratives to address changing contexts and concerns (see chapter 6). After laying out the data, I first argue that the similarities in Magdalene and La Malinche’s interpretive histories, which come to explicitly link the women in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures, encourages broadening the scope of traditional studies of biblical reception history, which often focus on Europe, Canada, and the United States when addressing the modern era. The fact that Magdalene, a biblical figure, comes to be identified with La Malinche, a figure from Mexican history, also shows the need to examine how biblical texts and themes interact with a broad range of texts, cultural narratives, and other artifacts when assessing the Bible’s reception in a particular context.

Second, I argue that the comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche’s interpretive histories provides additional resources for challenging the ongoing power of the image of the women as archetypal whores. As the following pages will show, I agree with many of the works discussed above that this image does not have a strong foundation in the earliest sources for the women’s lives, but rather is an interpretive construct that develops centuries later to meet certain communal needs. I also share the concern of many interpreters of the women that perpetuating their whore and/or traitor images can negatively stereotype women and/or indigenous people in harmful ways. As the following chapters demonstrate, interpretations of these women do not remain confined to the texts or artistic works that express them, but actually affect social

movements and real people's lives. Building off of the awareness that feminist and Chicana scholars in particular raise about the ethics of interpretation, I will demonstrate ways in which bringing Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs into conversation with each other can further problematize their most popular portraits and broaden understandings of their complex reception histories.

Third, I argue that it is precisely by taking seriously both the historical and ethical concerns of interpreters seeking to recover Magdalene and La Malinche from their more mythical portraits that one encounters broader hermeneutical issues raised by any attempt to make foundational texts and figures meaningful to new audiences. In this regard, the present study seeks to not only address each woman's interpretive history in relation to their most prominent, and seemingly problematic, images, but also to assess what can be learned from the larger phenomenon of two women from distinct contexts undergoing similar interpretive patterns over the centuries, including the more recent trend of scholars critically reassessing prior interpretations. Although much of this critical scholarship, described above, has focused on constructing historically accurate interpretations of the women, as opposed to purportedly "mythical" portrayals that are ideologically motivated, it is typically not merely concerned with the roles that the women played in past events, but also with how better understanding the women can positively inform the lives of people today. In other words, such attempts to "recover" the real women of the past are also motivated to some degree by a belief that their stories can impact contemporaneous concerns, just as were the earlier "mythical" portraits of the women that many scholars find to be problematic. This raises the question of how ideological factors also affect these historical reconstructions, and of whether the very use of historical

research to put forward a new normative image of a person from the past risks creating a new myth.

The following chapters demonstrate how all interpretation is contextual to some extent—meaning that it is influenced by the interpreter’s social location, experiences, and aims of interpretation. This means that, while we can argue that some interpretations of Magdalene and La Malinche are more historically plausible or ethically problematic than others, even present-day, well-intentioned efforts to paint accurate, and/or inspirational, portraits of the women also run the risk of projecting one’s own perspectives onto the women and thereby further objectifying them, as Townsend warns. In other words, the relationship between history and myth may be more ambiguous than some of the more recent studies on Magdalene and La Malinche suggest.

I will further argue that, given the essentially perspectival/contextual nature of all interpretation, together with the gaps in the early data about Magdalene and La Malinche that must be filled in order to create meaningful portraits of them, multiple interpretations of the women are inevitable. So, this study will conclude by addressing ways in which the polyvalence of meaning potential wrapped up in the figures of Magdalene and La Malinche might be respected while also maintaining some criteria for determining historically and ethically sound interpretations of them.

The methods of analysis used in this study are multiple. Although its aim is not to fully reconstruct the lives of Magdalene or La Malinche in their historical contexts, the study does use historical-critical methods at times to assess the historical plausibility of some interpretations of the women, as well as to ascertain how specific interpretations arose out of, and in response to, certain social, political, and ecclesiastical contexts. Literary analysis is prevalent throughout the

study because many interpretations of the women are expressed through written texts, which must be assessed in relation to the author's aims and audiences. Pictographic texts and different types of visual art also play a role in the women's interpretive histories, and similarly call for analysis that takes into account the artist's context. Finally, my comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories is itself an exegetical tool that illuminates certain contours of these histories and highlights the hermeneutical and ethical issues described above.

In order to make this comparison in chapter 6, chapters 2 through 5 first describe in detail the interpretive trajectories of each woman individually. Chapter 2 analyzes the portraits of Magdalene in the earliest written sources for her life, the New Testament Gospels, while chapter 3 discusses the vast array of interpretations of Magdalene that emerged between the second and twenty-first centuries. Likewise, chapter 4 discusses La Malinche's portrayals in the earliest written sources for her life, and chapter 5 traces subsequent interpretations of her from the late sixteenth to early twenty-first century.

Much of the information in these chapters may not be new to those who are familiar with the interpretive histories of Magdalene or La Malinche, and I am indebted to many of the scholars whose works are discussed above for pointing me to the primary sources I discuss in these chapters and providing analysis that guides my own work. There are several reasons why, nonetheless, it is crucial for the present study to lay out in some detail the data set for Magdalene and La Malinche's roles in their respective foundational narratives and in their subsequent interpretive arcs.

First, it is likely that many readers will be familiar with the details of only one of the women's lives and interpretive histories. Providing substantial information about both women will help all readers more fully engage the study.

Second, thorough analysis of the presentations of each woman in the earliest sources demonstrates a claim that is foundational to the rest of the study—namely, that these sources do not provide a single, unambiguous portrait of either woman. This facilitates the multiplicity of interpretations of the women that develop over the centuries.

Third, in order to convincingly show that there are significant similarities in how Magdalene and La Malinche have been interpreted over time, as well as how contexts affect these interpretations, it is important to provide details on a variety of interpretations of the women in different eras. This study by no means claims to be an exhaustive encyclopedia of all of the images that have emerged of these women in all times and places. But it does attempt to avoid oversimplifying the women's interpretive histories by reducing them to only their best-known images. This flattening of the women's interpretive histories is, in fact, part of what many contemporary interpreters of the women object to, and the richness of these histories is one tool that I argue can further dislodge the power of the stereotypical images of the women.

Finally, by bringing together a wide range of primary and secondary sources on Magdalene and La Malinche, and analyzing the major interpretive trends that they reflect, I hope that I have provided a thorough, yet accessible, resource for others who bring their own questions and concerns to the study of either woman.

Chapter 6 draws on the data and analysis of the previous chapters to describe the similarities—and key differences—between Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs. It then addresses the implications, mentioned above, of this comparison for studies of biblical reception history, further challenging the stereotypical image of the women as whores, and addressing broader issues that arise when attempting to make foundational texts and figures meaningful in shifting contexts.

Chapter 2

Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels

Introduction

My study focuses on the changing interpretations of women whom I presume to be real people from the past. So, I begin my study of the interpretation of Mary Magdalene with the earliest written representations of her in the four New Testament Gospels. Despite some strong similarities among the Gospels' depictions of Magdalene, they provide no unambiguous, uniform portrait of her. My aim is not to construct a narrative of who the historical Mary Magdalene would have been, nor is it to provide a thorough analysis of Magdalene's literary-theological function in each Gospel. Rather, my goal is to show that it is precisely the sparse, fragmentary, and complex nature of the primary sources for Magdalene that leads later readers to develop a plurality of interpretive constructions of her. By addressing the most prominent features of the New Testament depictions of Magdalene, as well as the main variations among these portrayals, I aim to set forth the main foundations upon which subsequent interpreters build.¹

In a manner analogous to the primary texts about La Malinche, each Gospel both transmits earlier oral and written accounts of the past, and reinterprets this material for certain ends. The Gospels are neither whole cloth literary creations of their authors, nor transparent windows into the past people and events they portray. When considering what they say about Magdalene, it is therefore important to note that, while the authors work from communal remembrances of her as an actual person, they also reshape these stories to fit their larger

¹ I recognize that some early Magdalene interpreters also likely drew upon oral traditions about her—perhaps some of those underlying the New Testament Gospels—or even other written accounts. Yet, since the New Testament Gospels are the earliest, relatively stable texts to mention Magdalene that have clearly influenced over two thousand years of interpreters, I work with these as the primary sources on Magdalene that are still available for us to examine today.

narrative and theological aims. So, Magdalene's characterization shifts according to each author's interests.

Mark

I begin with the earliest preserved text in which Magdalene appears: the Gospel of Mark.² This allows for a largely chronological examination of changing Magdalene interpretations. It will become clear, however, that the earliest Gospel does not necessarily provide the most prominent images of her that will fascinate later interpreters.

Introduction of Magdalene

Mark first introduces Mary Magdalene as among a group of women who witness Jesus's crucifixion (Mark 15:40–41). Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome are the two other named women in this group.³ This introduction reflects a few characteristics

² Like many scholars today, I follow the Two-Source Hypothesis of the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels, which assumes that Mark was the first of the New Testament Gospels to be composed, roughly forty years after Jesus's death, and that Matthew and Luke use Mark as a source, along with a shared written source (Q) and other sources unique to each of them. Also, while I acknowledge that the specific identities of the authors or redactors of the four New Testament Gospels remain unknown to us, I at times refer to the author of a particular Gospel by the name of that Gospel for the sake of simplicity.

³ Some think that four women are named here, identifying Mary, the wife or daughter of James the younger as separate person from Mary, the mother of Joses; e.g., Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 320. For discussion of the textual evidence that raises this possibility, as well as for the likelihood that only three women are intended here, see Eugene Boring, *Mark: a Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2006), 435, n. a; Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: a Commentary*, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), 772, n. a. Furthermore, some have suggested that the second Mary may be Jesus's mother, since she is named in Mark 6:3 as Mary (Μαρία), along with James and Joses as brothers of Jesus. Yet, several scholars argue that if Mark intended to portray Jesus's mother as a witness to his crucifixion he likely would have been more explicit in making this identification; e.g., Collins, *Mark*, 774; Joel Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, AB 27A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 1060. In addition, James, Jesus's brother, is not described as *the younger* in 6:3, also weighing against identifying the second Mary in 15:40 as Jesus's mother. However, Boring, *Mark*, 437–438 argues that Mark may be intentionally subtle and evocative with this reference to Mary, leaving it to the reader to decide if the mother of Jesus has become his follower. Salome is only mentioned in Mark's Gospel, and only appears in 15:41 and 16:1. In general, the identification of the women at Jesus's burial, crucifixion, and empty tomb in all four New Testament Gospels is a complicated matter. The names and number of women present at these scenes vary, and textual variants reflect attempts to reconcile these discrepancies. In Mark, we will see that in the burial scene (15:47) Salome's name is omitted from mention of Magdalene and the other Mary, whose designation is shortened to *the mother of Joses*. In

common to all Magdalene references in the Synoptic Gospels. First, she is always mentioned along with at least one other woman. Second, she is always listed first among the named women who accompany her, suggesting her significance among Jesus's followers.⁴ Third, she is never identified in relation to a man other than Jesus, whether as a daughter, wife or mother.⁵ The text, however, does not describe Magdalene in detail. Her designation as *the Magdalene* (v. 40) suggests she is from the town of Magdala on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.⁶ Mark 15:41 also states that she and the other women used to follow and serve Jesus when he was in Galilee, and that along with many other women she had come with Jesus to Jerusalem, where he would be crucified.

This concise description helps characterize Magdalene. Most significantly, it suggests she is a disciple of Jesus, although her portrayal as such is understated. While Magdalene is not one of Jesus's twelve closest disciples, Mark 15:41 at the very least indicates that she and the women

the empty tomb scene (16:1), Salome is once again named along with Mary Magdalene and the second Mary, who is now identified only as the mother of her other son, James. Whether or not all, or any, of these references to the women are Mark's own composition, as opposed to traditional material, is a matter of debate. This study understands that the same three women are referenced in 16:1 and 15:40, since it is plausible that Mark shortened the reference to Mary, the mother of James the younger and of Joses, in the subsequent mentions of her (15:47; 16:1). Adela Yarbro Collins, *The Beginning of the Gospel: Probing of Mark in Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 130, supports this interpretation. It is not clear why Salome's name would be omitted from 15:47, but perhaps her presence is implied by references to her in 15:40 and 16:1. Most significant for this study is the fact that Mary Magdalene is the one name that remains consistent in all of these references in Mark (and Matthew) to the women present at Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and resurrection.

⁴ E.g., Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition*, 20 argues that Magdalene being consistently named first on lists of women points to her position of esteem in the early church and her importance as a long-time disciple of Jesus. Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, AB 29A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970), 1003 argues that Magdalene's primacy in the New Testament Gospels wherever Jesus's women followers are listed may be because she was actually the first person to see the risen Jesus. Cf. Hengel, "Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen." As I note in the John section below, however, Mary Magdalene is listed last among the women who stand near Jesus's cross in John 19:25.

⁵ Unlike many women in the Gospels, such as Mary the mother of James and Joses (Mark 15:40) and Peter's mother-in-law (Mark 1:30).

⁶ Greek: Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνή. All citations of the Greek text of the New Testament are from the NA28, and all English translations of these texts are my own, unless otherwise indicated. Referring to her place of origin, *Magdalene* functions like a surname for Mary. See BDAG, s.v. Μαγδαληνή. Several manuscripts have Mariam (Μαριαμ) instead, a variant form of Mary (Μαρία). See BDAG, s.v. Μαρία 2. For more information on Magdala, see Collins, *Mark*, 774; Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1059–1060.

with her are part of a larger group of Jesus's followers during his Galilean ministry.⁷ In fact, the word used to describe their *following* of Jesus often designates discipleship in Mark, implying that they are portrayed as disciples, even though this term is not explicitly applied to them.⁸ Strengthening this possibility is indication that these women also *served* Jesus (v. 41).⁹ While explaining to the Twelve that greatness is found in serving rather than ruling over others, Jesus defines his own ministry and death as service on behalf of others (10:41–45), and calls them to be servants as well (9:35). Thus, even though the term *serve* appears infrequently in Mark and the exact nature of the women's service is not indicated, its clear significance to following in the way of Jesus also supports a portrayal of Magdalene and the women with her as disciples.¹⁰

⁷ See Boring, *Mark*, 167–172 for a thorough discussion of various categories of people who surround Jesus in Mark, including the Twelve, his disciples, his followers, and the crowds. As Boring notes, Mark's narrative does not always draw clear lines between these groups, which problematizes making definitive statements about whether or not Magdalene is portrayed as a disciple. One factor in the lack of clarity regarding who is a disciple in Mark is the history of traditions underlying this Gospel—it is possible that the not-always-consistent use of the term *disciples* is due to Mark's editing of diverse materials and weaving them into his narrative, resulting in some (perhaps unintentional) ambiguous uses of this term. To be sure, Mark does clearly depict the Twelve as a distinct group consisting of Jesus's closest disciples whom he specifically calls to be with him (10:3:13–19) and endows with special authority for specific tasks (e.g., 3:15; 6:7, 13). Yet, while Mark does at times seem to apply the term *disciples* specifically to the Twelve (e.g., 9:14, 18, 28; 11:11, 15), there are also instances of its use that do not clearly designate the Twelve and may imply a broader group beyond or including the Twelve (2:15, 23; 6:1, 35; 7:2; 8:4, 27, 33–34; 10:13; 12:43; 14:32). So, it is entirely possible—and likely, as I argue above—that Magdalene is portrayed as among a larger circle of Jesus's disciples, beyond the Twelve. Cf. Mary Rose D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women in Gospel Literature," 105–128.

⁸ The Greek verb underlying these references is ἀκολουθέω. For its use to indicate discipleship of Jesus, see especially Mark 1:18; 2:14; 8:34; 9:38; 10:21. The word ὀπίσω is also used to indicate people following or *coming after* Jesus as disciples (e.g., Mark 1:17, 20; 8:34).

⁹ The Greek verb for *serve* is διακονέω. The Greek verbs for *follow* (ἀκολουθέω) and *serve* (διακονέω) are both in the imperfect tense, indicating that these were ongoing activities of the women.

¹⁰ Besides in Mark 10:45 and 15:41, the Greek verb meaning *serve* (διακονέω) only appears in 1:13 and 1:31. The former text refers to angels serving Jesus in the desert; the latter to Peter's mother-in-law serving Jesus and some of the Twelve after Jesus heals her of a fever. The nature of the service of both this woman and the women who are said to serve Jesus in 15:41 is debated. This question cannot be engaged in detail here, but it should be noted that the very fact that the women serve is most significant in the context of Mark's Gospel, since it reflects the lifestyle of a true disciple. For further discussion, see D'Angelo, "Reconstructing 'Real' Women in Gospel Literature," 113–115; Deborah Krause, "Simon Peter's Mother-in-law—Disciple or Domestic Servant? Feminist Biblical Hermeneutics and the Interpretation of Mark 1:29–31," in *A Feminist Companion to Mark*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 37–53.

At Jesus's Crucifixion

To some extent, Mark's introduction of Magdalene and the other women as the sole witnesses from among Jesus's followers to his crucifixion further implies their role as disciples (15:40–41).¹¹ Since Jesus has defined his life as service that will lead to his death (10:45), and discipleship as losing one's life to take up the cross and follow him (e.g., 8:34–35; 9:35), the women's journey with Jesus to Jerusalem and presence at his crucifixion implies that they have chosen this path of discipleship. At the very least, the fact that a group of Jesus's disciples deserts him at his arrest (14:50), and Peter subsequently denies him (vv. 66–72), makes these women's presence at Jesus's crucifixion notable, especially since none of the Twelve are said to be there.

Mark's characterization of the women's witnessing role, however, is somewhat ambivalent. Their watching Jesus's crucifixion *from a distance* (15:40) echoes Peter's following Jesus *at a distance* to his questioning by the high priest, right before his denial (14:54).¹² To be sure, the danger and fear involved in being near Jesus as he is tried and executed as a criminal is realistic from the perspective of the narrative, so that both Peter and the women would understandably keep some distance.¹³ Yet, as with Peter's denial, the women's distance from Jesus may indicate the imperfect nature of their commitment to Jesus. And the contrast between

¹¹ Mark uses the Greek verb θεωρέω to indicate Magdalene and other women seeing or observing something in all three scenes in which she appears in this Gospel: she *sees* Jesus's crucifixion from afar (Mark 15:40); she *sees* where Jesus's body is laid (15:47); and she *sees* that the large stone sealing Jesus's tomb has been removed when she returns to anoint his body (16:4). The consistent use of this verb with Magdalene emphasizes her role as a witness to these events, and since it can also connote perception or understanding, the evangelist may also use it to indicate her understanding of the significance of these key events. See BDAG, s.v. θεωρέω; Boring, *Mark*, 444 for the women *seeing* the stone removed from the tomb's entrance as indication that they have come to at least a preliminary understanding of what God was doing in Jesus's life and death.

¹² The same Greek phrase for *from a distance* (ἀπὸ μακρόθεν) is used in both texts. It seems likely that here Mark draws on Psalm 38:11, as do Matthew and Luke in following Mark.

¹³ E.g., the Twelve flee when Jesus is arrested by a crowd with swords and clubs, reasonably causing fear that they might be harmed (14:43–50). And the subsequent note in 14:51–52 that a young man following Jesus was momentarily seized by those arresting him reinforces the reality of the danger of being near him during his final days.

the women's silent, distant witness to Jesus's crucifixion and the Roman centurion's bold declaration that Jesus is God's son (15:39) paints the women's presence as more neutral than decidedly positive. Despite this ambiguous characterization of Magdalene's witness to Jesus's crucifixion, her very presence here is significant, since it enables her to be a consistent witness to Jesus's death, burial, and empty tomb.

At Jesus's Burial

Mark's next mention of Magdalene is at the end of the following scene, which recounts Jesus's burial by Joseph of Arimathea (15:42–47). It is merely a brief note stating that she and Mary, the mother of James, saw where Jesus's body was laid (v. 47).¹⁴ So, it both connects the witness of Jesus's crucifixion with witness of his burial by two of the same people, and prepares for what follows in the next scene: the three women who were present at Jesus's death (v. 40) will go to his tomb to anoint his body (16:1). Since two of these women see where Jesus's tomb is, it is realistic that they know how to return to it.

At Jesus's Empty Tomb

The women's visit to Jesus's tomb is the scene in which Magdalene figures most prominently in all four New Testament Gospels. In Mark's version (16:1–8), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome go to Jesus's tomb after his burial in order to anoint his body with spices (vv. 1–2).¹⁵ On the way, they ask one another who will roll away the large

¹⁴ See note 3 above for the differences in presence and naming of the women at Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb.

¹⁵ See note 3 above for the differences in presence and naming of the women at Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb. The women's intention to anoint Jesus's body after it had been in the tomb for two nights raises historical and literary questions, such as: why would they not have anointed the body when it was first being buried, since two of these women witness Joseph of Arimathea place Jesus's body in the tomb (Mark 15:47)? And since an unnamed woman anoints Jesus as a prophetic act in preparation for his burial in Mark 14:3–9, why would these

stone from the entrance of the tomb for them (vv. 3–4). While this detail adds a degree of implausibility to the account on a historical level (i.e., why do they only realize the stone will be an obstacle to their anointing on the way to the tomb?), on the narrative level it indicates the surprising nature of what will occur when the women draw near to the tomb: as they look up, they see that the stone has already been rolled away from the tomb’s entrance (v. 4), no longer presenting an obstacle to their entering it. As they do so, they see a young man in a white robe sitting at the right side, and they are alarmed (v. 5). After telling them not to be alarmed, he informs them that Jesus’s body is not there because he has been raised, and invites the women to observe the place where his body had previously lain (v. 6).¹⁶ Subsequently, he commissions the women to go and tell Jesus’s disciples, including Peter, that Jesus is going ahead of them into Galilee and that they will see him there, just as he said (v. 7).¹⁷ It is not clear whether or not the women are included in the charge to go to Galilee or are also to recall Jesus’s earlier promise that

other women need to do it again? Such questions are a matter of much scholarly debate involving Mark’s editing of traditional materials and overall literary purposes, and cannot be addressed here. For the sake of this study, it is enough to say that since washing and anointing a body for burial was customary, and since it does not take place after Jesus’s actual death in the narrative, it provides a somewhat credible literary motive for the women going to the tomb so that they can discover Jesus’s body missing. For details, see Rudolf Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh, rev. ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 285–285; Collins, *Mark*, 773–782, 794–795.

¹⁶ As Collins *Mark*, 796 notes, the young man’s knowledge that the women are looking for Jesus, as well as his indication of where Jesus’s body had been, confirms to the women and to the reader that they have in fact come to the right tomb.

¹⁷ This apparently is to fulfill the promise Jesus makes in Mark 14:28 to go ahead of his disciples to Galilee after he is raised. The word *and* (Greek: *καί*) linking mention of Jesus’s disciples (τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ) and Peter (τῷ Πέτρῳ) could carry the sense here of *even* Peter, rather than *and* Peter. Since Peter denied Jesus right before his death (Mark 14:66–72), his explicit inclusion in the commission to meet Jesus in Galilee with the other disciples may indicate his restoration as a follower of Jesus, especially significant because he is one of the Twelve. Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1080–81, 1086 argues that this specification of Peter is likely a double entendre: the women are to make their announcement *even* to Peter, for the reason noted above, but also *especially* to Peter, reflecting his status as the first male disciple to experience a resurrection appearance (cf. Luke 24:34; 1 Cor 15:5). The women’s charge to pass on a message to Jesus’s *disciples* again reflects the ambiguity of Mark’s usage of this term. Here it could suggest that Magdalene and the women with her are not considered to be among Jesus’s disciples. However, it could also refer specifically to the Twelve—a likely option since Peter is named. Or, it could refer more generally to all those in Jesus’s broader circle of disciples who have not yet heard about Jesus’s resurrection, as have Magdalene and the other women. As mentioned in note 7 above, since Mark’s use of earlier traditions may at times be behind differing uses of the term *disciples*, its meaning here may not be entirely clear, and is not itself determinative of whether the larger narrative portrays Magdalene as a disciple.

he would go before his followers to Galilee after his resurrection (14:28).¹⁸ They are, however, the first people in the narrative to learn that Jesus has been raised from the dead and to be entrusted with the task of passing this news along.

Mark gives no indication that the women actually carry out this task. Instead, Mark 16:8 states that the women flee the tomb, trembling and amazed, and say nothing to anyone because they are afraid. Many contemporary scholars understand this enigmatic statement to be the earliest recoverable ending to Mark's Gospel.¹⁹ To be sure, the "additional endings" to Mark, designated in many versions of the New Testament as Mark 16:9–20, seem to have been included in manuscripts of Mark from as early as the second century, and their authenticity was not widely questioned until the nineteenth century.²⁰ Even so, I treat Mark 16:8 as this Gospel's

¹⁸ See the previous note; while the context of Mark 14:28 may imply that only the Twelve receive the promise of Jesus's Galilean appearance (i.e., 14:17), the narrative is ambiguous enough to allow for the possibility that other Jesus followers, such as Magdalene and the other women, also heard this promise and are thereby implicitly included in the charge to meet the risen Jesus in Galilee. Whether or not the women are included in the charge to go to Galilee and recall Jesus's promise of 14:28 also depends on whether one reads the second person plural pronouns in the young man's description of the message the women are to pass on to the disciples (προάγει ὑμᾶς εἰς τὴν Γαλιλαίαν· ἐκεῖ αὐτὸν ὄψεσθε, καθὼς εἶπεν ὑμῖν; Mark 16:7, underlining for emphasis mine) as also inclusive of the women, or, merely as a quotation of what they are to say to others, so that the *you* would refer only to the recipients of their message.

¹⁹ As I indicate below, considering Mark 16:8 as the earliest *recoverable* ending to Mark does not necessarily assume that the author intended to end the Gospel here, but rather that it is earlier than other known endings (especially those often designated as Mark 16:9–20). Those who consider 16:8 to be the earliest recoverable ending to Mark include Boring, *Mark*, 451 (see n. 1 for further bibliography); Collins, *Mark*, 780–81, n. g, 797 (see 797–799 for those who consider that Mark 16:8 was not the Gospel's intended ending); Morna Hooker, *A Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Mark*, BNTC (London: A & C Black, 1993), 382; Donald H. Juel, *The Gospel of Mark* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 168; Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1088–1090 (here he also addresses text-critical support for this view). Evidence for this position includes the fact that some of the most reliable manuscripts end at Mark 16:8 (e.g., κ , B), and that as the shorter, more difficult ending, it is likely earlier than the others. It can also explain the origin of the other expanded endings, since copyists would be more likely to add to or clarify a seemingly abrupt ending rather than to truncate a longer, more detailed one.

²⁰ Collins, *Mark*, 802; 806–807; Werner G. Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament*, trans. Howard Clark Kee, 17th ed. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1975), 99–101. As I will discuss below, additional endings were added to Mark 16:8 that aligned Mark's conclusion more with those of the other Gospels in terms of the report about Jesus's resurrection clearly being passed on and Jesus commissioning his followers. These endings are included as Mark 16:8b–20 in the NA28 and most modern English translations. Both Tatian and Irenaeus knew of the Longer Ending (Mark 16:9–20) in the second century, and scholars such as Collins and Kümmel argue that both the Shorter (Mark 16:8b) and Longer Endings were composed in the second century. See also James A. Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission: the Authentication of Missionaries and Their Message in the Longer Ending of Mark* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebek, 2000), 157–244; 473–480, for his case that the Longer Ending of Mark was composed between 120 and 150 CE.

ending here because Matthew and Luke, Mark's earliest interpreters, do not appear to draw on these endings in their redactions of Mark.²¹ This means that Magdalene and the other women's depiction in Mark ends with their apparent disobedience to the young man's charge. As with their distant witness to Jesus's crucifixion, the women's silence adds an ambivalent or even a negative cast to their portrayal as disciples and consistent witnesses to Jesus's ministry, death, burial, and empty tomb.

Many explanations of Mark's apparently abrupt and disappointing ending have been offered. Some attribute it to historical circumstances, such as that the author was unable to finish the Gospel, the original ending was lost, or the women's silence was temporary.²² Others posit literary explanations that interpret this ending as integral to the author's overall literary and theological aims.²³ Ultimately, the nature and purpose of Mark's ending remains somewhat

²¹ In fact, it is plausible that the additional Markan endings draw on material found in Matthew, Luke, and John. For example, the first appearance of the risen Jesus to Magdalene alone in Mark 16:9 is similar to John 20:14–18; mention in Mark 16:9b of seven demons having been cast out of Magdalene may reflect Luke 8:2b; the risen Jesus's appearance in Mark 16:12 to two people walking in the country is similar to the scene involving two men traveling to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–14; Jesus's commission to his followers in Mark 16:15–16 is comparable to Matthew 28:19–20. While one might argue that the other New Testament Gospels drew this material from the longer endings of Mark, the text-critical evidence for the earliest extant ending to Mark being 16:8a, cited in note 19 above, warrants against this. Also, there are aspects of Mark 16:9–20 that do not appear in the other Gospels, such as Jesus stating the those who believe the gospel will be able to handle snakes and drink deadly substances without it harming them (Mark 16:18). Kelhoffer, *Miracle and Mission*, 48–156 argues that the Longer Ending used copies of all four New Testament Gospels. Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 382 asserts that neither Matthew nor Luke show signs of having used the additional endings of Mark and that Mark 16:9–20 looks like a summary of traditions in other the Gospels. Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1090 similarly suggests that Mark 16:9–20 appears to be a compression of the resurrection appearance narratives of Matthew, Luke, and John, rather than these other Gospels' having expanded upon the brief reports in Mark 16:9–20.

²² For a summary of such views and for additional bibliography, see Boring, *Mark*, 451–453; Collins, *Mark*, 806–807; Marcus, *Mark 8–16*, 1088–1096. They also address variations of the view that Mark's original ending is contained in the resurrection narratives of another Gospel. Schüssler Fiorenza, "Mary Magdalene: Apostle to the Apostles," 22–23 argues that there is evidence in the New Testament Gospels of trying to downplay Magdalene and other women's role as witnesses and proclaimers of the resurrection. She sees this occurring, for instance, in the Mark 16:8 statement that the women were silent about the events in the tomb, in Luke's statement that the women's proclamation about these events was not believed (Luke 24:11), and in John's portrayal of Peter and the Beloved Disciple as the first to believe in the resurrection, rather than Magdalene (John 20:1–18).

²³ Common among these is variations of the view that the women's silence incites readers to consider their own response to the events of the empty tomb and commission of Mark 16:7; e.g., Boring, *Mark*, 449 (see n. 1 for further bibliography); Collins, *Beginning of the Gospel*, 137; Thomas G. Long, "Dangling Gospel," *ChrCent* 7 (2006): 19. Donald Juel, "A Disquieting Silence: the Matter of the Ending," in *The Endings of Mark and the Ends of God: Essays in Memory of Donald Harrisville Juel*, ed. Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Patrick D. Miller (Louisville,

enigmatic to the contemporary reader, and perhaps is inherently polyvalent.²⁴ This means that Mark's portrayal of Mary Magdalene also remains somewhat ambiguous, ending on a note that paints her more negatively than in her initial, more positive depiction.

Matthew

Assuming that Matthew's Gospel uses Mark as a major source, it preserves Mark's three basic references to Mary Magdalene at Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb, albeit with some significant changes and additions.

At Jesus's Crucifixion

Like Mark, Matthew also introduces Magdalene as a distant witness to Jesus's crucifixion, along with other women who have followed and served Jesus (Matt 27:55–56).²⁵ Yet, Matthew has altered aspects of Mark's account. The most significant of these for the

KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 1–14 also takes a literary approach to interpreting the ending of Mark, but does not suggest that it offers readers a challenge to do better than the fallible disciples in the narrative. Rather, he suggests that it can help readers see that God must be the one to fulfill the promises of Mark's Gospel. And Hooker, *Gospel According to St. Mark*, 387 is among those that note the irony of the women's silence when commanded to tell others about the resurrection, since earlier in Mark Jesus commands people to remain silent about him but they often do not. She interprets the women's silence as their inability to believe the good news, placing them in the same category as others in the narrative that have failed to understand the truth about Jesus.

²⁴ See Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University, 1979), 49–73 for his discussion and critique of the notion that all of Mark's Gospel, including its ending, must be entirely purposeful and make sense within a particular interpretive structure. He instead highlights the inherently enigmatic nature of Mark.

²⁵ As in Markan references to Magdalene, there are also some manuscripts of Matthew that list Magdalene's name in the variant form *Mariam* (Μαριαμ), rather than *Mary* (Μαρία). Like Mark 15:41, Matthew also specifically names three women at the crucifixion, beginning with Mary Magdalene. However, Matthew lists Mary the mother of James and of Joseph, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, as the second and third women, in contrast to Mark's Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. The second Mary may refer to the same woman in both Gospels, since the Greek name *Joses* was used at times for the Hebrew name *Joseph*. For this possibility, see Collins, *Mark*, 288; Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 21–28: a Commentary*, trans. James E. Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2005), 577. Many manuscripts have forms of *Joses* instead of *Joseph* in Matthew 27:56, apparently reflecting this interpretation. And Matthew may identify Salome from Mark's Gospel with the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who has already been mentioned in Matthew 20:20 as among those travelling with Jesus to Jerusalem. Or, the author may have replaced Salome with this other woman, who may have been familiar to the Gospel's readers.

presentation of Magdalene is the shift from Mark's statement that she and other women used to follow and serve Jesus *in* Galilee (Mark 15:41), to stating only that they followed and served Jesus *from* Galilee, on the journey to Jerusalem (Matt 27:55).²⁶ Matthew's version could imply that the women had some prior connection to Jesus's ministry, since otherwise their willingness to follow him to Jerusalem is hard to understand. But especially for someone not familiar with Mark's Gospel, Matthew's description does not clearly indicate that Magdalene and the other women participated in Jesus's Galilean ministry, as does Mark.²⁷

This raises the question of whether Mark's portrayal of Magdalene and the other women as disciples of Jesus is also present in Matthew. Overall, Matthew does retain Mark's use of the term *follow* to indicate discipleship,²⁸ as well as service being a defining characteristic of following Jesus.²⁹ So, Matthew's description of the women having served Jesus as they followed him from Galilee can still be seen as an indicator of discipleship, even if it does not imply that

²⁶ Mark 15:40–41, Greek: (40) Ἦσαν δὲ καὶ γυναῖκες ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι, ἐν αἷς καὶ Μαρία ἡ Μαγδαληνὴ καὶ Μαρία ἡ Ἰακώβου τοῦ μικροῦ καὶ Ἰωσήτος μήτηρ καὶ Σαλώμη, (41) αἱ ὅτε ἦν ἐν τῇ Γαλιλαίᾳ ἠκολούθουν αὐτῷ καὶ διηκόνουν αὐτῷ (underlining for emphasis mine); Matt 27:55, Greek: Ἦσαν δὲ ἐκεῖ γυναῖκες πολλαὶ ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι, αἵτινες ἠκολούθησαν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας διακονοῦσαι αὐτῷ (underlining for emphasis mine).

²⁷ While the narrative effect of this change will be discussed more below, it should be noted here that it might partly result from the evangelist's attempt to clarify and condense Mark's account. For instance, Matthew's version seems to resolve the potential awkwardness of Mark's reference, which indicates that these women had been active in Jesus's Galilean ministry but does not mention them in the narrative prior to Jesus's crucifixion (Mark 15:40–41), by naming the women's following and serving of Jesus as specific to the Jerusalem journey (Matt 27:55). Also, the identification of the women in Matthew 27:55 combines separate Markan references to the women witnessing the crucifixion who had followed and served him in Galilee (Mark 15:40b, 41a), and to the many other women who followed Jesus up to Jerusalem (Mark 15:41b). This allows Matthew to concisely describe all of these women together, and to eliminate Mark's ambiguity as to whether or not the women mentioned in 15:41b as having journeyed to Jerusalem also witnessed Jesus's crucifixion. In any case, Matthew's choice to only make explicit the women's service and following of Jesus on the trip to Jerusalem makes the overall nature of the women's involvement in Jesus's ministry more ambiguous than it appears at this point in Mark.

²⁸ Greek: ἀκολουθέω. E.g., Matt 4:18–22 (cf. Mark 1:16–20); 9:9 (cf. Mark 2:14); 16:24 (cf. Mark 8:34); Matt 19:21 (cf. Mark 10:21). Additional uses of this term in Matthew to indicate discipleship include 8:18–22; 10:38.

²⁹ As in Mark, the term *serve* (Greek: διακονέω) occurs infrequently in Matthew, in all the same contexts as in Mark (Jesus's temptation, Matt 4:11; the healing of Peter's mother-in-law, Matt 8:15; Jesus's statement about the purpose of his life and death being to serve, Matt 20:28), with an additional reference in Matthew 25:44. Even so, Jesus's self-definition of his life and death as service on behalf of others indicates its import for the path of discipleship, as it does in Mark.

they carried out these activities during Jesus's Galilean ministry. And since Matthew, like Mark, has general references to *disciples* that might imply a larger group of followers beyond the Twelve (e.g., Matt 5:1; 8:21; 9:14, 37; 12:1; 14:15, 19; 15:2, 32, 33, 36; 19:10, 13, 23, 25), it is possible that Magdalene and the other women are to be seen as part of this circle, even though they do not belong to the Twelve.³⁰ The women's presence at Jesus's death, where none of the Twelve or any other disciples are mentioned (27:55–56), certainly suggests their commitment to Jesus.³¹

Yet, the same ambiguity found in Mark's description of the women beholding Jesus's crucifixion at a distance carries over into Matthew (27:55; cf. Mark 15:40),³² suggesting that if they are portrayed as disciples, they are still subject to the fear and imperfections that also characterize other disciples.³³ And while Mark's use of the term *disciples* to indicate those whom the risen Jesus will meet in Galilee is ambiguous enough to possibly include the women (Mark 16:7), Matthew clarifies this referent by depicting only Jesus's eleven closest disciples present at this encounter (Matt 28:7, 16–20).³⁴ Although this does not necessarily mean that Magdalene and

³⁰ Yet, Matthew also uses the term *disciples* at times with apparent reference to the Twelve, for example, at the Last Supper in 26:26, since the reference at the start of the meal is to the Twelve (26:20). Furthermore, Matthew is unique among the Gospels in its references to the *twelve disciples* (10:1; 11:1; 20:17, although the use of *disciples* here is debated), and emphasizes the importance of the Twelve in ways Mark does not (e.g., Matt 19:28; 28:16–20).

³¹ Like Mark 14:50–52, Matthew 26:56 states that all Jesus's disciples fled at his arrest.

³² Matthew 27:55 has the same Greek phrase as does Mark 15:40 to describe the women beholding Jesus's crucifixion at a distance: ἀπὸ μακρόθεν θεωροῦσαι. Also like Mark, Matthew 26:58 uses this phrase to describe Peter following Jesus at a distance into the high priest's house, where he denies him (Matt 26:69–75).

³³ E.g., Matthew 8:23–27; 14:28–33; 16:5–12, 21–23. The contrast between the women's silent witness of Jesus's crucifixion and the Roman centurion's declaration that Jesus was God's Son is also present in Matthew (27:54).

³⁴ See notes 17 and 18 above on Mark 16:7. The parallel to the angel's command to the women in Matthew 28:7 uses the same phrase as Mark to designate Jesus's disciples (τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ) as the recipients of the women's message. When Jesus reiterates this command in Matthew 28:10 he refers to the disciples as his brothers (τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς μου). While either phrase in theory could refer to disciples beyond the Eleven, including the women, mention of only the Eleven present at the promised Galilee encounter (Matt 28:16–20) implies that they are the referent of the previous descriptions.

the other women are not portrayed as part of a larger circle of disciples, it does make it harder to build this case.

Ultimately, it is not entirely clear whether or not Matthew portrays Magdalene and the women with her as Jesus's disciples. There are certainly hints of such a portrait; yet, without Mark's reference to the women participating in Jesus's Galilean ministry on an ongoing basis, the sparse evidence in Matthew does not unequivocally characterize them as disciples.

At Jesus's Burial

As in Mark, Matthew also portrays Mary Magdalene and another woman as present at Jesus's burial (27:57–61).³⁵ In contrast to Mark, which states that the women see where Jesus's body is laid (Mark 15:47), Matthew only states that they are sitting opposite the tomb when Joseph of Arimathea places Jesus's body there (Matt 27:61). While this makes the women's witness to Jesus's burial more ambiguous than in Mark, Matthew does imply that they see where Jesus was buried, since these same women know the way to the tomb in 28:1. Similar to Mark, this brief reference to the women seems to mainly serve as a narrative link between the burial of Jesus's body and its subsequent discovery as missing from the tomb, since some of the same women will make this discovery (28:1–10). It also facilitates the portrayal of at least one of Jesus's followers, Mary Magdalene, as consistently present at his death, burial, and announcement of his resurrection.

³⁵ Here the text of the NA28 has *Mariam* (Μαριαμ) as Magdalene's name, supported by strong textual evidence, while many other manuscripts have *Mary* (Μαρία). In Matthew, the second woman at the burial is simply called *the other Mary* (Greek: ἡ ἄλλη Μαρία), which may refer back to Mary the mother of James and Joseph who is named at the crucifixion (Matt 27:56).

At Jesus's Empty Tomb

As in Mark, Magdalene's major role in Matthew occurs with her trip to Jesus's tomb, where she will discover his body to be missing (28:1–10). Matthew's account has some basic similarities to Mark's: Magdalene goes to the tomb with at least one other woman after the Sabbath (Matt 28:1; cf. Mark 16:1);³⁶ they discover that the stone sealing the entrance to the tomb is not an obstacle to potentially entering it (Matt 28:2; cf. Mark 16:4);³⁷ someone—in Matthew's case, an angel—explains to them that Jesus, who was crucified, has been raised and is no longer in the tomb, telling them to look at the place where his body had been (Matt 28:5–6; cf. Mark 16:6); the young man or angel charges the women to tell Jesus's disciples that the risen Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee, where they will see him (Matt 28:7; cf. Mark 16:7).

Matthew's expanded account, however, clarifies Mark's and adds a different interpretation of Magdalene's role and characterization. Whereas Mark implies divine agency in Jesus's resurrection with the unexplained removal of the stone sealing the tomb (Mark 16:4), Matthew makes divine intervention explicit. A great earthquake occurs when the women go to the tomb (Matt 28:2). Like the earth shaking, the rocks splitting, and the tombs being opened at Jesus's death (27:50–52), this dramatic event implies divine agency.³⁸ Then, a being clearly identified as an angel of the Lord comes down from heaven and rolls back the stone sealing the tomb (28:2–3), leaving no doubt that divine intervention played a part in Jesus's resurrection.³⁹

³⁶ The women who go to the tomb in Matthew 28:1 are Mary Magdalene and the other Mary; in Mark 16:1 they are Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome.

³⁷ Only Mark explicitly states that the women actually entered the tomb.

³⁸ See Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 595 for an interpretation of the earthquake as a signifier of divine power.

³⁹ The text does not make explicit when or how Jesus exited the tomb. Yet, since he does not appear in this scene, and since the angel speaks of his being raised in the past tense (28:6; ἠγέρθη, aorist tense), it seems that Jesus's resurrection occurred before the women came to the tomb (unlike *Gos. Pet.* 10, where two beings descend from heaven and escort Jesus out of the tomb). So, the earthquake and angelic opening of the tomb seem to be for the sake of the women being able to enter the tomb, rather than for the risen Jesus to be able to get out. Even so, the divine intervention displayed in the events of Matthew 28:2–7 effectively indicate that the resurrection of Jesus that the angel announces occurred by divine power.

These events cause the guards whom the Pharisees had placed at the tomb to become so afraid that they, like the earth, shake and become like dead people (v. 4).⁴⁰ The women are also afraid, as indicated by the angel telling them not to be (v. 5). Yet, the extraordinary events at the tomb lead to a different result for them. While the guards are apparently unconscious, the angel explains to the women that Jesus has been raised from the dead, “just as he said,” making them the first people in the narrative to learn of Jesus’s resurrection (vv. 5–6). The words *just as he said* (v. 6) also suggest that the women heard, and are to now recall, Jesus’s previous predictions of his resurrection (16:21; 17:22–23; 20:18–19).⁴¹ As the young man does in Mark, so too does the angel in Matthew commission the women to tell Jesus’s disciples that Jesus is going ahead of them to Galilee (28:7; cf. Mark 16:7). Yet, Matthew expands the content of this message so that the women are to make explicit what is only implied in Mark: that Jesus has been raised from the dead (Matt 28:7; cf. Mark 16:7).⁴² This seemingly small detail is significant in that it provides a clearer basis for later interpreters’ claims that Magdalene was among the first to announce the news of Jesus’s resurrection, and for portrayals of her as an evangelist.

A rather significant difference in Matthew’s empty tomb account is the women’s reaction to being entrusted with this message. Whereas in Mark they flee the tomb in trembling and amazement (Mark 16:8), Matthew characterizes them as simply leaving rather than fleeing the

⁴⁰ The noun σεισμός used for the *earthquake* that occurs in 28:2 is related to the verb σειώ that describes the guards’ *shaking*. The presence of the guards in Matthew seems to generally serve an apologetic purpose, clarifying that Jesus’s body was not stolen or moved by his followers when no one was looking; rather, he was resurrected from death to life.

⁴¹ Note that Matthew has the angel affirm that Jesus’s resurrection in particular fulfills Jesus’s own words, in some contrast to Mark 16:7, which has the young man affirming that Jesus meeting his disciples in Galilee is what fulfills Jesus’s prior promise (as given in Mark 14:28, which states that this appearance will occur after he is risen). Matthew does not make explicit that the women are present at any of Jesus’s predictions of his suffering and resurrection. In fact, Matthew 20:17 indicates that Jesus’s prediction in 20:18–19 is made specifically to the Twelve. Even so, the angel’s statement to them that Jesus’s resurrection occurred in fulfillment of his own words (28:6) suggests that they have somehow become aware of these words, either through the Twelve, or, perhaps by being among the disciples who hear Jesus’s predictions in 16:21 and 17:22–23.

⁴² Matthew eliminates Mark’s specific mention of Peter in the charge to go to Galilee.

tomb, and as having great joy as well as the fear that is an expected response to what they have witnessed (Matt 28:8).⁴³ This paints a less ominous picture of the women's response to their commission than does Mark's account. It also sets the stage for what follows once the women depart from the tomb—while Mark states that Magdalene and the other women remain silent out of fear (Mark 16:8), in Matthew the women run to pass the angel's message on to the disciples (Matt 28:8). Thus, Matthew portrays the women as immediately acting in obedience to this command.

Enhancing this positive portrayal of Magdalene and the other Mary is the contrast between them and the guards (27:62–66; 28:4, 11–15). Both groups experience the extraordinary descent of an angel from heaven to roll the stone away from the tomb, causing an earthquake, and witness his otherworldly glow (28:2–3). And both learn that Jesus's body is absent from its tomb (vv. 6, 11–15).⁴⁴ Yet, only the women are given the accurate interpretation of Jesus's missing body as Jesus having been raised from the dead (vv. 5–7), and respond appropriately by running to communicate this news to others (v. 8).⁴⁵ By contrast, the guards respond by recounting to the chief priests what occurred at the tomb before they became like dead men, resulting in the concoction of a lie that the guards are then bribed to perpetuate: that Jesus's disciples stole his body while they were sleeping (vv. 11–15). The women are thus portrayed as bearers of the truth in the midst of deception. Their joy at delivering the message (v. 8) also implies that they themselves believe it to be true.

⁴³ Matthew uses the common verb ἀπέρχομαι, which means *go away* or *depart*, to describe the women leaving the tomb, whereas Mark uses φεύγω, which connotes fleeing or escaping, especially to avoid danger. See BDAG, s.v. ἀπέρχομαι, φεύγω.

⁴⁴ Matthew 28:11–15 tells of the guards' subsequent report to the chief priests, in response to which the priests command the guards to tell people that Jesus's disciples stole his body while they were asleep. This implies that the guards knew that Jesus's body was missing from the tomb, and that this was part of their report to the chief priests.

⁴⁵ Since the guards become as dead ones (Greek: ἐγενήθησαν ὡς νεκροί) in 28:4, one can assume that they did not hear the angel's message to the women about Jesus's resurrection that is reported in 28:5–7.

Matthew makes Magdalene and the other Mary's faith in the risen Jesus explicit when Jesus encounters them himself (vv. 9–10). Such appearance narratives are lacking altogether in Mark, and it is striking that Jesus's first post-resurrection encounter is with these women, rather than with his inner circle of disciples. It occurs as the women run to deliver the message to those disciples in obedience to the angel's command (vv. 8–9). When Jesus greets them, the women immediately approach him, grasp his feet, and again respond appropriately by worshipping him (v. 9).⁴⁶ This implies that the women recognize Jesus and find confirmation in this encounter of the truth of the angel's pronouncement that Jesus has indeed been raised from the dead. Jesus then repeats the angel's basic message for them not to be afraid, but rather to tell the disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see him (v. 10). Then, once again, the women obey by continuing on their way (v. 11).

A couple of aspects of this encounter are worth exploring in more depth. First, while bowing down at Jesus's feet in reverence or petition is common in the Gospels (e.g., Matt 8:2; 9:18; 15:25; 18:26; 20:20),⁴⁷ holding onto his feet as Magdalene and the other Mary do in their encounter with the risen Jesus is unique.⁴⁸ The meaning of this act is not entirely clear. It may reinforce the portrait of the women as reverencing or worshipping Jesus, since it emphasizes

⁴⁶ The Greek word that implies the women worship Jesus is προσκυνέω. This verb generally indicates falling down before someone—typically a superior—and can have a range of connotations, including submission or reverence, petition, and worship. Here the women do not seem to petition Jesus, and the context suggests that their posture implies more than just reverence for Jesus, since they have already heard and presumably believed the angelic pronouncement that Jesus was raised from the dead. See BDAG, s.v. προσκυνέω. See William David Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3 vols.; ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988–1997), 1:236–237 for Matthew's general use of προσκυνέω to indicate worship. For its meaning as worship in this passage, see Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3:669; Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 606–607.

⁴⁷ As also indicated by the verb προσκυνέω, which does not necessarily imply worship of Jesus in all instances.

⁴⁸ An unnamed woman does bathe Jesus's feet with her tears, wipe them with her hair, kiss and anoint them in Luke 7:36–50. And Mary, the sister of Lazarus, anoints Jesus's feet and wipes them with her hair in John 12:1–7 (cf. 11:2). This of course implies that they touched his feet, but does not suggest that they grasped them the way the women do in Matthew 28:9.

their prostrate position.⁴⁹ Not exclusive of this first option is the possibility that their touching a Jesus who has feet serves the apologetic purpose of indicating that he was raised to life as an embodied human being, against possible objections that the women merely had a vision of Jesus or encountered him as a spirit.⁵⁰ And since John's Gospel contains a similar appearance narrative in which Mary Magdalene is forbidden to touch the risen Jesus (John 20:11–18), it is possible that an earlier source lies behind both Matthew and John's versions of this story.⁵¹ If so, then Matthew may include this scene in part just to preserve early Christian tradition. In any case, what is most significant for this study is that the contrast between the women in Matthew grasping the risen Jesus's feet and Magdalene being forbidden to touch him in John becomes an exegetical issue for later interpreters, as we will see.

Second, since Jesus does not say anything to the women that the angel did not already tell them, the narrative function of this encounter is debatable, and seemingly polyvalent. As mentioned, it supports the narrative's interpretation of Jesus's missing body as him having been raised back to life, thereby portraying as false the story that his disciples merely stole his body. The fact that Jesus appears both to the women and later to the Eleven (Matt 28:16–20) reinforces this understanding. Jesus's encounter with the women also shows the audience the proper response to the risen Jesus as faith and worship.

⁴⁹ This posture is already implied by the use of the verb προσκυνέω to indicate their worship of Jesus.

⁵⁰ Emphasizing the bodily nature of Jesus's resurrection may have been necessary to support Matthew's assertion that Jesus's body was not merely stolen from the tomb, as some apparently claimed in his time (Matt 27:62–66; 28:11–15). Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, 3:669 suggest that the women's holding of Jesus's feet may serve the purpose of proving he is not a ghost. Yet, Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 607 does not think Matthew aims to show Jesus's corporeality.

⁵¹ Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 1003–1004 suggests that a basic tradition of the risen Jesus encountering Mary Magdalene may be quite early, and that Magdalene seizing Jesus's feet may have been part of this tradition. He further suggests that both Matthew 28:9 (Magdalene grasping Jesus's feet) and John 20:17 (Jesus's statement to her not to cling to him) may reflect this element of the early tradition.

The women's positive reaction appears at first glance to be accentuated by the response of the Eleven to the risen Jesus: they worship him too, but unlike the women, some of them also doubt (vv. 9–10, 17).⁵² Jesus does not, however, rebuke these doubters for their lack of faith, nor does it prevent him from commissioning them—and not the women—to carry on his ministry (vv. 16–20). This makes the women's entirely faithful response seem less significant, since Jesus commissions only his inner circle, despite their doubt.

Another function of Jesus's appearance to the women may be to reinforce the importance of the encounter between Jesus and the Eleven in Galilee (vv.16–20). To be sure, Jesus's reiteration of the women's charge to tell the disciples about this encounter indicates the importance of their messenger role to some extent. Yet, they are not shown actually delivering the message. So, it seems that the author uses the incident to anticipate the culmination of the Gospel in Jesus's commission of the Eleven in Galilee.⁵³ Indeed, after departing from Jesus's presence to deliver the message, the women do not appear again in the Gospel.

Ultimately, Magdalene and the other Mary play a subsidiary role in Matthew's resurrection account. The final scene is where the focus lies (vv. 16–20). It makes clear that the

⁵² The Greek of v. 17, which indicates both worship and doubt as reactions to Jesus's appearance in Galilee (καὶ ἰδόντες αὐτὸν προσεκύνησαν, οἱ δὲ ἐδίσταναν), has been understood in various ways, especially in terms of who exactly doubted. While the participle ἰδόντες clearly refers back to the eleven disciples (ἕνδεκα μαθηταὶ) introduced in v. 16, the referent of the οἱ δὲ that indicates those who doubted (ἐδίσταναν) is less clear, since it typically indicates a change of subject (as at the beginning of v.16). It does not seem likely that it refers to others beyond the Eleven doubting, since only the Eleven are clearly indicated as present in this scene. Another possibility is that all of the Eleven both worshipped and doubted, but this option is weakened by the fact that οἱ δὲ typically indicates a subject change. Given such difficulties, I affirm the view that οἱ δὲ indicates that, while all of the Eleven worship Jesus, some of them also doubt. Since the verb διστάζω can mean *waver*, *hesitate*, as well as *doubt*, it seems to indicate the mixed reaction of some of the Eleven who do worship Jesus, but still with some reservation. For a summary of the major views on this issue, see Davies and Allison, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* 3:681–682; Luz, *Matthew 21–28*, 622–623.

⁵³ Despite the fact that the women are commanded twice to do so (Matt 28:7, 10), the narrative does not explicitly portray them delivering the message. The disciples' subsequent encounter with Jesus in Galilee (Matt 28:16–20) seems to imply that the women followed through. Yet, the text's introduction of the eleven disciples at Galilee specifies that they went to the mountain Jesus had designated, with no mention of having gone in response to the women's message. Even if this statement implies the women having delivered the message to the disciples, it effectively de-emphasizes the women's messenger role and instead calls attention to the Eleven's relationship with Jesus, with whom they are about to have a direct encounter.

risen Jesus, who has been given all authority in heaven and on earth, is the same Jesus who spoke and acted with authority before his crucifixion (v. 17; cf. 7:29; 9:6; 11:27). It also indicates that Jesus's previous ministry to Israel will now extend to Gentiles, and that the Eleven are chosen instruments through which Jesus's teaching and call to discipleship will continue, while Jesus himself remains present with his followers (28:19–20). Thus, Matthew's ending provides a greater sense of closure than does Mark's: the promised appearance of Jesus to his disciples in Galilee is actually narrated, and some of the ambiguity surrounding the future of the Jesus movement is eliminated. As in Mark, however, Magdalene's role in this movement is not addressed.

Luke

The Gospel of Luke also uses Mark as a major source and portrays Mary Magdalene as a witness to Jesus's death, burial, and empty tomb. Yet, Luke's portrayal of her at some of these events varies significantly from both Mark and Matthew. Luke also adds details about Magdalene that later interpreters will engage.

Introduction of Magdalene

Luke explicitly introduces Magdalene during Jesus's Galilean ministry, rather than at his crucifixion (Luke 8:1–3). Unlike Mark 15:40–41, Luke does not describe Magdalene and other women as following (ἀκολουθέω) Jesus, but rather states that they were *with Jesus* (σὺν αὐτῷ), along with the Twelve (vv. 1–2).⁵⁴ Luke does, however, use the same term διακονέω (v. 3) as

⁵⁴ Here Luke names two women along with Magdalene who are not mentioned in either Mark 15:40 or Matthew 27:56: Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna. Both of these women only appear in the New Testament in Luke's Gospel. While Joanna will appear again with Magdalene at Jesus's empty tomb (Luke 24:10), Susanna is only mentioned here.

Mark 15:41 to describe the women's service to Jesus. Overall, Luke's presentation here of Magdalene as one who accompanies Jesus in his ministry and serves him along with other women suggests that Luke has inserted the basic Mark 15:40–41 description of her earlier in the narrative. This appears on one hand to be a stylistic improvement on Mark: instead of first introducing Magdalene somewhat abruptly at the crucifixion with a retrospective statement about her participation in Jesus's Galilean ministry, Luke introduces her amidst the narrative portrayal of this ministry, preparing the reader for her appearances in the passion and resurrection accounts.

On the other hand, this insertion places additional emphasis on Magdalene's role in Jesus's Galilean ministry, and gives Luke an opportunity to describe her in more depth than does Mark. Only Luke describes these women as explicitly travelling with Jesus and witnessing his ministry together with the Twelve. Especially since Luke 8:1–3 functions as a summary passage that illustrates what is typical of Jesus's ministry, this portrayal suggests that Magdalene is among a larger group of Jesus's followers beyond the Twelve and that she participates in his ministry.⁵⁵

Her service to Jesus and the Twelve is also noteworthy.⁵⁶ Although Mark 15:41 and Matthew 27:55 also mention Magdalene and other women's service, Luke alone articulates that

⁵⁵ In effect, this passage summarizes what has characterized Jesus's ministry up until this point in Luke: itinerant preaching, bringing good news, healing, and freeing those who are oppressed. Such activities demonstrate the fulfillment of Jesus's programmatic statement about his ministry in 4:18–19, also reflected in the summary statement in 7:22. For more on Luke 8:1–3 as a summary passage, see François Bovon, *Luke 1: a Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1–9:50*, trans. Christine M. Thomas, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2002), 299–300; Joel B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, NICNT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 316–321.

⁵⁶ The Greek verb, διακονέω, which indicates the women's service, is in the imperfect tense, indicating that it was a continual activity. In contrast to Mark 15:41, which indicates that Magdalene and other women used to serve Jesus (Greek: διακόνουν αὐτῷ), the text of the NA28 of Luke 8:3 states that Magdalene and others used to serve *them* (Greek: διακόνουν αὐτοῖς), implying both Jesus and the Twelve (cf. Luke 8:1). Several manuscripts have the singular *him* (Greek: αὐτῷ) here instead. According to Bruce Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (2nd ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1994), 120–121, this singular reading may be a Christocentric correction that conforms to Mark 15:41; cf. Matt 27:55.

it entails giving of their own possessions to support Jesus's ministry (8:3), implying material and perhaps financial contributions.⁵⁷ Since in Luke-Acts sharing one's possessions freely is a marker of discipleship of Jesus and belonging to the Christian community, Magdalene and the other women's support of Jesus and the Twelve suggests such discipleship.⁵⁸

Another Lukan nuance is that Magdalene and the other women with her are also beneficiaries of Jesus's ministry, having been cured of illnesses and evil spirits (v. 2). Luke only specifies the nature of Magdalene's healing, stating that seven demons had been cast out of her. Although later interpreters will equate these seven demons with Magdalene's supposedly sinful past, and eventually identify her with the repentant sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50, nothing in Luke directly lends to such inferences. To be sure, demon possession could potentially isolate a person from community according to Luke's Gospel, so that the description of Magdalene's prior state might imply that she had experienced such marginalization.⁵⁹ Yet, Luke says nothing about her having been trapped in sin, and focuses on her present inclusion in, and active contribution to, Jesus's ministry, likely motivated by her having been restored by this very ministry. So, if Magdalene's introduction in 8:1–3 reflects any aspect of the preceding pericope of 7:36–50, it is the point of the parable Jesus tells to Simon: that one who experiences God's graciousness loves and gives freely (7:47).⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Greek: διηκόνουν αὐτοῖς ἐκ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων αὐταῖς. For the possibility that these women support Jesus's ministry financially, see Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, SP 3 (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1991), 131. The text does not clarify the source of these women's resources.

⁵⁸ E.g., Luke 12:33; 14:33; 19:8; Acts 4:32, 34, 37. I accept the common theory that both the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles were written by the same author as two interrelated volumes, so that shared themes are found in both works. Magdalene and the other women's sharing of possessions also lends to a portrait of them as disciples—even though that term is not specifically used of them—because it seems to reflect that they are among those who have received the word of God and acted on it appropriately, as the parable of the sower and Jesus's redefinition of his family that follow in chapter 8 indicate (Luke 8:15, 19–21).

⁵⁹ See especially Luke 8:26–31. For the potential ostracism that ill or demon-possessed people may have faced in Luke's context, see Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 318.

⁶⁰ This is not to suggest that Magdalene was in fact a repentant sinner, like the woman in the preceding pericope, but rather that she was a grateful recipient of Jesus's healing ministry, manifest in her generous support of it. Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 318–319 argues that Magdalene's introduction after Jesus's conversation with Simon in

At Jesus's Crucifixion and Burial

While Luke calls special attention to Magdalene's role in Jesus's Galilean ministry, the text does not even specifically name her presence at Jesus's crucifixion and burial (23:49, 55), although it is implied.⁶¹ Rather, both scenes indicate the presence of women who had followed Jesus from Galilee, which recalls the women introduced in 8:1–3 who served Jesus in Galilee.⁶² However subtly, Luke thereby indicates that the same women who were with and served Jesus during his Galilean ministry are the same ones present at his death and burial. Indeed, the lack of detail about these women's identities highlights their main role in these scenes as consistent witnesses to key events of the passion narrative, preparing for their subsequent role as witnesses to Jesus's empty tomb.

Another unique Lukan feature is that Magdalene and the other women's witness to Jesus's crucifixion occurs along with that of the crowds and of Jesus's acquaintances (vv. 48–49).⁶³ This portrait contributes to Luke's minimization of Jesus's abandonment at his arrest and death, in comparison with Mark and Matthew.⁶⁴ And since the people described as *all those known* to Jesus (v. 49, Greek: πάντες οἱ γνωστοὶ αὐτῷ) may include his closest remaining disciples (i.e., the Twelve minus Judas; cf. 22:47–53) and/or other disciples, Luke possibly does

7:40–47 disallows seeing her and the other women's benefaction of Jesus's ministry as repayment of a debt owed to him for their healing, since it speaks of expressing love freely out of gratitude rather than obligation.

⁶¹ This lack of naming may be a way of smoothing over the discrepancies in the names of the women portrayed in these scenes in Luke's Markan source (Mark 15:47; 16:1).

⁶² In Luke 23:49 the women are referred to as those who accompanied or followed Jesus from Galilee (Greek: γυναῖκες αἱ συνακολουθοῦσαι αὐτῷ ἀπὸ τῆς Γαλιλαίας); in 23:55 they are referred to as the women who had come with Jesus from Galilee (Greek: αἱ γυναῖκες, αἵτινες ἦσαν συνεληλυθυῖαι ἐκ τῆς Γαλιλαίας αὐτῷ). Despite the different phrasing, both identify the same group of women as those who traveled with Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem, implying that they are the same women who traveled with Jesus and provided for his ministry while in Galilee.

⁶³ The crowds mentioned in v. 48 leave the crucifixion beating their breasts in an apparent sign of repentance. It is all those *known* to Jesus (πάντες οἱ γνωστοὶ αὐτῷ) who are mentioned together with the women who followed Jesus from Galilee in v. 49 as those who had been standing at a distance, witnessing the events of Jesus's crucifixion.

⁶⁴ E.g., Luke omits mention in Mark 14:50 and Matthew 26:56 of all Jesus's disciples fleeing at his arrest, as well as Jesus's cry of God having abandoned him on the cross (Mark 15:34; Matt 26:46).

not portray the women as the sole witnesses from among Jesus's followers to his crucifixion.⁶⁵

To be sure, this may seem to detract from their positive characterization as faithful Jesus followers that occurs in Mark and Matthew especially by means of the contrast with Jesus's other absent followers. Yet, Luke's description of the women having followed Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem implies the continuity of their support for his ministry, so that their mere presence at his crucifixion indicates their ongoing discipleship (cf. 8:1–3). Yet, as in the other Synoptics, Luke portrays the nature of this discipleship as ambivalent, since Magdalene and the other women are distant, silent witnesses to Jesus's crucifixion (23:49).⁶⁶

As with the crucifixion scene, Magdalene's major function in Jesus's burial scene in Luke is as a witness to where Jesus's body is laid (vv. 50–56), another link in portraying her and the other women as consistent witnesses to Jesus's death, burial, and empty tomb. In fact, Luke prepares the reader for the women's witness to the latter even more than the other Synoptic Gospels by stating that after seeing where Jesus is entombed, they leave to go prepare the spices and ointments that they will bring back to the tomb after the Sabbath (v. 56).

At Jesus's Empty Tomb

Luke makes the empty tomb scene (24:1–12) continuous with that of Jesus's burial, eliminating the need to reintroduce the women who saw where he was buried as those who also

⁶⁵ As with the women who followed Jesus from Galilee, Luke does not make explicit who these people *known* to Jesus are. The only other use of the adjective γνωστός in Luke is in 2:44, referring to people—perhaps friends or acquaintances—travelling from Jerusalem with Jesus's parents and relatives. It could be that those known to Jesus present at his crucifixion are likewise friends or acquaintances, and/or that some of his disciples—including the Eleven—are among this group. Why Luke would not clearly identify the Eleven if present is a matter of debate. See François Bovon, *Luke 3: a Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 19:28–24:53*, trans. James Crouch, Hermeneia (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2012), 328 for the suggestion that Luke does not want to contradict the oral tradition of all Jesus's disciples fleeing at his arrest (cf. Mark 14:50; Matt 26:56), which Luke omits from his Gospel.

⁶⁶ The parallel with Peter following Jesus to the high priest's house from a distance is also found in Luke 22:54, as it is in Mark 14:54 and Matthew 26:58.

return to his tomb after the Sabbath.⁶⁷ Although these women's discovery of Jesus's body missing from the tomb shares some basic similarities with the accounts in Mark and Matthew, Luke's version has some striking differences in terms of Magdalene's role.

To begin with some basic similarities to the other Synoptic accounts, Magdalene and the other women in Luke's empty tomb story are the first of Jesus's followers to discover his body missing from the tomb (v. 4; cf. Mark 16:6; Matt 28:5–6). They are also the first followers to receive the correct interpretation of this occurrence as Jesus having been raised from the dead—in Luke's account, from two men in dazzling clothes that are portrayed as angels (Luke 24:4–5; cf. Mark 16:6; Matt 28:5–6).⁶⁸ And similar to the women in Matthew bowing in reverence before the risen Jesus, the women in Luke's account react appropriately to the presence of the angelic messengers by bowing their faces to the ground (Luke 24:5; cf. Matt 28:9).

The unique features of Luke's account that are relevant to Magdalene's portrayal center on the angels' message to the women and their response. Similar to Mark and Matthew, the angels in Luke tell the women that Jesus is no longer in the tomb because he has been raised from the dead (Luke 24:5; cf. Mark 16:6; Matt 28:5–6). However, distinct from the other Synoptics, Luke omits the notice that the risen Jesus will meet his disciples in Galilee (cf. Mark 16:7; Matt 28:7).⁶⁹ Therefore, it makes sense that the angels in Luke do not command the women

⁶⁷ This too may be a stylistic improvement on Mark's account, which names different women at Jesus's burial and empty tomb (Mark 15:47; 16:1). Yet, Luke does eventually name some of the women present at Jesus's empty tomb (Luke 24:10), and this list differs somewhat from those listed in 8:1–3: Mary Magdalene and Joanna are mentioned in both scenes, but Mary the mother of James is named instead of Susanna in 24:10. This may be in order to conform to Mark 16:1, which also lists Mary the mother of James as present, or to a tradition underlying it.

⁶⁸ Unique to Luke's account is the presence of two angelic figures or messengers instead of one, as in both Mark (16:5) and Matthew (28:2). Like Mark, Luke does not refer to these figures here as angels, but rather as two men (Greek: ἄνδρες δύο). Yet, these two men are best understood as heavenly messengers (e.g., their gleaming clothing, v. 4; the women's fearful reaction to them, v. 5). Furthermore, Luke 24:23 states that the women reported to others that they had a vision of angels (ἀγγέλων) following their experience at the tomb, eliminating any doubt for the reader about the identity of these figures.

⁶⁹ Also absent from Luke are Jesus's predictions that he will go ahead of his disciples to Galilee after he is raised (cf. Mark 14:28; Matt 26:32). This reflects Luke's emphasis on the importance of Jerusalem as the place

to tell the other disciples to go to Galilee for this encounter. But it is striking that neither do the angels commission the women to tell Jesus's other followers the news that he has been raised from the dead (as in Matt 28:7)—news that they alone know at this point in the narrative. So, unlike the other Synoptics, Luke does not portray Magdalene and the women with her as (divinely) commissioned messengers of Jesus's resurrection.

Yet, along with this apparent diminishing of the women's role is an added element of the angels' words to them that lends to their positive characterization in a way lacking in Mark and Matthew. Instead of telling the women to announce to others that the risen Jesus is going to Galilee (cf. Mark 16:7; Matt 28:7), the angels tell them to remember that Jesus had told them in Galilee about his crucifixion and resurrection on the third day (Luke 24:6–7). This statement makes explicit what is unclear from Mark 16:7 and hinted at in Matthew 28:6: that Magdalene and the women with her were present to hear at least some of Jesus's teachings and prophetic statements during his Galilean ministry.⁷⁰ It also indicates they were accountable for remembering his words, which in Luke's Gospel typically implies more than just recalling information.⁷¹ Rather, since the angels' command for the women to remember Jesus's words follows what appears to be a rebuke for their having looked for the Living One⁷² among the dead (Luke 24:5), it seems that the women are responsible for having kept Jesus's words present in mind even as they approached his tomb. Despite their initial misunderstanding of the situation, the women immediately remember Jesus's words after the angels tell them to do so (v. 8). While

where Jesus is crucified (Luke 23), where he appears post-resurrection to the Eleven and others (Luke 24:33, 36–49), and where the church will begin (Acts 1:4; 2; cf. Luke 24:47–49).

⁷⁰ Mention of Magdalene and the other women in Luke 8:1–3 as travelling with Jesus and the Twelve reinforces this understanding.

⁷¹ The Greek word for *remember* in Luke 24:6, 8 is *μνησκόμα*. It is also used, for example, in Luke 1:54, 72, where God sending Jesus as Israel's Messiah is a concrete action that results from God *remembering* God's mercy and covenant. Cf. Luke 23:42; Green, *Gospel of Luke*, 838–839.

⁷² I.e., Jesus (Greek: τὸν ζῶντα).

the text does not explicitly state that they thereby believed Jesus had in fact risen from the dead, again, in the context of Luke's Gospel, their remembrance does seem to imply that they not only recalled that Jesus had predicted his death and resurrection, but also that they understood in this moment that those words had been fulfilled.⁷³

That the women immediately go to tell the Eleven and Jesus's other followers what occurred at the tomb supports such an interpretation (v. 9). As mentioned, they do not do so in response to a command as in the other Synoptics, but of their own initiative. This further suggests that they believed what the angels told them to be true and worth reporting to others. The women's role as messengers is thus another unique feature of Luke's portrayal of Magdalene and the women with her. Both Mark and Matthew show them being commissioned to deliver a message to the disciples, but do not state that they actually do so. So, the women in Luke are portrayed as the first people to announce the news of Jesus's resurrection, providing a firmer foundation for later interpreters to consider them as the first Christian evangelists.

The apostles' reaction to the women's words is to disbelieve and dismiss them as nonsense (vv. 10–11). However, the rest of Luke 24 indicates that this lends to a negative characterization of the apostles rather than the women. Throughout the subsequent appearance narratives, the risen Jesus himself confirms the truth of what the women remembered at the tomb and reported to the apostles (vv. 26–27, 44–46), and rebukes the apostles and other disciples for their unbelief (v. 25, 38). The fact that Peter responds to the women's report by running to the tomb to investigate the matter for himself also suggests the truth of their message (v. 12).⁷⁴ So,

⁷³ The parallel with Peter remembering Jesus's word after having denied him (Luke 22:61) supports this interpretation—his weeping bitterly after this denial and remembering Jesus's word (that Peter would deny him) indicates this remembrance involved comprehension that Jesus's statement had been fulfilled.

⁷⁴ Cf. Luke 24:24, where one of the Emmaus disciples states that some disciples went to the tomb in response to the women's report and found things just as the women had described.

especially by means of the contrast with most of the apostles and other disciples who are explicitly described as doubting the resurrection, Magdalene and the women appear in Luke as the first to believe it.

Besides the women's lack of a commission to report on the empty tomb and their doing so nonetheless, another major difference between Luke's portrait of Magdalene and Matthew's, in particular, is that she does not explicitly encounter the risen Jesus himself. The lack of this scene is especially striking since Luke does describe appearances of the risen Jesus to his followers (vv. 13–53), and does so in greater length and detail than does Matthew (Matt 28:9–10, 16–20).

This raises the question of whether Magdalene's role in Luke is diminished by being among the first to learn and report that Jesus was raised from the dead, but not to witness the risen Jesus, as others do. It might certainly appear this way at first glance, especially since Luke does not explicitly mention her again after most of the apostles disbelieve the women's message (Luke 24:11). She is not named among those Jesus calls to be his witnesses and await the gift of the Spirit at the end of Luke (vv. 44–53), somewhat analogous to only the Eleven being commissioned by the risen Jesus in Matthew (Matt 28:16–20). In this regard, Magdalene seems to play a provisional intermediary role, similar to that in Matthew, in which she is mainly an impetus for the Eleven being prepared for their own encounter with the risen Jesus.

Yet, a closer look at the function of the appearance stories in Luke illuminates another possibility. Both Jesus's encounters with the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13–32) and with those gathered in Jerusalem (vv. 36–49) emphasize his need to counter their doubt about his resurrection and convince them that his death and resurrection have happened in fulfillment of Scripture. So, if Luke does imply that Magdalene and the other women believe the angels'

message about Jesus's resurrection, then it makes sense that they would not need an encounter with the risen Jesus to convince them. Seen in this light, the lack of a resurrection appearance specifically to the women reinforces a positive portrait of them as the first to believe in Jesus's resurrection, based solely on remembering and comprehending Jesus's own promise that this would occur. And since Luke's extended appearance narratives also aim to show the reader that the crucified and risen Jesus is in fact the Messiah, in fulfillment of Scripture, then perhaps which characters have encounters with Jesus is not as significant to Luke's purposes as what these encounters communicate.

Furthermore, the presence of Magdalene and the other women who witness the empty tomb may be implied among those gathered with the Eleven in Jerusalem when the risen Jesus appears to them (vv. 33–53). Strengthening this possibility is the explicit mention of women (including Jesus's mother) as present with the Eleven in Jerusalem after Jesus's ascension in Acts (Acts 1:12–14). Given Magdalene's prominent role among named women in Luke, it is likely that her presence is implied among these women in Acts. If so, it would mean that Acts portrays Magdalene as a member of the nascent Christian community and may also suggest she experiences the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2). From this one might infer that Luke 24:33 implies Magdalene's presence among those gathered in Jerusalem, where the risen Jesus will appear to them.

In the end, the portrait of Magdalene in Luke's empty tomb and appearance narratives is positive, even if it leaves her story somewhat open-ended. As with the other Synoptics, she is among the first to learn that Jesus has risen from the dead, and like Matthew, to apparently believe this news to be true. In contrast to Mark and Matthew, she clearly delivers this news to others, facilitating a later portrait of her as among the first Christian evangelists. Despite this

significant role, Luke does not clearly depict Magdalene encountering the risen Jesus for herself, nor explicitly name her among those Jesus calls to be his witnesses. Even so, the ambiguity of the narrative leaves open the possibility that she did see the risen Jesus when he appeared to other followers in Jerusalem.

John

John is unique among the New Testament Gospels. To be sure, it shares some basic similarities with the Synoptic Gospels. For example, all four Gospels end with passion and resurrection narratives that affirm that Jesus was arrested, tried, crucified, and raised from the dead. Yet, John also includes much material not found in the Synoptics, orders some episodes they have in common differently, and displays a unique literary style and theological perspective.⁷⁵ So, it comes as no surprise that, like the Synoptics, John's Gospel describes Mary Magdalene as having a significant role in the events surrounding Jesus's death and resurrection, but that it paints a unique portrait of her in this capacity.

At Jesus's Crucifixion

Like Mark and Matthew, John first introduces Mary Magdalene as present at Jesus's crucifixion, along with other women (John 19:25–27).⁷⁶ Yet, unlike the Synoptic Gospels, John does not give any background information here about Magdalene. Also unique to John is the fact that Magdalene is named last among the group of women present, rather than first, as in Mark

⁷⁵ There is ongoing debate about whether or not the author of John's Gospel knew of, and perhaps drew on, the Synoptic Gospels. While I will not engage this debate fully, it seems that at the very least John likely drew on similar traditions about Mary Magdalene as the Synoptic Gospels, accounting for some of the similar features of all four Gospels' portrayals of her. See D. Moody Smith, *John Among the Gospels*, 2nd ed. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), for a summary of views on the relationship between John and the Synoptic Gospels.

⁷⁶ Cf. Mark 15:40–41; Matt 27:55–56. As does Luke (23:49), John also depicts at least one other person besides Magdalene and other women as present at Jesus's crucifixion—namely, the Beloved Disciple (John 19:26).

and Matthew (v. 25).⁷⁷ Since the focus of this unique Johannine scene is on the dying Jesus entrusting his mother to the Beloved Disciple, it makes sense that his mother is listed first among the women. Furthermore, while the Synoptics depict Magdalene and other Jesus followers as distant witnesses to Jesus's crucifixion, only mentioning their presence after Jesus has died (Mark 15:37, 40; Matt 27:50, 55; Luke 23:46, 49), John presents a contrary image of the women (and the Beloved Disciple) standing so near to Jesus's cross that he is able to speak with some of them before his death (John 19:26–27). This contributes to a positive characterization of these witnesses, and is also consistent with the lack of the abandonment and ridicule of Jesus themes that are found especially in Mark and Matthew.⁷⁸ Jesus does not speak to Magdalene from the cross, and she appears basically as a faithful witness to Jesus' death.

⁷⁷ Jesus's mother is listed first here (without a proper name), while Mary Magdalene is last. There is debate about whether these are the only two women mentioned here, or, whether one or two more women are mentioned in between Jesus's mother and Magdalene, due to the unclear syntax of the Greek sentence (Εἰστήκεισαν δὲ παρὰ τῷ σταυρῷ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἡ μήτηρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἡ ἀδελφὴ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτοῦ, Μαρία ἢ τοῦ Κλωπᾶ καὶ Μαρία ἢ Μαγδαληνῆ). After Jesus's mother is mentioned there is an *and*, followed by mention of the sister of his mother. Immediately following is mention of *Mary of Clopas*, without an *and* preceding this name. Finally, following another *and*, the text names Magdalene. Those who think only two women are named here interpret Mary of Clopas and Mary Magdalene as the names of the two women first introduced generically; so, they are Jesus's mother and sister, respectively. Those who argue that three women are mentioned here consider Jesus's mother to be unnamed, and interpret Mary of Clopas as the name of the sister of Jesus's mother, while Magdalene is a third, separate figure. Others understand Mary of Clopas as a separate person from the sister of Jesus's mother, thus four women are mentioned: Jesus's mother, his sister, Mary of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. For a detailed description of this debate, as well as for who Mary of Clopas may have been, see Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 904–906. I agree with Brown's assertion that the first option of only two women being referenced here is the least probable. First, it would mean that both Jesus's mother and her sister were named Mary, which seems unlikely. Second, John does not name Jesus's mother when she is mentioned elsewhere in the Gospel (2:1, 3, 5, 12; 6:42), making it curious that she should be named here. Third, there is no clear evidence elsewhere for Jesus's mother being related to a Clopas. Regarding Magdalene, it should be noted that her first name appears throughout John variously as Mary (Μαρία) and Mariam (Μαριαμ) in different manuscripts, with substantial support for both readings.

⁷⁸ For example, as in Luke, there is no mention in John of Jesus's disciples fleeing at his arrest (John 18:1–14). Furthermore, John's crucifixion account lacks the mockery of Jesus dying on the cross by various groups of people, as is found in the Synoptic Gospels (Mark 15:29–32; Matt 27:39–44; Luke 23:35–39).

At Jesus's Burial

John does not depict Magdalene as a witness to Jesus's burial (vv. 38–42), which means that she is not a witness to all of the key events of Jesus's death, burial, and empty tomb, as she is in the Synoptics.⁷⁹ Her importance in John lies in her being the first person to encounter the risen Jesus at his tomb.

At Jesus's Empty Tomb

John's Gospel highlights and details Magdalene's role at Jesus's empty tomb more than any of the Synoptic Gospels, focusing on her unique one-on-one encounter with the risen Jesus (20:1–18). As in the Synoptics, she goes to Jesus's tomb early on the first day of the week after Jesus's death, but in John, she goes alone (v. 1). John gives no reason for Magdalene's trip to the tomb.⁸⁰ The text merely states that she went, and that she saw that the stone had been removed from the tomb (John 20:1).⁸¹

Here Magdalene's role diverges more markedly from those she plays in the Synoptics (v. 2), connected to the heightened role that Peter and the Beloved Disciple play in John's empty tomb narrative. Magdalene is the main actor at the very beginning of the sequence, and then drops out of the story for the eight verses in which Peter and the Beloved Disciple take center stage (vv. 2–10).⁸² The effect is to distribute elements of the empty tomb tradition among Magdalene, Peter, and the Beloved Disciple.

⁷⁹ Here the apparent intentions of Magdalene and other women in Mark (16:1) and Luke's (23:56–24:1) empty tomb scenes to anoint Jesus's body are explicitly carried out by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus.

⁸⁰ Mark (16:1) and Luke (24:1) suggest that Magdalene and other women go to Jesus's tomb to anoint Jesus's body, while Matthew (28:1) states only that they were going to see the tomb.

⁸¹ Mention of the stone's removal is interesting, since John's burial account (19:38–42) does not mention a stone being placed at the entrance of the tomb.

⁸² Based on this seemingly abrupt shift of characters, as well as some awkward transitional statements and narrative details in John 20:1–18, many scholars argue that the author of John likely drew on various traditions about Jesus's followers going to his tomb in order to compose this section of the narrative. Although I find this notion to

For example, although Magdalene is the first in John to discover that Jesus's tomb has been opened, she is not the first to witness his body to be missing from it, as she and other women are in all of the Synoptic accounts. This is because she does not actually look into or enter the tomb upon finding it open, but rather runs to tell Peter and the Beloved Disciple what she has concluded based on what she saw: that the Lord's body has been removed from the tomb, and its whereabouts are unknown (v. 2).⁸³ Based on her statements, Peter and the Beloved Disciple run to Jesus's tomb and become the first to witness that Jesus's body is indeed absent from its burial place (vv. 3–9).

Yet, it is noteworthy that Magdalene is the first character in the narrative to interpret what has happened to Jesus's body. Since Magdalene does not initially enter Jesus's open tomb, she does not immediately find someone there to interpret the meaning of Jesus's missing body, as she and other women do in the Synoptics. Rather, based on the evidence of the opened tomb she jumps to the reasonable conclusion that Jesus's body has been moved or stolen, and reports this to Peter and the Beloved Disciple (v. 2).⁸⁴ While this perhaps paints her as being a bit impulsive,

be quite plausible, this study focuses on the portraits of Magdalene that emerge from this text in its entirety, rather than on trying to decipher and interpret its pre-history. For an overview of theories of composition of John 20:1–18, as well as his own view, see Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 995–1004.

⁸³ Here Magdalene speaks using the second person plural, stating: “they took the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him” (translation and emphasis mine). Yet, when Magdalene repeats this sentiment, she speaks in the first person (John 20:13, 15). Scholars posit various explanations for the use of the plural language, including: a) it reflects remembrances or traditions, such as those found in the Synoptic Gospels, in which at least one other woman goes with Magdalene to the tomb; e.g., C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 563; b) it reflects a Semitic mode of speech with analogues in Greek; e.g., Rudolf Bultmann, *The Gospel of John: A Commentary*, trans. G. R. Beasley-Murray (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1971), 684, n.1; c) it is a literary device by which Magdalene's words express the sentiments of others as well; e.g., Craig Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel: Meaning, Mystery, Community*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), 68; Gail O'Day, “The Gospel of John” in *New Interpreter's Bible* 9 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1995), 840.

⁸⁴ A common interpretation of Magdalene's statement, “they took the Lord out of the tomb,” is that she has a tomb robbery in mind, in which Jesus's body has also been taken. While this is certainly plausible, it is not the only possible explanation. For instance, perhaps the author implies that Magdalene thought that some of Jesus's enemies had taken his body. The text simply does not clarify her reasoning here. However, her instinct that Jesus's body is missing does provide the narrative impetus for Peter and the Beloved Disciple to go to the tomb and not only find Jesus's body missing, but also evidence that it was not stolen by anyone—who would take the time to unwrap the grave clothes from the body and leave them in the tomb? Thus, this whole series of events builds anticipation for

and not yet enlightened to the reality of Jesus’s resurrection, it also portrays Magdalene as an independent interpreter of key events who takes initiative to act on her convictions. Indeed, Peter and the Beloved Disciple’s investigation will confirm her declaration that Jesus’s body is missing from the tomb, even though her explanation of this absence will be proven wrong.

In addition to not being among the first in John to discover Jesus’s body missing from the tomb, Magdalene is also not the first to believe that he has risen from the dead, as she and other women are in Matthew and Luke. Rather, John assigns this privilege to the Beloved Disciple, who seems to believe in Jesus’s resurrection when he enters the tomb and sees the grave clothes lying by themselves, Jesus’s body being absent (vv. 8–9).⁸⁵ This makes sense given the place the

the climatic revelation that Jesus has in fact been raised from the dead (John 20:16). For more on the possibility that tomb robbery is implied here, see Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 562–563; Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 983–984; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 68–69.

⁸⁵ These verses present several exegetical difficulties that will not be engaged here in-depth, but are important to note. First, the text merely states that, having entered the tomb, the Beloved Disciple “saw and believed” (Greek: εἶδεν καὶ ἐπίστευσεν). What he apparently saw were the wrappings from Jesus’s body lying by themselves, which is what Peter previously saw when he looked into the tomb (John 20:6–7). Yet, the object of his belief is not specified. Some have therefore suggested that the Beloved Disciple only came to believe that Magdalene’s claim about Jesus’s missing body was true (e.g., Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 3.69; NPNF 1.6:213). This would mean that he would not be the first to believe in Jesus’s resurrection, and that such belief would not precede an appearance of the risen Jesus. However, the Greek verb for *believe* (πιστεύω) is used in an absolute sense without an object elsewhere in John’s Gospel, often implying belief in Jesus (e.g., 1:50; 3:12; 4:41–42, 48, 53; 5:44; 6:36, 47, 69; 9:38; 10:25–26; 12:39, etc.). In light of this, as well as of the theological significance of the Beloved Disciple in John as one who is especially close to Jesus (e.g., 13:22–25; 19:26), I agree with scholars who understand the Beloved Disciple to believe in Jesus’s resurrection upon seeing the evidence in the tomb. See, for example, George R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, WBC 36 (Waco, TX: Word, 1987), 373; Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 987; Ernst Haenchen, *John 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of John, Chapters 7–21*, trans. Robert Funk, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 208. Second, 20:9 qualifies the statement of the Beloved Disciple’s belief with the phrase, “for they had not yet understood the scripture, that he must rise from the dead” (Greek: οὐδέπω γὰρ ᾔδεισαν τὴν γραφὴν ὅτι δεῖ αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν ἀναστῆναι). Here a plural verb is used to describe the lack of understanding (ᾔδεισαν), while the verb for the Beloved Disciple’s belief is singular (ἐπίστευσεν). While redactional and history-of-traditions arguments have been forwarded to explain this apparent discrepancy, it could also be the case that the author of John depicts the Beloved Disciple as the only one to believe in this scene (i.e., not Peter as well), hence the singular verb, while indicating that none of the disciples yet understood that Jesus’s resurrection was necessary according to Scripture, hence the plural verb. Third, some have interpreted v. 9 to mean that the Beloved Disciple’s belief in the resurrection is portrayed as incomplete, since he does not understand how this fulfills Scripture (e.g., O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 841). This may be true to some extent, since a couple of passages earlier in John do indicate that Jesus’s followers came to understand after his resurrection and glorification how aspects of what happened to him were foreseen by Scripture (2:22; 12:16). Yet, this does not mean that the Beloved Disciple did not fully believe in Jesus’s resurrection based on the evidence of the empty tomb, even if he did not yet understand how all of the events surrounding Jesus were foretold in Scripture. In contrast to the empty tomb and resurrection appearance narratives of Luke 24, John’s empty tomb/resurrection narratives do not portray any of Jesus’s followers understanding that Scripture foresees his resurrection—not even those who witness the risen Jesus himself. So, v. 9

Beloved Disciple has in John's Gospel as one who is particularly close to Jesus and who models faithful discipleship for the narrative audience.⁸⁶

Yet, neither the Beloved Disciple nor Peter is the first to encounter the risen Jesus himself. Instead, Mary Magdalene has this privilege. The encounter occurs in John 20:11–18, after Peter and the Beloved Disciple discover Jesus's body to be missing from its burial place (vv. 3–10). The scene opens with Mary weeping outside of Jesus's tomb (v. 11).⁸⁷ Notably, John's is the only New Testament Gospel to portray Magdalene as crying, a detail that later interpreters will engage. Her sorrow suggests she still believes that Jesus's body has been stolen. When she finally looks into the tomb, she sees what Peter and the Beloved Disciple did not: two angels sitting where Jesus's body had previously been (v. 11–12). Unlike the women in the Synoptic empty tomb accounts, Mary does not display fear upon seeing the angels. Rather, when

seems to be largely directed to the audience of the Fourth Gospel, which, by the time it was written, had come to understand that Scripture foresees Jesus's resurrection. Therefore, I interpret v. 9 as an explanation of why it is that the Beloved Disciple came to believe in Jesus's resurrection based on the sight of the graves clothes lying without Jesus's body in the tomb: such evidence was necessary precisely because he could not yet grasp from Scripture alone that Jesus had to rise from the dead.

⁸⁶ E.g., the Beloved Disciple is introduced at the Last Supper as reclining on Jesus's chest and asks him who is to betray him (John 13:22–25); he is likely the other disciple who accompanies Peter into the courtyard of the high priest, but, unlike Peter, does not deny Jesus (18:15–18, 25–27); the Beloved Disciple is near to Jesus's cross at his crucifixion, and Jesus entrusts his mother to him (19:26–27); he is the first to recognize the risen Jesus when he appears at the Sea of Tiberias (21:7). While there are indications in John that the Beloved Disciple may have been an actual, particular follower of Jesus (e.g., 19:35; 21:21–24), he also functions symbolically as an idealized disciple, as indicated by his above roles in the narrative and the fact that he is never given a proper name. For more on the role of the Beloved Disciple in the Fourth Gospel, see Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John I–XII*, AB 29 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), xcii–xcviii; Koester, *Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel*, 242–244; O'Day, "The Gospel of John," 840.

⁸⁷ The awkward transition from the scene involving Peter and the Beloved Disciple to the one focusing on Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus supports the theory that the story of Peter and the Beloved Disciple was initially independent of the story of Magdalene's trip to the tomb (for an overview of theories of composition of John 20:1–18, as well as his own view, see Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 995–1004). She was last mentioned in 20:2 as having run from the tomb to find these other disciples, with no indication that she returned with them to the tomb. Yet, when she is reintroduced into the narrative in 20:11 she is said to have been standing outside of the tomb, giving the impression that she had been there while Peter and the Beloved Disciple were inside (the Greek verb used here for Magdalene's standing, εἰστήκει, is in the pluperfect tense, which suggests an action that had been completed before a subsequent action in the narrative, thus reinforcing the idea that she had already been standing outside of the tomb when Peter and the Beloved Disciple return to their homes in 20:10). If this is implied, then it seems that these disciples said nothing to Magdalene upon leaving the tomb (20:10) about what they had discovered, nor about what the Beloved Disciple had come to believe, since she is weeping at the apparent theft of Jesus's body.

they ask her why she is weeping she repeats her earlier statement that someone has taken away her Lord, and she does not know where they have placed him (v. 13). Apparently, not even the sight of angels is able to shake her conviction about what happened, and Magdalene turns away before they are able to answer (v. 14).

Magdalene then sees the risen Jesus himself, but she does not recognize him (v. 14).⁸⁸ Thinking him to be the gardener, she asserts that if he has taken Jesus, he should let her know where he has laid him so that she can take him away (v. 15).⁸⁹ Her devotion to Jesus is steadfast, as she seems unwilling to leave the garden until she recovers his body. Yet, not even seeing the risen Jesus convinces Magdalene that something other than a common, human explanation is the appropriate interpretation of Jesus's missing body. It is only when Jesus calls her by name that she recognizes him, as indicated by her calling him Rabbouni (which the text indicates means "teacher") in return (v. 16).⁹⁰ Although such a title does not fully describe who Jesus is post-resurrection, Mary's use of the title implies that she now understands that Jesus's body was not stolen, but rather that Jesus is once again alive in it.⁹¹

This brief exchange gives the first and only hints in John's Gospel of Magdalene's relationship to Jesus, both before and after his death. Her referring to him as *my teacher* suggests that she may have been one of his disciples during his earthly ministry, making her dedication to

⁸⁸ Lack of initial recognition of the risen Jesus is also a major characteristic of the Emmaus disciples in Luke meeting the risen Jesus (Luke 24:13–35).

⁸⁹ John 19:41 indicates that Jesus's tomb is in a garden, making it plausible for Magdalene to assume that this man she does not initially recognize is the gardener.

⁹⁰ The text of the NA28 has Magdalene's name here as Mariam (Μαριαμ), with strong attestation; however, many manuscripts have Mary (Μαρία) instead. While the text itself translates Rabbouni (Greek: ραββουνι) as "teacher" (Greek: διδάσκαλε), the Hebrew or Aramaic word underlying it could also be translated as *lord* or *master*, and even more properly, *my lord* or *my master*, given the form of the word. See BDAG, s.v. ραββουνί; Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 992; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 686, n. 6.

⁹¹ To be sure, Magdalene calling Jesus "teacher" is not as strong of a christological confession as Thomas's subsequent "my Lord and my God" when he encounters the risen Jesus (John 21:28). However, this statement alone is not concrete evidence that she still regards Jesus as merely the human teacher she had known before his death, since she refers to him as "the Lord" (John 20:2) and "my Lord" (John 20:13) while searching for Jesus's body.

finding his body understandable. And Mary's recognition of Jesus when he calls her by name affirms to the reader that she belongs to him, since he previously stated that he is the Good Shepherd whose own sheep know his voice, and for whom he lays down his life (10:1–15). She is, at the least, among Jesus's true followers.

Jesus's subsequent words to Magdalene indicate that she only partially understands the nature of his return to embodied life.⁹² After acknowledging one another, Jesus says to her, "do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father" (v. 17).⁹³ The difficulty of discerning the meaning of this statement makes it a key point of exegetical wrestling for later Magdalene interpreters.⁹⁴ They especially note the seeming inconsistencies with Magdalene and other women grasping the risen Jesus's feet without rebuke in Matthew (Matt 28:9), and of Jesus

⁹² It is common for characters that have a one-on-one encounter with Jesus in John to initially misunderstand Jesus's words and who he is; e.g., Nicodemus (John 3:1–21); the Samaritan woman (John 4:4–26).

⁹³ The Greek phrase used here is μή μου ἅπτου. Common English translations include "touch me not" (ASV), "do not hold on to me" (NIV; NRSV; OJB), "do not hold me" (RSVCE), "do not cling to me" (ESV; NKJV), and "stop clinging to me" (NASB). There are a couple of major factors that account for such variations. First, the range of meanings for the verb indicating Magdalene's *touch*, ἅπτω, includes touch in the basic sense of making physical contact, but can also connote close contact, yielding translations such as "take hold of," "hold on to," or even "cling to" (See BDAG, s.v. ἅπτω). Second, there are different possibilities for interpreting the verb's present tense and imperative mood, which is negated to form the prohibition. One possibility is that the negation of a present tense imperative indicates that an action that is already underway is to be stopped; hence, translations such as "stop clinging to me." E.g., Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 992 translates it as "Stop touching me" (but also acknowledges the following possibility). Yet, it is also possible that such an imperative can be used to prohibit an action that is about to occur, but that is not already in progress. Translations such as "touch me not" or "do not hold on to me" capture the ambiguity of whether or not the action is perceived as already in progress. E.g., C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953), 443, n. 2, "Do not cling to me"; Haenchen, *John 2*, 207, "Do not hold me;" Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 687, n. 1 affirms Dodd's translation. To deal with the difficulty posed by the text's lack of clear indication that Magdalene is actually trying to touch Jesus, some manuscripts add the phrase, "and she ran towards [him] to touch him" at the end of v. 16. Regarding the verb's tense, some scholars prefer translations of ἅπτω that seem to capture the continual aspect of the present tense, such as "hold on to" or "cling to" rather than "touch" (e.g., Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 992). Other scholars have suggested that the text of this phrase was corrupted or miscopied during transmission in order to reckon with the exegetical difficulties it presents (see some of these views summarized in Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 565, and Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 993). Ultimately, context is key for determining the translation and meaning of μή μου ἅπτου, as reflected in my own argument.

⁹⁴ The perspectives of such interpreters will be dealt with more fully in the following chapter. Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 992–993 summarizes the wide range of interpretations, which includes: the notion that Jesus's resurrection body is in some type of transitional state, and therefore is not to be touched (perhaps because his wounds are still sore, or because Magdalene would be ritually defiled by touching a dead body); that Magdalene should show greater respect for Jesus's glorified body by not touching it; since Jesus invites Thomas to touch him, perhaps the issue is that it would be inappropriate for a woman to touch Jesus's body; Jesus is telling Magdalene not to test the physical reality of the his body, etc.

inviting Thomas to touch his body in John 20:27.⁹⁵ So, further exploration of this Johannine statement is necessary.

Jesus's prohibition appears a bit harsh on first glance—why would he not allow this woman who has been fervently searching for his body to hold him now that she knows he is alive? Discerning the reason for this prohibition is complicated by the fact that the text gives no explicit motive for Magdalene's attempt to touch him, unlike Thomas's explicit motive for wanting to physically examine Jesus's wounded, resurrected body later in the narrative (John 20:24–29). After Jesus appears to Magdalene alone he appears to a group of disciples, but Thomas is absent (vv. 19–24). When Thomas hears that they saw the risen Lord, he insists he will not believe it until he sees the nail marks in Jesus's hands and touches his pierced body (v. 25). Jesus then appears again to the disciples, including Thomas, and invites him to do what he proposed, telling him at the same time not to doubt, but to believe (vv. 26–29). So, for Thomas, touching the risen Jesus's body is about proving that he has in fact been raised from the dead. Jesus consents to it, but also rebukes Thomas for requiring such a test for belief. This encounter thereby suggests that Jesus's prohibition of Magdalene's holding on to him is not a general rejection of anyone touching his resurrected body.⁹⁶ It also shows by way of contrast that

⁹⁵ The Greek verb for the women *grasping* Jesus's feet in Matthew 28:9 is κρατέω, which is different than the one used in the John 20:17 prohibition (ἅπτω). Yet, like ἅπτω, κρατέω can also connote close contact, making translations of it such as *grasp* or *hold* appropriate. Bultmann argues that there is no essential difference in meaning between κρατέω in Matthew 28:9 and ἅπτω in John 20:17 (Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 687, n.1).

⁹⁶ Different language is used to describe physical contact in Jesus's encounter with Magdalene and in his encounter with Thomas, further demonstrating that different issues are at stake in each episode. While ἅπτω is the Greek verb for *touch* in the former, the latter (John 20:27) uses the verbs βάλλω and φέρω to describe Jesus's invitation for Thomas to *put* or *place* his hands on, or even into, Jesus's pierced body. Unlike ἅπτω, these verbs do not carry the potential meaning of *hold* or *cling to* that suggest Magdalene is attempting something more than a simple touch of Jesus's body. The overall context of the Thomas episode makes it clear that he wants to touch Jesus's body to prove that Jesus is indeed risen from the dead, which clearly differs from what is expressed through the Magdalene encounter, as I argue above. In light of Jesus's assertion that Magdalene cannot hold on to him because he has not yet ascended to the Father, some suggest that Jesus's subsequent invitation for Thomas to touch him implies that the narrative considers Jesus to have ascended and returned to earth somewhere in the course of John 20:18–26. This view is unconvincing for several reasons. First, as Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John*, 565 notes, it seems strange that the Evangelist would not explicitly mention such an important occurrence. Second,

Magdalene's attempt to grasp Jesus is not in order to quell doubt that Jesus has been raised from the dead, since Jesus does not rebuke her the way he does Thomas. The fact that Magdalene has already recognized Jesus affirms this—she believes she is seeing him, and therefore is not reaching out to grasp him for proof.

So, why does Jesus prohibit Magdalene from holding on to him? Significantly, his own explanation does not focus on Magdalene's motivation, but rather on who he is and what he has left to accomplish. "For I have *not yet* ascended to the Father" (v. 17, emphasis mine) implies that Jesus is not generally opposed to Magdalene's touch, but rather indicates that something about the present moment makes it inappropriate. The context further suggests that Jesus's statement functions largely metaphorically, making *hold on to* or *cling to* more appropriate translations of the Greek phrase that expresses it than *touch*. The issue is not that a mere physical touch by Magdalene will delay Jesus's necessary return to the Father. It is instead that her attempt to hold Jesus reflects a lack of understanding that his resurrection is not a permanent return to his previous mode of life and of relating to his followers. Rather, Jesus's still forthcoming return to the Father will complete his glorification, and transform the way he will relate to his disciples from there on out.⁹⁷ Jesus makes clear to his disciples during his life that it

concurring with Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 687, the Fourth Gospel suggests that Jesus's promised return to his followers post-ascension (John 14:1–3, 18–19, 23) will not be in the same, earthly mode they knew him in before his crucifixion, making it unlikely that the returned Jesus would invite Thomas to touch him in the way he does. Third, O'Day's assertion that the awkwardness of Jesus's prohibition to Magdalene in John 20:17 is largely due to the difficulty the author faces in trying to describe Jesus's glorification—an unfolding event that transcends temporal categories—in linear, narrative fashion, should be heeded (O'Day, "The Gospel of John," 842–843). While discussing the overall role of the resurrection appearances in John is beyond the scope of this project, it is important to note that among the New Testament Gospels, John especially links Jesus's glorification with his crucifixion (e.g., 3:14; 8:28; 12:32–33), making it understandable that the author's incorporation of traditions about Jesus's resurrection appearances into the narrative would appear a bit awkward on both literary and theological levels.

⁹⁷ John's Gospel states that God—Jesus's Father—has sent Jesus into the world (e.g., John 3:17, 34; 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 36–38; 6:29, 38–39, 44, 57; 8:16, 18, 42), and that Jesus will return again to his Father (e.g., John 3:13; 6:62; 14:12, 28; 16:5, 28; 17:13). This return begins with Jesus's crucifixion, but is not yet complete until he is raised from the dead and finally ascends again to be with the Father. See the previous note about the difficulty of describing such transcendent events within the confines of a linear narrative.

is necessary for him to return to the Father in order for them to receive the Spirit, which will be the way that both they and future generations of believers will relate to him once he is no longer physically present on earth (e.g., John 7:32–39; 14:16–17, 25; 15:26; 16:7, 12–15; cf. 3:3–15). Thus, Magdalene is not to hold on to the resurrected Jesus as though relationship as previously known with him is merely resuming.

Jesus's subsequent command to Magdalene further indicates the transformed nature of his relationship with his followers post-resurrection. In John, Magdalene is not to tell the disciples about an upcoming encounter between them and the risen Jesus. Rather, Jesus commissions her to announce his ascension to the disciples by stating that he is going to his Father and their Father, his God and their God (20:17). The fact that Jesus refers to the disciples here as his *brothers* makes clear the implications of this announcement: Jesus's ascension enables a new familial relationship in which his followers also become children of God, and siblings of Jesus,⁹⁸ by means of the Spirit, whom Jesus imparts to the disciples in John 20:21–23.⁹⁹ Seen in this context, Magdalene's encounter with the risen Jesus functions in part to

⁹⁸ John 20:17b. Greek: πορεύου δὲ πρὸς τοὺς ἀδελφούς μου καὶ εἰπὲ αὐτοῖς· ἀναβαίνω πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ πατέρα ὑμῶν καὶ θεὸν μου καὶ θεὸν ὑμῶν. Based on the context, the term often translated as *brothers* (ἀδελφούς) seems clearly to refer to Jesus's disciples rather than to his biological siblings. When Magdalene immediately carries out Jesus's command to announce his ascension, the text says that she did so to the disciples (John 20:18; Greek: τοῖς μαθηταῖς), indicating that this is the referent of *brothers* (ἀδελφούς). Cf. Matt 28:10, 16. Also, there is no grammatical or contextual reason why *brothers* (ἀδελφούς) could not refer to both male and female disciples.

⁹⁹ This also raises the issue of whether the reader is to understand that Jesus did ascend after his encounter with Magdalene and before imparting the Spirit, since his ascension was a condition of the latter. Here too we must understand that the author is somewhat constrained by the task of conveying events that transcend normal human categories within a linear, narrative format. The text simply does not clarify whether or not Jesus's appearances to groups of his disciples are to be understood as him encountering them in his resurrected body pre-ascension, or as visionary experiences the disciples have of him once he has ascended. Unlike Luke 24:50–51 and Acts 1:9, John does not portray Jesus's ascension, so the precise nature and duration of his appearances to his followers in John 21 remains unclear.

indicate how the readers of the Gospel, who can no longer see Jesus physically on earth, can be in relationship with him, as could the first generation of his disciples.¹⁰⁰

So, even though Peter and the Beloved Disciple are the first to discover Jesus's body missing from the tomb, and the latter is the first to believe Jesus's resurrection, Magdalene is the first one commissioned to announce Jesus's return to the Father, which implies she also is to announce that Jesus has risen from the dead. John not only describes Magdalene carrying out this commission, but even assigns her direct speech in doing so: "I have seen the Lord," she proclaims to the disciples, and also tells them the things Jesus had said to her (v. 18).¹⁰¹ An even clearer foundation thereby emerges in John's Gospel for later understandings of Magdalene as the first evangelist and apostle-to-the-apostles. Her claim to have seen the Lord is especially significant to the latter designation, since Paul counts witnessing an appearance of the risen Jesus as a characteristic of apostleship (1 Cor 15:3–11). Furthermore, Jesus's commission of Magdalene to announce the ascension seems to represent the commission of believers in the narrative audience to also proclaim the news about Jesus to others, so they too might believe.¹⁰²

As in the Synoptic Gospels, Mary Magdalene is not explicitly mentioned again in John after the empty tomb sequence. Her presence may be implied among the group of disciples gathered when the risen Jesus appears to them in John 20:19–23, since this scene immediately

¹⁰⁰ Also implied in Jesus's statement to Thomas in John 20:29 that those who have not seen, yet have believed in the risen Jesus, are blessed.

¹⁰¹ As noted in the previous sections, Matthew only implies that Magdalene and the other women deliver the message entrusted to them, while in Mark the situation is highly ambiguous. And though Luke 24:9–10 shows the women reporting what they experienced at Jesus's tomb, the text does not give them direct speech in doing so.

¹⁰² This reflects the overarching purpose of John's Gospel, as stated in 20:31. There is debate about whether the verb for *believe* (Greek: πιστεῦ[σ]ητε) in this verse is a present or aorist subjunctive, as indicated by the varied textual witnesses and the two possible readings both being present in the text of the NA28. If it is present tense, the implication might be that the Gospel is written to those who are already believers, in order that they might continue in their belief. If it is in the aorist tense, the implication might be that the Gospel intends its audience to come to belief, suggesting it may have been written largely for non-believers. However, this grammatical distinction is not itself conclusive for the meaning of the verse, or for nature of the Gospel's intended audience. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 1056, 1058–1061.

follows her announcement of Jesus's ascension to the disciples (John 20:18), and her recognition of Jesus as *my teacher* may suggest that she herself was a disciple of Jesus. If so, then she would also have received the Holy Spirit and the authority to forgive sins directly from Jesus. However, the text does not tell us so much.

Likewise, there is no explicit mention of Magdalene in the final chapter of John's Gospel (John 21), which recounts additional appearances of the risen Jesus to his disciples. To be sure, her absence seems less conspicuous in light of the fact that not even all of Jesus's remaining inner-circle of disciples are mentioned here.¹⁰³ Yet, what is striking is what this chapter may imply about the risen Jesus's prior appearance to Magdalene. The issue stems from John 21:14, which describes the appearance narrative that begins the chapter as the third time the risen Jesus appeared to the disciples (21:1–13). Counting backwards, the two previous appearances would be that of Jesus to Thomas and other disciples (20:26–29), and his initial appearance to a group of disciples (20:19–23). So, it seems that from the perspective of John 21, Jesus's appearance to Magdalene is not considered as belonging to the category of appearances to his disciples. On one hand, this apparent omission may simply reflect that John 21:14 refers to appearances to groups of disciples, rather to an individual. On the other hand, it may suggest that Magdalene is not considered a disciple, or at least that her encounter with the risen Jesus is less significant than those to other disciples.

The issue is complicated by the possibility that John 21 was added to the Gospel by a later redactor.¹⁰⁴ If so, then the apparent minimization of Magdalene's significance as it appears

¹⁰³ Since Judas has betrayed Jesus (John 18:2, 3, 5), only eleven of his twelve closest disciples remain. Just seven disciples are said to be present for these appearances, and only five are named (John 21:2). However, one of the unnamed disciples is apparently the Beloved Disciple (John 21:20–23).

¹⁰⁴ Many modern scholars take this view, including Barrett, Boismard, Brown, Bultmann, Dibelius, Dodd, Haenchen, Käsemann, Kümmel, Lightfoot, and Schnackenburg, so that it is often considered the majority view. There are content and stylistic reasons for this position, although the former are the most convincing. A major one is that John 20:30–31 appears to bring the Gospel to a close, making what follows in chapter 21 seem surprising and/or

in John 20 can be attributed to someone other than the author of John 1–20 and thereby be seen as a very early reinterpretation of her role in John’s Gospel. Yet, if the author of the rest of the Gospel also was responsible for John 21, then perhaps the argument for Magdalene’s portrayal as a disciple in this Gospel is diminished.¹⁰⁵ In either case, there is no evidence that John’s Gospel ever circulated without chapter 21, making the above issue another one with which Magdalene interpreters must wrestle.

The Additional Endings of Mark

Before leaving the New Testament, one additional set of texts that refer to Magdalene must be addressed. These are often referred to as the Additional Endings of Mark, or the Markan Appendix, which follow upon Mark 16:8 in many manuscripts and are included in most contemporary English translations.¹⁰⁶ As noted in the Mark section above, I address these endings separately because Matthew and Luke do not show clear evidence of having used them in their redactions of Mark. Subsequent interpreters, however, are aware of them by the second century, and work with the assumption that they are part of Mark’s Gospel.

The short version of Mark (ending at 16:8) that most critical scholars regard as the earliest available to us gives no indication that Magdalene and the women with her actually

out of place. Also, Jesus’s statement after his encounter with Thomas in 20:29 that those are blessed who have not seen and yet believe suggests that no more appearances of the risen Jesus are to be recounted; yet, this is precisely what occurs in John 21. In addition, the appearances of Jesus to his disciples at the Sea of Galilee in John 21 seem to be awkwardly placed after those that apparently take place in Jerusalem—why would Jesus’s disciples return to their previous way of life after having been commissioned by Jesus and receiving the Holy Spirit? Furthermore, some also claim that ecclesiastical themes appear in John 21 that are not of concern in the rest of the Gospel. For more details on this position, as well as for scholars who hold it, see Brown, *John XIII–XXI*, 1077–1082; Bultmann, *The Gospel of John*, 700–702; Haenchen, *John 2*, 221–222, 229–234.

¹⁰⁵ E.C. Hoskyns is the main twentieth century scholar who holds that the author of John 1–20 included chapter 21 as part of the original Gospel. He argues that John 20:30–31 is not the conclusion of the entire Gospel, but rather only of the resurrection stories of John 20. See E.C. Hoskyns, *The Fourth Gospel* (London: Faber & Faber, 1947), 549–50. Gail O’Day, “The Gospel of John,” 850–852; 854–855 also presents several arguments that challenge the critical consensus that John 21 is a later epilogue added by a separate redactor.

¹⁰⁶ These translations typically indicate that not all of the earliest manuscripts include these endings.

communicate the message to the disciples that the risen Jesus will meet them in Galilee. Rather, it notes only their fear and silence. Neither are there appearances of the risen Jesus, nor his commissioning of his followers in some capacity. It seems likely, therefore, that the additional endings were appended to Mark (by the second century) to supplement its abrupt ending, and to make it more consistent with what would have been known from the other Gospels, and perhaps also from ongoing oral tradition.¹⁰⁷ As such, these additional endings can be seen as early forms of interpretation of Mark's Gospel.¹⁰⁸ What is significant for this study is how these endings reiterate aspects of Magdalene's portrayal in the Gospels, suggesting that they were well-known parts of Christian tradition by the time of their composition.

There are two references to Magdalene in these texts: one in what is called the Shorter Ending, and the other in the so-called Longer Ending. The Shorter Ending immediately follows Mark 16:8 in double brackets in the NA28, and may also be bracketed in English translations to separate it from 16:8a (the earliest recoverable ending of Mark), since it has no verse number of its own. Only one manuscript has it alone following Mark 16:8, while several manuscripts include it along with the Longer Ending.¹⁰⁹ Referring back to the women who flee the tomb in 16:8, it briefly states that they promptly proclaimed the things commanded them to those around

¹⁰⁷ See note 20 above for the dating of these additional endings. Holly Hearon argues that there is not enough verbal agreement between the Markan Longer Ending and the parallel statements in other New Testament Gospels to decisively conclude that the former was dependent literarily on the latter. Rather, she argues that this ending more likely drew on elements of oral Magdalene tradition. See Holly Hearon, *The Mary Magdalene Tradition*, 47–57.

¹⁰⁸ Boring, *Mark*, 453. The additional Markan endings expand on the bare-bones empty tomb account of Mark 16:1–8, as do the empty tomb and resurrection appearance stories of Matthew 28 and Luke 24. As mentioned, whether or not John's Gospel was written with knowledge of Mark is a matter of debate. In any case, it also includes a rather extensive empty tomb account and stories of Jesus's resurrection appearances that suggest these were important parts of early Christian tradition, making it understandable that later redactors would add aspects of these to Mark's conclusion.

¹⁰⁹ This one manuscript is Codex Bobienseis, a Latin text that dates to the fourth or fifth century. It omits the words "and they said nothing to anyone" from Mark 16:8 in order to transition more smoothly to this ending. For a summary of the different ways various manuscripts attest to both the Shorter and Longer Endings of Mark, see Collins, *Mark*, 802, 804–806.

Peter (supposedly the Eleven), and that Jesus himself then sent out proclamation of salvation through these disciples.¹¹⁰

The first part of this ending follows a bit awkwardly upon the statement in 16:8 that the women said nothing to anyone.¹¹¹ Even so, it interprets this silence as temporary by stating that the women did in fact pass on the message entrusted to them (cf. Mark 16:7). It thus gives the clear indication missing in Mark's earliest ending that the news of Jesus's resurrection did reach his inner circle of disciples. In doing so, it paints a less ambiguous portrait of Magdalene (and the other women), showing her to be faithful to the task entrusted her and as among the first to proclaim Jesus's resurrection to others. In this regard it echoes John 20:18, the only other explicit notice in the Gospels that Magdalene carried out her commission as a messenger.

The second part of this ending also adds a brief notice that Jesus himself worked through his disciples to proclaim salvation, bringing it into closer agreement with the other Gospels that all relate Jesus commissioning his disciples. As noted above, it seems that the Eleven are specifically in view here, painting Magdalene and the other women in an intermediary or provisional role similar to their portrayals in Matthew and Luke. They are key in proclaiming the news of Jesus's resurrection to his inner-circle of disciples, but apparently are not themselves included in Jesus's charge to spread this news to the wider world.

The Longer Ending consists of what now is designated as Mark 16:9–20 (in double brackets in the NA28, and often designated as not included in the earliest manuscripts in many English translations). Although some manuscripts include both the Shorter and Longer Endings,

¹¹⁰ The Greek word *συντόμως* that describes the women passing on the news of Jesus's resurrection can be translated either as *promptly* or *briefly*. See BDAG, s.v. *συντόμως*. The phrase *those around Peter* seems to refer to Jesus' remaining eleven closest disciples, after Judas is no longer among them. Cf. Mark 16:7; Acts 2:14; 5:29 for Peter named specifically along with other disciples, or, in the Acts examples, with the apostles.

¹¹¹ This makes the omission of the words "and they said nothing to anyone" from Mark 16:8 in Codex Bezae Cantabrigiae understandable.

the majority of them have the Longer Ending following immediately upon Mark 16:8, making this the most prevalent form of Mark's Gospel until the nineteenth century, when the originality of this ending became more widely questioned.¹¹² It recounts three appearances of the risen Jesus, as well as Jesus's ascension and the subsequent spread of the gospel. Thus, like the Shorter Ending, it reflects key aspects of the conclusions of the other Gospels.

Magdalene is the subject of the first appearance in vv. 9–11. In contrast to Mark 16:1–8 and the Shorter Ending, here Magdalene is not portrayed as being with other women. Rather, similar to John 20, she is alone when the risen Jesus appears to her. Strikingly, the text states explicitly that this is the first of his appearances (v. 9), therefore concurring with John's Gospel (John 20:11–18). While we cannot know for sure whether the author used John as a source, or worked from other oral and/or written sources, this statement suggests that by the second century a tradition of Magdalene as the first to witness the risen Jesus was prevalent enough to resonate with the audience of Mark's expanded Gospel.

Also notable is the text's mention that Jesus had cast out seven evil spirits from Magdalene (Mark 16:9). This reflects the information provided about her in Luke 8:2, but makes explicit that Jesus is the one who delivered her of the demons. These two brief texts (Luke 8:2; Mark 16:9) are the only New Testament references to what will become a prominent point for subsequent Magdalene interpretations.

¹¹² Collins, *Mark*, 804–806. She argues that the rise of text criticism and paleography especially contributed to an emerging consensus in the nineteenth century that the earliest recoverable ending of Mark is 16:8. It should also be noted that some manuscripts that have the Longer Ending also include what is referred to as Freer Logion between 16:14 and 16:15. This is a statement of Jesus that explains the disciples' initial disbelief in the resurrection as a product of Satan's intervention, thereby making the transition to Jesus commissioning them in v. 15 less abrupt.

Finally, this ending depicts Magdalene alone telling the Eleven that Jesus had appeared to her, making her the first to announce the news of his resurrection (Mark 16:10).¹¹³ This too is similar to what occurs in John's Gospel (John 20:18), but rather than Magdalene being the one weeping, in the Longer Ending of Mark Jesus's other followers are mourning and weeping (Mark 16:10; cf. John 20:11, 13, 15). Similar to Luke's Gospel, Magdalene is not explicitly commissioned here to tell this news to others, but when she does, they do not believe it (Mark 16:11; cf. Luke 24:11). Likewise, this unbelief does not characterize Magdalene negatively or suggest that her testimony is not trustworthy. Rather, also reminiscent of Luke, the Eleven's lack of belief in both Magdalene's witness (Mark 16:11) and that of two other disciples in the next scene (vv. 12–13) leads to Jesus reproaching them in the third appearance account (v. 14; cf. Luke 24:38). So, Magdalene appears in this Longer Ending as one who believes in Jesus's resurrection without need of convincing and faithfully proclaims it to others, as she and the other women do in Luke.

Conclusion

Although the New Testament Gospels' depictions of Mary Magdalene share some common traits, no uniform portrait of her can be constructed from them that does not gloss over their major differences. To be sure, there is significant overlap in terms of Magdalene's role as a witness to Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb, as well as in her being among the first to learn that Jesus was raised from the dead. Her depiction as a participant in most of these foundational events of Christianity in all four New Testament Gospels is indeed striking. There

¹¹³ Again, it seem that Jesus's remaining closest disciples (the Twelve minus Judas) are the referent of *those with him* (Greek: τοῖς μετ' αὐτοῦ) in Mark 16:10, since they are said here not to believe Magdalene (Mark 16:11; cf. Luke 24:11), and in 16:14 Jesus is said to appear specifically to the Eleven and reproach them for not believing those he had previously appeared to (including the two disciples of 16:12–13).

is also evidence in each Gospel that suggests Magdalene is portrayed as a disciple of Jesus; however, it is not equally strong in each text.

Even so, some of the characteristics and roles of Magdalene that later interpreters engage the most are not found in all of the Gospels, or even in most of them. For instance, only Luke, John, and the Additional Markan endings depict Magdalene telling others the news of Jesus's resurrection, and only Matthew, John, and the Additional Markan endings tell of her having an encounter with the risen Jesus himself. These images are the bases for later interpreters' more developed portrayals of Magdalene as the first Christian evangelist and apostle-to-the-apostles; they are not, however, consistent across all of the New Testament Gospels. Indeed, if the earliest Gospel, Mark, were the only source on Magdalene available to later interpreters, the above portrayals may not have developed at all, since the text ends with her fleeing Jesus's tomb in fear and remaining silent about the news that he was raised from the dead.¹¹⁴ And though subsequent interpreters are fascinated with Magdalene's deliverance from seven demons, this detail only occupies two verses in the entire New Testament: one in Luke and one in the later, Longer Ending to Mark that may have drawn this information from Luke's Gospel. Furthermore, the degree to which each Gospel portrays Magdalene as a faithful versus fallible follower of Jesus varies, with tensions in this regard even within a single Gospel. So, it is understandable that subsequent, fuller descriptions of Magdalene will necessarily be interpretive constructs that combine details from different Gospels and fill in the gaps in these sources in various ways.

¹¹⁴Scholars sometimes cite seeing the risen Jesus and receiving a commission to preach the gospel as the Pauline criteria for apostleship, and thereby conclude that Magdalene is portrayed as an apostle—especially when considering her role in John's Gospel (e.g., D'Angelo, "Reconstructing Real Women."). Yet, apostleship is not an emphasis in Mark's Gospel—it is only used twice (3:14; 6:30), apparently of the Twelve, but the first reference is likely a later addition to Mark. And Magdalene in Mark's Gospel does not see the risen Jesus, nor is she portrayed as actually proclaiming Jesus's resurrection, further indicating that later designations of her as *apostle-to-the apostles* do not derive primarily from Mark's portrayal of her.

The sparse, ambiguous details about Magdalene in the Gospels, and the discrepancies among those that are present, indicate that these texts are not concerned with presenting a biography of Magdalene, or even with providing a full portrait of her role in the Jesus movement. Rather, we catch only a glimpse of her as part of a larger story.

Chapter 3

Mary Magdalene Interpretations, from the Second Century to the Present

Introduction

The previous chapter addressed Mary Magdalene's prominent role in what would become the four canonical New Testament Gospels, which were composed by the end of the first century CE. This chapter summarizes a trajectory of Magdalene interpretations from the second century to the present. Given the vast amount of texts, art, and religious practices from around the world that portray Magdalene across the centuries, this overview must be selective. It begins with texts from the second through six centuries that express Christian themes, but that were not included in what would become the New Testament canon. The second section addresses the portrayals of Magdalene in patristic writings, produced by leaders of what would come to be considered as the "orthodox" Christian church.¹ The third section explores medieval European interpretations of Magdalene, and the fourth looks at her portrayals during the Reformation period in Europe. Finally, the fifth section addresses modern interpretations of Magdalene, mostly from Europe and North America.

Magdalene portrayals in the post-New Testament through medieval periods tend to closely relate, or even conflate, her with other women who appear in the New Testament or in other religious texts. She is often blurred with other women named Mary, and above all, she is merged with the unnamed woman of Luke 7:36–50. This tendency reflects in part the increasing use of Magdalene as a symbolic figure used to achieve various ends. Such use of the Magdalene figure will be challenged in the Renaissance, when some scholars seek to recover her identity as

¹ I place "orthodox" in quotation marks to acknowledge that this description of the church is based on the perspective of those who comprised what became mainstream Christianity. While this chapter touches on Magdalene traditions of the Eastern church, its focus is on Western European interpretations because of their strong influence on modern Western exegesis of Magdalene, which is one of this project's major points of analysis.

an individual person known from the New Testament texts. This shift continues to shape Magdalene scholarship into the twenty-first century.

Early Extra-Canonical Portrayals of Magdalene

The texts explored in this section are considered to either be outside of those essential to Christian practice and faith, or even heretical, from the perspective of those who came to lead the dominant, organized church.² Some of these texts, however, likely functioned as Scripture for the communities that used them, as reflected in part by the fact that they do not provide explicit analysis of earlier biblical texts, as patristic writings do, but rather draw on biblical themes (among others), characters, and even genres to present their communities' own beliefs as continuous with these earlier traditions.

The portrayals of Mary Magdalene in these early extra-canonical texts are diverse, since they are written to various communities with a range of practical and theological concerns.³ Even so, some common images and themes emerge. In many of these texts Magdalene plays a more extensive role than in the New Testament Gospels. For instance, in several texts she has a significant speaking and leadership role among Jesus's disciples and in the Christian movement.

² See Lee Martin McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: Its Origin, Transmission, and Authority*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), 210, 379–381 for more on key moments in the formation of the biblical canon. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in his *Thirty-ninth Festal Letter* (367 CE) gives a list of canonical Old and New Testament books that became standard for many modern Bibles. His is considered to be the first known list of the twenty-seven canonical New Testament books. Even so, Athanasius's canon was not adhered to universally, and the modern Catholic and Protestant canons were not fixed until the post-Reformation era.

³ While several of these texts reflect aspects of gnosticism, a dualist theology/philosophy that considers matter to be evil and the spiritual to be good, they cannot all be categorized as such, and there is debate as to what extent particular texts reflect aspects of gnostic belief. Works that substantially treat Magdalene's portrayal in early extra-canonical texts include: Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels and Early Tradition*; Bernabé Ubieta, *María Magdalena: Tradiciones en el Cristianismo Primitivo*; Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*; Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*; de Boer, *Mary Magdalene: Beyond the Myth*; de Boer, *The Gospel of Mary*; de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*; Ehrman, *Peter, Paul, & Mary Magdalene*; Haskins, *Mary Magdalene*; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*; King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*; Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*; Tuckett, *The Gospel of Mary*; F. Stanley Jones, ed., *Which Mary?: The Marys of Early Christian Tradition* (SBLSymS 19; Atlanta: SBL, 2002).

She also is portrayed as having unique spiritual knowledge that derives from her intimacy with Jesus, especially through visionary encounters. Another theme is the resistance Magdalene faces to her leadership role from some of Jesus's male disciples, which in some texts is a function of her being a woman.⁴ While some of these images are similar to those found in the New Testament Gospels, it is not clear whether the texts addressed in this section used these Gospels as sources, and if they did, to what extent. It is also possible that they made use of other written sources, and/or oral tradition—perhaps some of the same ones underlying, or based on, the New Testament Gospels.

One theme that emerges in some of these texts warrants its own introduction: namely, the linking at some level of Mary Magdalene with Jesus's mother, whom I will refer to as Mary of Nazareth. As we will see, some texts seem to apply New Testament descriptions of Mary of Nazareth to the Magdalene. Others assign key aspects of Magdalene's role, especially as described in John 20:11–18, to Mary of Nazareth instead. Still other references nearly conflate the two women. This linking may partly stem from the John 19:25 mention of both Mary of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene (along with Mary of Clopas) standing together at Jesus's

⁴ The degree to which such tensions reflect conflict over women's leadership and status in actual early Christian communities is debated. For instance, Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, 155 raises this possibility generally to explain Magdalene's prominence in these extra-canonical texts. Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, significantly develops this possibility. On pages 102–104 she states that although tradition has both Peter and Magdalene receiving special appearances from the risen Jesus, they never receive individual appearances in the same early Christian text. Furthermore, whenever these two appear in the same text, Peter diminishes Mary's status. Brock then argues that this reflects actual controversy in early Christianity over who received the first resurrection appearance and who has apostolic authority. She claims that it also reflects conflict in churches over women's roles. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 222–225 cautions against accepting what he considers the prevalent view in earlier scholarship that these extra-canonical texts as a whole reflect disagreement between gnostic and non-gnostic Christian groups over the position and spiritual authority of women (he cites, for example, Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*), and advises analyzing each text's situation separately. For example, the only text he thinks this view clearly applies to is *Gospel of Mary*, while others, such as *Pistis Sophia I–III*, seem to reflect an inner-gnostic controversy. As to the question of what conflict between Magdalene and male disciples in these texts might reflect about the concrete situation of second and third century women associated with the groups that produced them, he argues that several texts show no direct interest in women's concrete experiences. Rather, Mary Magdalene often functions as an ideal heroine from the past who transmits gnostic tradition.

crucifixion. It may also suggest that various traditions about these Marys circulated in antiquity, some of which may be distinct from those represented in the New Testament.⁵

Related to such blurring, the identity of the prominent Mary figure in some extra-canonical texts is debated, especially in the *Gospel of Mary*, *Pistis Sophia*, *Acts of Philip*, and the texts found in the Nag Hammadi codices.⁶ More than one Mary appears in many of these texts, and only the *Gospel of Peter*, *Pistis Sophia*, and the *Gospel of Philip* among this group specify at some point that one of these Marys is the Magdalene.⁷ The lack of specificity about Mary's identity in these texts, along with the blurring of attributes of Mary of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene as they appear in the New Testament, leads some scholars to conclude that the main Mary figure is better understood primarily as a representation of Mary of Nazareth rather than Mary Magdalene, or, at least as a more ambiguous figure than is often assumed.⁸ I am convinced, however, by the arguments for understanding this figure as primarily representing Mary Magdalene, and my discussion reflects this assumption.⁹

⁵ I use *Marys* as the plural of *Mary* throughout this work. Some authors use *Maries* instead.

⁶ The texts discussed here that are part of the Nag Hammadi codices, discovered in Egypt in 1945, are the *Gospel of Thomas*, the *Gospel of Philip*, *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and *Dialogue of the Savior*. Some of these texts are also known from manuscripts not found at Nag Hammadi.

⁷ E.g., *Gos. Pet.* 12.50; *Pist. Soph.* 2.83, 85, 87, 88, 90, 94, 96, 97, 98, 99; 3.127, 132; *Gos. Phil.* 59.6–11.

⁸ E.g., Enzo Lucchesi, “Évangile selon Marie ou Évangile selon Marie-Madeleine?” *AnBoll* 103 (1985): 366; Stephen J. Shoemaker, “A Case of Mistaken Identity? Naming the Gnostic Mary,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 5–30. Shoemaker argues here that ultimately, the ambiguous, apocryphal “Mary” figure in question is likely a composite that draws on attributes of both Mary of Nazareth and Mary Magdalene.

⁹ Those who hold the common view that the Magdalene is the prominent Mary figure in these texts, and whose arguments persuade me, include Antti Marjanen, “The Mother of Jesus or the Magdalene? The Identity of Mary in the So-Called Gnostic Christian Texts,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 31–42; Ann Graham Brock, “Setting the Record Straight—The Politics of Identification: Mary Magdalene and Mary the Mother in *Pistis Sophia*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 43–52; Karen L. King, “Why All the Controversy? Mary in the *Gospel of Mary*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 53–74. Cf. Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 73–104. These scholars generally work from the clear references to Magdalene in the texts listed in note 7 above, as well as from Magdalene's portrayals in the New Testament, to determine that other portrayals of “Mary” in the extra-canonical texts that display similar features can be considered as depicting the same literary character. Such scholars also recognize the difficult and nuanced issues involved in definitively identifying the Marys in these texts. For instance, Marjanen acknowledges in *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 160–161, that the reference in *Gos. Phil.* 59.6–11 to three women who accompanied Jesus, including Magdalene, likely presents a mythical, composite figure, rather than a representation of any one historical woman. I acknowledge that the literary presentations of “Mary” in these texts may indeed draw on attributes of different historical figures and traditions, as well as be highly stylized to fit the author's purposes. By recognizing the

Gospel of Peter

The extant fragment of the second century *Gospel of Peter* resembles key aspects of the New Testament Gospel passion and resurrection narratives, with notable differences, including in its portrayal of Mary Magdalene.¹⁰ A significant difference is that it explicitly calls her a disciple (μαθήτρια) of the Lord (*Gos. Pet.* 12.50); this status is only implied in the New Testament Gospels.¹¹ But in contrast to these Gospels, Magdalene is not a witness to Jesus's crucifixion or among the first witnesses to Jesus's empty tomb in *Gospel of Peter* (9.35–10.42).¹² Once she does arrive at the tomb with other women (12.50–13.55), she finds a young man (13.55, νεανίσκος; cf. Mark 16:5) sitting in it who announces that Jesus is risen and is returning to where he came from (*Gos. Pet.* 13:55–56), similar to aspects of the New Testament Gospel

prominent Mary figure in these texts as the Magdalene, I simply agree with the scholars cited above that she shares similar traits as the character explicitly named as Mary Magdalene, and therefore, on some level, references to this figure are literary interpretations of Mary Magdalene, however loosely connected they may be to her portrayals in the New Testament or to the actual first-century woman of that name.

¹⁰ Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, 151 dates this text to the beginning of the second century. Wilhelm Schneemelcher dates it roughly to the middle of the second century; see Christian Maurer and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "The Gospel of Peter," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, rev. ed., ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher, trans. R. McL. Wilson, vol. 1 of *New Testament Apocrypha*, ed. Wilhelm Schneemelcher (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1991–1992), 216–227. All *Gospel of Peter* citations follow the English translation of Christian Maurer in this chapter, except where noted.

¹¹ The feminine term for *disciple*, μαθήτρια, only appears once in the New Testament, in reference to Tabitha in Acts 9:36. All citations of the Greek text of *Gospel of Peter* are from Paul Foster, *The Gospel of Peter: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Commentary*, TENTS 4 (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

¹² Mary discovers the empty tomb *after* the soldiers guarding it and some Jewish elders have already seen it opened. Unlike Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56–24:1, this text does not clearly indicate that Mary goes to the tomb to anoint Jesus's body, but rather because she had not done at the Lord's tomb what women are accustomed to do for their deceased beloved ones out of fear of the Jews (*Gos. Pet.* 12.50). The context suggests that this custom likely involves lamenting (12:52, 54), although 12:54 describes the women's intention to leave a memorial for Jesus outside his tomb in case they are unable to enter it. By contrast, another second-century text, *Epistula Apostolorum*, does portray Magdalene and other women as going to Jesus's tomb to pour ointment on his body, and as the first to discover the empty tomb and hear that Jesus had risen from the dead (*Ep. Apos.* chs. 9–10). All citations of this text follow the English translation by C. Detlef G. Müller, "Epistula Apostolorum," in Schneemelcher, *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, 249–284. Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 67 argues that the effect of the guards and elders witnessing Jesus's actual resurrection before Magdalene and other women find the empty tomb is to remove them from their position as primary witnesses to the resurrection and mediators of the kerygma, assigning those roles instead to men.

resurrection narratives.¹³ Yet, this figure does not commission the women to tell others this news, as in Mark 16:7, Matthew 28:7, and John 20:17. Similar to the earliest ending of Mark (16:8a), the women flee the tomb in fear in *Gospel of Peter* (13.57) and are not mentioned again—at least in what remains of the text today.

Gospel of Mary

The *Gospel of Mary*, named for Mary Magdalene,¹⁴ is one of several texts that portray her as an authoritative figure and prominent speaker among Jesus’s disciples.¹⁵ After the resurrected Jesus’s departure from earth, she comforts the other disciples and encourages them to go and preach the gospel, despite fear of resistance (*Gos. Mary* 9.5–24).¹⁶ Then, at Peter’s request, she teaches the disciples the Savior’s words that she alone knows because she received

¹³ E.g., all the New Testament Synoptic Gospels portray a figure or figures in or near Jesus’s tomb who tell the women, or just Magdalene, that Jesus is risen (Mark 16:5–6; Matt 28:2–3, 5–6; Luke 24:4–7), while the statement that Jesus is returning to where he came from is reminiscent of John 16:28; 20:17.

¹⁴ All citations of the *Gospel of Mary* are from the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 (BG 1) manuscript as printed and translated into English in R. McL. Wilson and George W. MacRae, “The Gospel According to Mary,” *Nag Hammadi Codices* V, 2–5, and VI, with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 1 and 4, ed. Douglas M. Parrott, NHC XI (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 453–471, unless otherwise noted.

¹⁵ The date of the *Gospel of Mary* is debated. King, *Gospel of Mary*, 3 states that it was written in the early second century CE. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 98 argues that a mid-second century date is most likely. And R. McL. Wilson and George W. MacRae, “The Gospel According to Mary,” in Parrott, *NHC* V, 2–5, and VI, 454 posit a *terminus ad quem* for the composition of this text as the early third century CE. Although it does not resemble the genre of the canonical Gospels, *Gospel of Mary*’s presentation of Jesus’s post-resurrection appearances to Magdalene and other disciples likely stems from knowledge of the earlier Gospels and/or the traditions underlying them. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 117 argues that this text presupposes a special encounter between Magdalene and Jesus analogous to those of John 20:14–18 or Mark 16:9–11. He also states that almost all of the undisputed New Testament quotations in *Gospel of Mary* are derived from the canonical Gospels (98). This implies that the author of the former had knowledge of the latter. And Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 11 argues that this gospel recalls traditions in Mark and John that Mary was the first to see the risen Christ, but interprets these resurrection appearances as visions received in dreams or ecstatic trance. Both Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 99, and King, *The Gospel of Mary*, 30 are among the scholars that consider this text to be framed as a post-resurrection dialogue between Jesus and his disciples.

¹⁶ Magdalene is also commissioned by the resurrected Jesus to uplift the disciples in the *Manichean Psalms*, 187 and 192.21–22. In the former psalm, Mary is also praised for serving (διακονεῖν) the Lord’s commandment with her whole heart. See C.R.C. Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm-Book: Part II* (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1938), 187, 192.

them through a visionary encounter with him (10.1–17.8).¹⁷ Thus, she functions as an intermediary between the risen Jesus and other disciples.¹⁸ But Andrew doubts that Magdalene’s teachings came from the Savior because they seem strange, and Peter objects to the notion that the Savior would speak privately with a woman and not to the rest of the disciples (17.10–22). After a weeping Mary defends herself (18.1–5), Levi rebukes Peter and affirms that the Savior made Mary worthy, and that he knew and loved her more than the other disciples (18.6–20).¹⁹

Gospel of Philip

The *Gospel of Philip* also affirms Mary’s close relationship with Jesus.²⁰ It calls her the Lord’s companion who, along with Mary, his mother, and her sister, always walked with him

¹⁷ Since pages 11–14 of BG 8502, 1 are missing, it is difficult to discern how much of the text after 10.22 includes solely Magdalene’s speech. Yet, the statement in 17.6–8, “When Mary had said this, she fell silent, since it was to this point that the Savior had spoken with her” (*NHC* V, 2–5, and VI, 467) suggests that her teaching could have occupied most of 10.1–17.8. Mary’s receipt of insight through a visionary encounter with Jesus may find its point of departure in the John 20:11–18 depiction of the risen Jesus in a one-on-one encounter with Magdalene. The *Questions of Mary* is another early text that reportedly portrays Magdalene as the recipient of revelation. Only known from Epiphanius’s paraphrases of parts of this text in his *Panarion* (26.8.1–26.9.5), it may have been the product of a libertine gnostic community (Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, 154; Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 189–190 also suggests this as a possibility). See *The Panarion of Epiphanius of Salamis: Book I (Sects 1–46)*, trans. Frank Williams, 2nd ed., Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 63 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 96–97. Magdalene also appears to be the only one in *Gospel of Mary* who truly comprehends Jesus’s teaching, and King, *The Gospel of Mary* 4, 30 argues that her teaching role parallels the one Jesus played when he was still with the disciples.

¹⁸ She also has this function in *Ep. Apos.* 10–11, though in a setting more like the resurrection and appearance narratives of the canonical Gospels. Here Magdalene, two other women, and the risen Christ try to convince the disciples of the resurrection. Mary’s attempt is met with the disciples’ doubt.

¹⁹ A Greek fragment of the text (P. Ryl. 463) has Levi merely stating here that the Savior loved Mary very well (*NHC* V, 2–5, and VI, 469). Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 166 argues that this may have resulted from a scribal error, which would suggest that Mary being specially loved by Jesus was “part of the symbolic world of the original *Gospel of Mary*.” He also thinks that the two Greek fragments of *Gospel of Mary* (P. Ryl. 463 and P. Oxy. 3525) do not derive from the same manuscript and thereby reflect that there were at least two different *Gospel of Mary* Greek versions, and that these Greek fragments are different enough from the Coptic manuscript (BG 8502, 1) to suggest that they stem from versions that are distinct from the *Vorlage* of BG 8502, 1 (Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 96).

²⁰ All *Gospel of Philip* citations are from the edition of the text by Bentley Layton and the translation into English by Wesley W. Isenberg in *Nag Hammadi Codex II, 2–7*, ed. Bentley Layton, *NHC* XX (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 142–215. Wesley W. Isenberg, “Introduction” [to *The Gospel According to Philip*], in *NHC* II, 2–7, 131–139 suggests a date in the second half of the third century CE. Madeleine Scopello, “Introduction” [to *The Gospel of Philip*], in *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 157–160 suggests this text dates to the late second or early third century CE.

(*Gos. Phil.* 59.6–11). As in the *Gospel of Mary*, this text also indicates that the Savior has a special love for Mary, even though a key phrase is unclear at points: “[...loved] her more than [all] the disciples [and used to] kiss her [often] on her [...]” (*Gos. Phil.* 63.30–64.9). The first lacuna might read, “But Christ loved,” or possibly, “The savior loved.” The second one might read, “mouth,” “feet,” “cheek,” or “forehead.” It is also possible that the phrase translated as “kiss” may be better understood as “greet.”²¹ The potential image this phrase creates of Jesus kissing Magdalene raises questions about whether Jesus and Magdalene were romantically involved. Given the context, however, it seems likely that this imagery reflects spiritual intimacy, since the Savior’s response to the other disciples’ inquiry as to why he loves Mary more suggests that it is because she has greater spiritual understanding than them.²²

Gospel of Thomas

Magdalene also has a speaking role in the *Gospel of Thomas* (21).²³ In this text too Peter resists her position among the disciples specifically because she is a woman, which he claims makes her unworthy of life (114). Jesus himself, however, comes to her defense with an enigmatic statement that he will make her a male so that she too may enter the kingdom of heaven (114).²⁴

²¹ For this and the possibilities listed for the lacunae, see the footnotes in *NHC II*, 2–7, 169.

²² See Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 151–160 for a discussion of this issue. By looking at the other reference to Mary as Jesus’s companion in the *Gospel of Philip* (59.6–11), as well as at texts of the era comparable to the one in question, he argues that Magdalene as Jesus’s companion in *Gos. Phil.* 63.30–64.9 most likely means that she is his earthly partner in a spiritual relationship, and that him kissing her can be understood as a means to convey spiritual power.

²³ All citations of the *Gospel of Thomas* are from the edition of the text by Bentley Layton and the translation into English by Thomas O. Lambdin in *NHC II*, 2–7, 52–93. Helmet Koester, “Introduction” [to *The Gospel According to Thomas*], in *NHC II*, 2–7, 38–49 discusses the possibility of a first century CE origin. Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, 151 suggests a late second century origin.

²⁴ Bovon, *New Testament Traditions and Apocryphal Narratives*, 151 argues that becoming male in this text can mean returning to the primitive state, which is more androgynous than virile, by ridding oneself of the flesh that distinguishes man and woman. This view seems to find support in logion 22, which states that entering the

Revelation Dialogues

Mary's speaking role is even more prominent in several revelation dialogues from the second and third centuries. These dialogues generally take a question-and-answer format through which Jesus imparts secret teachings to his disciples.²⁵ In *Dialogue of the Savior*,²⁶ Mary not only asks the Savior questions but also provides interpretations, leading to her description "as a woman who understood completely" (*Dial. Sav.* 139.8–13).²⁷ And in *Pistis Sophia*, Magdalene is Jesus's primary interlocutor who both questions him and provides interpretations.²⁸ She is uniquely characterized as "the beautiful in her speech" (*Pist. Soph.* 1.24), and the Savior gives her special blessings because of her understanding (3.130, 132). In this text too Peter takes issue with Mary as a woman because she talks too much (1.36). Jesus responds that anyone enabled by the Spirit to understand what he says has the right to speak, including Peter. Later, Mary complains to the Lord that, though her mind understands, she is afraid to give her interpretations

kingdom of heaven is a matter of male and female becoming one and the same. See also Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 79 for other scholars who address this question.

²⁵ Madeleine Scopello, "Introduction" [to *The Dialogue of the Savior*], in Meyer, *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 298. Karen King, "Why All the Controversy?" in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 55 appropriately considers *The Gospel of Mary* to be a revelation dialogue as well. I treat that text separately above because of its great significance in the Magdalene tradition.

²⁶ All citations of *Dialogue of the Savior* are from the text and translation into English by Stephen Emmel in *Nag Hammadi Codex III*, 5, ed. Stephen Emmel, NHS XXVI (Leiden: Brill, 1984), 37–95. Helmet Koester and Elaine Pagels, "Introduction" [to *Dialogue of the Savior*], in *NHC III*, 5, 1–17, suggest an early second century CE date. Scopello "Introduction," [to *The Dialogue of the Savior*], in *Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, 298 notes that the entire text does not take the format of a revelation dialogue.

²⁷ This echoes the spiritual understanding that she displays in *Gospel of Mary*. Cf. *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, where Mary also questions Jesus (NH III, 4, 98.9–99) and shows a special concern for the mission of the disciples (NHC III, 4, 114.8–13). All citations of *Sophia of Jesus Christ* are from *Nag Hammadi Codices III*, 3–4 and V, 1, edited by Douglas M. Parrott, NHS XXVII (Leiden: Brill, 1991).

²⁸ All *Pistis Sophia* citations are of the text edited by Carl Schmidt and translated by Violet Macdermot into English in *Pistis Sophia*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, NHS IX (Leiden: Brill, 1978). The first number is the book, followed by the chapter. Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 171 dates this text to the third century CE. Marjanen, 170–188, also gives a good, concise analysis of Magdalene's role in this very long text. He, like other scholars, affirms that though *Pistis Sophia* consists of four books, the fourth book was initially independent and only later attached to Books I–III.

because Peter threatens her and hates her “race,” which likely refers to the female sex (2.72).²⁹ Even so, the text affirms her status, along with that of John the virgin, over that of the other disciples (2.96). It also describes Magdalene as happy, spiritually pure (2.87; 3.118), and blessed among all generations (1.34)—a designation similar to how Mary of Nazareth describes herself in Luke 1:48.³⁰ *Manichean Psalms* 187.30–33 similarly calls Magdalene *blessed*, perhaps also recalling the Lukan description of Jesus’s mother.³¹

Acts of Philip

Another extra-canonical text that portrays Magdalene in a broader role than do the New Testament texts is the fourth century *Acts of Philip*.³² It describes Magdalene as the apostle Philip’s sister, who becomes an active participant in his ministry.³³ She is a virtuous ascetic who holds the register of where the apostles are assigned to preach. Here she acts as an intermediary between the Savior and Philip, who is distressed about his mission (8.2–3). After speaking with the Savior on Philip’s behalf, the Savior commissions Magdalene to accompany Philip and encourage him on his mission, commending her manly mentality that contrasts Philip’s feminine mentality (8.3). While on this mission, Magdalene plays a role in healing the sick (13.4; 14), helps prepare communion bread, occasionally preaches to women, and baptizes them (8.2; 14.9;

²⁹ See Marjanen, *The Woman Jesus Loved*, 181 for the interpretation of “race” as the female sex, which Mary represents.

³⁰ It should be noted that several disciples are called blessed in these extra-canonical texts, so some caution is in order in identifying an intentional connection between Magdalene and Mary of Nazareth when the former is called blessed. There is, however, reason to consider such a connection when the more specific description of *blessed among all generations* is used.

³¹ Allberry, *A Manichaeon Psalm-Book: Part II*, 187.

³² All *Acts of Philip* citations follow the translation by François Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews, *The Acts of Philip: A New Translation* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2012), unless otherwise noted. They state that the text was probably composed in the fourth century CE. For a thorough treatment of Magdalene’s role in this text, see François Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 75–90.

³³ Her name often appears in this text as Mariamne (Μαριάμνη). See Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 75–80.

6.9). At times she even shares the title of *apostle* with Philip and Bartholomew, who is also on the mission (8.16, 21; 13.1).

Strikingly, Jesus prepares Magdalene for mission by instructing her to shed her feminine garments and appearance before entering a city that worships the mother of serpents. The purpose is to dissociate from Eve, who represents *woman* and is the means by which the primeval serpent brought death to humanity. Magdalene is to flee Eve's poverty and be rich in herself (8.4). She is thus portrayed as the antitype to Eve—a portrayal that is common in patristic texts, as we will see below.

This is one of several ways in which Magdalene is portrayed in *Acts of Philip* similarly to Mary of Nazareth in Christian tradition. Her function here as anti-type to Eve is one that Mary of Nazareth also often plays in patristic texts. Similarly, before sending Magdalene out in mission, the Savior calls her “blessed among women” (8.3), which recalls Elizabeth's designation of Mary of Nazareth in Luke 1:42. Another connection comes in the account of Philip's martyrdom (*Acts Phil. Mart.* 14–42). Here Magdalene, along with Philip and Bartholomew, are detained by their opponents and subjected to public humiliation, physical violence, and the threat of death. Magdalene's captors call together the entire city to watch them strip her naked as a way to shame her for travelling with the male apostles, whom they conclude must have “debauched” her (*Acts Phil. Mart.* 19). In the very moment she is stripped, Magdalene's body miraculously transforms so that the crowd cannot see her naked (*Acts Phil. Mart.* 20).³⁴ Two recensions of *Acts of Philip*

³⁴ The recension of the text that Bovon refers to as Γ has a cloud of fire cover Magdalene at this point, in addition to her body being transformed. See Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 82–83. See also the Greek text of more than one manuscript (with French translation) in François Bovon, Bertrand Bouvier, and Frédéric Amsler, *Acta Philippi 1: Textus*; Corpus Christianorum: *Series Apocryphorum* 11 (Turnhout: Brepols, 1999), 372–375.

describe her transformed body as a “shrine of glass” (κιβωτὸς ὑέλινη).³⁵ The word κιβωτός in the Septuagint refers both to the ark of the covenant (Exod 39:14) and to Noah’s ark (Gen 6:14), and therefore represents divine presence and provision.

Throughout Christian tradition, Mary of Nazareth is also referred to as an ark, since she bears the divine presence by carrying Jesus in her womb.³⁶ It is not clear whether *Acts of Philip* makes an intentional connection between Magdalene and Mary of Nazareth by describing her body as a κιβωτός. This ascription does, however, thematically link the women in terms of asserting their purity: Magdalene as κιβωτός escapes the shame of public nakedness in an apparent refutation of her enemies’ charge that her chastity has been compromised, while it is Mary of Nazareth’s pure, virginal status that makes her a fitting receptacle for the Lord.

Coptic Apocryphal Texts

A final extra-canonical set of texts with notable Magdalene portrayals can be broadly considered as Coptic apocrypha. Most of the texts addressed here are considered homilies of “Pseudo-Cyril,” since many are attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem but were composed after his lifetime.³⁷ I give special attention to one that focuses on Mary Magdalene, *An Encomium on*

³⁵ Bovon cites these two recensions as Θ and Δ in “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 83. See the Greek text in Bovon, Bouvier, and Amsler, *Acta Philippi 1*, 375.

³⁶ Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 83–84, 88 points out the fact that both Magdalene in *Acts of Philip* and the Virgin Mary in Christianity are portrayed as an ark. Some examples of the latter include: *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, attributed to Bartholomew the Apostle, as edited and translated in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1913), 179–230; p. 190 referenced here (all references to this text are to this translation); *On the Annunciation to the Holy Virgin Mary*, attributed to Gregory Thaumaturgus, but likely a spurious work (ANF 6:60); Athanasius, *Homily of the Papyrus of Turin*, cited in Luigi Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church: The Blessed Virgin Mary in Patristic Thought* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1999) 106–107 (this too may be the product of a later author); Bovon, “Mary Magdalene in the *Acts of Philip*,” in Jones, *Which Mary?*, 88, n. 47, cites *Questions of Bartholomew* 2.8 as another example.

³⁷ Cyril (ca. 313–386 CE) was an early Christian theologian. A group of homilies are attributed to him that several scholars conclude were composed well after his lifetime (though they may have roots in earlier traditions), so that their author is referred to as Pseudo-Cyril. See Roelof Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem, On the Life and the Passion of Christ: A Coptic Apocryphon*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 188 (Leiden: Brill, 2013)

Mary Magdalene, referencing in footnotes other sermons in this group that similarly describe Magdalene. I then address unique portrayals of Magdalene in the other sermons and an additional text, *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, especially in terms of how they link her with Mary of Nazareth.

An Encomium on Mary Magdalene describes Magdalene's life from childhood through the post-resurrection period.³⁸ It thereby paints a fuller picture of her life than do the New Testament or other early extra-canonical texts. According to the *Encomium*, Magdalene was orphaned as a child and entrusted to Theophilus as her guardian (*An Encomium on Mary Magdalene* 3.8–17). She is closely related to Mary, the mother of Jesus—both biologically as her aunt (3.17–19), and in the events of Jesus's death and resurrection. One striking echo of church tradition about Mary of Nazareth in the text's presentation of Magdalene is that she too is described as a life-long virgin (1.2; 2.7). She is also a “chaste noblewoman” (2.11), which is significant because Magdalene's noble upbringing becomes a stable feature of her medieval hagiographies. Also similar to such hagiographies is the *Encomium's* description of Magdalene

for a thorough treatment and translation of one of these homilies, *On the Life and the Passion of Christ*, as well as a summary of seven other homilies. Since these homilies arguably were composed between the fifth and eighth centuries, it seems certain that Pseudo-Cyril does not refer to any one person, making authorship of these texts ultimately anonymous. E.g., Christine Luckritz Marquis, cited in the following note, suggests a date for the *Encomium on Mary Magdalene* as the mid-fifth to early sixth century, while Roelof Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem*, 70 suggests an eighth-century composition date for *On the Life and the Passion of Christ*. Unless otherwise noted, Pseudo-Cyril homilies other than the *Encomium on Mary Magdalene* follow the titles and numbering listed in Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril of Jerusalem*. I also rely on his descriptions of the contents of many of these texts, since they are not all available in English translation.

³⁸ For an introduction and translation of this text, see Christine Luckritz Marquis, “An Encomium on Mary Magdalene,” in *New Testament Apocrypha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. Tony Burke and Brent Landau, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 197–216. All citations of *An Encomium on Mary Magdalene* are from this translation (Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril* 105, calls this text *On the Life and the Passion of Christ*; CPC 0118). Although this text is attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem, Marquis asserts that it is more likely written by Pseudo-Cyril, in part because she dates it to the mid-fifth to early sixth century (Marquis, 198–200). She also notes that this text rarely resembles a typical homily, and can instead be considered as a pseudepigraphic memoir attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem (Marquis, 201).

as a noble saint (1.1). Alongside these descriptions is mention that seven unclean spirits had been in her, without assigning particular significance to this occurrence (1.2).

In contrast to the New Testament Gospels, this text's empty tomb and resurrection account has both Jesus's mother and Magdalene as main characters.³⁹ While it does not entirely conflate the two women, it does ascribe some aspects of Magdalene's role in the John 20:11–18 encounter with the risen Jesus to his mother instead, thus blurring the two Marys to some extent. Such blurring, or transferring aspects of Magdalene's role in the New Testament to Mary of Nazareth, is common in the Pseudo-Cyril sermons. For instance, in the *Encomium* it is Jesus's mother rather than Magdalene who thinks him to be the gardener (cf. John 20:15), being unconvinced by Peter and John's testimony to her that Jesus had been raised (*Encom. Mary* 11.14–15, 21–22).⁴⁰ The risen Jesus then calls Magdalene by name, and she believes it is him (11.24–25; cf. John 20:16).⁴¹ Subsequently, Jesus's mother tries to touch him and hears the words “don't touch me” from her son (*Encom. Mary* 11.28–29), rather than Magdalene, as in John 20:17. His reason is that his mother has disobeyed him by dwelling amidst the Jews, which polluted her (11.31–33). Although Jesus then commissions her to tell the other disciples about his resurrection (11.34), it is Magdalene who actually carries out this task (11.37). Thus, Magdalene is portrayed more positively in this scene than his mother Mary, as faithful to Jesus and quicker to believe his resurrection.

³⁹ Cf. other Coptic texts where both Mary Magdalene and Mary of Nazareth are present at Jesus's tomb when it is discovered that Jesus has risen from the dead: *On the Passion and Resurrection* (CPC 0116), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 78; *On the Resurrection* (CPC 0117), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 80; *On the Resurrection and the Passion* (CPC 0114), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 85; *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 187–188.

⁴⁰ Cf. *On the Passion and Resurrection* (CPC 0116), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 78; *On the Resurrection and the Passion* (CPC 0114), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 85, where Jesus's mother is also the one to mistake Jesus for the gardener, instead of Magdalene.

⁴¹ Cf. *On the Resurrection and the Passion* (CPC 0114), Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril* 86, where Mary, Jesus's mother, is the one he calls by name instead of Magdalene.

Magdalene is also an authoritative figure in the *Encomium*, as in earlier texts. Here too she receives special, direct teaching from Jesus of hidden mysteries because he loves her (2.7–8; 13.13). Unique to this text, however, is that Jesus also reveals these mysteries to his mother, and that Jesus loves and joins himself to Magdalene because she is a virgin (2.7–8). Magdalene also receives direct revelation of Scripture’s meaning from the angel Gabriel when she petitions him on behalf of Theophilus (14.1–9), showing her both as an intermediary between heavenly and human realms and as having spiritual authority. Indeed, Gabriel tells her that the Savior commanded him to fulfill all her requests (14.7). Such authority also manifests in the wonders that God works through Magdalene (1.4). And when someone tries to steal her animals, she writes a complaint letter to emperor Tiberius, who responds by stating that anyone who resists her in anything will be beheaded (7.1–10). It is also Magdalene who sends Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea to Pilate to ask for Jesus’s body, despite their insistence that she do it herself, since she has the backing of the emperor (10.1–8). And when Jesus’s mother is on her deathbed, she appoints Magdalene to take her place among the apostles, commanding them to “listen to her as [if] she is me” (12.1–4).⁴²

While other Coptic apocryphal texts display Magdalene and Jesus’s mother in ways similar to the *Encomium*, a few unique portrayals in these texts are worth pointing out. One is a significant blurring of the identity of Jesus’s mother in *Discourse on Mary Theotokos*, also attributed to Cyril of Jerusalem.⁴³ When describing her family background, the Virgin Mary identifies herself as Mary Magdalene, because she was born in the village of Magdalia, and as

⁴² Quotation is from Marquis, “An Encomium on Mary Magdalene,” in Burke and Landau, *New Testament Apocrypha*, 209.

⁴³ This is also considered part of the Pseudo-Cyril homilies, and Van den Broek, *Pseudo-Cyril*, 93 calls it *On the Virgin Mary (CPC 0119)*. He suggests a date of composition in the sixth century (Van den Broek, 97). All citations of this text are to the edition and translation in E. A. Wallis Budge, *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt, Part 2: Translations* (London: British Museum, 1915), 626–651.

Mary of Clopas and Mary of James.⁴⁴ Despite this apparent composite identification of several New Testament Marys, the text later clearly distinguishes Jesus's mother from Magdalene, since the mother entrusts a group of virgins to Magdalene before her death.⁴⁵

Also, in contrast to the *Encomium*, several texts designate Mary of Nazareth as the first to witness the risen Jesus, and/or to announce his resurrection to others, rather than Magdalene. For instance, *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, attributed to the apostle Bartholomew, extols the Virgin Mary as the first among women, since she both gave birth to Christ and was the first to witness him after his resurrection.⁴⁶ On one hand, assigning the role of first witness and proclaimer of the resurrection to the Virgin Mary is consistent with the tendency throughout church history to elevate the status of the mother of Christ. On the other hand, it strips Magdalene of some of her most prominent New Testament roles. Traditions of the Virgin Mary as the first, or as among the first, to witness the risen Jesus also find expression in patristic writings, some of which will be discussed below.⁴⁷

Another striking feature of this same text is that it gives a long list of named women who go to Jesus's tomb after his burial.⁴⁸ As in the New Testament accounts, Mary Magdalene is listed first. What is novel here is that the repentant, formerly sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50 is listed among these women, clearly distinct from Magdalene. This ascribes an important role to the repentant woman that is not found in the New Testament, and shows a clear contrast to what

⁴⁴ *Discourse on Mary Theotokos*, 630.

⁴⁵ *Discourse on Mary Theotokos*, 646.

⁴⁶ *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 192.

⁴⁷ For more details, see "Resurrection of Christ, The," in Michael O'Carroll, *Theotokos: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Blessed Virgin Mary* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2000).

⁴⁸ *Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*, 187–188.

will emerge in Europe in roughly the same time period: namely, Gregory the Great's conflation of Mary Magdalene with the woman of Luke 7:36–50.⁴⁹

Patristic Portrayals of Magdalene

The patristic authors, commonly known as the church fathers, include bishops, theologians, apologists, exegetes, and even a pope of what developed into mainstream Christianity.⁵⁰ Writing roughly between the second and seventh centuries CE, they aim to define and defend their understandings of Christianity against those who question its validity as a religion, as well as against so-called heretical texts and beliefs that also expound upon early Christian texts and traditions. Part of the patristic writers' defense against opposition is to show how the four New Testament Gospels, which carried significant authority for the developing church, are compatible with one another, despite apparent discrepancies. Since Magdalene appears in the Gospels in their climactic narratives of Jesus's passion and resurrection, patristic authors often address her to show how differing aspects of her portrayal in each Gospel are in fact harmonious, and therefore that the Gospels' claims about Jesus are trustworthy. Contributing to the complexity of this task is the fact that more than one Mary appears in these Gospel narratives, and each Gospel has different women present with Magdalene at these key events, so that authors are not always sure how to identify them in relation to each other. Patristic writers also wrestle with the question of why the risen Jesus appeared first to Magdalene, a woman, instead of to one of Jesus's twelve closest disciples.

⁴⁹ While dating *The Book of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ* and the traditions that it reflects is difficult, a possible date for the text is between the fifth and seventh centuries. See Felix Scheidweiler and Wilhelm Schneemelcher, "The Gospel of Bartholomew," in *New Testament Apocrypha: Gospels and Related Writings*, 537–557. Gregory the Great writes in the sixth century.

⁵⁰ Of course, there was great diversity within this broad stream of Christianity, as evidenced by the growing divide between Eastern and Western churches that would lead to a formal split in 1054.

While there is theological and exegetical diversity among patristic authors, they do present some shared images of Magdalene, or, at the very least, tend to take up similar interpretive issues arising from her portrayals in the Gospels. Prominent understandings of Magdalene in patristic writings include witness to Jesus's resurrection, apostle-to-the-apostles, a new Eve, and a model repentant sinner.⁵¹ She is also linked with Mary of Nazareth in significant ways, including as a symbol of the church. As in some early extra-canonical texts, Magdalene's gender also plays a role in how patristic authors interpret her and her important role in the Gospel passion and resurrection narratives.

Primary Resurrection Witness

An early Christian portrayal of Magdalene is as one of the *myrrhophores*, or ointment bearers, who go to anoint Jesus's body in the tomb, based on the resurrection accounts in Mark 16:1 and Luke 23:56–24:1. Since the New Testament texts do not describe the actual resurrection of Jesus, and the risen Christ himself only began to be visually portrayed around the tenth century, the ointment bearing women's trip to Jesus's tomb, where they would not find his body, became a common way to represent the resurrection.⁵² It thereby acknowledges the women in one of their prominent New Testament roles as the first to learn of Jesus's resurrection, and in some cases, as the first to witness the risen Jesus himself.

Largely drawing on John 20:1–18, patristic writers interpret Magdalene's role as a witness to the events of Jesus's resurrection in various ways. Generally speaking, they often

⁵¹ Works that deal substantially with understandings of Magdalene in the patristic era include Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels*; Bernabé Ubieta, *María Magdalena*; de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-up*; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*; and Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*.

⁵² See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 61–63. She notes that the number of women who go to the tomb in artistic renderings varies between two and three, as they do in the New Testament Gospels, and that beginning around the fourth century an angel or angels often accompany the women. The role of the *myrrhophores* seems to have been, and still is, especially prominent in the Eastern church, both in texts and imagery.

acknowledge her as the first person to see and worship the risen Christ, having faithfully sought him at the tomb out of great love for him.⁵³ For instance, drawing on John's Gospel, Tertullian contrasts Magdalene's attempt to touch the risen Jesus (John 20:17), motivated by love, with Thomas's, which is motivated by doubt (vv. 24–25, 27–29).⁵⁴

Tatian's *Diatessaron* also explicitly acknowledges Magdalene as the first person to see the risen Jesus and report the resurrection to the apostles, as in John 20.⁵⁵ Subsequently, it has her and other women report this again to the disciples. The text does not merely state that the disciples dismiss the women's report as an idle tale, as in Luke 24:11, but goes even further in stating that their words seemed to them like sayings of madness.⁵⁶ Celsus, the second century Greek philosopher and opponent of Christianity, reportedly gives similar critiques of the women's testimony to Jesus's resurrection. Origen, the Alexandrian Christian theologian and exegete, cites Celsus's attempt to discredit Magdalene's claim to have witnessed the risen Jesus by dismissing her as a "half-frantic woman."⁵⁷

Several patristic writers understand Magdalene's trip to the tomb as her mistakenly searching for the living Jesus among the dead, and as her doubting the resurrection, at least

⁵³ E.g., Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.31.1 (ANF 1:560), cites "Mary" as the first to see and worship the risen Christ, and the one to whom Christ said, "touch me not." While he does not specify that this Mary is the Magdalene, since his descriptions of her allude to New Testament texts that clearly identify Magdalene (i.e., Matt 28:1–9 and John 20:1–18), it seems safe to assume that he refers here to Magdalene. Ambrose, *Exposition on the Christian Faith* 5.4.52 (NPNF 2.10:291), states that Mary worshipped Christ, also seeming to draw on Matthew 28:9.

⁵⁴ Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 25 (ANF 3:621). Tertullian (ca. 155–240 CE) was an early Christian apologist and theologian who wrote prolifically in Latin. Hippolytus also cites Mary's love for Jesus as the reason she clings to him, drawing on Matthew 28:9 (*In Cant.* 25.2). All citations of Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* are from the translation and numbering in Yancy Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing: Hippolytus' Commentary on the Song of Songs in Social and Critical Contexts: Texts, Translations, and Comprehensive Study*, Gorgias Studies in Early Christianity and Patristics 62 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2015), 42–47.

⁵⁵ Tatian, *Diatessaron* 53.25 (ANF 9:125).

⁵⁶ Tatian, *Diatessaron* 53.32–38 (ANF 9:126).

⁵⁷ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 2.55 (ANF 4.453). Origen (ca. 184–254) was a Greek-speaking, Alexandrian Christian biblical exegete, theologian, and apologist who was condemned by the Church in the sixth century for some of his views.

initially. For example, Chrysostom interprets Mary's weeping at Jesus's tomb (John 20:11) as indication that she does not yet understand that Jesus has risen from the dead. He attributes this lowliness of mind in part to her being a woman, who is feeble by nature, and contrasts her negatively with the male disciples, who see the grave clothes in the tomb and immediately believe.⁵⁸ Even so, Chrysostom also portrays Mary more positively in this same homily because of her concern for Jesus and zeal to see where his body laid, which was rewarded with her being the first to see the angels in the tomb, and then the risen Christ.⁵⁹

Ambrose's view of Magdalene's role at the empty tomb is complex, in part because it varies in different texts that address different concerns (a common tendency in patristic writings).⁶⁰ In general, he acknowledges Magdalene as among the women who first discover Jesus's empty tomb and learn of his resurrection, consistent with the New Testament resurrection accounts. Whether or not he considers her as the first witness to the resurrection events, however, is not entirely clear. In *On Virgins (De virginibus)* he states that virgins are the first to see the resurrection of the Lord, before the apostles.⁶¹ Strikingly, his inclusion of Magdalene in this group implies that he considers her to be a virgin. Yet, he only names Mary Magdalene as a witness to the resurrection after another Mary first sees the risen Jesus. This unspecified Mary—arguably Jesus's mother—sees and believes, while Magdalene still has doubts, even though she subsequently also sees the risen Jesus.

The depiction of a doubting Magdalene also appears in Ambrose's commentary on the

⁵⁸ John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 86.1 (NPNF1.14:321). Chrysostom (ca. 349–407 CE) was Archbishop of Constantinople.

⁵⁹ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 86.1 (NPNF1.14:321). Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on 1 Corinthians* 38.8 (NPNF 1.12:229); *Homilies on Matthew* 89 (NPNF 1.10:507–8).

⁶⁰ Ambrose (ca. 340–397 CE) was bishop of Milan.

⁶¹ Ambrose, *On Virgins*, chapter 3. All references to this text are from Ambrose, *On Holy Virginitly with a Brief Account of the Life of St. Ambrose (from whom the tract is derived)*, ed. and trans. A.J. Christie (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1843).

Gospel of Luke, which in actuality draws on the resurrection accounts of all four Gospels.⁶² Here Ambrose acknowledges Magdalene as among the women who first learn of Jesus's resurrection, without designating another Mary as the first to see the risen Jesus. What is striking is that, in an attempt to reconcile the differences between Matthew and John's depictions of Magdalene in their resurrection accounts, Ambrose argues that these Gospels refer to two different women who are each called Mary Magdalene.⁶³ For him, this explains the puzzle of why the Magdalene in Matthew is allowed to hold the Lord's feet, while the risen Jesus himself prohibits the Magdalene in John from touching him. Ambrose interprets the Magdalene in Matthew as quick to believe in the resurrection and announce it to others, full of joy, and the one in John as slow to believe and proclaim, weeping out of doubt-filled grief. Ambrose cites this doubt (both in his Luke commentary and in *On Virgins*) as the reason why the risen Jesus prohibits Magdalene from touching him (John 20:17), explaining that one can only touch Jesus through faith, not through physical contact.⁶⁴ Since John's Magdalene still doubts, she cannot yet touch Jesus, even though she is on the path of spiritual progress.⁶⁵ He clarifies that Jesus is not generally opposed to a woman touching him, since Mary herself had anointed his feet without rebuke.⁶⁶ This seems to reflect an identification of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany (John 12:1–3), although Ambrose does not make this explicit.⁶⁷ He also interprets Jesus initially calling Magdalene

⁶² All references to this text are from Ambrose, *Exposition of the Holy Gospel According to Saint Luke, with Fragments on the Prophecy of Esaias*, trans. Theodosia Tomkinson, 2nd ed. (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 2003).

⁶³ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.153–154. Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels*, 160, cites Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–340) as the first writer to claim there are two different Mary Magdalenes in order to resolve the apparent discrepancies between her depictions in the New Testament Gospels' resurrection accounts.

⁶⁴ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.155, 160, 163; Ambrose, *On Virginity* 4.

⁶⁵ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.162–163.

⁶⁶ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.164.

⁶⁷ It is unclear whether Ambrose may also have the unnamed repentant woman of Luke 7:36–50 who also anoints Jesus's feet in mind here. As noted below, it is Gregory the Great who first makes the identification of Magdalene with this woman explicit.

woman (John 20:15) as a sign that she is still unbelieving, since the “perfect man” who has full faith in Christ (Eph. 4:13) is no longer represented according to physical gender.⁶⁸ In *On Virgins* Ambrose states that this is not a rebuke of her sex, but of her slowness of faith.⁶⁹ Again, in his Luke commentary, he states that John’s Magdalene has yet to lay aside the deceit of the world and the uncertainty of the flesh, as reflected by the fact that she neither grasps Jesus’s feet nor worships him. That the Matthean Magdalene does these things, by contrast, displays the compassion of perfect faith rather than physical obedience, since she believes that Christ is both God and Man.⁷⁰

Jerome similarly explains the John 20:17 prohibition of Magdalene touching the risen Jesus as a response to her failure to recognize his divinity, although he does not propose two different Magdalenes as a solution to the discrepancies between Matthew and John on this point.⁷¹ In another text he more generally explains that the risen Lord appeared first to “some poor women” to show his humility.⁷² He does, however, provide a more positive assessment elsewhere of Magdalene’s privilege of seeing the risen Christ before the apostles, stating, “for we judge of people’s capabilities not by their gender but by their mind.”⁷³

Apostle-to-the-apostles

Related to her patristic depiction as primary resurrection witness is Magdalene’s

⁶⁸ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.161; Ambrose, *On Virginity* 4.

⁶⁹ Ambrose, *On Virginity* 4.

⁷⁰ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.163.

⁷¹ Jerome, *Letter 59: To Marcella* (NPNF 2.6:123). He does, however, suggest that it is the other women who go to the tomb in Matthew, exclusive of Magdalene, who hold his feet, while the doubting Magdalene presented in John is denied this privilege. Jerome (ca. 347–420 CE) was a priest, theologian, and important translator of the Bible into Latin (the Vulgate). Cf. Gregory the Great, *Homily 25*, for a similar understanding of Mary not being able to touch Jesus because she does not believe he is coeternal with the Father. All references to Gregory’s sermons are from Gregory the Great, *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Dom David Hurst, Cistercian Studies Series 123 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1990). The reference to *Sermon 25* cited here is on page 193.

⁷² Jerome, *Letter 12: To Anthony, Monk* (NPNF 2.6:13).

⁷³ Jerome, *Letter 127.5.3: To Principia*, translated by de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 122.

depiction as first to announce the resurrection to Jesus's other disciples. While the formal title *apostolorum apostola*, meaning *apostle to/of the apostles*, is only commonly attached to Magdalene around the twelfth century, portrayals of her in this role appear much earlier.⁷⁴ While many authors praise her as the first person to proclaim Jesus's resurrection, several also seem to temper this positive portrayal. This occurs by explaining that Jesus also appeared directly to the other disciples soon after his appearance to Magdalene, and/or that it was fitting for Magdalene, as a woman, to first proclaim resurrection life because it remedies the death that the first woman brought into the world through her sin.

The earliest portrayal of Magdalene as apostle-to-the-apostles seems to appear in Hippolytus's *Commentary On the Song of Songs* in the late second or early third century.⁷⁵ There is, however, debate about the identity of the prominent figure called Mary in this text, since she is not clearly identified as the Magdalene, and appears together with Martha as the ones who first meet the risen Jesus. Some scholars argue that these women are Mary and Martha of Bethany,

⁷⁴ See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 62–63, where the author states that she found no use of the phrase *apostolorum apostola* before the twelfth century, by which time it was commonly known. Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 38 cites Peter Abelard as the first one to apparently apply this title to Magdalene (which coheres with Jansen's assertion, since Abelard lived in the twelfth century), but suggests that even in the work of Odo of Cluny there may be the foundations for this title. As we will see below, Hippolytus describes Martha and Mary as apostles to the apostles (*In Cant.* 25.6) in the second or third century. The exact phrase he may have used in the original text, however, is unknown, since the most complete extant version of this text is a Georgian translation made by the ninth century. A modern Latin translation, made from the Georgian text, renders this title as *apostoli ad apostolos*, according to J. A. Cerrato, "Mary and Martha in the Commentaries of Hippolytus," in *Studia Patristica* 34, ed. M. F. Wiles and E. J. Yarnold (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 294–297 (p. 294 cited here). As Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 62 notes, this modern translation does not provide solid evidence for the title *apostolorum apostola* being clearly used of Magdalene in the early church. Hippolytus's description of the women in this role using similar terminology does, however, pave the way for such later ascriptions. For the date of the Georgian translation and other information on the texts and translation of Hippolytus's commentary *On the Song of Songs*, see Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing*, 42–47. For the Latin translation see *Traité d'Hippolyte sur David et Goliath, sur le Cantique des cantiques et sur l'Antéchrist version Géorgienne*, ed. Gérard Garitte, CSCO 264, Scriptorum Iberici, 16 (Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, 1965), 23–53 (p. 47).

⁷⁵ Hippolytus (ca. 170–235 CE) was an influential theologian in Rome. Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing*, 83 suggests Hippolytus's *Commentary On the Song of Songs* likely originated in the early third century. Cerrato, "Mary and Martha in the Commentaries of Hippolytus," 294 argues that it may have been written in the late second or early third century.

sisters of Lazarus, and that Mary Magdalene is not in view here.⁷⁶ Others interpret Hippolytus's text as reflecting an early conflation of Mary Magdalene and Mary of Bethany, which becomes widespread in the Middle Ages, or, simply assume that Magdalene is the referent of the Mary character.⁷⁷ While engaging this debate is beyond the scope of this project, it is worth noting that this may be another instance of the general tendency, already seen in extra-canonical texts, to either blur Magdalene's identity with that of another woman, and/or, to assign aspects of Magdalene's New Testament portrayals to another female figure—in this case, Mary of Bethany. Since several New Testament texts that clearly speak of Magdalene are applied to the Mary figure in Hippolytus's *Commentary On the Song of Songs*, and since later interpreters understand his work as an interpretation of Magdalene, I include his text here as one that can reasonably be understood as an interpretation of the New Testament images of Magdalene at some level.⁷⁸

The commentary draws on Song 3:1–4 to portray Martha and Mary as the Song's lovesick bride who seeks her beloved, Jesus, at the tomb. In doing so, the women symbolize the synagogue that does not initially believe in Jesus's resurrection, but will come to do so upon

⁷⁶ E.g., Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing*, 97–101, 130, especially n. 15 on pp. 100–101; J. A. Cerrato, *Hippolytus Between East and West: The Commentaries and the Provenance of the Corpus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 173–183. One of the texts addressed above, *Book of the Resurrection of Christ*, 187–188, does list Mary and Martha of Bethany among the women who go to Jesus's tomb, and the scholars cited here give other such examples within Christian tradition.

⁷⁷ E.g., Cerrato, "Mary and Martha in the Commentaries of Hippolytus," 295–296 describes the view that these Marys have been conflated, although he does not defend it; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 63 assumes that for Hippolytus, the dual figure of Martha and Mary was Mary Magdalene; de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 107 sees Martha and Mary together functioning as the Mary Magdalene of John's Gospel, further noting that it seems that Hippolytus portrays Magdalene and Mary, Martha's sister, as the same person.

⁷⁸ E.g., the description in *In Cant.* 24.3 of Martha and Mary going to Jesus's tomb draws on the New Testament Gospels' empty tomb accounts, which state that women, including Magdalene, go to the tomb; *In Cant.* 24.4 has the angel at the tomb asking the women who they are seeking and telling them that Jesus is risen (cf. Mark 16:6; Matt 28:5–6; Luke 5); *In Cant.* 25.2 has the risen Jesus addressing the women by name, and them responding with "Rabbuni," reminiscent of John 20:16; this same section then has Jesus tell them "do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my father," in conformity with John 20:17. It is possible that early traditions have Mary and Martha as witnesses to the empty tomb (so Cerrato, "Mary and Martha in the Commentaries of Hippolytus"), and that these are reflected in *On the Song of Songs*. Even if this were the case, there is enough resonance between this text's portrayal of Mary and Martha and the New Testament's depiction of Magdalene to consider it an interpretation of the latter on some level.

finding the risen Christ.⁷⁹ As in Matthew 28:9, the women cling to the risen Jesus's feet.⁸⁰ In this text, however, they refuse to let go of Jesus (drawing on Song 1:4), insisting on entering into spiritual union with him and ascending with him.⁸¹ Martha reinforces this request by speaking of her and Mary as a new sacrifice, a new Eve who will no longer wander astray or be filled with deception.⁸² Instead of taking them to heaven with him, Jesus makes the women "apostles to the apostles," commissioned to announce the resurrection to the apostles.⁸³ By carrying out this task in obedience to Christ, they reverse the disobedience and seduction of old Eve. It is indeed for this reason that the women have been entrusted with this task—so that as a New, obedient Eve, they might properly serve as a helper to "Adam" in bringing the apostles the resurrection proclamation, and from there on out be in unity with, and be led by, Adam.⁸⁴ While the author draws on biblical and cultural notions of female submission to male headship to illustrate this, the use of Martha and Mary as symbol of the synagogue suggests that the main point of this imagery is to indicate that the believing synagogue now submits to Christ, the new Adam, as well as to the believing male apostles, rather than intending to prescribe proper roles for males and females in the church.⁸⁵ Since the disciples do not immediately believe the women (because old Eve reported deception), the risen Jesus appears to them himself.⁸⁶ The conclusion to the account of the women's trip to the tomb specifies that their apostolic function represents the synagogue gaining peace and the church being glorified.⁸⁷

By contrast, Ambrose does seem to portray Magdalene in her role as first proclaimer of

⁷⁹ *In Cant.* 24.2, 25:6–25:10. See Smith, *The Mystery of Anointing*, 98 for the women representing the converted synagogue.

⁸⁰ *In Cant.* 25.2.

⁸¹ *In Cant.* 25.2–4.

⁸² *In Cant.* 25.3–4.

⁸³ *In Cant.* 25:6.

⁸⁴ *In Cant.* 25.7–8.

⁸⁵ Here I draw on Smith's interpretation in *The Mystery of Anointing*, 97–132.

⁸⁶ *In Cant.* 25.6, 9.

⁸⁷ *In Cant.* 25:10.

the resurrection largely as representative of *woman* in general, and as compensating for the first Eve's betrayal. In one treatise he cites Mary's worship of the risen Jesus as the reason she was appointed as messenger of the resurrection to the apostles, but further explains that it is fitting for a woman to first bring the message of grace to humanity, since woman first brought it the message of death.⁸⁸ In doing so, Mary looses the "hereditary bond" and the huge offense of womankind.⁸⁹ As becomes common in ecclesiastical interpretation, Ambrose applies Romans 5:20 to his explanation of Mary's evangelistic role: "that where sin had exceedingly abounded, grace might more exceedingly abound."⁹⁰ This emphasizes Mary as representative of *woman*, who inherited the sin of the first woman. It also reflects a theme that becomes common in Christian interpretation of the fittingness of the first resurrection witness and proclaimer being a sinner, since it exemplifies the message of grace inherent in the resurrection proclamation. While Mary's personal sins are not in view here, Gregory the Great's clear identification of her and the repentant woman of Luke 7 will provide a specific sinful past for the Magdalene figure.

In his Luke commentary, Ambrose explains Jesus sending the slow-to-believe Magdalene to proclaim the resurrection to the apostles as being for the purpose of them, who are stronger, teaching her to believe.⁹¹ Here too he explains her proclamation as recompense for Eve having imparted sin to man, and further states that the full reversal of Eve's deceptive speech comes with men reclaiming their rightful gift of preaching the gospel.⁹² So, Magdalene/woman's role as resurrection proclaimer is only provisional because of her gender. Ambrose affirms this by

⁸⁸ Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.11.74 (NPNF 2.145).

⁸⁹ Augustine, *Sermon 232.2* (translated by de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 110–111), makes a very similar argument: Christ in his benevolence appointed the female sex as the first to proclaim that he was risen so that this sex could make up for its being the cause of the Fall. He also notes the contrast between Adam believing Eve, a lying woman, while the disciples did not believe the women in Luke's gospel who truthfully proclaimed the resurrection.

⁹⁰ Ambrose, *On the Holy Spirit* 3.11.74 (NPNF 2.145). Cf. Jerome, *Letter 59.4, To Marcella*, as translated in De Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 101.

⁹¹ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.155.

⁹² Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.156–157.

stating that women are less steadfast than men in preaching and weaker in performance, and by quoting the 1 Timothy 2:12 prohibition on women teaching.⁹³

Chrysostom likewise acknowledges that Magdalene reported Jesus's appearance and words to her at the tomb to the other disciples, in conformity with John 20:18. Yet, he further states that the risen Jesus also appeared to these disciples the same day, since it was likely that they either would not believe the woman (i.e., Magdalene) or would grieve that they had not been deemed worthy of the vision she had of him.⁹⁴

Gregory of Antioch describes Magdalene and the other *myrrhophores* in a more positive manner in his *Sermon on the Bearers of Ointment*. The risen Jesus himself calls them brave and believing. After the women meet him at the tomb, he commissions them to tell the disciples that they will see him in Galilee and to communicate the mysteries they have seen.⁹⁵ Gregory even has Jesus command the women to be the first teachers of those who will become teachers (i.e., the other disciples) with the words, "Let Peter, who has denied me, learn that I can also ordain women to be apostles."⁹⁶

A New Eve/Anti-type to Eve

As seen above, portrayals of Mary's apostleship often incorporate another patristic image of her as a new Eve, or as an anti-type to Eve. This displays a symmetry in the patristic authors'

⁹³ Ambrose, *Expositio evangelii secundum Lucam* 10.157, 165. In the latter section Ambrose also cites 1 Corinthians 14:35, which states that since it is shameful for a woman to speak in church, they should ask their husbands anything they want to know at home.

⁹⁴ Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 86.2 (NPNF1.14:322).

⁹⁵ Gregory of Antioch, *Sermon on the Bearers of Ointment*, section 11. All citations of this text are from de Boer's translation, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 157–169. Here Gregory also draws Eve into his discussion of the resurrection, but he does not specifically compare Magdalene with her as Ambrose and Augustine do. Rather, he portrays a reversal of both Eve and Adam's condemnation as part of the resurrection's general overturning of death and evil (see de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 167). Gregory of Antioch (d. 593 CE) was Patriarch of Antioch.

⁹⁶ Gregory of Antioch, *Sermon on the Bearers of Ointment*, section 11.

understandings of salvation history: a woman was responsible for bringing sin and death into the world, so it is only fitting that a woman be the first to announce Jesus's resurrection, since it undoes this sin and death. In this view, Magdalene often functions as a representative of the female sex. To what extent this is a positive or negative representation of her is debatable.

On the positive side, it highlights Magdalene's obedience to her commission to proclaim Jesus's resurrection and acknowledges her role as among the first to do so, cohering with John 20:18 and Luke 24:9. It also facilitates a portrayal of Magdalene as intimate companion to Jesus, the new Adam. This is evident in Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in which Mary/Martha as a new Eve does not want to let go of the risen Christ, the new Adam, and so asks that her heart be united with his heavenly body.⁹⁷ It also recalls the *Gospel of Philip's* portrayal of Magdalene as a close spiritual companion to Jesus.

On a less positive note, emphasizing that Magdalene's proclamation makes up for Eve's transgression functions in part as an apology for why a woman would be allowed the privilege of being the first witness and proclaimer of Jesus's resurrection, rather than one of his twelve closest male disciples, thereby diminishing the significance of Magdalene's role. In this regard it is Magdalene's gender, rather than her faithfulness to Jesus, that qualifies her to be the first to proclaim the resurrection.⁹⁸ It also implies that females as a corporate entity bear the burden of one woman's sin (especially in the interpretation of Ambrose), and therefore, that a woman was responsible to make up for this transgression.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Hippolytus, *Commentary On the Song of Songs* 25.4.

⁹⁸ Cf. Gregory the Great, *Sermon 25* on John 20:1–18, for another portrayal of Magdalene making up for Eve's death-producing act by giving men life. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of St. John* 86 (NPNF 1.14:321–323), also gives a variation on this theme, stating that the risen Jesus specifically gives the women he encounters joy because their sex had been in sorrow as a result of the first curse.

⁹⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 32, suggests that Magdalene as anti-type to Eve portrays her as having been sullied by Eve's sin. Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels*, repeatedly argues that the Eve-Magdalene comparison should not be taken as evidence that patristic authors were conflating Magdalene

Links with Mary of Nazareth

Magdalene being contrasted with Eve is a feature of patristic interpretation that she shares with Mary of Nazareth. Like Magdalene, Mary, the mother of Jesus, is often commended for her obedience to her divine calling, which in some way makes up for the failure and disobedience of the first woman, Eve.¹⁰⁰ While the Eve-Mary of Nazareth analogies take various forms, a common expression of it is that Mary's belief of the angel Gabriel's announcement that she will conceive Jesus by the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:26–38) is a positive contrast to Eve believing the serpent's words (Gen 3:1–7). The result of Eve's belief, according to patristic authors, was sin and death entering humanity, while the result of Mary's was bearing the Savior who would reverse this destruction.¹⁰¹ Although employed in somewhat different ways, Eve-Mary of Nazareth and Eve-Magdalene patristic analogies both portray the Marys as representative of all women at times, which enables their faithful acts to make up for the failures of the first woman.

In fact, Augustine depicts both Marys acting together as a new Eve. When explaining the appropriateness of the female sex being the first to proclaim the resurrection because the first woman deceived man, he more generally states that since man fell through the female sex, man has also been restored through the female sex: a virgin (i.e., his mother) brought forth Christ,

with the sinful woman of Luke 7, since Magdalene's personal sin is usually not implied, but rather Eve's or humanity's sin as a whole; e.g., 167, 170.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 (ANF 1:249); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4 (ANF 1:455); Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17 (ANF 3:536); Augustine, *A Treatise on the Merits of Forgiveness of Sins, and on the Baptism of Infants* 56 (NPNF 1.5:37) For Ephrem the Syrian's depictions of this theme, see Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 144–150.

¹⁰¹ This contrast is heightened by describing both women as virgins (many patristic authors consider pre-sin Eve to be a virgin): while the first virgin disobeyed God and brought destruction, the virgin Mary's obedience brought life. E.g., Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 100 (ANF 1:249); Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4 (ANF 1:455); Tertullian, *On the Flesh of Christ* 17 (ANF 3:536); John Chrysostom, *Commentary on Psalm 44.7*, cited in Gambero, *Mary and the Fathers of the Church*, 179.

while a woman proclaimed his resurrection.¹⁰²

In several homilies Peter Chrysologus conflates these two Marys, portraying them as representative of *woman* and, in some places, as antitype to Eve. For instance, in a resurrection sermon, the fifth century bishop of Ravenna interprets the “other Mary” of Matthew 28:1 who goes with Magdalene to Jesus’s tomb as Mary, Jesus’s mother.¹⁰³ Although he explicitly names both women at first, they quickly merge into one figure, a “woman,” who, by believing in Jesus’s resurrection counteracts the first woman’s sin. In another resurrection sermon he makes it clear that such uses of the Mary-Eve typology are not primarily to praise women’s role as first to witness and proclaim Christ’s resurrection, but rather to explain that “woman,” as hell’s entryway and the source of evil, sin, and death, brought the message of faith in order to compensate for the first woman’s faithlessness.¹⁰⁴

Chrysologus’s general assessment of women as inferior to men reinforces this understanding and leads to additional explanations of how women were allowed to be the first witnesses and proclaimers of Jesus’s resurrection. For example, in *Sermon 75* Chrysologus calls the blurred Mary of Nazareth/Mary Magdalene figure a “type” of the church, and explains that “Mary,” the name of Christ’s mother, is doubled in two women to prefigure that the church would be comprised of two peoples: Gentiles and Jews. He makes it clear that it is only as type

¹⁰² Augustine, *Sermon 232.2* (translated by de Boer, *The Mary Magdalene Cover-Up*, 111).

¹⁰³ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 74*, as translated by George E. Ganss, S.J., *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons, Vol. 1* and *Saint Valerian, Homilies*, FC 17 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1953), 123–127. Peter Chrysologus (ca. 380–450) was bishop of Ravenna from roughly 433 until his death, and was known for his concise, theologically rich homilies.

¹⁰⁴ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 79.2*, as translated by William B. Palardy, *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons, Vol. 3*, FC 110 (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 36. Here no woman is explicitly named in this contrast, but since it is a homily on Luke 24:1 we can infer that the women compensating for Eve’s sin includes Magdalene. Although Chrysologus, therefore, does not explicitly conflate Magdalene with Jesus’s mother here, this employment of the Eve-women-at-resurrection contrast is still relevant to interpreting his use of the conflated Mary figure as antitype to Eve in *Sermon 74*, since his overall point is that this figure functions as symbolic of *woman*, which is what makes her apt to compensate for Eve’s sin. Chrysologus also portrays *woman* as a new Eve counterbalancing old Eve in *Sermons* 63.3, 64.2, 65.4, 77.4–5, 80.3–4, 99.5, and 149.9.

of the church that the Marys go before men to Jesus's tomb, since women as a sex come after men and rank after the [male] disciples.¹⁰⁵ *Sermon 76* affirms that the angel at Jesus's tomb only sends the conflated Marys to announce the resurrection insofar as they represent the bride of Christ, the church.¹⁰⁶ And *Sermon 82* explains the discrepancy between the women who witness Jesus's empty tomb staying silent in Mark 16:8a and Mary Magdalene announcing the resurrection in Mark 16:10 as the former showing women in their role as women, which requires them to always be silent, while the latter shows Magdalene functioning as the church, not as a woman.¹⁰⁷

So, in merging Mary Magdalene with Mary of Nazareth, Chrysologus creates a *type* of woman who compensates for Eve's sin by her faithful actions in response to Jesus's resurrection. This type also functions as a representative of the church and bride of Christ, which is the only way in which the conflated Marys, or any of the women in the Gospel resurrection accounts, can be the first witnesses and proclaimers of Jesus's resurrection. This reflects Chrysologus's view that women having this privilege over men would be problematic, since the female sex ranks behind the male sex.

Blurring Mary of Nazareth with Mary Magdalene also occurs in Syriac texts, including those of Ephrem. For instance, a homily for Holy Week attributed to Ephrem addresses why

¹⁰⁵ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 75.3*, as translated by William B. Palardy, *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons, Vol. 3*, 16. Cf. *Sermon 79.3*, where Chrysologus appeals to a mystical order to explain that the [male] apostles do not rank behind women because the latter are the first to proclaim the resurrection. Instead, the apostles are kept for greater things. Cf. *Sermon 80.1*, in Ganss, *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Vol. 1*, 128, where Chrysologus takes up the issue of whether males were disgraced by "weak woman" being the first to witness the risen Jesus. His response is negative, explaining that it is a symbolic mystery by which "the male sex was already represented in Christ when the angel came to the women, in order that man might precede woman in honor as much as the Lord precedes the angel."

¹⁰⁶ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 76.2*, as translated by William B. Palardy, *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons, Vol. 3*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ Peter Chrysologus, *Sermon 82.6*, as translated by William B. Palardy, *Saint Peter Chrysologus, Selected Sermons, Vol. 3*, 47.

Mary Magdalene, a woman, was the first to see the risen Jesus instead of a man.¹⁰⁸ The answer is that it is a mystery involving Jesus's church and mother: a virgin (i.e., Mary of Nazareth) first received Christ on earth by conception, and Mary (i.e., Magdalene) was the first to receive him alive out of the grave. So, these Marys are initially linked in terms of their key functions in relation to Jesus, but subsequently are merged into one Mary figure that represents the church. While this is another instance of these blurred Marys representing the church, they do not appear in this text as antitype to Eve, responsible to compensate for the first woman's sin, as they do in Chrysologus's writings. Robert Murray suggests that the author of this homily fuses the Marys because of their shared name, and considers the Virgin as type of the church in that she is the mother of Christ's members, while Magdalene is a type of the church as Christ's spouse and proclaimer of the gospel.¹⁰⁹

After assessing a range of Syriac texts that link these Marys, Murray posits three categories of traditions that do so in different ways: one understands the Mary of John 20:11–17 as Christ's mother (e.g., Ephrem's *Diatessaron* commentary); an Antiochene tradition (e.g., Chrysostom, *Didascalia*) understands the "other Mary" of Matthew 28:1 to be Jesus's mother, but does not make her the Mary of John 20:11–17; and a third tradition (e.g., Ephrem's *HArm.* 5) combines Jesus's mother and Magdalene by referring to their respective functions as mother and resurrection witness at the same time (as seen in the example above).¹¹⁰ He argues that the eventual sharing of the name Mary to refer both to Jesus's mother and the Magdalene was an innocent development in Syriac tradition, which functions to symbolically portray this figure as

¹⁰⁸ See Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 147–148 for a portion of this text in English translation that I draw on here.

¹⁰⁹ Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 148.

¹¹⁰ Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 333–334.

the church.¹¹¹

Penitent Sinner

A final patristic portrayal of Magdalene that I will discuss is that of model penitent sinner. It is first clearly expressed by Pope Gregory I (ca. 540–604 CE), better known as Gregory the Great, in the late sixth century. While Gregory is counted among the church fathers, he lived in the transitional period between late antiquity and the Middle Ages, making the context and purpose of his writings somewhat distinct from that of earlier patristic writers. Like these authors, Gregory also expounds on Scripture in a context where both Christians and non-Christians are present.¹¹² Yet, with the significant disintegration of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, Gregory helped stabilize Western Europe by combining political power with the papacy, paving the way for the unity of church and state that would structure medieval Europe. Consequently, Gregory draws on Scripture to shape moral Christian lives rather than primarily for apologetic purposes. Regarding Magdalene, this means that Gregory is not as constrained to explain the discrepancies among her portrayals in the New Testament Gospels in order to preserve their harmony and historical reliability. She can function instead for him largely as a symbol of God's great mercy for even the worst of sinners, thereby calling people to repentance and comforting anxious Christians about their salvation.

The main means by which Gregory constructs an image of Magdalene as a penitent sinner is by identifying her with the woman in Luke 7:36–50 who had been a sinner in the city but then repents, as evidenced by her seeking Jesus at a Pharisees' house where she weeps at Jesus's feet, washing them with her tears, drying them with her hair, kissing them, and anointing

¹¹¹ Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom*, 335.

¹¹² In fact, Gregory launched significant missionary efforts to convert England to Christianity.

them.¹¹³ Upon seeing this, Simon the Pharisee says to himself that if Jesus were a prophet, he would know what kind of woman it is who is touching him. He thereby implies that her act is not positive and that Jesus should not allow it. In response, Jesus explains through a parable that the more one has been forgiven, the more one loves, which is what this woman's lavish treatment of Jesus reflects. Jesus also tells Simon that he has failed to show him the proper marks of hospitality—he gave him no water for his feet, no kiss, and did not anoint him—all actions that, by contrast, the repentant woman did for Jesus.

Gregory does not give a detailed explanation of how he arrives at the conflation of this woman and Magdalene, which is prominent in two sermons and a short letter.¹¹⁴ In his sermon on Luke 7:36–50 he merely states that the repentant woman of Luke 7 is the same as the woman John calls Mary. It seems that he refers here to Mary of Bethany, since she also anoints Jesus's feet and wipes them with her hair in John 12:1–8. That Gregory understands this Mary to be the same woman as Mary Magdalene is clear from his subsequent reference to her having had seven demons, as Mark attests (it seems he refers to 16:9, which specifically names Mary Magdalene).¹¹⁵ Gregory thereby presents a conflation of Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the repentant woman of Luke 7. In his Easter sermon on John 20:11–18 Gregory likewise assumes this conflation, opening it with reference to “Mary Magdalene, *who had been a sinner*

¹¹³ Gregory the Great, *Sermon 33* on Luke 7:36–50 (pages 268–279 in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst), and *Sermon 25* on John 20:11–18 (pages 187–199 in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst).

¹¹⁴ Gregory the Great, *Sermon 33* on Luke 7:36–50 (pages 268–279 in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst); *Sermon 25* on John 20:11–18 (pages 187–199 in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst); Gregory the Great, *Selected Epistles 7.25: To Gregoria* (NPNF 2.12:219b).

¹¹⁵ It is striking that Gregory cites Mark 16:9 rather than Luke 8:2 as the text that describes seven demons being cast out of Magdalene; since this is a sermon on Luke 7:36–50, it seems that Gregory could have drawn support for his conflation of the woman in this text with Magdalene based on the fact that Luke 8:2—immediately following the story he addresses—introduces Magdalene as one who had seven demons cast out of her. However, the text of Luke suggests that a different woman is introduced in 8:1–3. E.g., in 8:1 Jesus is no longer in Simon's house, but is instead traveling with the Twelve and some women. If Mary Magdalene—first named in Luke 8:2 among these women—were the same woman Jesus just encountered in 7:36–50, one would expect the text to indicate this somehow. Instead, her introduction reads as though a new character is being introduced into the narrative. Cf. Hippolytus above for an earlier patristic author who may conflate Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany.

in the city,” which clearly alludes to Luke 7:37.¹¹⁶ Later in this sermon he also implicitly identifies the conflated Magdalene/Luke 7 woman with Mary of Bethany, as she is known from Luke 10:38–42, by stating that she sat at Jesus’s feet and heard his Word.¹¹⁷ This conflation paves the way for an additional medieval portrayal of Magdalene as a contemplative. Overall, Gregory’s identification of Magdalene with Luke’s repentant sinner intensifies her function as a model of true penitence for others who have sinned.

Excursus: The Making of Gregory’s Conflated Magdalene

While no clear identification of Mary Magdalene and the repentant woman of Luke 7:36–50 appears before Gregory’s writings, its roots can be found in the New Testament Gospels and in earlier Christian authors’ attempts to sort out the identity of the various women in these texts who anoint Jesus during his life (Matt 26:6–13; Mark 14:3–9; John 11:2; 12:1–8; Luke 7:36–59). In light of both the similarities and differences between these anointing stories, and out of concern to show Gospel harmony, interpreters wrestled with whether each account refers to the same event carried out by the same woman, different events carried out by the same woman, or different events carried out by different women, and in any case, who the anointing woman/women might be.¹¹⁸ No consensus was reached in patristic writings, or even within the

¹¹⁶ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 187 (emphasis in the translation, indicating that it draws on a biblical text).

¹¹⁷ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst 198.

¹¹⁸ Matthew and Mark’s anointing accounts are quite similar: both present an unnamed woman anointing Jesus’s head while in the house of Simon the leper in Bethany. This act is interpreted as preparation for his burial. The anointing in John also takes place in Bethany, but rather than being in Simon’s home, it takes place at the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. And here Mary is explicitly named as the one who anoints not Jesus’s head, but his feet, with perfume saved for the day of his burial. Luke’s story is the most distinct, since it alone casts the anointing woman as a former sinner who ministers to Jesus out of love for him because he forgave her, rather than in preparation for his burial. Nonetheless, it is similar to John’s account in that the unnamed woman anoints Jesus’s feet, and like Matthew and Mark’s account, the event takes place in Simon’s house (although he is not called a leper in Luke). For a good description of how Luke’s account of the anointing relates to the others, see Johnson, *The Gospel of Luke*, 128–129.

various works of one particular author.¹¹⁹ There are some instances of the women in two or more of the anointing accounts being identified with one another, including Mary of Bethany being identified with the unnamed women who anoints Jesus in Luke 7.¹²⁰ Since both women anoint Jesus's feet, while the women in Mark and Matthew anoint Jesus's head, one can see why this identification would be made.

And, as noted above, there are instances prior to Gregory of apparently identifying Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany. In light of this precedent, and given the general confusion in the early church over the identity of the various Marys in the Gospels, it is not completely surprising that Gregory also makes this connection.¹²¹

Besides Magdalene's identification with Mary of Bethany, who had been linked at times with the repentant woman of Luke 7, there are a few other possible reasons why Gregory identifies Magdalene with the repentant Luke 7 woman. One is Magdalene's role in the New Testament and early church as one of the *myrrhophores* who goes to anoint Jesus's body at his

¹¹⁹ Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels*, 147–185 deals in depth with this question of how and when Magdalene became conflated with the Luke 7 woman. He argues that it is not as early or as common as is often asserted, and does not find unambiguous evidence of it in patristic texts before Gregory the Great. In his analysis he provides much evidence from silence against this conflation—i.e., patristic texts that discuss the woman in Luke 7 without identifying her with Magdalene, and visa versa. He also assesses the various way authors identify (or confuse) the women who anoint Jesus in the Gospels. Cf. Urban Holzmeister, “Die Magdalenenfrage in der kirchlichen Überlieferung.”

¹²⁰ E.g., Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 62.1 (NPNF 1.14:227) distinguishes Mary of Bethany from the anointing women in Matthew and Luke. Augustine, *Harmony of the Gospels* 2.79.154 (NPNF 1.6:172–172) asserts that the same woman named Mary (supposedly, Mary of Bethany) anointed Jesus on two separate occasions: once in Bethany, as Matthew, Mark, and John report, and another as reported in Luke, which does not locate Simon's house in Bethany. In doing so, he identifies the repentant sinner of Luke 7 with Mary of Bethany and the unnamed anointer in Mark and Matthew; Atwood, *Mary Magdalene in the New Testament Gospels*, 157 cites an instance of Origen conflating Mary of Bethany and the Luke 7 woman, although he notes that in other works Origen seems to take various positions on the identity of the anointing women.

¹²¹ As seen in the previous chapter, there are several Marys named as present at Jesus's crucifixion, burial, and empty tomb in the New Testament Gospels, including Mary Magdalene, Mary of James (Mark 16:1), Mary of Joses (Mark 15:47; Mary of James and of Joses are likely the same woman referred to in Mark 15:40 as Mary, mother of James and of Joses), Mary, mother of James and Joseph (Matt 27:56), Mary of Clopas (John 19:25), Mary, Jesus's mother (John 19:25), and an unnamed “other Mary” (Matt 28:1). Since not even Mark's Gospel, for example, consistently identifies the same group of women as present at these key events, it is no wonder that early Christian interpreters struggled to identify the various women named Mary as they appear in the Gospels, and that they would come to identify some of these Marys with one another. This is especially prone to happen in a context where demonstrating the harmony of the four New Testament Gospels was important.

tomb, which may have led Gregory to associate her with the women who anoint Jesus during his lifetime. Indeed, Luke's empty tomb account uses the same word, *μύρον*, to describe both the ointment the women, including Mary Magdalene, prepare to take to Jesus's tomb (Luke 23:56), and the ointment the unnamed woman uses for Jesus's feet in Luke 7:37. Furthermore, Mary Magdalene is first introduced in Luke's Gospel in 8:1–3, which immediately follows the story of the unnamed repentant woman. While the narrative does not give any indication that these are to be understood as the same woman, this, along with the factors mentioned above, may have contributed to Gregory's conflation of the unnamed woman of Luke 7:36–50 and Mary Magdalene, especially since his biblical exegesis takes place in part at the allegorical level.¹²² As we will see below, this leads Gregory to interpret Magdalene's former possession by seven demons as indicative of her sinful past, thus providing another link with the woman of Luke 7:36–50.

The precise nature of the sins of the Luke 7:36–50 woman has been debated throughout church history. While I will not engage this debate here, it is important to note that the woman's sins have often been understood as sexual in nature, even before Gregory's time. Reference to her being a sinner in the city has been construed as her having been a prostitute, and some see her washing and kissing Jesus's feet as erotic gestures.¹²³ So, Gregory's allusions to the conflated

¹²² See note 124 below.

¹²³ E.g., Chrysostom, *Homilies on the Gospel of John* 62.1 (NPNF 1.14:227) describes the anointing woman of Luke 7 as a harlot; Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 12.4 (ANF 1.9:452) conflates the Luke 7 woman with Rahab, the woman known in Joshua as a prostitute, to allegorically describe a repentant who no longer plays the harlot (referring to Gentiles receiving the word of God). Among modern interpreters, Joel Green, *The Gospel of Luke*, 309–310 claims that the Luke 7 woman's characterization as a sinner in the city clearly marks her as a prostitute, and, that in a context that often viewed women as temptresses or sex objects, her actions at Jesus's feet would have been understood as erotic; Jane Schaberg, "Luke," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, ed. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, revised and updated (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 505 likewise asserts that the Luke 7 woman's sin would likely have been understood as notorious sexual activity, i.e., prostitution. Cf. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 129. Some modern scholars, however, do advise caution in asserting that this woman would definitely have been seen as a prostitute. E.g., Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, AB 28 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981), 689 admits that the woman's sin being prostitution may be implied by the Pharisee's thoughts, but that the text does

Magdalene figure's former sins being at least partly sexual in nature may arise from his understanding of Luke 7:36–50, and/or from previous interpretations of this text.

Since this conflation fuels many subsequent interpretations of Magdalene, it is worth looking more closely at Gregory's use of it in each sermon. In his sermon on Luke 7:36–50, merging the unnamed woman in this biblical text with Mary Magdalene allows him to highlight the depth of sin from which a person can repent. He starts with his historical or literal understanding of the text, which for him is what a passage means within its biblical context.¹²⁴ Drawing on Mark 16:9, Gregory interprets the seven demons that were cast out of Magdalene as the totality of all vices that had filled her, since the number seven signifies totality.¹²⁵ He then draws on Luke 7:36–50 to expound upon her sinful past and subsequent repentance. For Gregory, Mary's former sins include seeking earthly things and speaking proudly. When describing her seeking out Jesus with her jar of ointment, he characterizes her as “a woman who had earlier been eager for actions which are not allowed,” who used the ointment disgracefully as her own perfume and had many ways of offering pleasure.¹²⁶ This seems to suggest that her sins were partly sexual in nature.¹²⁷ Gregory, however, does not dwell on the specifics of Mary's

not even hint at what her sin actually entailed. He further states that the women's tears caution against interpreting her actions as intended to be erotic. Barbara E. Reid, “Do You See This Woman?’ Luke 7:36–50 as a Paradigm for Feminist Hermeneutics,” *BR* 40 (1995): 37–49 more forcefully counters the assumption that this woman was a prostitute, and provides possible alternative understandings of her sin: for instance, perhaps her employment brought her into frequent contact with Gentiles, or she was ill or disabled. Either situation, Reid argues, could have designated her as sinful in Luke's context.

¹²⁴ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 95 suggests this sermon was likely preached in 591 in Rome. Gregory's biblical exegesis often employs three layers of interpretation. The first is to arrive at the historical or literal meaning of a text, which for him is its basic meaning within the biblical texts and worldview. This level of interpretation can seem highly symbolic or even allegorical at times to modern readers; however, allegory is a second level of interpretation that Gregory employs, followed by a moral interpretation of the text, which is the highest form of interpretation for him. At times these layers of meaning are not clearly distinguished in Gregory's writings.

¹²⁵ He understands *seven* to indicate totality because all time is understood in terms of seven days.

¹²⁶ Gregory the Great, *Homily 33* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 269–270.

¹²⁷ In the allegorical section of this sermon, Gregory does mention a “prostituted woman” as symbolic of Judea in an allusion to Jeremiah 3:1 (see Gregory the Great, *Homily 33* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 277).

sinful past, but instead praises her great repentance. Since she recognized the shame of her sin, she ran to Jesus with full faith that he could do what she asked for, and was forgiven. Gregory notes both that her faith saved her, and that her extravagant love of Jesus completely burned away her sin. He interprets her actions at Jesus's feet as a sacrifice, offering to the Lord the very things she had once used sinfully. For instance, the hair used to beautify her face was now used to wipe away her tears of repentance, and the lips used to speak proudly now kissed his feet.

Gregory then provides a mystical or allegorical interpretation of the conflated Magdalene, based on his literal interpretation of her as paradigmatic penitent. He first establishes that Mary represents converted Gentiles, while the Pharisee whose house she finds Jesus in represents the Jewish people. Gregory's positive description of faithful Gentile converts, who properly honor and serve Christ in light of his mercy, contrasts his negative description of the unfaithful Jewish people, who should have done these things, but did not.¹²⁸ Gregory then asserts that the conflated Mary also represents any Christian who turns back to the Lord whole-heartedly after sinning.¹²⁹ He develops these comparisons throughout the sermon to describe the virtues of the true Christian life that stems from full repentance and receipt of Christ's mercy. At one point he compares the repentant woman (he does not always refer to her as Mary) with the bride in Song

This text states that a woman who is divorced by her husband, marries another man, and returns to her first husband would be considered polluted—figurative language for God's people acting as a "whore" through their faithlessness and then wanting to return to the LORD (Jer 3:1; NRSV). Gregory employs this imagery as part of a larger, general discussion of God's great mercy for those who have sinned, even though they do not deserve it. He does not explicitly connect the allegory of the prostituted woman with the conflated Magdalene/Luke 7 woman that he speaks of more directly elsewhere in the sermon. He does, however, return to the example of the repentant woman of Luke 7 at the end of the sermon, shortly following this allegory. The allegorical nature of much of Gregory's sermon, together with the interspersed images of repentant women, may help give rise to later, more explicit interpretations of the conflated Magdalene/Luke 7 woman as a repentant prostitute. This image does not, however, unambiguously arise from Gregory's sermons.

¹²⁸ At least at one level, this contrast seems to present his view of the historical development of Christianity out of Judaism, and then spreading predominantly among Gentiles; it is unclear to what extent he intends this analogy to address converts of his own time.

¹²⁹ Maisch sees a transition in Gregory's work from the conflated Magdalene representing converted Gentiles to representing penitent Christians as corresponding to the decline in conversion of non-Christians and infant baptism becoming the norm. See Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 32.

of Songs in order to praise her providing Jesus with the internal nourishment and “feast of the heart” that the Pharisee could not provide through his external acts of hospitality.¹³⁰ Since Gregory considers the bride to represent the church, the conflated Magdalene effectively comes to represent the church as well, as seen in previous texts.

In his Easter sermon on John 20:11–18, Magdalene as the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50 helps explain the ardent love with which she seeks Jesus at his tomb in John, since the Lukan text explains that receiving great forgiveness is linked to loving greatly.¹³¹ Even so, her love of Jesus is mixed with doubt about his resurrection, which is why she does not immediately recognize him when he appears to her in the garden.¹³² When she does, she proclaims Christ’s resurrection to the apostles. Gregory first describes this using the now familiar analogy of Magdalene, as a woman, announcing the resurrection life that counteracts the death that a woman caused in Paradise.¹³³ He also describes Magdalene’s proclamation as resulting from her own experience of Christ’s forgiveness of her former sins, so that she proclaims the new life of the one who restored her to life.¹³⁴ Since she abandoned her wicked ways, washing the stains on her heart and body with her tears, Magdalene found herself in a position of grace that allowed her to announce the resurrection to the apostles, who themselves are its messengers.¹³⁵

At the end of the sermon, Gregory explicitly holds Magdalene up as a model of repentance, along with other biblical figures such as Peter.¹³⁶ Here he states that one who is aflame with lust and has lost purity of body can turn to Mary as an example of purging love of

¹³⁰ Gregory the Great, *Homily 33* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 275.

¹³¹ Cf. Luke 7:47. He draws here too on the Song of Songs image of the bride seeking the bridegroom as a metaphor for the church seeking Christ, with Mary functioning as the bride by persistently seeking Jesus in the garden where he tomb is located. See Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 188–189.

¹³² Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 192.

¹³³ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 195.

¹³⁴ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 195, 198.

¹³⁵ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 195.

¹³⁶ Gregory the Great, *Homily 25* in *Forty Gospel Homilies*, trans. Hurst, 198–199.

her body with divine love. Like his description of her former sins in the Luke 7:36–50 sermon, these statements too seem to suggest that Magdalene’s sins were at least partly of a sexual nature. In fact, some scholars argue that in his context they would have definitely been understood as such.¹³⁷

Gregory also mentions the conflated Mary in his letter *To Gregoria*.¹³⁸ It similarly presents this figure, which he does not directly name, as representative of the great forgiveness that God can grant to even the worst of sinners. This is meant to console Gregoria about the possibility of forgiveness of her own sins, although he does not think a Christian should have full assurance of this during life so that they do not become complacent in regard to sin. What is notable in this letter is Gregory’s clear description of the Magdalene figure as worthy to see the risen Lord and hold his feet, despite her sinful past, and her role in proclaiming the resurrection—key elements of her portrayals in the New Testament. As in his sermons, however, the emphasis in this letter is on God’s love and mercy toward sinners, as exemplified through the conflated Mary, rather than on Mary Magdalene as an individual person.

While many modern interpreters will take issue with Gregory’s conflated Magdalene, especially since it paves the way for ascribing to her an illicit sexual past, defaming the biblical Magdalene does not seem to be his goal in his writings, even if it is an unintended consequence. Rather, he repeatedly praises her penitence and ardent love of Jesus, and does not dwell extensively on her supposedly sinful past. Providing concrete models of Christian virtues and examples of God’s mercy to sinful humans are overarching themes of these sermons and letter, explaining—even if not justifying from a modern perspective—their conflation of Magdalene

¹³⁷ See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 34, including n. 48, where she draws on the work of Ruth Mazo Karras to assert that medieval thinkers assumed that all female sin was expressed sexually. Cf. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 148.

¹³⁸ Gregory the Great, *Selected Epistles 7.25: To Gregoria* (NPNF 2.12:219b).

with the repentant woman of Luke 7, which, as mentioned in chapter 2, does not clearly arise from the biblical texts alone. On a more basic level, Gregory's conflated Magdalene may reflect his solution to the general patristic uncertainty about the identity of various New Testament Marys, and their relation to the women who anoint Jesus in the Gospels.¹³⁹

Mary Magdalene in Eastern Traditions

The summary of Magdalene interpretations outlined above does not neatly distinguish writers of the Eastern from those of the Western church, since some themes are common across geographical boundaries. And though this study focuses mostly on unfolding Western Magdalene traditions, it is important to note that the Gregorian-conflated-Magdalene, which becomes prominent in Western medieval European interpretation, did not take hold in the East. Eastern Christianity instead continued to celebrate Mary Magdalene as one of the *myrrhophores* and primary resurrection witness, not identifying her either with Mary of Bethany or the repentant woman of Luke 7, and still does to this day.¹⁴⁰

Indeed, what is likely the earliest evidence of devotion to Magdalene, which also becomes widespread in medieval Europe, comes from the East. As early as the sixth century her tomb was designated as being in Ephesus, and it became a pilgrimage site.¹⁴¹ Legends state that after Jesus's death, Magdalene went to live with John the Evangelist and Jesus's mother, who had been entrusted to his care, in Ephesus.¹⁴² According to Modestus of Jerusalem, Mary Magdalene was a lifelong virgin whose apostolic career ended there in martyrdom.¹⁴³ Tradition

¹³⁹ See note 118 above.

¹⁴⁰ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 90; Brittany E. Wilson, "Mary Magdalene and Her Interpreters," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, 532.

¹⁴¹ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 107–108; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 44.

¹⁴² Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 106–108.

¹⁴³ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 107; cited from PG LXXXVI, cols. 3273–6.

also states that Magdalene's relics were moved to Constantinople in the ninth century and buried alongside her presumed brother, Lazarus.¹⁴⁴ Thus, legends about Magdalene's life and efforts to honor her developed in the East, before they became even more amplified and widespread in Western Europe.

Medieval Portrayals of Magdalene

The collapse of the Roman Empire in the fifth century led to increasing distance between Western and Eastern Christianity. In the East, Christianity carried on as the imperial religion of the Byzantine Empire, with Constantinople as the seat of political and religious authority. In the West, political control became fragmented as various migrant groups ruled different provinces.¹⁴⁵ Gregory the Great brought stability to the West by consolidating political and religious power in the figure of the pope at Rome. This helped facilitate the merger of Christianity and culture, creating a medieval society that was built around monastic life as the source of learning and Christian teaching. In this context, biblical texts were not used primarily to defend the Christian faith, but rather to shape moral Christian lives. The cults of Christian saints proliferated, with hagiographic writings about their lives to facilitate devotion to them and inspire Christians to faithful living. The High Middle Ages, in turn, saw the rise of mendicant orders whose mission was to bring Scripture to the laity through preaching. All of these facets of medieval European life contributed to the images of Magdalene and their dissemination among the people.

This section overviews some of the most prominent images of medieval Magdalene—saint, penitent, Jesus's beloved disciple, witness of Jesus's passion and resurrection, apostle,

¹⁴⁴ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 108.

¹⁴⁵ Simon Yarrow, *The Saints: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 37.

evangelist, and contemplative—as well as some of the main texts and works of art that shape them. All of these images had already developed to some extent, especially through the Gregorian conflation of Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the repentant woman of Luke 7, which becomes widely accepted in the Middle Ages. What is novel in this era is the development of complete legends of Magdalene’s life that incorporate these elements into coherent narratives, filling in details lacking in previous portrayals. This creates a fairly stable “stock” version of Magdalene’s biography that preachers, writers, and artists draw on, emphasizing particular aspects to impact their audiences. So, while patristic authors discuss Magdalene as part of commentary on biblical texts, medieval interpreters largely work from Magdalene’s legendary images that become part of the social fabric. Although such images do have roots in her New Testament portrayals, they are highly embellished and reworked over time, so that the medieval Western church’s Magdalene essentially becomes a figure of its own, finding ongoing expression and reinterpretation in texts, art, and societal institutions such as monasteries. The fact that Magdalene is celebrated as a saint confirms that she has taken on a life outside of the New Testament Gospels, and outside of texts in general.

Saint

After the Virgin Mary, Magdalene was the most significant female medieval saint.¹⁴⁶ The earliest evidence of devotion to Magdalene in the West comes in Bede’s *Martyrology*, written in the early eighth century, which designates July 22 as her feast day. Prayers for this day appear in the ninth century, and a complete mass in her honor developed by the eleventh or twelfth

¹⁴⁶ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 17. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, trans. David Mycoff, Cistercian Studies Series 108 (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1989), 85 affirms that Magdalene is second only to the Virgin among women. For details of Saint Magdalene in medieval literature, see Garth, *Saint Mary Magdalene in Mediaeval Literature*.

century.¹⁴⁷ A key component of the rise of devotion to Magdalene was her being made the patron of the great Burgundy church, Vézelay, in 1050, which was originally dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Claiming to have her relics, Magdalene's cult was established at the church, associated with the Benedictines, and it became a popular pilgrimage site.¹⁴⁸

Possession of a saint's relics had religious, economic, and political benefits. The patron saint was believed to protect the city and perform miracles in association with her relics. Possession of relics also allowed a location to claim continuity with the earliest followers of Jesus, ascribing to it religious and political authority in a context where these were often linked. The influx of pilgrims to venerate a saint's relics also brought increased economic activity to an area. In light of these factors, it is not so surprising that prince Charles of Salerno, the Angevin prince whose mother was the heiress to Provence, happened to "discover" Magdalene's relics in the Provençal church of Saint-Maximin in 1279—despite Vézelay's claim to already possess them. Charles had what he claimed were Magdalene's head and body placed in separate reliquaries, and entrusted Magdalene's new shrine at the church to the care of the Dominicans.¹⁴⁹ Over time, the town of Saint-Maximin-la-Sainte-Baume gained prominence over Vézelay as locus of the Magdalene cult and pilgrimages. To this day, a public procession of Magdalene's relics takes place there annually on her feast day, which is still celebrated on July 22.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 35. The standard work on the development of Magdalene's cult in the West is Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie-Madeleine en occident des origines à la fin du moyen-âge*, 2 vols. (Cahiers d'archéologie et d'histoire 3; Auxerre-Paris: Publications de la Société des Fouilles Archéologiques et des Monuments Historiques de l'Yonne-Librairie Clavreuil, 1959).

¹⁴⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 35–36.

¹⁴⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 41–43.

¹⁵⁰ The present-day Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Anglican, and (some) Lutheran churches celebrate her feast on that date.

Legends

Hagiography, or legendary material, both explains the rise of devotion to Magdalene—including at Vézelay and Provence—and facilitates such devotion by praising her exemplary life and God’s work through her. The first known “life” (*vita*) or biography of Magdalene is the ninth century *vita eremitica*.¹⁵¹ It describes Magdalene’s life after Jesus’s ascension, stating that she lived as a hermit in the desert without food or clothing for thirty years. This is a major aspect of Magdalene’s biography that seems to have been adapted from the *vita* of Saint Mary of Egypt, a popular version of which was composed in the late sixth or early seventh century.¹⁵² According to this source, Mary of Egypt was sexually promiscuous before her conversion to Christ, which drove her to retire to an extreme ascetical, penitential solitary life in the wilderness. While commonly referred to as a former prostitute, in this version of her life Mary insists that she took no payment for her sexual endeavors, but rather sought to fulfill her insatiable lustful desires. This portrays her activity as more reprehensible, since her lust was a free gift, not a means of survival.¹⁵³ The linking of Magdalene with Mary of Egypt is likely another factor that fueled Magdalene’s medieval image as a former sexual sinner, in addition to Gregory’s prior identification of her with the repentant woman of Luke 7. Or, it may be the case that this link with Mary of Egypt occurred precisely because Magdalene’s sin was already thought to be sexual in nature.

Around the ninth or tenth century, a homily attributed to Odo of Cluny combined all of the New Testament passages relevant to Gregory’s conflated Magdalene into one narrative. This

¹⁵¹ It appeared in southern Italy, but may have initially arrived in the West by means of Greek monks who fled Byzantium. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 37–38; cf. Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 87.

¹⁵² For an English translation of the life of St. Mary of Egypt that is found in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Graeca* (BHG 1042) PG 87:3697–726, see Maria Kouli, “Life of St. Mary of Egypt,” in Alice-Mary Talbot, ed., *Holy Women of Byzantium: Ten Saints’ Lives in English Translation* (Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1996), 65–94.

¹⁵³ Kouli, “Life of St. Mary of Egypt,” in Talbot, *Holy Women of Byzantium*, 80.

vita evangelica thereby gave further expression to the identification of Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the unnamed penitent woman of Luke 7.¹⁵⁴

In the same period the *vita apostolica* was composed, describing how Magdalene first became associated with Provence.¹⁵⁵ According to this legend, Magdalene and other disciples of Jesus were persecuted after his resurrection and put out to sea in an aimless boat. They landed on the shores of Marseilles and preached the gospel to the Gauls, with Magdalene herself successfully converting Aix-en-Provence to Christianity.¹⁵⁶ Around the eleventh century, the *vita eremitica* and *apostolica* were merged into a single legend, the *vita apostolico-eremitica*.¹⁵⁷ After her evangelistic activity in Gaul and thirty years of contemplative hermitage in a cave, it states that Magdalene died and was buried in the Provençal church of Saint-Maximin. It further alleges that a monk from Burgundy, Badilus, stole her body around the eighth century.¹⁵⁸

These claims are also forwarded in another eleventh century legend, which explains how Magdalene's relics ended up in Burgundy.¹⁵⁹ Badilus supposedly was sent on a divinely ordained mission in 749 to rescue Magdalene's relics in Provence from invaders. He did so successfully, and brought them back to Burgundy. As Jansen notes, legends such as these supported Vézelay's claims to Magdalene's relics.¹⁶⁰

Legends were also written that attest to the alleged discovery in 1279 of Magdalene's relics in Provence, as well as to their efficacy. The Dominican work of 1315, the *Book of Miracles of Saint Mary Magdalen*, attests to her miracles at the Provence shrine.¹⁶¹ The *Dominican Legend* was added to this book in the latter part of the fifteenth century, clarifying the

¹⁵⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 38.

¹⁵⁵ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 87.

¹⁵⁶ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 38–39.

¹⁵⁷ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 87–88.

¹⁵⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 39.

¹⁵⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 38.

¹⁶⁰ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 39.

¹⁶¹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 43.

connections between the saint who evangelized Provence, those who had come to rule it, and the Dominican monks that became the present-day evangelists of the region.¹⁶²

In addition to legitimizing certain sites' claim to a patron saint, hagiographical material served the broader purpose of facilitating devotion to the saints and faithful living among the people. The thirteenth century *Golden Legend*, written by the Dominican archbishop of Genoa, Jacobus de Voragine, became the most popular medieval collection of saints' lives.¹⁶³ As a source for preaching and devotions at home, the *Golden Legend's* version of Magdalene's life helped bring her story and significance for Christian living to the masses. There are, however, other medieval *lives* of Magdalene that reflect both the basic features of her medieval biography and characterizations, as well as some variations in the details.¹⁶⁴ I will summarize this biography below, describing in the process key images it reflects of the composite medieval Magdalene.

Paradigmatic Penitent

A prominent title for Magdalene in medieval preaching is *Beatissima Peccatrix*, or most blessed sinner.¹⁶⁵ This has roots in Gregory the Great's identification of Magdalene with the repentant sinner of Luke 7. As pope, Gregory's interpretation of Magdalene was influential, and

¹⁶² Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 44. Provence was ruled at the time by the Angevin dynasty, including Charles of Salerno, who allegedly discovered Magdalene's relics in Provence.

¹⁶³ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 40. For an English translation of the *Golden Legend* version of Magdalene's life, see Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan, vol. 1 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), ch. 96, pp. 374–383. All references to *The Golden Legend* are from this translation.

¹⁶⁴ Other *lives* of Magdalene available in English include one attributed to Friar Nicholas Bovon, a thirteenth century Anglo-Norman poet. See "The Life of Mary Magdalene," in Ameila Klenke, *Three Saints' Lives by Nicholas Bozon* (St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute Publication, 1947), 1–26. Cf. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, trans. Mycoff. This text was initially attributed to Rabanus Maurus, but that has since been challenged. Mycoff, 10, suggests it was written in the late twelfth century by an anonymous author who was strongly influenced by Bernard of Clairvaux's spirituality. Mycoff, 7, argues that *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha* was written a bit before the *Golden Legend*, but that the main features of this legend were already in place at the time of its composition.

¹⁶⁵ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 206.

his writings remained popular into the Middle Ages.¹⁶⁶ Whereas he only hinted at the nature of Magdalene's sinful past, medieval legends construct detailed stories about her life before encountering Jesus in order to explain how she fell into sin, and how she came to follow Jesus. A common feature is that Magdalene was born into a wealthy, noble or even royal, family. Her parents are often identified as Theophilus and Eucharia, and her siblings are Martha and Lazarus, which affirms her identification with Mary of Bethany (John 11–12:8; cf. Luke 10:38–42).¹⁶⁷ The *Golden Legend* explains that Magdalene took her name from Magdalum, a walled town and ancestral property that was entrusted to her.¹⁶⁸ A slightly earlier version of her life, *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, describes young Magdalene not only as extremely beautiful—a common feature of her biography—but also as “decorous and gracious in speech,” well-educated, and marked by integrity.¹⁶⁹ This makes her turn toward sinful living all the more devastating, even if not entirely surprising, given medieval understandings that the combination of female youth, beauty, and wealth are a recipe for falling into the temptations of the flesh, especially because females were considered to be the weaker sex. As this legend puts it, “the hotness of youth, the desires of the flesh, the weakness of the sex all turn one away from bodily chastity.... She perverted whatever God had given her for the growth of honesty to the service of a lascivious and pandering life.”¹⁷⁰ This legend further states that Magdalene's possession by seven demons is due to her innumerable sins, thereby reflecting Gregory's

¹⁶⁶ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 96 states that Gregory's sermons on Magdalene were taken up into the liturgy for Holy Week and the resurrection.

¹⁶⁷ The *Golden Legend* has her father's name as Syrus, which Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 149 argues may be a confusion of his name with his place of origin. Cf. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, trans. Mycoff, 28, which states that Theophilus was a Syrian. The roots of the designation of Magdalene's father as Theophilus may already be reflected in the *Encomium on Mary Magdalene*, which designates him as her guardian.

¹⁶⁸ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375.

¹⁶⁹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 29–31.

¹⁷⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 30–31. Cf. de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 149.

interpretation.¹⁷¹ The *Golden Legend* describes Magdalene's giving of her body to pleasure as so notorious that her proper name was forgotten and she became known only as the "sinner," which seems to reflect her conflation with the unnamed sinner of Luke 7.¹⁷² Some versions of her story state that her father dies when she is young, leaving her without a male guardian (her brother, Lazarus, was in the military) and a large inheritance to squander, contributing to her downfall into sin.¹⁷³

Other perspectives on Magdalene's life prior to conversion often share the theme of her giving herself over to sexual promiscuity. Some claim that she was the bride of the wedding at Cana (John 2:1–11), set to marry John the Evangelist when Jesus called him as a disciple and left Magdalene behind. The anger or shame of losing her betrothed led Magdalene, in some instances, to pursue a life of fleshy pleasure.¹⁷⁴ Others state that Magdalene left a husband in Magdala and went to Jerusalem to lose herself in promiscuity.¹⁷⁵ Honorius describes Magdalene's flight to Jerusalem as her forgetting God's law and her birth to freely become a common prostitute, even setting up a brothel that was a temple of demons, since she had seven devils.¹⁷⁶ Magdalene also becomes associated with the Samaritan woman in John 4, who had five

¹⁷¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 33.

¹⁷² de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375.

¹⁷³ See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 150; de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375; *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, eds. Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 290, in discussing Anna Brownell Jameson's summary of Magdalene's medieval legends.

¹⁷⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 150–151; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 158–159; de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 382. Here de Voragine denies the truth of these legends.

¹⁷⁵ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 151. A fifteenth century Swiss sermon, "Saint Mary Magdalene," in *Exemplary Lives: Selected Sermons on the Saints, from Rheinau*, ed. and trans. James C. Wilkinson (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006), 132–141 has a version of this account in which Magdalene leaves her husband and becomes a "public sinner in the city," explaining that her possession by seven demons was because she had fallen into the seven cardinal sins (p. 135).

¹⁷⁶ Honorius of Autun, *Speculum Ecclesiae: De Sancta Maria Magdalena*, PL 172, col. 979, quoted in Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 16. Cf. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 158–159; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 47.

husbands, and the woman caught in adultery in John 7:53–8:11, further fueling her image as having a past filled with sexual immorality.¹⁷⁷

Medieval writers and preachers, therefore, commonly interpret Magdalene's former sin at least as promiscuity, and often as prostitution. In fact, Jansen argues that medieval preachers took it for granted that Magdalene was a prostitute before her conversion.¹⁷⁸ Medieval morality saw riches as easily leading to gluttony, which in turn leads to carnal sin.¹⁷⁹ Given the widespread Aristotelian understanding of the female sex as weaker in body and will, a wealthy Magdalene was seen as especially prone to fall into such sin.¹⁸⁰ Her medieval pre-conversion image as exemplifying *vanity* reinforces this understanding.¹⁸¹ As a wealthy woman, Magdalene is described at times as ornately adorned. Her hair, assumed to be long enough to wipe Jesus's feet, is described as both marvelous and an aspect of her vanity.¹⁸² Since long, unbound hair was commonly considered as superfluous, and even seductive, for an adult woman in the Middle Ages, it contributed to an ostentatious image of Magdalene that supposedly helped her lure suitors.¹⁸³ As Jansen notes, such vanity could easily lead to the capital sin of *luxuria*, or lust: the excessive craving for bodily pleasure.¹⁸⁴ For medieval society, therefore, it was not a stretch to associate the image of Magdalene as a wealthy, well-adorned beauty with sexual promiscuity, especially given her identification with the Luke 7 woman. Since this type of appearance and activity was associated with harlotry, Magdalene was also commonly identified as a former

¹⁷⁷ Wilson, "Mary Magdalene and Her Interpreters," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, 532; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 148.

¹⁷⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 166–167.

¹⁷⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 150.

¹⁸⁰ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 151.

¹⁸¹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 156.

¹⁸² Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 157. Magdalene's association with vanity leads to her becoming the patron saint of hairdressers and cosmeticians. See Wilson, "Mary Magdalene and Her Interpreters," in *Women's Bible Commentary*, 532. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, 30 describes it as a marvel; *Mediations*, ch. 28, p. 100 says it was part of her vanity.

¹⁸³ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 157; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 246.

¹⁸⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 164.

prostitute, even though versions of her life, such as the *Golden Legend*, do not state that her lustful activity was exchanged for money.¹⁸⁵ In any case, Jansen argues that preachers helped construct Magdalene's medieval, multi-faceted image as a means of warning people of the dangers it reflects, such as wealth, vanity, sexual immorality, and prostitution.¹⁸⁶

Drawing on Luke 7:36–50, medieval Magdalene's conversion supposedly takes place in Simon's house, where she encounters Jesus and washes and anoints his feet as described in the biblical text. Some texts state that divine initiative drives Magdalene to seek out Jesus, making it clear that God actually seeks her first.¹⁸⁷ A common theme is that it is Magdalene's own recognition of the baseness of her sinful life and desire to turn from it that drives her to seek Jesus when she learns that he is in town.¹⁸⁸ Strikingly, she is said at times to love him intensely even before she meets him because of his reputation for kindness and forgiveness, making her lavish acts at his feet an expression of this love and gratitude, along with her tears expressing sorrow for her sin.¹⁸⁹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* reflects Gregory's understanding of Magdalene using what she previously had dedicated to sinful purposes to tend to Jesus—her eyes once sought out worldly loves, but now their tears wash Jesus's feet; her hair once beautified her face, but now dries his feet; her mouth had served pride and lasciviousness, but now kisses his

¹⁸⁵ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 164. "The Life of Mary Magdalene," in Ameila Klenke, *Three Saints' Lives*, 3, states that Magdalene did not "sin to obtain recompense," since she was rich, making it clear that in this version of her story she did not actually work as a prostitute. Even so, her supposed sexual immorality still portrays her as a harlot-like figure in popular imagination.

¹⁸⁶ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 146–147.

¹⁸⁷ E.g., *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 33–34 describes the Holy Spirit inspiring Magdalene, who reflects on the honorable life she once had and is moved to reclaim it by repenting. She also recognizes the eternal punishment she would face if she does not. And de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375 states that Magdalene was guided by the divine will to seek out Jesus.

¹⁸⁸ E.g., *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 33–35; John of Caulibus, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, ed. and trans. Francis X. Taney, SR., Anne Miller, O.S.F., and C. Mary Stallings-Taney (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1999), ch. 28, pp. 99–100; *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 4. All references to the *Meditations* are to the translation cited here. Its editors argue that the text was likely written by John of Caulibus, a fourteenth century Franciscan of Tuscany. Since, however, St. Bonaventure was believed to be the author for centuries, I refer to the text simply by its title, rather than also by John of Caulibus as its proposed author.

¹⁸⁹ E.g., *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 33–35; *Meditations*, ch. 28, pp. 99–100.

feet.¹⁹⁰ Also similar to Gregory, the *Golden Legend* describes Jesus forgiving her sins and bestowing such grace upon her that she is set aflame with love for him. It alludes to Romans 5:20 in its explanation that, “where trespass abounded, grace was superabundant.”¹⁹¹

Although Mary Magdalene as repentant prostitute—or as a penitent of any sort—does not find a clear basis in the New Testament, this image did serve social and ecclesiastical purposes in the Middle Ages, making its proliferation understandable. The medieval emphasis on penitence made it appealing to have exemplary figures that people could turn to for inspiration, especially one like Magdalene, who was also celebrated as a saint.¹⁹² Magdalene as repentant prostitute held particular value to the church’s twelfth and thirteenth century movement to rescue prostitutes, who could only be saved by repentance and renouncing the profession.¹⁹³ Religious institutions under Magdalene’s patronage developed across Europe to reform prostitutes and prevent young women seen as prone to such a lifestyle from falling into it.¹⁹⁴ In 1227 Pope Gregory IX even confirmed the Order of Repentant Women, or “Penitents of Saint Mary Magdalene.”¹⁹⁵ By the end of the seventeenth century, repentant prostitutes in England were called *magdalens*, and similar titles were also used in Italy and France.¹⁹⁶ While special houses for these women were aimed at helping them find a better life, they were also a way to safeguard society from the moral dangers that prostitutes, or other unattached women, seemed to pose. One way to do this for the women who proved not to have a religious calling was to eventually marry

¹⁹⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 36.

¹⁹¹ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375.

¹⁹² Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 135–136 states that emphasis on penitence grew in the eleventh century with the Gregorian reforms and Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.

¹⁹³ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 173–4.

¹⁹⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 178–179, 182. Cf. Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 174, who cites a wandering preacher, Robert of Arbrissel, establishing the first foundation for women in 1100, which served not just prostitutes, but also widows, virgins, poor women, etc.

¹⁹⁵ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 175; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 54.

¹⁹⁶ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 176.

them off. Magdalene also became the patron of lepers, another marginalized group considered a potential contaminant to society, and hospitals for them were established in her name.¹⁹⁷

Beloved Disciple

Although Magdalene became widely known as a penitent sinner in the Middle Ages, the emphasis in many of her portrayals lies not on her sinful past, but on her following Jesus wholeheartedly post-conversion. Her extravagant display of love for Jesus at Simon's house, and his bestowing abundant love and grace upon her in return, facilitates another medieval image of Magdalene as his beloved disciple and intimate companion, whom he always defends against criticism.¹⁹⁸ This is not an entirely new portrayal; as seen above, some early extra-canonical texts depict her as an intimate spiritual companion of Jesus, and Hippolytus's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* portrays her and Martha as the bride in that text who seeks Jesus, her beloved. It does, however, expand and acquire additional significance in the Middle Ages.

Magdalene as intimate friend of Jesus is especially prominent in *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*. While its author is unknown, it was likely influenced by the mystical spirituality of Bernard of Clairvaux.¹⁹⁹ Fittingly, it portrays Magdalene as in a zealous, mutually loving relationship with Christ that suggests a mystical union. Her conversion story reflects this: Jesus approaches Magdalene first at Simon's house (in contrast to Luke 7:37–38, where the woman seeks Jesus), then drives the seven demons out of her and impregnates her with the seven gifts of the Spirit, causing her to conceive a good hope and give birth to a fervent

¹⁹⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 173–175.

¹⁹⁸ E.g., as conflated with Mary of Bethany, Jesus defends Magdalene against Martha's criticism that she is not helping her, and against Judas's charge that the perfume with which she anoints Jesus's feet could have been sold and given to the poor. He also defends her as the woman of Luke 7, whose actions are criticized by the Pharisee. See *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 41, 84–85; *Mediations*, ch. 70, p. 222. De Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 376 more generally states that Jesus "kindly took her side at all times."

¹⁹⁹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 9–10. See note 164 above.

charity.²⁰⁰ From that point forward she becomes Jesus's "first servant," "special friend," "glorious friend of God," and one who had no equal in intimacy with Christ.²⁰¹ Since the Son of God loved Magdalene greatly, she is honored equally with the apostles and Virgin Mary.²⁰² Reflecting this high assessment of Magdalene, another popular medieval text, *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, describes her as the beloved disciple, along with her title of "Apostle of the apostles."²⁰³

So ardent is Magdalene's love for Jesus in *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* that she anoints him on two additional occasions besides her conversion. On one occasion, she again anoints his feet, massaging and tenderly washing them, drawing them to her breast and lips. On the other she anoints Jesus's head as an act of worship, massaging his hair with her hands.²⁰⁴ While these descriptions may suggest a romantic connection between Jesus and Magdalene, the text later clarifies that her love for him is chaste.²⁰⁵ This intimate imagery instead functions to portray Magdalene as the bride in the Song of Songs who expresses a sweet, spiritual love and devotion to Jesus that flows from the spiritual gifts he gave her. It comes to powerful expression in Magdalene's witness of Jesus's arrest and crucifixion. She is said to be so loyal when all others have abandoned him at his arrest that "the skin of her flesh adhered to the bones of the Savior."²⁰⁶ And as she sees him lifted on the cross, the text states that Mary's soul was pierced with grief just as Jesus was pierced with nails, reflecting her intimate connection with her beloved.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 35.

²⁰¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 39, 72, 84, 93.

²⁰² *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 89.

²⁰³ *Meditations*, ch. 91, p. 294.

²⁰⁴ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 54–56.

²⁰⁵ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 95.

²⁰⁶ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 60.

²⁰⁷ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 62.

Magdalene as the bride of the Song of Songs also appears in other medieval texts. At times it characterizes her fervent search for Jesus's body at the tomb, reflecting John 20:1–18.²⁰⁸ And according to Malvern, Bernard of Clairvaux equates Magdalene-as-bride with the loving, contemplative soul in his sermons on the Song of Songs.²⁰⁹ Since *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* also makes Magdalene a symbol of the contemplative life, and is meant to inspire other Christians to similar loving devotion, its depiction of Magdalene-as-bride may in part function to promote this spiritual path that became prized in the Middle Ages. This text certainly expresses the multifaceted nature of the medieval Magdalene figure. While praising Magdalene it calls her both “holy sinner” and “most ardent lover of Christ” in the same sentence, reflecting that in the medieval mindset, Magdalene’s formerly sinful life does not preclude her being an intimate companion of Christ; rather, the former is seen as contributing to the intensity of the latter.²¹⁰

Magdalene’s New Testament Roles

The medieval images of Magdalene examined so far derive mostly from her conflation with the woman of Luke 7 and Mary of Bethany, rather than from her explicit New Testament roles in Jesus’s ministry, death, and resurrection. While Magdalene’s composite identity is widely accepted in the Middle Ages, this does not mean that interpretations of her explicit New Testament roles are neglected. At times they are incorporated into her biographies, alongside the attributes derived from the other two women. In fact, there is a general trend of augmenting Magdalene’s role in Jesus’s passion and resurrection, and of characterizing her more fully than in the Gospels.

²⁰⁸ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 194, who cites Anselm as one example of this.

²⁰⁹ Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 82.

²¹⁰ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 79.

As seen in Magdalene's depiction as intimate companion to Jesus, there is some attention in medieval texts to her role in Jesus's ministry. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* explicitly calls her a disciple, and Honorius interprets her passionate devotion to Christ as motivating her following of him and ministering to him as she is able.²¹¹ The *Golden Legend*, which only briefly mentions Magdalene's New Testament roles, interprets this ministry as doing household chores on Jesus's travels.²¹² Jansen notes that Magdalene's anointing of Jesus's feet, and attempt to anoint his body, also symbolized at times the works of mercy on behalf of the needy to which all Christians are called, associating her with the active life of service.²¹³

Greater emphasis falls on Magdalene's key roles in Jesus's passion and resurrection, which are often expanded from the New Testament Gospels. This is evident throughout *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, as well as in passion dramas that became increasingly popular in the Middle Ages.²¹⁴ In the *Meditations*, Jesus often stays at the house of Magdalene (conflated with Mary of Bethany), Martha, and Lazarus in Bethany. Here Magdalene functions as a leader and spokesperson for the group, imploring Jesus to celebrate the upcoming Passover with them in Bethany and thereby avoid going to Jerusalem, where she knows he faces death.²¹⁵ This attempt to dissuade Jesus from his fate in Jerusalem becomes part of European passion traditions, as does the portrayal of Magdalene as constant companion and supporter of Jesus's mother, who is also present with Jesus's followers at Bethany.²¹⁶ All are grieved when Jesus denies Magdalene's request, but she weeps more bitterly than even Jesus's mother, "like one intoxicated

²¹¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 72; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 196–197 cites the Honorius Augustodunensis reference.

²¹² de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 376.

²¹³ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 108–109.

²¹⁴ See Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 100–113 for a detailed treatment of Magdalene's role in medieval drama.

²¹⁵ *Meditations*, ch. 72, p. 226.

²¹⁶ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 200.

by her Master, crying loudly and sobbing uncontrollably.”²¹⁷ This expressive, highly emotional characterization of Magdalene in the events of Jesus’s death and resurrection becomes common in medieval texts, dramas, and art.²¹⁸ The weight of Magdalene’s relationship with Jesus is seen in the *Meditations*’ depiction of her convincing Jesus to celebrate the Passover with them at a home she and her siblings supposedly own in Jerusalem, since he is intent on meeting his death there.²¹⁹

Unlike the New Testament Gospels, the *Meditations* portray Magdalene, along with Jesus’s mother and other women, as witnesses to his triumphal entry into Jerusalem (cf. Matt 21).²²⁰ And *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* makes Magdalene a witness to Jesus’s arrest, trial, and floggings, where she again weeps bitterly for her beloved.²²¹ Her devotion is also clear at Jesus’s crucifixion and burial. The *Meditations* describe Magdalene as especially inconsolable at seeing Jesus die, since she is his beloved disciple.²²² And in her role as faithful companion to Jesus’s mother, Magdalene catches the Virgin in her arms when she collapses after Jesus’s death.²²³ These women also participate in preparing Jesus’s body for burial. When it is taken down from the cross, the Virgin cradles his head on her lap and Magdalene embraces his feet, where she had received great grace.²²⁴ They then wrap these parts of his body for burial, with Magdalene again weeping at the feet of Jesus, as she had first done at her conversion. Her compassionate and sorrowful tears now wash his feet more intensely than before, and her grief makes it so that she can “hardly hold her heart within her body: gladly would she have died at

²¹⁷ *Meditations*, ch. 72, pp. 226–227.

²¹⁸ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 229–296 for a thorough treatment of Magdalene’s depictions as *weeper*.

²¹⁹ *Meditations*, ch. 72, p. 227.

²²⁰ *Meditations*, ch. 71, p. 223–225.

²²¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 60–61.

²²² *Meditations*, ch. 78, p. 254. Cf. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 61–62.

²²³ *Meditations*, ch. 79, p. 258.

²²⁴ *Meditations*, ch. 79, p. 260.

the feet of her Lord.”²²⁵ The women then help carry Jesus’s body to its tomb. These portrayals thereby expand Magdalene’s New Testament role as witness in the passion narratives, and clearly characterize her as passionately devoted to Jesus.

Magdalene’s trip to Jesus’s tomb as one of the ointment bearers is commonly noted and depicted visually in the Middle Ages.²²⁶ According to the New Testament Gospels, this endeavor leads to her discovery that Jesus’s body is missing from the tomb because he has been raised from the dead. In Matthew, she is among the first to witness the risen Jesus, and in John she alone has this privilege. In medieval times, as in earlier eras, Magdalene is broadly acknowledged as the first witness of the risen Christ; yet, this stands in some tension with a growing tendency to assign this role to Jesus’s mother. As Jansen notes, increased devotion to the Virgin forced medieval interpreters to confront the puzzle of why the risen Jesus would not appear to his mother first.²²⁷ Some writers, therefore, make strained attempts at both assigning the first resurrection appearance to Jesus’s mother and affirming the New Testament portrayal of Magdalene as the first (or among the first) witness, while it says nothing about an appearance to the Virgin.²²⁸ One author even ascribes the roles of apostle-to-the-apostles and evangelist-to-the-

²²⁵ *Meditations*, ch. 80, pp. 261–262.

²²⁶ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 217–218; cf. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 80, where the author refers to Magdalene as “famous balsam-bearer.”

²²⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 59.

²²⁸ *Meditations*, chs. 82–84 make this move. Chapter 82 depicts Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James, and Salome asking permission of “our Lady” (i.e., the Virgin Mary) to go to the tomb with their ointments. After she grants it, she prays to God to restore Jesus to life, in fulfillment of Jesus’s own words that he would rise on the third day. While she is still praying, the risen Jesus appears to her. In the meantime, Magdalene discovers Jesus’s empty tomb and seeks to find out where his body has been taken, in conformity with John 20:11–18 (ch. 83). Jesus, still with his mother, perceives Magdalene’s anguish and tells his mother that he wants to go to console Magdalene. The Virgin approves and sends him on his way. Chapter 84 then shows Jesus appearing alone to Magdalene, as in John 20:11–18. Strikingly, the text describes this visit as occurring in a preferential way, before all others, as Scripture states (p. 285). Here it seems clear that the author attempts to preserve the Gospel of John’s portrayal of Magdalene as the first to see the risen Jesus, without smoothing out the tension this creates with Jesus having already appeared first to his mother in the text. It seems as though the appearance to Jesus’s mother is considered to be in a class of its own, in light of her unique status in Jesus’s life and the church, so that Magdalene can properly be considered the first of Jesus’s other followers to see him post-resurrection. De Voragine explicitly deliberates this question in the *Golden Legend*. In Magdalene’s *vita*, he simply states that Christ appeared to her first (ch. 96, p. 376). In his treatment of the Resurrection of the Lord, however, he initially acknowledges that Jesus’s first appearance was to

evangelists to Jesus's mother, rather than to Magdalene.²²⁹ Although this was not the norm, it reflects the medieval understanding of Saint Magdalene as secondary to the Virgin in overall significance. We have already seen this in Magdalene's role as handmaid of the Virgin. A fifteenth century Swiss sermon on Magdalene also poetically captures this notion.²³⁰ It describes Mary, Jesus's mother, and Mary Magdalene as two lights that shine as examples for others. The mother is the sun who illumines the sinless ones who walk by day, while Magdalene represents the moon, the lesser light that calls sinners to repentance, since they live in the darkness of night.

Although Jacobus de Voragine ultimately concedes that the Virgin must have first seen the risen Jesus, he also acknowledges Magdalene as the first resurrection witness according to the New Testament Gospels,²³¹ giving five reasons why Jesus wanted to appear to her first: 1) "she loved him more ardently" (Luke 7:47);²³² 2) to show that he died for sinners (Matt 9:13); 3) harlots enter the kingdom of God before the wise; 4) since a woman had been the messenger of death (i.e., Eve),²³³ it is fitting for a woman to announce life; 5) where sin abounded, grace abounds even more (Rom 5:20).²³⁴ Most of these are not new to the Middle Ages, although Magdalene being explicitly equated with a harlot does not appear in the patristic era. Here it is clear that Magdalene's conflated image as penitent sinner, and therefore as grateful lover of

Magdalene, in accordance with the Gospels (ch. 54, pp. 219–220), but eventually concedes that he must have first appeared to the Virgin Mary, despite the Gospels' silence on the matter (ch. 54, pp. 221–222). To support this, he argues that it would be unthinkable for Jesus not to appear to, and console, his mother post-resurrection, since she certainly grieved more than others over his death. He reasons that the Gospels do not record this because if the witness of the other women who saw him was considered to be nonsense, then certainly no one would have believed the testimony of a mother on behalf of her own son. He also appeals to Ambrose's *De Virginibus*, where the Virgin is the first to encounter the risen Christ.

²²⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 59 cites this author as Eadmer of Canterbury, writing in the twelfth century.

²³⁰ "Saint Mary Magdalene," in Wilkinson, *Exemplary Lives*, 133.

²³¹ See note 228 above.

²³² de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 220.

²³³ Cf. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 73–74.

²³⁴ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 219–220. Cf. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 58, who cites Bonaventura's four reasons why Magdalene was the first to witness the risen Jesus: 1) she loved more ardently than others; 2) to show that Jesus came for sinners; 3) to condemn human pride; 4) to instill faith.

Jesus, becomes the basis for why she was the first to witness the risen Jesus, fusing her New Testament roles with her legendary ones. This list also shows how the conflated Magdalene figure supports the now common theological concept of the appropriateness of the first resurrection witness being a former sinner, since such a person embodies the significance of this event.²³⁵ Notably, female sexual immorality becomes paradigmatic of the depths of human sin from which Jesus redeems people.

Portrayals of Magdalene as first resurrection witness commonly draw on John 20:11–18, and the now famous “do not touch me” (*noli me tangere* in Latin) command from Jesus continues to fuel written and visual interpretations.²³⁶ The *Meditations* presents a compassionate treatment of Mary in the garden, showing that, while she wrongly searched for the living Jesus among the dead, she did so because she was overcome with grief and forgot Jesus’s promise that he would rise on the third day.²³⁷ The intimacy between Magdalene and the risen Jesus is apparent in their description as “two loving souls” immersed in “sweet gladness and the greatest joy.”²³⁸ As she gazes at him lovingly, she asks him about the details of what has occurred, and he responds. When Magdalene tries to kiss Jesus’s feet, he restrains her not as a harsh rebuke for lack of faith, but in order to “raise her soul to heavenly thoughts.”²³⁹ The author then asserts that he cannot believe that Jesus did not eventually let Magdalene kiss his hands and feet, since he made this preferential visit to relieve her grief. Before Jesus departs, Magdalene asks that he not forget her and his tender regard for her. Jesus reassures her and blesses her before taking leave. The *Meditations* also expresses Magdalene’s preferential status with Jesus in a subsequent

²³⁵ Cf. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 58–59.

²³⁶ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 215–217 for further examples from texts and art.

²³⁷ *Meditations*, ch. 84, pp. 284–285.

²³⁸ *Meditations*, ch. 84, pp. 284.

²³⁹ *Meditations*, ch. 84, pp. 284.

appearance to all of the disciples, including Magdalene.²⁴⁰ Here she is the beloved disciple who sits again at Jesus's feet as she did during her lifetime (as conflated with Mary of Bethany). Supposing that the disciples implored Jesus to stay with them longer than intended, the author states that it is easy to believe that Magdalene in particular, with confidence and reverent boldness, tugged on his clothes to get him to stay. He explains that this would not be presumptuous on her part, since her mutual love with Jesus was such that what she did was not displeasing to him.

Just as Magdalene is widely acknowledged as the first resurrection witness in the Middle Ages, so too is she commonly given the title of apostle-to-the-apostles (*apostolorum apostola*), honoring her as the first evangelist who announced the resurrection to Jesus's other followers. John 20:11–18 is foundational for Magdalene's portrayals in this role, since here Jesus commissions her alone to tell the disciples about his ascension, and implicitly, about his resurrection (cf. Matt 28:10), and she immediately does so (John 20:17–18). By also announcing that she has seen the Lord (v.18), Magdalene's role as first evangelist is integrally linked to her being a witness to the risen Jesus. *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene* describes this as Magdalene, most tenderly loved by Jesus, being elevated to such a position of grace and honor in seeing the risen Jesus first that she had to exercise her apostolate immediately.²⁴¹ In doing so, her honors multiply as she also functions as the prophet of the ascension, since she announces this to the other apostles before it occurs. In this regard, Magdalene is equal to John the Baptist as more than a prophet (Matt 11:7–15; Luke 7:24–28).²⁴² Some medieval texts also expand Magdalene's

²⁴⁰ *Meditations*, ch. 91, pp. 294–295.

²⁴¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 73.

²⁴² *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 84.

explicit New Testament roles by portraying her as a witness to Jesus's ascension and a recipient of the Holy Spirit.²⁴³

While there is broad agreement about Magdalene being apostle-to-the-apostles in the Middle Ages (with the exception of the Virgin receiving this title at times, as noted above), there is not consensus as to whether she continued to preach and make converts subsequent to Jesus's ascension, or, whether she exhausted her role as evangelist in announcing the resurrection to the disciples. Legends going back at least to the ninth or tenth century *vita apostolica* take the former view, as does the *Golden Legend*. It states that fourteen years after Christ's resurrection, Peter entrusted Magdalene to Maximin, one of Jesus's seventy-two disciples.²⁴⁴ Amidst persecution, Maximin, Magdalene, Martha, Lazarus, and others are set adrift in a rudderless boat. By God's will, they land safely in Marseilles. Magdalene is the first to preach Christ to the non-Christians there, calling them to turn from their cult of idols. They admire her beauty, eloquence, and sweet message, which the author sees as the result of her mouth having kissed the Savior's feet, so that it breathes "the perfume of the word of God more profusely than others could."²⁴⁵ Magdalene also preaches to the governor of the province and even appears to his wife in a vision, rebuking her for not providing food and shelter for the Christians who have arrived there. She even has her own disciples as she continues preaching in the region.

Magdalene also functions as an effective intercessor and miracle worker to confirm her preaching. For instance, the governor and his wife promise to do whatever Magdalene wishes if her God grants them a son. She prays, and God responds by allowing the governor's wife to conceive. While traveling with her husband to Rome, the wife dies in childbirth and her husband

²⁴³ E.g., *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 83; "Saint Mary Magdalene," in Wilkinson, *Exemplary Lives*, 139; cf. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 81–82.

²⁴⁴ See de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 376–381.

²⁴⁵ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 377.

leaves her body on an island, along with his living infant son. He and Peter return two years later to find his son unharmed, which he attributes to Magdalene's protection. So he implores Magdalene to bring his wife back to life by her prayers, and she does. As the wife returns to life she states that she actually journeyed with her husband and Peter in Rome while she was presumably dead, recounting the details of what they did and saw. Since Magdalene was her guide on this mystical journey, she appears not only as a miracle-worker, but also as an intermediary who can cross the boundary between life and death, between the merely human and the spiritual realms.

Excursus: Magdalene as Mother

Jansen details how the popularity of these miracle stories also associated Saint Mary Magdalene with fertility, childbirth, and motherhood in the Middle Ages, despite there being no New Testament indication that she experienced these during her life.²⁴⁶ There is, for example, evidence of medieval people praying to Magdalene to help them conceive, and their prayers being answered.²⁴⁷ And some women in Italy had nuptial dolls in the image of Magdalene that were thought to assist with childbirth.²⁴⁸ To some extent, barren women, those expecting, and distressed mothers starting turning to Saint Magdalene for her assistance in the Middle Ages, linking her in a surprising way with the most prominent saint associated with motherhood: the Virgin Mary.²⁴⁹ There are also instances of the faithful, such as Catherine of Siena, devoting

²⁴⁶ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 294–303.

²⁴⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 296–97.

²⁴⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 298.

²⁴⁹ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 298–299. Jansen devotes an entire chapter, “In the Shadow of the Virgin,” 286–306, to the similarities and differences between Saint Magdalene and the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages.

themselves to Magdalene as a spiritual mother and protectress, adding another dimension to Magdalene's less prominent image as a maternal figure.²⁵⁰

According to the *Golden Legend*, Magdalene and her companions end up converting Marseilles to Christianity, and Lazarus is elected as its bishop. They also successfully evangelize Aix, where Maximin is ordained as bishop. Magdalene retires to the wilderness to pursue heavenly contemplation. While the text portrays this as her choice and a noble path, it does leave only male apostles as church leaders. This is consistent with the theme of Magdalene being under the authority of male apostles, such as Maximin and Peter, during her ministry. In fact, the governor of Marseilles goes to Rome for the purpose of confirming with Peter whether or not what Magdalene preaches is the truth, showing that her apostolic ministry respects the church hierarchy of which it is a part.

The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene also describes Magdalene as preaching both to believers and non-believers when she takes a break from her contemplation. It sees it as fitting that she who was appointed apostle of the resurrection and prophet of the ascension should also be an evangelist for believers throughout the world.²⁵¹ And Cavalca's *life* of Magdalene describes her not only evangelizing Gaul, but also preaching during Christ's life.²⁵² As Jansen addresses in detail, medieval texts and art commonly depict Magdalene as a preacher post-ascension, with some claiming that she earned the golden crown typically reserved for preachers,

²⁵⁰ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 303.

²⁵¹ *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene*, trans. Mycoff, 96.

²⁵² See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 81.

and that she taught wisdom and the Christian faith.²⁵³ In 1297, the Dominicans—the mendicant Order of Preachers—even made Magdalene their patron.²⁵⁴

The image of Magdalene, as a woman, preaching to both Christians and the masses stands in sharp relief to the actual situation in the medieval church, which generally prohibited women’s public preaching and teaching.²⁵⁵ This was based in part on the New Testament prohibitions of women’s public teaching (1 Cor 14:34–35; 1 Tim 2:12), and on church tradition going as far back as Ambrose.²⁵⁶ The tension between Magdalene’s prominent portrayals as evangelist and the church’s position on women’s preaching led some to limit her proclaiming role to the one-time event of initially announcing the resurrection to Jesus’s disciples. Others claimed that she was only allowed to preach post-ascension due to a special dispensation of the Holy Spirit, perhaps because the early church lacked male preachers.²⁵⁷ Claiming that Magdalene had only announced the resurrection to the apostles was one strategy used to condemn so-called heretical groups, such as the Cathars and Waldensians, who defended having female preachers by appealing to Magdalene.²⁵⁸ So, while Magdalene’s evangelistic and apostolic activities were widely acknowledged and celebrated in the Middle Ages, this did not translate into broad support for other women taking on these roles in their own setting.

Contemplative

A final prominent image of medieval Magdalene is that of a contemplative. As already seen in Gregory the Great’s writings, this image is rooted in her conflation with Mary of

²⁵³ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 66–76.

²⁵⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 76.

²⁵⁵ See Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 54–57 for details.

²⁵⁶ As noted in the patristics section above.

²⁵⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 54–57, 66.

²⁵⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 56–57.

Bethany, who sits at Jesus's feet and listens to his teaching while Martha is busy providing hospitality (Luke 10:38–42). In the Middle Ages, Mary of Bethany is widely accepted as representative of the highest life of spiritual contemplation, while Martha represents the active life of service.²⁵⁹ Since Magdalene's identification with Mary of Bethany is the norm in this era, she too comes to symbolize the contemplative life.

The image of Magdalene listening at Jesus's feet also coheres with her ministering lovingly to his feet out of love and gratitude as the forgiven sinner of Luke 7. As noted above, her actions lead to an understanding that she is an especially close spiritual companion to Jesus, which goes hand-in-hand-with her image as a contemplative. The *Golden Legend* states that Magdalene's heavenly contemplation made her "enlightened by the light of perfect knowledge in her mind," which in turn makes her an enlightener of others.²⁶⁰ This resonates with the portrayals in early extra-canonical texts of Magdalene as one who has received special spiritual knowledge from Jesus and teaches it to others.

Another facet of Magdalene's contemplative life appears in the ninth century *vita eremitica*, which describes her living out the last thirty years of her life as a hermit in a desert, without food or clothing. The eleventh century *vita apostolico-eremitica* changes the setting of Magdalene's retreat to a cave in Gaul, where she dedicates herself for thirty years to contemplation after retiring from her missionary activity. This becomes a stable part of Magdalene's medieval biographies, and a cave in the Sainte-Baume mountain ridge in Provence was identified as Magdalene's retreat, and is still a pilgrimage site today. The *Golden Legend* merely states that she lived unknown to humans in a cave in the wilderness, surviving only on

²⁵⁹ E.g., *Meditations*, ch. 45, p. 156; cf. 54, pp. 185–191.

²⁶⁰ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 375.

spiritual, rather than earthly, sustenance while she devoted herself to heavenly contemplation.²⁶¹ Angels attend to her, even lifting her daily at the seven canonical hours to listen to the chants of the heavenly hosts. A priest who came to live a few miles from Magdalene realizes that a heavenly secret surrounds her existence, and approaches her, trembling, to learn her story. After identifying herself as Mary, the notorious sinner who earned forgiveness, she tells the priest to inform bishop Maximin that she will soon die, and that he should seek her in his church the following Easter.²⁶² He does so, and Maximin finds Magdalene in his church on the designated day, lifted two cubits above the floor by the choir of angels that brought her there, in prayer. Her face is so radiant from daily visions of angels that no one can gaze upon it directly. After taking Holy Communion from Maximin, she lies down before the altar and dies, releasing a sweet odor that permeated the church for seven days. Maximin buries her, and instructs that he also be buried near Magdalene.

Magdalene's legendary ascetic, contemplative retreat seems to have been initially understood as motivated by her love of Jesus and desire to pursue the "better part" (Luke 10:42) of spiritual proximity to God. At some point, it also started to be interpreted as a form of ongoing penitence in which she deprives herself of all the earthly comforts and pleasures that she enjoyed before her conversion. Visual images of Magdalene powerfully capture this dual understanding of her wilderness retreat. Similar to Mary of Egypt, legends developed of Magdalene's clothes disintegrating during her ascetical isolation and her hair growing long enough to cover her body, head to toe. Around the thirteenth century, striking images emerge of Magdalene as clothed only

²⁶¹ de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, 380–381.

²⁶² The priest's interactions with Magdalene echo those of the monk Zosimas, who comes upon Mary of Egypt in the desert and asks for her story. This perhaps reflects another element of Magdalene's *vita* that was taken from that of Mary of Egypt.

with her long hair, often praying and attended to by angels.²⁶³ Some images portray Magdalene's otherwise naked body as fully covered by her thick mane, while others give enough glimpses of her skin to remind the viewer of her nakedness. Her nudity may invoke humanity's primeval innocence, as Adam and Eve were naked in paradise, and thereby reflect Magdalene's forgiven, spiritually pure state. Her hair thereby seems to represent the spiritual covering and provision she receives as a contemplative who has renounced earthly goods for devotion to God alone. Yet, her nudity simultaneously evokes her sexually sinful past, suggesting that Magdalene's spiritual retreat is at least partly penitential. Toward the end of the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, portrayals of Magdalene increasingly pull her hair back and expose more of her body, making her a seductive figure that evokes her supposedly sinful past perhaps even more than her sanctified, contemplative retirement.

Magdalene as model contemplative led to the establishment of various institutions in her name that draw on this image. One university professor presents her as a model student who learned at the feet of Jesus himself, and a college at both Oxford and Cambridge were dedicated to Magdalene.²⁶⁴ Convents of various orders were also established under the patronage of Magdalene, distinct from the houses founded to reform wayward women.²⁶⁵ Many women who pursued a religious life looked to Magdalene for inspiration, not only because of her portrayals as a mystic, but also because of her paradigmatic repentance. The latter was especially significant to women who were not virgins when they dedicated themselves to Christ's service, since a

²⁶³ For a fuller discussion of this topic, with illustrations, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 229–236; Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 130–142.

²⁶⁴ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 118. Magdalen College at Oxford was established in 1458. Magdalene College at Cambridge was initially founded as a Benedictine hostel in 1428, then was re-established in 1542 as the College of St. Mary Magdalene.

²⁶⁵ See details in Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 119–124.

woman's holiness was largely linked with virginity.²⁶⁶ The legendary Magdalene's rise to sainthood after a sexually immoral past gave hope to these women that they too could achieve a purified state. For instance, Margaret of Cortona was an unwed mother who received divine assurance that her sorrowful repentance restored her virginal purity. She even heard Christ say that Magdalene herself was in the heavenly choir of virgins. This example shows that the many images of medieval Magdalene, such as repentant whore and contemplative, were not always strictly separated from one another. In fact, Jansen notes that some medieval mendicant preaching portrays Magdalene as pursuing the mixed life of both active ministry and contemplation.²⁶⁷

Margaret's experience also reflects another striking similarity between medieval Magdalene and Mary, Jesus's mother, that has already emerged in other contexts; namely, an understanding of *both* women as virgins. Jansen notes that at times the floral wreath typically reserved for virgins was ascribed to medieval Magdalene, and that in the litany she was at the head of the virginal choir, only surpassed by the Virgin Mary.²⁶⁸ While not necessarily considered a virgin in body, the common concept that Magdalene strictly maintained her chastity after her conversion, and by her ongoing penitence, facilitated an image of her as a spiritual virgin. It is precisely the fact that she achieved such a pure and honorable state after having lived a sinful life that distinguished her from the supposedly sinless Virgin Mary, and that thereby made her a more accessible role model to many women, whether belonging to a religious order

²⁶⁶ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 177–191 for a thorough discussion of this topic. She addresses Margaret of Cortona's story on 184–187. Cf. Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 286–294.

²⁶⁷ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 49–51.

²⁶⁸ Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 287.

or not. Magdalene's restored virginity provided hope of salvation and closeness to God to those who had not lived perfect lives, but who had sincerely repented.²⁶⁹

What is clear overall in medieval interpretations of Magdalene is that her multi-faceted biography provides several powerful characterizations of the saint that can be variously emphasized and expounded upon for particular ends. Her New Testament portrayals provide a partial foundation for her legends, and they are at times significantly amplified. Sometimes, however, they are nearly absorbed into the images of Magdalene that develop from her conflation with Mary of Bethany and the woman of Luke 7:36–50. Although Magdalene's alleged sexually sinful past is never completely out of view, it is precisely her exemplary repentance and loving dedication to Christ that make her a popular saint. As such, her images are widely disseminated through sermons, liturgy, devotional material, art, and drama, so that they become part of the medieval cultural fabric.

Renaissance Portraits of Magdalene

The fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Empire in 1453 resulted in many Eastern Christian scholars leaving for Western Europe, bringing the classical Greek learning and texts with them that would become a key component of Renaissance humanism. This affected Magdalene's portrayals in several ways. A very significant one is that scholarly challenges emerged to the church's conflation of her with other New Testament women. Related to this, Protestant reformers moved away from Magdalene's medieval legendary portrayals and instead emphasized her New Testament roles, often in support of their own theologies. At the same time, Renaissance art in particular made Magdalene into a figure that synthesized both sacred and

²⁶⁹ For a more detailed discussion of Magdalene as virgin, see Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen*, 286–294.

secular themes. In response to these societal shifts, the Catholic Church's Counter-Reformation employed some of the Magdalene's medieval images to reinforce its own theology and values, while also seeking to curb the more legendary aspects of Magdalene's story that Protestants critiqued.

Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the De-conflating of Mary Magdalene

Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples (c. 1455–1536) was a French humanist, priest, professor, and biblical scholar whose work reflects some of the key components of the emerging Protestant Reformation. For instance, he studied the New Testament in Greek, its language of composition. In doing so, he presented an implicit challenge to the authority of the Roman Church's Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. And his assertion of the ultimate authority of Christian Scripture over church tradition became one of the foundations of the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation. While Lefèvre himself remained a pious Catholic his whole life, his work fueled the incipient challenges to the previously unquestioned authority of the church to interpret the Bible and define Christian doctrine and practice.

Debate had already emerged regarding the identification of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the woman of Luke 7:36–50 when Lefèvre wrote his critiques of this conflation between 1517 and 1520.²⁷⁰ One factor that may have contributed to these debates was the arrival in the West of liturgy from the Eastern church, which always celebrated Magdalene as a separate person, in contrast to the Roman Church's celebration of her as conflated with the two other

²⁷⁰ For Lefèvre's treatises on Mary Magdalene in Latin and English, as well as a thorough introduction to the context and debates that shaped them, see *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Sheila M. Porrer, *Travaux d'Humanisme et Renaissance* 451 (Geneva: Droz, 2009). All citations of Lefèvre's treatises on Mary Magdalene follow the English translation in this edition.

women.²⁷¹ Lefèvre argues against this conflation by closely examining the New Testament texts that explicitly refer to each of them, and concludes that they are to be understood as three distinct women. He cites Gregory the Great as the first one to make this identification, seemingly due to the confusion about the identities of the various women who anoint Jesus in the Gospels. Lefèvre reflects some of the impulses of modern historical-literary-critical biblical scholarship in arguing against Magdalene's identity with any of these anointing women. For example, he states that only Luke 7:36–50 in the Gospels serves to make such a connection, and even this sparse evidence does not hold given that the explicit introduction and characterization of Mary Magdalene in Luke 8:1–3 clarifies that a different woman is in view.²⁷² Among other factors, these women are distinguished by the fact that the one in Luke 7 was forgiven of her sins, while Mary Magdalene was freed from seven devils; according to Lefèvre, to be attacked by a devil is an illness, not a sin.²⁷³ This diverges from Gregory's interpretation of the devils as Magdalene's sin that became widespread in the medieval era. Lefèvre argues that Gregory meant this as allegory rather than as the text's historical meaning.²⁷⁴ This shift away from the allegorical exegesis that was common in the Middle Ages became a key characteristic of Reformation biblical exegesis.

Addressing those who might critique his contradiction of the view of the great church father, Gregory, Lefèvre argues that his view finds overwhelming support in the many fathers before Gregory who did not conflate the three women.²⁷⁵ Lefèvre thereby seeks to correct church

²⁷¹ Noting that no single text shows the definitive start of the challenges to the conflated Magdalene, Sheila M. Porrer offers this as one of several possible contributors. Others include the renewed interest at the time in the Greek and Latin church fathers, many of who do not conflate Magdalene with other women, and the sixteenth century liturgical reforms that perhaps led pious humanists to try to separate Mary of Bethany from her association with prostitution. See *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 46–48.

²⁷² *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 207, 427, 429.

²⁷³ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 207.

²⁷⁴ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 207, 225, 439.

²⁷⁵ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 199, 201, 203, 221.

tradition in part by drawing on that same tradition. This reflects both his respect for tradition and his conviction that Scripture, along with reason, is the ultimate authority when a position stands in contradiction to the church's writings and practices. Significantly, Lefèvre does not radically challenge the cults of the saints in the way the Protestant reformers will, and is concerned not to completely disrupt popular piety. He tells of having venerated Magdalene himself at her pilgrimage sites in Provence, and counters fears that a de-conflated Magdalene will diminish spiritual devotion by arguing that, on the contrary, people will now have three individual women to celebrate, since all serve as excellent examples of perfect love for Christ.²⁷⁶

The Mary Magdalene that Lefèvre identifies is basically the one that is explicitly designated in the New Testament Gospels, with some details filled in. She is the woman who followed Jesus in Galilee and served him out of her own resources, making her an example for those who minister to others through acts of charity.²⁷⁷ Without clear support in Luke 8:1–3, Lefèvre argues that the women listed here are holy matrons, including some of the mothers of the apostles, whose husbands either traveled along with them, or, who were widows that brought their children along.²⁷⁸ The prestige of this group is such that Lefèvre argues it would be shameful for a repentant prostitute (i.e., the woman of Luke 7:36–50) to join them immediately after her conversion. He clearly separates this figure from the Mary Magdalene who participated in the key events of Jesus's passion and resurrection as a disciple, and eventually, as apostle-to-the-apostles.²⁷⁹

Lefèvre's argument for this de-conflated Mary Magdalene had both its supporters and its sharp critics. The latter consisted of churchmen and academics, including the Sorbonne in Paris,

²⁷⁶ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 167, 169, 227, 251, 435.

²⁷⁷ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 167, 169.

²⁷⁸ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 429, 435.

²⁷⁹ *Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples and the Three Maries Debates*, ed. and trans. Porrer, 253.

which condemned his view in 1521. The controversy was due to the fact that Lefèvre had challenged not only the Roman Church's view of Saint Mary Magdalene, but also its very authority to interpret the Bible and prescribe Christian doctrine and practice. This challenge is taken up more fully by the Protestant reformers.

Martin Luther and John Calvin on Mary Magdalene

Martin Luther (1483–1546), a German monk, priest, and professor, became a key figure in the Protestant Reformation through his sharp critiques of the Roman Church's theology and practices. His conviction that people are justified by faith alone, not aided by works, became the cornerstone of his theology. It arose from his own careful reading of Scripture, which he asserted even more vehemently than Lefèvre as authoritative over the teaching of the church, and even of the pope himself. Luther also critiqued the Roman Church's veneration of the saints, among other practices he considered to be idolatrous. He nonetheless still considered some saints, such as Magdalene, to be worthy of respect and consideration because of their exemplary faith and conduct. Although Lefèvre's critique of the conflated Magdalene appeared around the same time that Luther posted his ninety-five theses disputing Church practices (1517), Luther still takes this conflation for granted. Overall, he sees this Magdalene as exemplary in the various biblical texts associated with her, and as a representative of all Christians in many cases.

In a lecture on Psalm 119, Luther describes Magdalene's fervent search for Jesus at the grave as a bride seeking her husband.²⁸⁰ In the context of his lecture, she thereby represents the faithful synagogue that becomes the bride of Christ, or the church. He adds that she alone may explain the Songs of Songs, seeming to reflect the common medieval interpretation of this text as

²⁸⁰ Martin Luther, *First lectures on the Psalms* (1513–1515), LW 11:509–510.

an allegory for the relationship between Christ and the church, and of Magdalene as symbol of the church.

Luther addresses Magdalene's prominent role at Jesus's tomb more extensively in his sermons on John 20, dating from 1528–1529.²⁸¹ He praises her ardent love and zeal in seeking Jesus, and sees her passionate weeping as a sign of her great devotion to him. The image he paints is of a person drunk with love, “without any sense or reason,” who gives no regard to the danger or potential obstacles in her search for Jesus.²⁸² Indeed, Magdalene is so consumed with love for Jesus that she does not even see the angels standing at the tomb. She forgets everything but Christ, including her “womanly reserve and her station.”²⁸³ Magdalene is thereby an example of how of all Christians should be aflame with love for Christ and cling to him and his gospel alone.²⁸⁴

When Magdalene does finally encounter the risen Jesus, Luther presents a relatively sympathetic understanding of his prohibition of her touch.²⁸⁵ It is not because Jesus generally objects to her touch, but rather is concerned that Magdalene misunderstands the nature of his resurrection and wants to correct this. According to Luther, she assumes Jesus has returned to the same form of human life that he had before his death, so that her communion with him could carry on as it had before. Jesus therefore prohibits her touch as a means of explaining that he has risen into a different existence that will come to fullness with his ascension to heaven, where he will rule as King.

While Luther does acknowledge that Magdalene obeys Jesus's command and passes on news of his resurrection to the disciples, he does not celebrate her as apostle-to-the-apostles or

²⁸¹ Martin Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:284ff.

²⁸² Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:298.

²⁸³ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:299.

²⁸⁴ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:299, 302.

²⁸⁵ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:304–305.

indicate that she had an ongoing preaching role in the Christian community. Instead, her role seems to be provisional, with the disciples she first preaches the resurrection to being entrusted with the task of preaching to the whole world.²⁸⁶ This is consistent with the view Luther states elsewhere, that women are typically not to teach or preach publically, unless there is no man available to do so.²⁸⁷

Luther also addresses Magdalene's deep spiritual bond with Jesus, derived from her identification with Mary of Bethany.²⁸⁸ As Jesus's host, she developed close fellowship with him, risking property, honor, and life itself to follow him. To the present-day Christian who might say it was easier for Mary to have this intense love for Jesus because she was physically with him, Luther argues that her love resulted primarily from her clinging to his words, not just his physical presence. In this regard she too is exemplary for Luther, this time for how all Christians should treasure the preached Word of the gospel of Christ, which they have had with them for a longer time than did Mary. For Luther, the proclamation of the gospel is key for people coming to faith and knowledge of Christ, and is something he critiques as lacking under the papacy. Understanding Magdalene/Mary of Bethany as pious exemplar of eagerly receiving the spoken Word therefore serves Luther's theology better than does the medieval interpretation of this figure as an ascetical contemplative who enjoys spiritual ecstasy.

Luther mentions Magdalene in terms of her identification with the repentant sinner of Luke 7 in a variety of contexts, often as exemplary of his understanding that God's forgiveness is a gift that human actions cannot merit.²⁸⁹ By humbling herself at Jesus's feet, laying claim to nothing, Magdalene allows Jesus to speak of her merits and exalt her above the Pharisee. She is

²⁸⁶ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:309, 351.

²⁸⁷ Martin Luther, *The Misuse of the Mass* (1521), LW 36:151–52.

²⁸⁸ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 17–20* (1528–1529), LW 69:299–301.

²⁸⁹ E.g., Martin Luther, *Selected Psalms III* (1518–1525), LW 14:150–151, 346; *Two Kinds of Righteousness* (1519), LW 31:303; *Sermons on the Gospel of St. John, Chapters 6–8* (1530–1532), LW 23:247–248.

saved by the faith which led her seek to forgiveness from Jesus. Luther uses this to defend his doctrine of justification by faith alone against the papists, who allegedly claim that the woman's act of love saves her.²⁹⁰ For Luther, the woman is not forgiven because of her love, but rather her love flows from her having received forgiveness freely. Luther also cites the "poor harlot Mary Magdalene" to illustrate how Jesus chooses the lowly as his disciples, clearly showing his understanding of her as a former prostitute.²⁹¹

John Calvin (1509–1564), the influential French theologian, pastor, and reformer, does apparently distinguish Mary Magdalene from Mary of Bethany and the repentant sinner of Luke 7. In his commentary on John, however, he provides a bleaker assessment of her role in the events of the resurrection than does Luther.²⁹² He acknowledges her as a faithful disciple, present at Jesus's crucifixion and with him to the end, showing that she was not delivered of seven devils in vain.²⁹³ At the empty tomb, however, he portrays her as overly emotional, superstitious, and set on earthly things.²⁹⁴ In harmonizing John 20 with the other Gospel resurrection accounts, Calvin understands Magdalene to stay at Jesus's tomb with other women after Peter and John have already discovered it to be empty. The women are not to be praised for this action, since the male disciples leave the tomb with comfort and joy at believing in the resurrection, however

²⁹⁰ Martin Luther, *Luther's Explanatory Notes on the Gospels*, ed. E. Mueller, trans. Peter Anstadt (New York: P. Anstadt and Sons, 1899), 210–211.

²⁹¹ Luther, *Sermons on the Gospel of John, Chapters 1–4* (1537–1540), LW 22:192–193. One note in *Table Talk* cites Luther as saying that Christ adulterated with three women: the woman at the well in John 4, Magdalene, and the woman caught in adultery in John 8. While this has been used to claim that Luther believed Jesus and Magdalene had a romantic relationship, caution is in order for such assertions. Luther himself did not write this statement, and the person who did (Johannes Schlaginhaufens) does not provide context. The footnote on this statement suggests that Luther may have been describing the accusations against Jesus as an adulterer, glutton, etc., when he made this remark. In any case, Luther does not make this claim about Jesus and Magdalene in any of his own writings. See *Table Talk* (1532), no. 1472 and n. 100, LW 54:154.

²⁹² John Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21 and the First Epistle of John*, trans. T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Commentaries* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1961).

²⁹³ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 181.

²⁹⁴ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 191–201.

incompletely, while the women “are filled with idle and useless weeping.”²⁹⁵ This is in contrast to Luther’s positive assessment of Magdalene’s weeping as reflecting her love for Jesus. It also resonates with the sixteenth century development of the English term *maudlin*, derived from *Magdalene*, to describe someone who is excessively tearful or emotional, as may occur with drunkenness.²⁹⁶

On a more positive note, Calvin understands Magdalene’s immediate recognition of the risen Christ when he calls her by name as reflective of the calling of all Christians, stating that people only truly know Christ when Christ first invites them to himself. Calvin describes this as the conversion of her dull mind, possible because God enlightens her by the Holy Spirit. Magdalene calling Jesus “Rabboni” in response is her profession of obedience to him as his disciple, and exemplifies that all whom Christ calls should respond immediately.²⁹⁷

Not wanting to contradict Matthew 28:9, Calvin explains Jesus’s “do not touch me” in John 20:17 not as a general prohibition of the women touching him, but rather as a rebuke of them touching him too much.²⁹⁸ He thinks Jesus allowed the women to touch him to alleviate their doubt, but stopped them when he realized they were too fixated on his bodily presence, reflecting their “foolish and unreasonable” desire to keep him in the world.²⁹⁹ They do not understand that his resurrection is not complete until he ascends to rule from the Father’s right hand, and they therefore serve as an example for Christians to lift their minds on high and rid themselves of earthly affections.

²⁹⁵ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 196.

²⁹⁶ For more on the literature and depictions of Magdalene that led to this terminology, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 270–276; cf. Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*, 9.

²⁹⁷ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 198.

²⁹⁸ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 198–199.

²⁹⁹ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 198.

Calvin acknowledges Magdalene and the other women as the first to see the risen Jesus and to announce the resurrection to the other disciples. This seems to be problematic for some, however, since he addresses why John would present a woman (i.e., Magdalene) as the first witness to the resurrection—the chief article of the Christian faith—rather than more important witnesses. His response is in part that God chooses the weak and the foolish to confound the wisdom of the flesh (1 Cor 1:27).³⁰⁰ He further argues that the women first saw the risen Christ and passed this news along to the apostles in order to shame them for being slow to believe in the resurrection, stating, “those whom the Son of God had so long and laboriously taught with little or no success, deserve to have as their teachers, not only women, but even oxen and asses.”³⁰¹ The women’s role as first proclaimers of the resurrection is therefore extremely important, but also provisional. Calvin rejects the idea that the women act as apostles here, and states that the office of announcing the resurrection to the world belongs to the other disciples. He also clarifies that their one-time role as teachers of the apostles is not to be taken as exemplary, apparently countering some who have inferred from their acts that women can baptize.³⁰²

While there are significant differences between Luther and Calvin’s interpretations of Magdalene, they share an emphasis on portrayals of Magdalene (and the women she is conflated with, in Luther’s case) that arise from the New Testament, more so than from medieval hagiography. Both scholars also reflect aspects of their own theological convictions through the figure of Magdalene, and place less emphasis on her role as first proclaimer of the resurrection than is found in the medieval church. Despite some critiques of the conflated Magdalene, an

³⁰⁰ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 191.

³⁰¹ Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 199. Here Calvin seems to refer to instances such as that recorded in Numbers 22:22–35, where a donkey is enabled to speak as a rebuke to its rider, Balaam, who was displeasing to God.

³⁰² Calvin, *The Gospel According to St. John 2, 11–21*, 199–200.

image so ingrained in popular imagination would not easily fade away, as seen vividly in Renaissance artistic portrayals.

Renaissance Magdalene: A Synthesis of the Sacred and the Secular

Magdalene's medieval legendary images continued to be popular throughout the Renaissance, despite Lefèvre and others' attempts to put these aside in favor of her biblical roles. These images, however, increasingly combine aspects of the church's narratives about Magdalene with themes of the surrounding culture, including from the Greek classics that were revived in Europe during this time. This resulted, generally speaking, in portrayals of Magdalene that make her a more overtly sensuous figure that expresses both religious and secular themes. This shift is especially visible in Renaissance visual art.

As early as the fifteenth century in Germany, Magdalene's long hair that serves as her only garment starts being portrayed as covering less of her body.³⁰³ As Haskins notes, Gregor Erhart's wooden statue of Magdalene that dates to about 1500, entitled *La Belle Allemande* or *Saint Mary Magdalene*, exemplifies this.³⁰⁴ It shows Magdalene standing with her hands joined in what might be a position of prayer, reflecting her penitential and contemplative hermitage. Her long hair covers her genitals but drapes around her breasts, leaving them exposed. The statue thus combines medieval images of the ascetic Magdalene, whose nudity in part represents innocence, with the Renaissance interest in the human body and physical beauty.

While some more traditional images of Magdalene as a repentant sinner remain during the Renaissance, sixteenth century Italian art in particular increasingly portrays her with as much

³⁰³ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 232.

³⁰⁴ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 233–234.

interest in her beauty and sensuality as in her religious penitence.³⁰⁵ Titian's 1531 painting, the *Penitent Magdalene*, epitomizes this tendency. It shows a full-figured Magdalene from the waist up, naked and wrapped in her long golden hair that does not cover her breasts. This portrayal reflects Renaissance ideals of female beauty, and casts Magdalene as a Venus figure, the Roman goddess of love, beauty, and desire.³⁰⁶ Her face turned to the side and her attempts at covering her breasts with her right hand while she covers her groin with her left hand are features of the "modest Venus" (*Venus Pudica*) convention that portrays the goddess in a way that both conceals part of her body while also revealing much of it. In fact, Titian's Magdalene bears striking similarities to Venus in Botticelli's famous fifteenth century painting, *Birth of Venus*. The ointment jar sitting in the bottom left-hand corner of the portrait helps identify the woman in Titian's painting as Magdalene. Her image as penitent sinner comes across in her upward gaze with tear-filled eyes. While the medieval saint is still visible in this portrait, it is a much more sensual portrayal of her penitence and hermitage than in earlier times. As Maisch notes, Renaissance era portrayals no longer invite the viewer to contemplate Magdalene's converted state as much as the sinful life of passionate love that she left behind.³⁰⁷ By casting Magdalene as a Venus, Titian and others effectively reconfigure her to express both divine and erotic love, as well as the general Renaissance interests in beauty and the human body.

³⁰⁵ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 235–248.

³⁰⁶ For more on Magdalene as a Venus figure, see Malvern, *Venus in Sackcloth*; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 236–248, 261; Rachel Geschwind, "The Printed Penitent: Magdalene Imagery and Prostitution Reform in Early Modern Italian Chapbooks and Broadsheets," in *Mary Magdalene: Iconographic Studies from the Middle Ages to the Baroque*, ed. Michelle A. Erhardt and Amy M. Morris (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 107–134; pp. 120–122 referenced here.

³⁰⁷ Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 65, 76.

Magdalene in the Counter-Reformation

The Protestant reformers' critique of the Roman Church's theology and practices necessitated a response. At the Council of Trent (1545–1563), the Roman Church reaffirmed many of its beliefs and practices that Protestants opposed, but also made some attempts to curb clear excesses, such as the sale of indulgences as assurance of salvation that Luther so vehemently attacked. This Council became emblematic of the Counter-Reformation, which was, in part, the Roman Church's response to the Protestant Reformation. Despite Protestant criticism of the cults of saints and use of religious art, the Roman Church did not do away with the legendary portrayals of Saint Mary Magdalene or her portrayal in art; perhaps it simply could not, since these elements had become part of the cultural fabric, reflected in Luther's own acceptance of the conflated Magdalene. Instead, portrayals of the conflated Magdalene shift in Counter-Reformation culture to reflect key beliefs and practices of the Roman Church. One twentieth-century author even calls Magdalene the "favourite saint of the Counter-Reformation."³⁰⁸

Magdalene's penitential conversion especially takes on renewed significance in the Counter-Reformation. It reaffirms the Roman Church's commitment to the sacrament of penance, which Protestants rejected.³⁰⁹ It likewise reflects the Church's understanding of salvation involving both faith and human action, when Magdalene's ministering to Jesus at Simon's house is seen as contributing to her forgiveness, rather than merely as a response to it. As noted in the previous section, visual art of Magdalene as a penitent continues to be popular during the Renaissance, and Counter-Reformation representations of this theme abound. One

³⁰⁸ H. J. C. Grierson, *Cross Currents in English Literature of the XVIIth Century: or, the World, the Flesh & the Spirit, Their Actions & Reactions*, Messenger Lectures on the Evolution of Civilization (London: Chatto & Windus, 1929), 181.

³⁰⁹ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 249.

example is Peter Paul Rubens's *Christ and the Penitent Sinners* (1617), which depicts Jesus with Magdalene, Peter, the thief who repented on the cross next to Jesus, and King David. This group of famous penitents surrounding Jesus places more emphasis on repentance and devotion to Christ than comes across in works such as Titian's *Penitent Magdalene*. In Rubens's piece, Magdalene is bowed down reverently before Jesus, recalling her supposed conversion at his feet in the Pharisee's house. Although she has on a garment besides her hair, it still leaves much of her torso uncovered and her breasts nearly exposed. Jesus is also only partially covered in a cloth, showing that, while the Counter-Reformation Church sought to curb the nudity and eroticism in earlier Renaissance religious works, it was not entirely successful in doing so.³¹⁰

Magdalene's repentance was also portrayed in conjunction with her solitary hermitage in Counter-Reformation works. These images show her alone in nature, having turned away from the world. They often include a book and a skull along with her ointment jar. The book represents her contemplation, while the skull is a symbol of Jesus's death that also reminds the penitent of her own mortality and the transitoriness of life.³¹¹ One example of Magdalene's wilderness portrayals is Titian's 1565 revision of his *Penitent Magdalene*, in which she is now mostly clothed with a shawl, although she still appears as a sensual figure.

Images of a penitent, contemplative Magdalene also reflect the Counter-Reformation emphases on strengthening spiritual life and dedication to Christ's service, which result in the foundation of new religious orders, or the reformation of existing ones. Teresa of Ávila is a prominent example of this movement, and of those who devoted themselves to the religious life finding inspiration in Magdalene.³¹² The Spanish Carmelite nun, mystic, and writer desired a

³¹⁰ See Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 256–261.

³¹¹ For more details on this theme, see Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 62–81; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 269–270.

³¹² For more examples, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 254–256.

more rigorous spiritual discipline, so she founded a convent that followed a stricter rule. This developed into a wider movement called the Discalced Carmelites, which became a separate order in 1593.³¹³ Inheriting the conflation of Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the repentant woman of Luke 7, Teresa was especially motivated by the saint's conversion and dedication to Christ. She writes of her devotion to Magdalene and how she often meditates on her conversion, especially when she takes communion. Comparing herself to Magdalene as the penitent sinner, Teresa states of one communion experience, "since I knew the Lord was certainly present there within me, I, thinking that He would not despise my tears, placed myself at His feet ... and I commended myself to this glorious saint [i.e., Magdalene] that she might obtain pardon for me."³¹⁴

In sum, Lefèvre's critique of the conflation of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the repentant sinner of Luke 7 was an important shift, not only for interpretation of the medieval saint, but also for its use of biblical texts as the primary source on Magdalene. This leads some Protestant interpreters in particular to focus more on the Mary Magdalene portrayed in the New Testament than the legendary one of medieval hagiography. Even so, Luther and Calvin place less emphasis on Magdalene's New Testament roles as first witness and proclaimer of Jesus's resurrection than do many medieval interpretations of the saint. Overall, the medieval, conflated Magdalene still proves meaningful and useful and to Catholics, some Protestants, and the broader cultural milieu. Magdalene is increasingly a figure that bridges religious and non-religious themes, interpreted not only by church officials and monastics, but also by academics and artists.

³¹³ See "Teresa of Avila" in *Handbook of Women Biblical Interpreters*, ed. Marion Ann Taylor and Agnes Choi.

³¹⁴ Teresa of Ávila, *The Book of Her Life*, ch. 9.2, in *The Collected Works of St. Teresa of Avila*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh, o.c.d and Otilio Rodriguez, o.c.d., vol. 1, (Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 1976), 71.

Magdalene in the Modern Era

That Mary Magdalene has become a malleable figure, shaped to express a variety of sacred and secular interests, is increasingly apparent in the modern era. Her mythical identity as a fallen woman serves to explore female sexuality and the role of women in society. The Catholic Church continues to honor her as the composite saint, while both Catholic and Protestant religious works draw on various aspects of her New Testament portrayals. And with the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason there is a growing split between sanctioned ecclesiastical interpretations of the Bible and those of academically trained biblical scholars, especially in Protestant circles. This results in challenges to traditional Christian doctrine, as well as the use of biblical texts to discover the history of early Christianity, which affects Magdalene interpretation in significant ways.

Magdalene in Modern Culture

As in the Renaissance, modern culture continues to be fascinated with the image of Magdalene as a woman who deviates from sexual norms, and may or may not be reformed. Noble courtesans are prominent in eighteenth century literature, and are often associated with Magdalene as identified with the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50. Drawing on this theme, a courtesan may be converted to a virtuous life by her love for a noble man.³¹⁵ Paul Heyse's 1899 play, *Maria von Magdala*, portrays Magdalene as a courtesan within the events of the New Testament.³¹⁶ She is not a paid prostitute, but does take lovers, including Jesus's betrayer, Judas.

³¹⁵ For more on this theme, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 286–289; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 79, 111–133.

³¹⁶ Paul Heyse, *Maria von Magdala: Drama in 5 Akten* (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1904). For an English version, see Paul Heyse and William Winter, *Mary of Magdala: an Historical and Romantic Drama in Five Acts* (New York: Macmillan, 1903).

When a crowd tries to stone her as an adulteress, Jesus saves her. This transforms Magdalene into a devoted follower of Jesus who renounces her human lovers out of pure love for Jesus.

While Heyse's Magdalene exercises some personal agency and independence, many eighteenth to twentieth century literary and dramatic works draw on her legendary character to develop the trope of the fallen woman, who is victimized by a society whose morals she violates.³¹⁷ These sinful women transgress societal sexual norms in some fashion: as prostitutes, unwed mothers, adulteresses, etc. This is usually not by their own choice, but rather because their parents die, they are seduced, or are otherwise vulnerable and do what is necessary to survive. The fallen woman is mostly a passive figure, driven by fate to a tragic end (e.g., suicide or being killed) in a society that offers outsiders like her no chance for redemption or a place to belong. Such works not only explore pressing contemporaneous issues of women's sexuality and role in society, but also critique the strict morality that drives the fallen woman to destruction.

The medieval Magdalene's role as a figurehead in movements to reform prostitutes continues in modernity. "The Great Social Evil" of prostitution was increasingly seen as a threat to public health and morality in Victorian England, and the number of "Magdalene Houses" to keep prostitutes from society while they were rehabilitated increased.³¹⁸ A prostitute was called a *magdalen*, and the very practice was at times referred to as *magdalenism*.³¹⁹ This woman stood as a contrast and threat to the Victorian ideal of a middle-class woman as virtuous, pure, and confined to the domestic realm, where she selflessly serves husband and children. In effect, the prostitute/housewife dichotomy reflected a religious and cultural contrast between the legendary

³¹⁷ See, for example, Friedrich Hebbel's drama, *Maria Magdalena* (1843); for an English edition see Friedrich Hebbel, Barker Fairley, and L. H. Allen, *Three Plays* (J. M. Dent & Sons, 1914). For more on this theme, see Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 333–341; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 79, 111–133.

³¹⁸ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 315–365.

³¹⁹ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 318; William Tait, *Magdalenism: An Inquiry into the Extent, Causes, and Consequences of Prostitution in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: P. Rickard, 1840).

Mary Magdalene and the Virgin Mother Mary, who adequately models feminine ideals of the era. Over time, the *magdalens* placed in the custody of institutions—at times against their own will—were not just prostitutes, but also any woman considered to be in violation of sexual norms, such as unwed mothers or women who had been sexually active outside of marriage. Some of the Magdalene Laundries in Ireland notoriously became like forced labor asylums, with the last one closing only in 1996.³²⁰ While the complex issues involved in these practices cannot be explored here, it is striking that the woman known from the New Testament primarily as a faithful follower of Jesus and first proclaimer of his resurrection becomes synonymous with female sexual deviance and attempted rehabilitation.

Magdalene as representative of female sexuality, seduction, and agency proliferates in twentieth and twenty-first century works of popular culture.³²¹ While some of these portraits originated in novels, they became even more widely known through film adaptations. For example, Nikos Kazantzakis's 1955 novel, *The Last Temptation*, was made into a 1988 film that portrays Jesus as so fully human that he is subject to all forms of temptation, including lust and the possibility of not dying on the cross.³²² Magdalene is a whore who represents the sin that Jesus came to redeem, and becomes his follower after he saves her from the mob that wants to stone her. Jesus has romantic feelings for Magdalene that present a great temptation to have a sexual relationship with her, and to even marry her and have children together—all of which would constitute exchanging his divine calling for a mundane life.³²³ Speculation that Jesus and

³²⁰ Rebecca Lea McCarthy, *Origins of the Magdalene Laundries: An Analytical History* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, 2010), 1–3.

³²¹ For an overview of these works, see Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 68–73, 98–120; Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 366–400; Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 156–175.

³²² *The Last Temptation of Christ*, directed by Martin Scorsese (1988; Irvington, NY: Criterion Collection, 2000), DVD. See note 9 in chapter 1 for the novel's publication information.

³²³ Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 167–170.

Magdalene may have been married or had a romantic relationship also appears in other works.³²⁴ While the 1970 rock opera-turned-movie *Jesus Christ Superstar* does not explicitly show them in such a relationship, Magdalene, the repentant woman who anoints Jesus, expresses strong feelings for him that she never had for the many men she previously knew.³²⁵ And the bestselling book, *The Da Vinci Code*, which became a movie in 2006, explores the possibility that Jesus and Magdalene were romantic partners and that the French Merovingian kings came from their bloodline.³²⁶ While some earlier Christian writings portray Magdalene as a spiritual intimate companion of Jesus and representative of the church as his bride, these modern works go even further in exploring the possibility of an explicit romantic relationship between them. Like the conflated Magdalene they draw on, many of these interpretations do not have a clear foundation in the earliest historical evidence for Magdalene. They instead draw on various traditions about her, reconfiguring aspects of them for new situations and audiences. In doing so, they often perpetuate the conflation of Magdalene with the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50. There are, however, other more recent interpretations of Magdalene that portray a different image. Margaret Starbird, for example, understands Magdalene as Jesus’s divine feminine counterpart.³²⁷

³²⁴ This is a theme in several novels by Margaret Starbird, including *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar: Mary Magdalen and the Holy Grail* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1993). In addition to novels, there are some scholarly treatments of this theme, including William E. Phipps, *Was Jesus Married? The Distortion of Sexuality in the Christian Tradition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), and Barbara Thiering, *Jesus the Man: A New Interpretation from the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Doubleday, 1992).

³²⁵ *Jesus Christ Superstar*, directed by Norman Jewison (1973; Universal City, CA: Universal, 2004), DVD.

³²⁶ Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003); *The Da Vinci Code*, directed by Ron Howard (Culver City, CA: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, 2006), DVD.

³²⁷ Margaret Starbird, *The Woman with the Alabaster Jar*; Margaret Starbird, *The Goddess in the Gospels: Reclaiming the Sacred Feminine* (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1998).

Modern Ecclesiastical and Academic Views on Magdalene

In the patristic and medieval eras, biblical interpretation was mostly the prerogative of church leaders (i.e., bishops and popes), or members of religious orders. While Reformation era scholars challenged this locus of interpretive authority, many of them still did their own biblical scholarship in service to various Christian communities. The symbiosis between church and academy continues to some extent in modernity. There is, however, an increasing tendency for Protestants in particular to pursue biblical scholarship that does not aim to develop ecclesiastical doctrine or affirm average Christians in their faith, but rather that seeks to better understand biblical texts in relation to the socio-religious contexts that shaped them. This led to the widespread use of historical-critical methods in biblical scholarship, which also impacted Magdalene scholarship. Inevitably, cultures' images of Magdalene continued to influence both ecclesiastical and academic interpretations.

Unlike in earlier epochs, no new ecclesiastical images of Magdalene clearly emerge in modernity. Instead, she continued to be portrayed in both her New Testament roles and those that derive from her conflation with Mary of Bethany and the repentant sinner of Luke 7 into the twentieth century.³²⁸ The Roman Catholic Church celebrated the conflated Magdalene as a saint until 1969, when the liturgical calendar was changed and she was no longer identified with the other two women. In 2016, Pope Francis authorized declarations that sought to re-emphasize

³²⁸ See Maisch, *Mary Magdalene*, 134–155 for a discussion of Magdalene in modern spiritual poetry.

Magdalene's key role as apostle-to-the apostles.³²⁹ And some academic biblical commentaries still adhered to the conflated Magdalene in the twentieth century.³³⁰

Over time, however, an increasing number of religious and academic interpretations of Magdalene did challenge her conflated identity, including some by women.³³¹ One example is Clara Lucas Balfour, who objected in 1847 to Magdalene being confused with the sinful woman of Luke 7:36–50 and consequently having institutions for penitent women named after her.³³² Balfour instead praised Magdalene as a woman “independent of control” who had the leisure and means to follow and minister to Christ.³³³ She is faithful to Jesus until the end, and though woman is favored through all of gospel history, according to Balfour, Magdalene's role as the first witness and proclaimer of the resurrection surpasses this, making the details of her life afterwards so superfluous as to not be recorded. Balfour nonetheless seems to portray Magdalene within the Victorian ideals of womanhood, describing her “tender feminine heart” as humbly devoted to Jesus with the love that a mother has for her only child.³³⁴

The modern scholarly interest in biblical texts as windows into the historical circumstances that gave rise to them has often resulted in Magdalene being mentioned only in passing when addressing the resurrection narratives in which she is found. Influenced by modernity's high esteem of reason and humanism, the eighteenth century saw the rise of quests for the “historical Jesus,” in which scholars try to separate what can be known about the first

³²⁹ “The liturgical memory of Mary Magdalene becomes a feast, like that of the other apostles, 10.06.2016,” Holy See Press Office, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/06/10/160610b.html>; “Mary Magdalene, apostle of the apostles, 10.06.2016,” Holy See Press Office, <https://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/en/bollettino/pubblico/2016/06/10/160610c.html>.

³³⁰ E.g., J. H. Bernard, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. John*, ed. A. H. Hallie, vol. 2; ICC 29 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929), 412–413; William Barclay, *The Gospel of John*, vol. 2, chapters 8 to 21 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), 300.

³³¹ E.g., Peter Ketter, *The Magdalene Question*, trans. Hugo Charles Koehler (Milwaukee, WI: Bruce, 1935).

³³² Clara Lucas Balfour, *The Women of Scripture* (London: Houlston and Stoneman, 1847), 320–330.

³³³ Balfour, *The Women of Scripture*, 321.

³³⁴ Balfour, *The Women of Scripture*, 322, 327.

century person of Jesus from the church's subsequent dogmatic claims about him as the Christ. Ernest Renan published a very popular one of these works in 1863.³³⁵ His *Life of Jesus* portrays Magdalene and the women with her as faithful followers of Jesus. It describes Magdalene as particularly enthusiastic and claims that she was “the principal means by which faith in the resurrection was established.”³³⁶ Renan does not, however, mean this in the traditional sense of her being the first to report that Jesus had been raised back to life and that she had seen him outside of the tomb. He instead suggests that belief in the resurrection arose out of the love that the disciples and the women around Jesus had for him, leading them to think he was with them and consoling them after his death. Renan especially credits Magdalene's imagination for making this belief stick, stating that the credulous love and passion of one who had been possessed (i.e., by demons) gave the world a resuscitated God.³³⁷ As seen here and in other modern *lives* of Jesus, biblical scholars begin to challenge the historicity of the resurrection as Jesus returning to bodily life after his crucifixion and burial, and instead look for sociological, religious, and psychological reasons for how this belief may have emerged among his followers.

This reflects the shift in modern Protestant biblical scholarship to use New Testament texts to discern the historical development of early Christian practices and beliefs, rather than to make doctrinal or edifying claims for present-day Christians. Since the texts do not transparently reflect this development, scholars try to discern the earliest layers of Christian tradition they preserve as the basis for determining how Christianity unfolded. Especially in the work of history-of-religions scholars and form critics, Paul's understanding of Jesus's resurrection is

³³⁵ The original French title is *Vie de Jésus*.

³³⁶ Ernest Renan, *The Life of Jesus* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1941), 70.

³³⁷ Renan, *The Life of Jesus*, 197–198.

often considered earlier and more historically reliable than the Gospel resurrection narratives.³³⁸ Nowhere in his letters does Paul mention the empty tomb stories that feature Magdalene and other women as the first to learn of Jesus's resurrection, as well as to first proclaim it and to witness the risen Jesus, according to some of the Gospels. In fact, in his recital of early Christian tradition in 1 Corinthians 15:3–11 about Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection, neither Mary Magdalene nor the women who accompany her to the tomb in the Gospels are mentioned in the list of people to whom the risen Jesus appeared (vv. 5–8). Even if they may be implied in the five hundred to whom Jesus appeared at once (v. 6), scholars taking Paul's descriptions of the resurrection and its witnesses as more historically reliable than the Gospel accounts makes the role of Magdalene and other women in these events secondary, or even negligible.³³⁹ The Gospel empty tomb narratives, in which these women figure so prominently, start to be understood as later, apologetically motivated additions to a primitive passion narrative to express and substantiate Christian belief in Jesus's bodily resurrection. In this view, Magdalene's role especially in John 20:11–18 as the first to witness the risen Jesus is often set aside because Paul

³³⁸ Paul does not give a full doctrinal treatment of the resurrection in his letters, but from texts such as Philippians 2:5–10, scholars have argued that he considers Jesus's resurrection as his exaltation to heaven, never portraying it as a return to embodied life on earth after exiting the tomb, nor recounting stories of Jesus's ascent to heaven post-resurrection (cf. Acts 2:32–33). In his treatment of believers' resurrection in relation to that of Jesus in 1 Corinthians 15, Paul does argue that resurrected life is somehow embodied, but understands this as a spiritual body, and does not refer to Jesus having returned to embodied life on earth after his death. The notion of Jesus's resurrection as God exalting him to his rightful place in heaven is thought to reflect an earlier Christian belief than those expressed in the Gospel empty tomb narratives, in which Jesus is portrayed as returning to life on earth after his death and meeting with his followers before his bodily ascension to heaven (e.g., Luke 24; Acts 1:1–11). For a summary of the critical issues and scholarly perspectives involved in interpreting the New Testament statements about Jesus's resurrection, see Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 966–978.

³³⁹ One prominent scholar who takes this position is the German New Testament scholar and theologian, Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976), who contributed to both history-of-religions research and form criticism. He argues that the risen Jesus first appeared to Peter, as supported by 1 Corinthians 15:5, and that the empty tomb stories are later apologetic legends developed to prove the resurrection. Even though Paul wrote ten to twenty years before the New Testament Gospels were composed, Bultmann thinks Paul's omission of the empty tomb stories in his letters is not necessarily because they did not exist yet, but rather because they were insignificant to the church's official proclamation of Jesus's resurrection. He also takes the view that the earliest Christian proclamation understood the resurrection as equivalent to Jesus's ascension/exaltation. In this view, Magdalene's reported witness of the risen Jesus and proclamation of his resurrection in John 20:11–18 was not essential to the development of the primitive church's belief in, and preaching of, Jesus's resurrection. See Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition*, 287–291 and *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 45.

claims that Peter had this privilege (v. 5; Cephas is another name for Peter; cf. Luke 24:34). In his 1913 classic, *Kyrios Christos*, Wilhelm Bousset even asserts that Mark 16:8a, which states that the women did not tell anyone about Jesus's resurrection upon fleeing the tomb, is an explanation of why the story of the women at the empty tomb remained unknown for so long—namely, because it only developed after other traditions about the resurrection.³⁴⁰

In the second half of the twentieth century, fewer biblical scholars accept the conflation of Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the woman of Luke 7:36–50. Some also acknowledge that the empty tomb stories, in which Magdalene plays a significant role, may be just as early as those of Jesus's post-resurrection appearances to his followers.³⁴¹ In fact, more scholars start to use historical and sociological methods of New Testament study to reassert the first century Mary Magdalene, in contrast to her legendary portrayals, and to assess her influence within early Christianity.

The 1945 discovery in Nag Hammadi, Egypt, of many of the early extra-canonical texts discussed in the first section of this chapter greatly facilitated this task, since they show Magdalene in a prominent role among Jesus's disciples that reinforces understandings of her as an apostle, teacher, and visionary, which have foundations in the New Testament.³⁴² Some scholars also argue that the conflicts between Peter and Magdalene in these texts show that there were diverse streams of early Christian tradition about who was the first resurrection witness, and that different groups may have used each of these apostolic figures to represent their own

³⁴⁰ Wilhelm Bousset, *Kyrios Christos: A History of the Belief in Christ from the Beginnings of Christianity to Irenaeus*, trans. John E. Steely (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2013), 106.

³⁴¹ See Brown, *The Gospel According to John XIII–XXI*, 966–978.

³⁴² Manuscripts of the *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Philip*, *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and *Dialogue of the Savior* were among those discovered at Nag Hammadi. No additional copies of the *Gospel of Mary* were found there, although two texts found together with the *Gospel of Mary* in the Berlin Codex (*Apocryphon of John* and *Sophia of Jesus Christ*) were part of this discovery.

understandings of Jesus's teachings as authoritative.³⁴³ Such arguments can further the case that Magdalene's reported witness to the risen Jesus in John 20:11–18 is not simply a later, secondary tradition, but may actually reflect an early tradition that existed at the same time as traditions of Peter's apostolic primacy. Together with the *Gospel of Mary*, the Nag Hammadi texts' portrayals of Magdalene are also taken as evidence that some early Christian groups supported women as leaders and teachers.³⁴⁴

The expansion of feminist biblical scholarship in the 1970s was another important factor in renewed academic interest in Mary Magdalene.³⁴⁵ The general feminist concern of the era to acknowledge women as agents in history helped fuel feminist biblical scholars' efforts to reconstruct and reclaim Mary Magdalene's first century identity and significance to early Christianity, as opposed to her legendary and pop culture portrayals (see chapter 1 for specific works). To be sure, this type of Magdalene scholarship is not exclusively the work of those who consider themselves to be feminists, and both male and females have produced works that reassert and seek to better understand Magdalene's first century roles as witness and proclaimer of the foundational events of Christianity. It has been, nonetheless, female and/or feminist scholars in particular that assert that nearly two thousand years of interpretation of biblical texts and Christian tradition from a largely androcentric perspective was key to wrongly identifying Magdalene as a repentant prostitute, and, at times, to suppressing her important evangelistic and apostolic roles. Thus, one major goal of feminist and other more recent Magdalene scholarship is to debunk her long-standing identification as a former whore, which inevitably continues to link

³⁴³ For a thorough treatment of this topic, see Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*; cf. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 48–69; Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, 304–334; King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 172–173.

³⁴⁴ E.g., Brock, *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle*, 173; King, *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala*, 171; Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, 64–67, although she acknowledges that not all early, non-orthodox Christian groups were affirming of women.

³⁴⁵ See chapter 1 for bibliography on scholarly works on Mary Magdalene.

Magdalene with female transgression, widely understood to be a product of female sexuality. While Magdalene's negative reputation was often redeemed and presumably put to good use from the perspective of those employing this image in various interpretations over the centuries, modern feminist scholars recognize how damaging it can be for women in general—especially since, as seen above, Magdalene comes to represent all women in her role as new Eve. Another major reason for highlighting Magdalene's roles in early Christian texts and history is that it provides a positive, female biblical model to serve as an argument for contemporary women's equality and leadership in all aspects of ministry and society, including women's ordination.

As discussed in chapter 1, many of the more recent works on Magdalene written by females, and/or from a feminist perspective, tend to focus on two major tasks: seeking to learn more about the real first century woman and her role in the beginnings of Christianity, and critically reassessing her long history of interpretation. Some works focus on one of these tasks more than the other, while others do a bit of both in order to challenge popular understandings of Magdalene (especially as a whore) and put forward what they believe to be more historically accurate portraits of her. This involves using historical and literary methods to assess texts and other ancient evidence in order to reconstruct the first century Magdalene, as well as using forms of ideological criticism to expose the influence of biases—especially patriarchal perspectives—in the construction of the purportedly “mythical” images of Magdalene.

Perhaps the most comprehensive recent work to undertake both major tasks is Jane Schaberg's *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene* (see chapter 1). Further commentary on this work helps illuminate some of the key issues involved in modern Magdalene scholarship, and potentially in any attempt to make foundational texts and figures meaningful in changing contexts. Schaberg acknowledges that her work is done from a feminist perspective and employs

feminist methodology.³⁴⁶ This means, in part, that she does not believe there is any completely objective standpoint from which one can analyze history or make normative claims.³⁴⁷ Biblical scholarship in general has increasingly accepted this to be true over the past fifty years, and I argue that it is one factor responsible for producing the wide array of Magdalene interpretations that have been presented in this chapter.

Related to this is Schaberg's assertion that ideology has played a significant part in distorting or suppressing Magdalene's historical roles as witness and proclaimer of Jesus's resurrection throughout centuries of subsequent interpretations.³⁴⁸ In particular, Schaberg sees patriarchal forces at work in legendary portraits of Magdalene, such as her popular image as a whore, as well as sexism in general playing a role in how contemporary biblical scholarship is conducted.³⁴⁹ She also claims that the ideologies or assumptions of particular scholars can affect even their choice of what evidence to include in the scope of their studies: "We choose what elements we investigate and which we allow to disturb our thoughts, our hypotheses, our methods, our active commitments."³⁵⁰

Such selective use of available evidence, Schaberg argues, may be at work even in the composing and editing of the New Testament Gospels, which are the earliest written texts on Magdalene. The claim that some of these Gospels downplay earlier traditions of Magdalene's roles as witness and proclaimer of the resurrection go at least as far back as Schüssler Fiorenza's 1975 article (see chapter 1). Schaberg's own reconstruction of the first century Magdalene similarly asserts that a historically-reliable tradition of Magdalene as key resurrection witness

³⁴⁶ E.g., Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 12, 14, 304.

³⁴⁷ E.g., Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 14.

³⁴⁸ E.g., Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 65–120.

³⁴⁹ E.g., Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 245.

³⁵⁰ E.g., Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 245.

and leader within early Christianity that can be seen especially in John 20:1–18 was minimized over time, as reflected in other Gospels or even in other sections of John.³⁵¹

In particular, Schaberg argues that John 20:1–18 draws on an earlier tradition that makes use of 2 Kings 2:1–18 (the account of Elisha witnessing Elijah's ascent and thereby becoming his prophetic successor) to designate Magdalene as Jesus's earthly successor because she witnesses his ascent to God.³⁵² In other words, Magdalene, rather than Peter or Jesus's other male disciples, first received the commission and power to carry on Jesus's ministry, even if others would also come to share in these because of her proclamation about Jesus.³⁵³ This so-called Magdalene tradition, which Schaberg attempts to reconstruct, stands in contrast to the portrait in Luke-Acts of Jesus's male disciples witnessing his ascension and becoming the successors to his earthly ministry (Luke 24:51; Acts 1:9–11). Schaberg believes that Luke's Gospel especially diminishes Magdalene, and that its ascension accounts attempt to overwhelm the rival tradition of Magdalene as Jesus's successor because the author perceives the power it ascribes to a female as a threat.³⁵⁴

She likewise suggests that Magdalene's disappearance from John's Gospel after 20:18, and only Jesus's (presumably male) disciples receiving subsequent resurrection appearances and his gift of the Holy Spirit in 20:19–31, reflects androcentric bias in the redaction of the Gospel that would not allow it to end with a woman alone receiving the definitive interpretation of Jesus's ascension.³⁵⁵ Schaberg thus argues that androcentric perspectives play a role even in how

³⁵¹ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 326–327, 338, 340–341.

³⁵² Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 300–349.

³⁵³ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 341.

³⁵⁴ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 317, 318 and n. 105.

³⁵⁵ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 326–327.

pre-Gospel traditions are incorporated into, or excluded from, the written New Testament Gospels, just as ideology has played a role in subsequent interpretations of these texts.

Consequently, for Schaberg and others who challenge interpretations of Magdalene that they consider to be historically and ethically problematic because they go beyond what the primary data substantiates and unfairly stereotype women, it is necessary to critically assess how ideological factors have shaped previous interpreters' assessment of the historical data. In other words, critical reassessments of Magdalene such as Schaberg's claim that ideology has been a factor in previous interpreters' misreading or even disregarding of the primary evidence, leading to problematic results.

I agree with this claim in regard to much of Magdalene's previous interpretive trajectory and argue, in fact, that it illustrates the nebulous relationship between history and ideology when attempting to exegete the meaning of a person from the past for contemporaneous audiences. Many attempts across the centuries—including by more recent feminist scholars—to interpret Magdalene are not merely concerned with understanding her roles in past events, but also in appropriating her as a figure that can address present-day concerns. Schaberg, for example, explicitly states that she hopes that her reconstruction of Magdalene can be an empowering resource for contemporary audiences.³⁵⁶ She also admits that her feminist ideology shapes her approach to the historical study of Magdalene.³⁵⁷ While I agree that there is no purely objective standpoint from which to do historical research, and feminist methods can be a useful tool for such pursuits, this raises the question of whether, or to what extent, the ideologies of present-day scholars trying to reclaim historically accurate portraits of Magdalene might also unduly influence their work with the primary sources, as is claimed of earlier “legendary” portraits. To

³⁵⁶ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 350.

³⁵⁷ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 352.

be sure, deciding that Magdalene is an inspirational figure for contemporary women seeking ordination, for example, may result from a historical investigation that determines her to be an early evangelist and apostle to Jesus's other disciples. But it is also fair to ask how the hope of finding positive images of Magdalene to counter the negative ones might affect how such historical analysis is conducted.

Take, for example, the fact the Schaberg privileges for her reconstruction traditions about Magdalene and other women first discovering Jesus's empty tomb and of the risen Jesus appearing to Magdalene, such as in John 20.³⁵⁸ This decision may very well result from a determination that these are early, reliable sources, as Schaberg asserts.³⁵⁹ But is it also possible that this choice is motivated in part by the hopes of finding an empowering image of Magdalene in the primary sources, just as privileging traditions of Peter's apostolic primacy (e.g., 1 Cor 15:5) might be said to reflect androcentric bias, whether conscious or not?

Likewise, since the primary evidence for Magdalene's life is sparse, all interpreters must fill in some of the gaps in order to present a portrait of her that is rich enough to address new audiences. How these gaps are filled, it seems, will inevitably be shaped to some extent by interpreters' assumptions and aims. Schaberg admits that she uses her imagination to help fill in some of the gaps in the evidence for Magdalene's life—filling in gaps is, in fact, an accepted feminist methodology.³⁶⁰ But this raises the same issue that scholars such as Schaberg apply to earlier, "legendary" portraits of Magdalene of whether, or to what extent, such ideological filling of gaps leads to a more historically accurate portrait of Magdalene, or whether it too risks creating a "legendary" Magdalene.

³⁵⁸ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 350.

³⁵⁹ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 350–351.

³⁶⁰ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 311, 351, 352 and n. 277.

Schaberg is admirably transparent about the methods and aims of her work. She admits that her reconstruction is not the only plausible one, and that if it fails to convince readers, the feminist commitments that motivated it make her hope that it at least is enough to “destabilize existing ‘authoritative’ readings and the oppressiveness of the whole Magdalene tradition.”³⁶¹ She further states that even if her reconstruction of Magdalene’s important role in nascent Christianity were to be legendary, it could still be empowering for people today.³⁶²

While Schaberg’s work cannot fully represent all of the more recent attempts to reassess Magdalene’s life and interpretive arc, it does raise important questions about any attempt to “reclaim” the historical Magdalene in such a way that she can meaningfully address contemporaneous audiences—especially regarding the ambiguous relationship between history and ideology and whether a purely “historical” Magdalene is something that even contemporary interpreters can, or hope to, recover. These questions will be addressed with more detail in chapter 6.

Conclusion

This chapter shows how Mary Magdalene has been variously interpreted over two thousand years according to the assumptions, methods, aims, and contexts of interpreters. The sparse information about her in the earliest written sources, the New Testament Gospels, is not sufficient to compose a complete biography. The fact that interpreters fill in the gaps and write life stories for her anyway, or, expand some aspect of her earliest portrayals, demonstrates the power of the Magdalene figure to address shifting social and ecclesiastical concerns. Undergirding the resulting array of Magdalene interpretations are assumptions—often

³⁶¹ Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 352.

³⁶² Schaberg, *The Resurrection of Mary Magdalene*, 350.

stereotypes—about the female sex. In many instances, Magdalene functions as a malleable symbol through which different communities negotiate important questions surrounding gender roles, social norms, and theological concerns. Magdalene scholarship still flourishes in the second decade of the twenty-first century. As in previous eras, these interpretations of Magdalene express contemporaneous values and concerns, even while they attempt to construct a more historically accurate portrait of the first century woman that has given rise to a plethora of images.

Chapter 4

La Malinche in the Earliest Sources

Introduction

The interpretive history of the sixteenth century Nahua woman known as La Malinche, Marina, or Malintzin (ca. 1500–1529) bears striking similarities to that of Mary Magdalene, despite differences in their historical and cultural contexts.¹ Both women play important roles in the foundational events of new communities: Magdalene in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus that led to the emergence of Christianity, and La Malinche in the Spanish Conquest of central Mexico that led to the foundation of New Spain, and eventually, the modern Mexican nation.

La Malinche found herself in this role because she was given to the Spanish *conquistadores* (“conquerors”) as a slave, and her skill with various languages made her a valuable interpreter and cultural intermediary throughout the campaign. She also bore a son to Cortés, the leader of the Conquest, which eventually led to her widespread portrayal as the symbolic mother of the mixed-race or *mestizo* Mexican people.

As with Magdalene, the sparse early evidence for La Malinche portrays her in basically positive or neutral ways, with some minor negative notes. And she too is variously interpreted over the centuries according to changing perspectives and concerns, including the understanding of her as a paradigmatic traitor and whore—at times even as the Mexican Mary Magdalene. In order to assess such interpretations in the next chapter, this chapter examines what the earliest sources say about La Malinche.

¹ See chapter 1, note 1 for explanations of La Malinche’s names.

Historical Background and Terminology

La Malinche has become an unforgettable figure in Mexico and Chicano/a culture because she happened to take part in events that changed the course of history: the Spanish Conquest of lands that would become modern Mexico. The phrase *Spanish Conquest of Mexico* can have multiple referents, but I use it for the 1519–1521 campaign led by the Spaniard Hernán Cortés (1485–1547) that resulted in the defeat of the dominant Mexica indigenous groups in the Valley of Mexico and the fall of their capital, Tenochtitlan, to the Spanish.²

When La Malinche was born around 1500 CE, several major civilizations had already thrived in Mesoamerica.³ While the particular group that enjoyed political and economic dominance shifted over time, the descendants of these various groups continued to make Mesoamerica ethnically and linguistically diverse, as is still the case in contemporary Mexico. By at least the twelfth century, some Nahuatl-speaking peoples had settled in the Valley of Mexico,⁴ including on swampy lands surrounding a system of five lakes in the center of the

² Cortés's first name is sometimes given as Hernán or Hernando. While the fall of Tenochtitlan gave the Spaniards control of central Mexico, many subsequent expeditions and battles would take place to gain control of the entire area that now comprises Mexico.

³ These include the Olmec civilization, dating from roughly 1500 BCE, as well as the later Maya, Teotihuacan, and Toltec civilizations. For a summary, see Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears: The Aztec Account of the Conquest of Mexico*, trans. Angel Maria Garibay K. (from Nahuatl into Spanish), trans. Lysander Kemp (into English), expanded and updated ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), xxviii–xxxiii.

⁴ Various Nahuatl-speaking groups had been migrating into central Mexico for centuries, likely coming from what is now the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. For more on the Nahua peoples' migration to central Mexico, including the Mexica and their rise to dominance, see Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 14–15; Inga Clendinnen, *Aztecs: An Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 15–28; León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxx–xxxiii. In indigenous accounts, the ancestral homeland of the Nahua peoples is called Aztlán. For a summary of the story of the migration from Aztlán and the sources that recount it, see Roberto Lint-Sagarena, "Aztlán," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures: The Civilizations of Mexico and Central America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1:72–73. There is some debate about where exactly Aztlán is located, and to what extent it is referred to as a physical versus a mythical place in these foundational narratives. As Lint-Sagarena's article notes, Aztlán is often a multivalent term in the Chicano/a movement, referring to both physical lands and a marker of shared identity. See also Alicia Arrizón, "Mythical Performativity: Relocating Aztlán in Chicana Feminist Cultural Productions," *Theatre Journal* 52 (2000): 23–49; Michael E. Smith, "The Aztlan Migrations of the Nahuatl Chronicles: Myth or History?" *Ethnohistory* 31 (1984): 153–186. The *Annals of Tlatelolco*, which is one of the earliest extant Nahuatl accounts of Mexica history and the Spanish Conquest, states that the various Nahua tribes involved in the migration left the cave that they had dwelt in, called Chicomóztoc, in 1051, and that after years of walking amidst the cacti they departed on their journey in 1064. See

valley.⁵ The Nahuatl-speaking Mexica (me-SHEE-ka) settled in the region around the thirteenth century, and eventually established two significant city-states on an island in Lake Texcoco (part of the larger lake system): Tenochtitlan (ca. 1325) and Tlatelolco. A century later, Tenochtitlan formed what became known as the Triple Alliance with the neighboring city-states of Texcoco and Tlacopan.⁶ In 1428, these allies wrested control of the region from Azcapotzalco, reflecting the common reality of Mesoamerican city-states vying for political and economic control. In fact, the initially independent city-state of Tlatelolco was subjugated by Tenochtitlan in 1473.⁷

The Triple Alliance, and the large region that it came to dominate, is often referred to as the Aztec Empire. The term *aztec*, however, can be confusing or misleading, in part because it has various referents.⁸ For the sake of clarity, therefore, I will use the term *Triple Alliance* to

Anales de Tlatelolco, trans. Rafael Tena (Mexico City: Cien de México, 2004), 53–55. All references to this text are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. There is no complete translation of the Nahuatl text into English, but James Lockhart has translated some sections relevant to the Conquest into English in James Lockhart, ed. and trans., *We People Here: Nahuatl Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico*, Repertorium Columbianum 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 256–273.

⁵ These lakes were called Lake Zumpango, Lake Xaltocan, Lake Xochimilco, Lake Chalco, and the largest, Lake Texcoco. Due largely to the Spanish draining the lakes in the colonial period to prevent flooding, only small portions of them remain today. Present-day Mexico City lies on top of the basin of former Lake Texcoco.

⁶ The city-state of Texcoco is sometimes spelled as Tetzco or Tezcoco, having been located on the eastern bank of Lake Texcoco.

⁷ León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xxxv.

⁸ For an overview of the issues involved in using the word *aztec*, see Robert Barlow, “Some Remarks on the Term ‘Aztec Empire’,” *The Americas* 1 (1945): 345–349; Alfredo López Austin, “Aztec,” trans. Scott Sessions, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Mesoamerican Cultures* 1:68–72; Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 14–15, 279. *Aztec* (Spanish: *azteca*), derived from the Nahuatl word *Aztlán*, can refer to one who comes from this ancestral homeland, and is at times used to refer to all Nahuatl-speaking peoples. In other instances, *Aztecs* is used more specifically for the Mexica peoples who formed a significant part of the Triple Alliance, and especially of the Tenocha people (the residents of Tenochtitlan) who became the dominant party in the alliance. Some scholars have noted, however, that *Aztec* would not have been the primary way the Mexica identified themselves at the time of the Spanish Conquest; e.g., Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 279 argues that no group called themselves *Aztecs* in the year 1500. And James Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), 1 argues that *Aztec* was not the Mexica’s primary designation, and that its general usage for Nahua peoples can give the false impression of a “quasi-national unity” among them, which did not exist. Although this term does appear in some early post-Conquest histories of Mexico, including one written in Nahuatl, its usage only becomes widespread in subsequent centuries. For a summary of the historical sources that include the term *Aztec*, see Barlow, “Some Remarks on the Term ‘Aztec Empire’.” One early work that he does not mention, but that also uses this term, is Fernando Alvarado Tezozómoc’s *Crónica Mexicáyotl*, written in Nahuatl in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. For a Spanish translation of the Nahuatl text, see Adrián León, trans., *Crónica Mexicáyotl* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1992). Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 279 states that the designation *Aztecs* for

refer to the political entity described above that controlled the Valley of Mexico at the time of the Conquest, and to its large network of subjected city-states that reached west-east from the Pacific to the Gulf Coast, and north-south from what is present-day central Mexico to present-day Guatemala.⁹ I will use the term *Mexica* to refer to people belonging to this ethnic group, including the residents of Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco. This seems appropriate considering that after the Spanish rebuilt the conquered Triple Alliance capital, Tenochtitlan, they renamed it *Mexico* after its Mexica founders. Today it is still known as Mexico City, or just Mexico, and is the capital of the modern nation of the same name.

The Earliest Sources on La Malinche

As with Magdalene, all we can know of La Malinche comes from the perspectives of others, since we have no extant writings of hers. The earliest references to La Malinche are found in sixteenth century accounts of the Spanish Conquest of Mexico, and fall into two basic categories: those written by Spaniards who took part in the Conquest, or who were close to someone who did, and those that reflect indigenous perspectives on the same events. As we will see, however, the distinction between Spanish and indigenous sources is not a neat one, since some of the latter were partially mediated through Spanish methods or supervision.

Unlike with the Gospel sources on Magdalene, I do not here present each of the primary sources on La Malinche individually. Instead, I outline a more-or-less chronological, composite account of La Malinche's life that draws on the various sources that provide information about her and the events in which she participated. The extent and nature of the sources on La

the peoples of central Mexico became popular in the eighteenth century. López Austin, "Aztec," 68 credits Alexander von Humboldt's work of the early nineteenth century for the term's subsequent widespread use.

⁹ León-Portilla, *The Broken Spears*, xli.

Malinche make this approach preferable to a text-by-text analysis, especially since the Malinche material addresses a longer period of her life than do the Gospels for Magdalene.

There is not enough information in these sources to write a complete biography, but there is enough to provide interpretive snapshots of key aspects of her character and life. These fragmentary glimpses of La Malinche cannot be taken as transparently accurate representations of her life, character, or motivations, since each author or community writes with a specific agenda and perspective. Since this project focuses on *representations* of women from the past, I will not provide a thorough evaluation of the historical accuracy of all of the details recounted about La Malinche, nor try to reconstruct her life within her own context.¹⁰ I will, however, discuss at times which accounts or details about her life seem more plausible. I begin with a brief overview of the major sources for La Malinche's life.

The Earliest Spanish Sources

The Spanish sources provide the most details about La Malinche, and are the texts that generations of interpreters primarily draw on to construct their own portrayals of her. They typically refer to her as Marina, at times adding the honorific prefix *Doña*.

Letters of Hernán Cortés

Cortés's *Letters from Mexico* contain the earliest written references to Marina.¹¹ The leader of the Conquest of Mexico wrote these five letters to King Charles V of Spain, who was also the Holy Roman Emperor, between 1519 (the year Cortés landed in Mexico) and 1526.

¹⁰ See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, for such a reconstruction.

¹¹ A standard English edition is Hernán Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, ed. and trans. Anthony Pagden (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1986). All references to these letters are to this edition, unless otherwise noted. The following summary draws on the introductory essay in this edition by J. H. Elliott, xi–xxxvii. Several Spanish editions are also available under the title *Cartas de Relación*.

While Cortés insists that these documents provide a true account of his and his army's exploits in Mesoamerica, scholars have noted his capacity to omit and distort evidence in order to elevate and justify his own actions in the Conquest.¹² This was necessary because Cortés, technically operating as an agent of the governor of Cuba, Diego Velázquez, was only granted legal authority to explore and trade in Mexico, not to conquer or colonize it. While Velázquez was awaiting approval from the Spanish Crown to undertake the latter himself, Cortés usurped the governor's authority and set out to colonize Mexico. His letters to the Spanish king, therefore, largely serve to defend himself against charges of rebellion against the governor of Cuba and to demonstrate that his actions are for the benefit of the Spanish kingdom and the church. To achieve these ends, Cortés tends to minimize the contributions of others involved in the Conquest, and to overlook details that would cast him in a negative light. While Marina was Cortés's most valuable interpreter and would bear his first son, it is therefore not surprising that he only explicitly mentions her briefly in two of his letters: the Second (1520) and the Fifth (1526).

Chronicle of Francisco López de Gómara

Francisco López de Gómara (1511–1566) was a Spanish priest who served as Cortés's personal secretary and chaplain between 1541 and 1547, when Cortés died in Spain.¹³ Although Gómara never set foot in the Americas, he composed a thorough book on the Conquest of Mexico, based largely on Cortés's letters and personal accounts, as well as on conversations with

¹² E.g., J. H. Elliott, "Introductory Essay" in Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, xx–xxi; Benjamin Keen, "Conquest Narratives," in *Encyclopedia of Mexico: History, Society, & Culture*, ed. Michael S. Werner (London: Routledge, 1998), accessed on Credo, https://search-credoreference-com.proxy.library.emory.edu/content/entry/routmex/conquest_conquest_narratives/0?institutionId=716.

¹³ The following summary of Gómara's work draws largely on the editor's introduction in Francisco López de Gómara, *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*, ed. and trans. Lesley Byrd Simpson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), xv–xxvi. All references to Gómara's work are cited from this edition, unless otherwise noted.

another *conquistador* and companion of Cortés, Andrés de Tapia. His book on the Conquest was initially published in 1552 as the second part of a larger work on the history of the Indies, and was called *La Crónica de la Nueva España (The Chronicle of New Spain)*, or *Historia de la Conquista de México (History of the Conquest of Mexico)*. Gómara's work is arguably the earliest Spanish history of the Conquest of Mexico, and together with Bernal Díaz del Castillo's work, provides the most detailed narrative among the earliest sources. This gives Gómara's work ongoing historical value, despite the many critiques leveled against it.¹⁴ A major criticism forwarded by some contemporaries of Gómara and modern historians alike is that his main aim was to write a glowing biography of Cortés, rather than to provide a thorough, factual account of the Conquest.¹⁵ Indeed, a standard contemporary English translation of the work finds it more fitting to entitle it *Cortés: The Life of the Conqueror by His Secretary*.¹⁶ Gómara is, therefore, said to be hesitant to criticize his employer's character and actions, and to skew the truth by painting Cortés in a positive light. Díaz charges that this is in part due to Cortés's son greasing Gómara's palm to write the work.¹⁷ The fact that Gómara was not an eyewitness to any of the events he describes fuels criticism of his account's veracity. In terms of Marina, Gómara's account is especially valuable in that, together with Díaz's work, it gives the most thorough account of her life among the earliest sources.

¹⁴ Whether or not these critiques are entirely valid is a matter of debate. See Lesley Byrd Simpson, introduction to Gómara, *Cortés*, xv–xxvi for details.

¹⁵ Contemporaries who criticized Gómara and his work include Bartolomé de la Casas (see Gómara, *Cortés*, xvi–xviii for a summary of de las Casas's critiques), and Bernal Díaz del Castillo, whose critiques appear above and in the following section.

¹⁶ This is the edition and translation of Lesley Byrd Simpson, cited in note 13 above.

¹⁷ Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España*, ed. Guillermo Serés; Biblioteca Clásica de la Real Academia Española 36 (Madrid: Real Academia Española, 2011), 74. I cite a Spanish edition here because the standard English edition of this work omits Díaz's lengthy critique of Gómara's work. From here forward, all references to Díaz's account of the Conquest will be to the following English edition, unless otherwise noted: Bernal Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, ed. and trans. J. M. Cohen (London: Penguin Books, 1963). Cf. Keen, "Conquest: Conquest Narratives," in *Encyclopedia of Mexico*. The son of Cortés who supposedly paid Gómara to write the book about his father's role in the Conquest was Cortés's heir and son by his second wife (Doña Juana de Zúñiga), Don Martín Cortés. He is not to be confused with Cortés's first-born son, whom he fathered with Marina, who was also named Martín Cortés.

Chronicle of Bernal Díaz del Castillo

Bernal Díaz del Castillo (ca. 1492–96 to 1584) claims to be an old and seasoned Spanish soldier and colonizer by the time he wrote his account of the Conquest, roughly between 1555 and 1568.¹⁸ He participated in the two initial Spanish expeditions from Cuba to Mexico in 1517 and 1518 before joining the one Cortés led in 1519.¹⁹ As a soldier in Cortés’s army, Díaz witnessed first-hand most of the key events of the Conquest and the establishment of New Spain. It is this eyewitness status that Díaz claims as his basis for writing a “true history” of the Conquest, in large part to counter what he considers to be blatant falsehoods in other chronicles.²⁰ Díaz especially writes in response to Gómara’s work, criticizing its lack of eyewitness perspective and omission of the role of others in the campaign in order to exalt Cortes’s feats.²¹

While Díaz provides a more balanced account of the Conquest, including both praise of Cortes’s military genius and criticism of his flaws, it cannot be taken as a strictly objective history. One reason for this is that he begins to compose it some thirty years after the events it covers occurred, when his memory of certain details might have been uncertain.²² Díaz likely

¹⁸ See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1263–1270 for the editor’s timeline of Díaz’s life and of key events of the Conquest. Díaz’s book was not published until 1632.

¹⁹ The captains of the earlier expeditions were Francisco Hernández de Córdoba (1517) and Juan de Grijalva (1518). Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: the Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 129 thinks Díaz’s claim to have participated in all three of these voyages is improbable, but that it functions to support his authority as an eyewitness.

²⁰ Although the title of Díaz’s book is variously translated, the original *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de la Nueva España* (*True History of the Conquest of New Spain*) indicates its purpose as a supposedly true account of the Conquest meant to counter the other accounts that Díaz considers erroneous. For his extended criticisms of these works, see Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 70–74. For Díaz’s assertion of eyewitness status, see his prologue in *The Conquest of New Spain*, 14.

²¹ See Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 14 for his appeal to his unscholarly style of writing as support for the claim that he writes as a truthful eyewitness, not needing to add luster to his account with polished rhetoric. This is in part likely a reference to Gómara’s more refined, classical literary style.

²² E.g., Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 48 states that he writes down some soldiers’ names from memory, and will later write down the names of all who participated in the expedition, to the extent that he can remember them. It is possible that Díaz did make notes during the Conquest that later helped him write his chronicle.

relied to some extent on his imagination to portray in minute detail conversations and events that occurred decades earlier.²³ In addition, Díaz's work displays characteristics of a formal request to the Spanish Crown for land and other benefits as a reward for his service, which were common for the *conquistadores* to make.²⁴ Díaz had already received an *encomienda* in Guatemala, where he settled in 1540, but his possession of indigenous labor and tributes was threatened by the passage of the New Laws of 1542 that sought to protect indigenous peoples from the exploitation of Spanish *encomenderos*.²⁵ Díaz even traveled to Spain twice to secure his privileges, and finally was appointed as governor of Guatemala in 1551. Despite this reward, and his key role in the Conquest, Díaz claims in the prologue to his book that he has no riches to leave his offspring, except his true story.²⁶ Like Cortés, therefore, Díaz also has reason to highlight his own contributions to the Conquest in his account.

Díaz's work stands out because it is a thorough, detailed account of the Spanish exploration and colonization of the Americas. It also provides the most details about Marina and the highest appraisal of her among the earliest sources, making it a main source for many subsequent works on her.

A general feature of the Spanish chronicles of the Conquest is the *conquistadores*' understanding that their militant colonization efforts go hand-in-hand with their attempts to convert indigenous peoples to Christianity. Whether from a sincere concern to spread the Catholic faith, and/or, as a justification for their often violent subjugation of indigenous groups, the *conquistadores* clearly convey their notion that divine providence facilitated their success in

²³ For more on this point, see Guillermo Serés, introduction to Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, ix–xii.

²⁴ Keen, "Conquest: Conquest Narratives," in *Encyclopedia of Mexico*.

²⁵ Keen, "Conquest: Conquest Narratives," in *Encyclopedia of Mexico*; Serés, introduction to Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, x–xi. Bartolomé de las Casas was a major proponent of the laws to protect indigenous peoples.

²⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 14.

not just gaining more land and subjects for the Spanish crown, but also new members of the church.

Early Indigenous Sources

Annals of Tlatelolco

The *Annals of Tlatelolco* is likely the earliest indigenous narrative of the Conquest.²⁷ It tells of this event, however, within an extensive history of the Tlatelolca people that begins with their ancestors' migration from Aztlán. As with other indigenous annals, the *Annals of Tlatelolco* were likely written based on earlier oral recitations of the community's history.²⁸ Although its date of composition is debated, this anonymous Nahuatl text almost certainly existed by the 1540s.²⁹ While the author(s) of the *Annals* may have been trained by Spanish friars, who were instrumental in developing a Roman alphabetic system for writing the Nahuatl language,³⁰ the work appears to reflect a genuinely indigenous perspective, without conspicuous Spanish influence.³¹

²⁷ See Lockhart, *We People Here*, 37–43 for background information on the *Annals of Tlatelolco*.

²⁸ See Camilla Townsend, *Annals of Native America: How the Nahuas of Colonial Mexico Kept Their History Alive* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 1–15 for an introduction to the Nahuatl annals, or alphabetic historical texts.

²⁹ Lockhart, *We People Here*, 42. Lockhart, 38–39, disputes the 1528 composition date that is sometimes forwarded based on the claim in a later copy of the work that its original was composed in 1528. For a supporter of the earlier date, see J. Jorge Klor de Alva, forward to León-Portilla, ed., *The Broken Spears*, xv–xvii. Townsend, *Annals of Native America*, 8–9 links the anonymity of most of the annals to the nature of the oral performances of these histories, which involved multiple speakers retelling the same events in their own way. Since the emphasis was on the community as a whole, individual speakers' names were rarely included in the early transcriptions of these performances—a practice that continued as written transcriptions were copied.

³⁰ Lockhart, *We People Here*, 42. Cf. Lockhart, *The Nahuas After the Conquest*, 326–373 for a thorough examination of Nahuatl writing practices, both pre- and post-Conquest.

³¹ Townsend, *Annals of Native America*, 8 (cf. 12) argues that the historical annals are likely the indigenous works farthest removed from Spanish supervision and influence.

Florentine Codex

The *Florentine Codex* is the best-preserved manuscript of an encyclopedic work on Nahua culture and history, whose common English title is *General History of the Things of New Spain*.³² Bernardino de Sahagún (ca. 1500–1590), a Franciscan friar who lived in New Spain, commissioned, supervised, and edited this twelve-book work.³³ Having trained Nahua men to write their language in the Roman alphabet, Sahagún collected statements from indigenous people and had his aides write and rework them in Nahuatl. His informants were typically older, and seem to largely have come from Tlatelolco. Composition of the Nahuatl text spanned roughly from 1547–1569. Sahagún also had that text translated, or at times more loosely paraphrased, into Spanish in columns parallel to the Nahuatl. A complete Spanish edition was finished around 1577. The work is also abundantly illustrated, reflecting the nature of pre-Conquest Nahuatl writing as largely pictographic. Book Twelve of the *Florentine Codex* addresses the Conquest, and is the most extensive Nahuatl account of these events. Its composition likely began around 1555, and is the book in which Marina appears.

The extent to which the *Florentine Codex* exhibits an indigenous versus Spanish perspective is a matter of debate. It is certainly influenced by the aims and questions of the Spanish friar who commissioned it, and who seems to have had a clear hand in organizing and editing its content. Nonetheless, James Lockhart, a prominent scholar of the Conquest and the

³² The common Spanish title for this work is *Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*. Scans of all of the volumes of the *Florentine Codex* are available online in the World Digital Library, <https://www.wdl.org/en/item/10096/view/1/1/>. For the first English translation of the Nahuatl text of the entire twelve-book work, see Bernardino de Sahagún, *General History of the Things of New Spain*, ed. and trans. Arthur J. O. Anderson and Charles E. Dibble, 2nd ed. (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research, 1970). All references to the *Florentine Codex* in this work are from the edition and translation of Book Twelve in Lockhart, *We People Here*, 48–255. Here Lockhart presents his English translations of both the Nahuatl and Spanish texts of Book Twelve. Further references to this text will be cited as *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*.

³³ The following background information on the *Florentine Codex* comes largely from Lockhart, *We People Here*, 27–37.

Nahua people, argues that it does largely reflect indigenous perspectives on matters.³⁴ In this regard, it is an important early source for indigenous portrayals of Marina.

La Malinche's Early Life

All of the earliest sources agree on one main aspect of La Malinche's life: she was an indigenous woman with a prominent role as an interpreter for the Spanish *conquistadores*. There is, however, sparse, and at times conflicting, information about her life prior to serving the Spanish, and about how she ended up in that position. Cortés mentions her in his Second Letter only as “my interpreter, who is an Indian woman from Putunchan.”³⁵ In his only other explicit reference to her, found in the Fifth Letter, Cortés calls her by name: Marina (her Christian name), without the honorific title *Doña* that some others use. He again mentions that she is his interpreter, adding that she has always accompanied him since she was given to him as a gift, along with twenty other women.³⁶

Other early Spanish accounts concur with Cortés's basic description of Marina. Most of them, however, provide more information on Marina's background and participation in the Conquest, and diverge from one another on certain details. One of these is Marina's place of birth.³⁷ Gómara writes that Marina told Cortés she was from the village of Olutla, near a larger state called Coatzacoalcos.³⁸ Marina's own children would speak of both Olutla and Tetiquipaque as her birthplace; others claim it was Jaltipán.³⁹ And Díaz states that she was from

³⁴ Lockhart, *We People Here*, 33–34.

³⁵ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73.

³⁶ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 376. While Cortés refers to twenty women in addition to Marina that were given to the Spanish at Potonchán, both Díaz and Gómara state that she was one of twenty women total gifted to them. See Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 80–82; Gómara, *Cortés*, 48.

³⁷ See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 11–29 for a detailed discussion of Malintzin's early life and the circumstances of her becoming enslaved in Tabasco.

³⁸ Gómara, *Cortés*, 56. Coatzacoalcos is now a large coastal city in the Mexican state of Veracruz.

³⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 13; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 33.

Paynala (or Painala), a town about twenty-four miles from Coatzacoalcos.⁴⁰ There is, therefore, no consensus on where Marina was born, but since all of these towns lie in the vicinity of Coatzacoalcos, it is reasonable to assume that she was born somewhere in this region on the Gulf Coast of Mexico.

There is also general agreement that Marina's family of origin was Nahuatl, making Nahuatl her native language. Although many Nahuatl-speaking people populated Coatzacoalcos, they did not necessarily see themselves as one people with the ruling Mexica of the Triple Alliance, despite a shared language and ancestral heritage.⁴¹ Diverse political entities had developed over the centuries in Mesoamerica, so that even groups that shared a language and ethnic background did not always consider themselves as a unified people, nor were they naturally allies. Through a combination of negotiation, political marriages, warfare, and threats, the Triple Alliance increased the number of its subjects. It generally allowed subjected city-states to maintain their own governments as long as they paid tributes to Tenochtitlan.⁴² This did not mean, however, that subjects were friendly with their overlords, or that they saw themselves, other subjected groups, and the people of the Triple Alliance as a singular group. This point is significant because later interpretations of La Malinche as a traitor to the native inhabitants of Mexico seem based in part on a misunderstanding of all the indigenous peoples as a pre-existing unified entity.

Both Gómara and Díaz claim that Marina's family held high social status: Gómara states that her wealthy parents were related to the lord of her native village. Díaz claims that her

⁴⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85.

⁴¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 14–17.

⁴² For details on how the Triple alliance expanded and functioned, see Clendinnen, *Aztecs*, 24–28; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 14–17.

parents were actually the lords and chiefs of her town of birth.⁴³ In fact, Díaz begins his chapter on Doña Marina by stating that she “had been a great lady” and a chief “over towns and vassals since her childhood,” thereby ascribing her parents’ presumed position to her as well. Díaz may have had his own motives for emphasizing, or even exaggerating, Marina’s social status, as discussed below. There is reason to believe, however, that both Díaz and Gómara are correct in describing Marina as born into an elite Nahua family. For one, Díaz personally knew Marina, and likely got some details of her life directly from her. In addition, early Spanish and indigenous sources show Marina aptly interpreting conversations between Cortés and Moctezuma II, the ruler of the Triple Alliance, upon the Spaniards’ arrival in Tenochtitlan.⁴⁴ This would require the ability to use *lordly* Nahuatl, an elevated form of the language used with dignitaries that follows its own grammatical rules. Frances Karttunen argues that Marina did have this capacity, and, since it cannot be improvised, it supports Gómara and Díaz’s claims that she was initially raised in a noble Nahua household, where she would have learned such speech.⁴⁵

La Malinche among the Maya

Both Gómara and Díaz’s accounts state that Marina was separated from her family and native community as a child. How this occurred, however, differs in each account. Gómara claims that merchants stole the young Marina during a war and sold her at a market in Xicalango (also Xicallanco), “a large town above Coatzacoalcos, not far from Tabasco.”⁴⁶ She ended up in the control of the lord of Potonchán, an important Chontal Maya city in the vicinity of Tabasco,

⁴³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 56–57; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85.

⁴⁴ Variant spelling of Moctezuma include Montezuma, Motecuhzoma, and Moteuczoma.

⁴⁵ Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 11; Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” 301.

⁴⁶ Gómara, *Cortés*, 57.

which lies to the east of Coatzacoalcos on the Gulf Coast.⁴⁷ This is the same city that Cortés states Marina is from, apparently because this is where he received her.⁴⁸

Díaz, by contrast, reports that Marina's father died when she was very young and that her mother married another chief, by whom she had a son. Apparently quite fond of this son, Marina's mother and stepfather agreed that he should succeed his father as chief after they die. To remove any potential obstacle to this occurring, they allegedly gave Marina away by night to another indigenous group from Xicalango. To cover their actions, they spread a rumor that Marina, the heiress, had died. The people of Xicalango then gave Marina to the people of Tabasco, so that she ended up in the same place as she did in Gómara's account.⁴⁹

While we cannot know for certain the truth of Marina's past, historian Camilla Townsend finds Gómara's explanation of how Marina ended up in the possession of other indigenous groups to be more plausible than that of Díaz. She explains that in pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican life, it was common for females to become slaves. They might be taken as prisoners-of-war, their families could sell them if they came into hardship, or a woman might become a slave

⁴⁷ Gómara, *Cortés*, 57; Andrés de Tapia, another participant in, and chronicler of, the Conquest, also claims that Marina was stolen by traders as a child, then sold in Tabasco, where she was raised. See "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," in Patricia de Fuentes, ed. and trans., *The Conquistadors: First-Person Accounts of the Conquest of Mexico* (New York: Orion Press, 1963), 17–50; page 24 referenced here. All references to de Tapia's chronicle are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. Gómara likely used de Tapia's chronicle as one of his sources, so it is possible that he got this detail from him. See de Fuentes, ed. and trans., *The Conquistadors*, 18; Germán Vázquez, ed., *J. Díez, A. Tapia, B. Vázquez, y F. Aguilar: La Conquista de Tenochtitlan*, *Crónicas de América* 40 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1988), 62–65. Vázquez dates de Tapia's chronicle to roughly 1539, suggesting that it was then redacted in Spain from 1540–47.

⁴⁸ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73, where *Potonchán* is spelled as *Putunchan*.

⁴⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85. Díaz does not name the place where Marina ended up as Potonchán, as does Gómara, but rather as Tabasco. This could refer to the wider Tabasco region, in which Potonchán was located, but Díaz specifically refers to a town of Tabasco, where the battles are fought that end with Marina being transferred to the Spanish. Cohen, the translator and editor of Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, notes that the town that Díaz calls *Tabasco* was also known as *Potonchán* (68, n. 2). The parallels between Díaz and Gómara's accounts of the Spaniards' interactions with the people that give them Marina also suggest that they both refer to the same place. There is some general ambiguity in the early sources about the location and identity of sixteenth-century Potonchán, especially because Díaz at times refers to it as Champotón. There is, however, another town called Champotón farther east on the Gulf Coast where Spanish expeditions also arrived. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 28–33 speaks of Champotón and Potonchán as two different towns, both in Chontal Maya territory, which had encounters with the Spanish.

voluntarily, with the possibility of buying her freedom back some day.⁵⁰ Townsend notes, however, that it would have been unusual for Marina's mother to simply give her daughter away to another community.⁵¹ According to Nahua convention, she argues, it would not have been standard for a daughter to present an obstacle to a son inheriting his deceased father's position, as Díaz suggests.⁵² She instead finds Gómara's explanation that Marina was taken by merchants and sold in the markets to be more plausible. A long-distance slave trade did exist, and, as Townsend suggests, people in Marina's own community may have delivered her over to merchants in exchange for goods that they needed. Or, they may have given her as a peace offering to prevent an attack from another group.⁵³

However she got there, the early accounts agree that Marina ended up in the possession of the Chontal Maya people of Tabasco (probably in the town of Potonchán), by no choice of her own. Presumably a slave, Marina likely became a domestic servant, and, perhaps, a concubine to her master.⁵⁴ As will become apparent later, Marina learned at least one dialect of Maya during this time, in addition to her native Nahuatl.

La Malinche is Given to the Spanish

Hernán Cortés led the third Spanish expedition from Cuba to Mexico in 1519, when Marina was likely still a teenager.⁵⁵ Their expedition landed on the island of Cozumel and the

⁵⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 19–21.

⁵¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 19, 23.

⁵² Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 23.

⁵³ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 22–24.

⁵⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 19, 27. Whether Marina was given away, as Díaz claims, or taken by merchants and sold at market, as Gómara claims, it is almost certain that Marina became a slave in the Maya community where she ended up. Gómara states this explicitly later, when he says that the leaders of Potonchán gave the Spanish twenty of their female slaves, including Marina (as addressed below). Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 18–28 describes the complex relationships between the various wives, concubines, and female slaves that co-existed in many Nahua and Maya households.

⁵⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 12.

Yucatán Peninsula, then travelled west along the Gulf Coast, arriving at the Tabasco River in March of 1519.⁵⁶ The Spaniards were determined to enter Potonchán, which was located along the river, not far inland from the Gulf of Mexico. The people of Potonchán resisted, and fighting broke out between the two groups. After an initial battle, and then the decisive Battle of Cintla, the Spanish took Potonchán.⁵⁷ This was the first victory of Cortés's campaign, and both Díaz and Gómara cite the people of Potonchán as the first natives to become vassals of Emperor Charles in what would become New Spain.⁵⁸ After Cortés orders the residents to repopulate the town, the Spaniards rename it Santa Maria de la Victoria.⁵⁹

It is common in the chronicles for those who become subjects of the Emperor to also become Christians, at least on the surface. This was reportedly the case in Potonchán. After peace is made, Cortés gives the people of Potonchán an exhortation to the Christian faith that becomes a common feature of his interactions with indigenous peoples. He tells them to leave their idols and human sacrifices behind, and to turn to the one true God, whose Son died on the cross.⁶⁰ The people of Potonchán reportedly accept this message, along with an image of Jesus and his mother, Mary, and destroy their idols.⁶¹ Cortés has an altar built (or, according to Gómara, a cross is erected in the town's temple), and the town gathers around it with the Spaniards a few days later to celebrate Palm Sunday Mass.⁶²

⁵⁶ The Spanish renamed the Tabasco River the Grijalva River when they came upon it during the 1518 expedition, led by Juan de Grijalva.

⁵⁷ See Gómara, *Cortés*, 38–52 and Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 68–83 for their accounts of these events.

⁵⁸ Gómara, *Cortés*, 51; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 83.

⁵⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 76, 80–82; Gómara, *Cortés*, 51–52. According to Díaz, the Spanish gave the town this name because they won victory over it on Lady Day, also known as the Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (March 25).

⁶⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 81; Gómara, *Cortés*, 51.

⁶¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 81; Gómara, *Cortés*, 51.

⁶² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 81, 83; Gómara, *Cortés*, 51.

Whether or not events actually occurred in this manner, such descriptions at the outset of these chronicles seem to foreshadow that the ideal response of all indigenous peoples to the Spanish is to renounce their own rulers and religion and accept those of the foreigners. In this regard, Cortés's first victory in the Americas becomes paradigmatic of the goals of the unfolding Conquest. It is significant, therefore, that Marina is portrayed as among the first converts to Christianity in Potonchán. She is part of a peace offering from the men of Potonchán to the Spanish, along with nineteen other women, food and other provisions, and various trinkets.⁶³ Even before the Palm Sunday gathering, Fray Bartolomé de Olmedo conducts a Mass directed at these women. After explaining the Christian faith and calling them to leave their idols for worship of Jesus Christ, the women are baptized.⁶⁴ Díaz claims that these were the first women to become Christians in New Spain.⁶⁵ Gómara states that they were the first Christians in general to be baptized there.⁶⁶ Whether or not this is the case, it supports a portrait of the events at Potonchán as foundational to the establishment of a Christian New Spain, and of Marina as emblematic of its first converts and subjects, since she alone is named among the baptized women.⁶⁷

This is especially the case in Díaz's account, which displays the highest praise for Doña Marina among the chronicles. While Gómara does not specifically mention Marina among the women when they are given to the Spanish and baptized, Díaz names and praises her at both of these events. In the peace-making scene, he states that the material gifts were nothing in

⁶³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 48; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 80.

⁶⁴ For the baptismal Mass, see Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82. Gómara, *Cortés*, 57 states that the women were baptized, but he does not describe the event.

⁶⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82.

⁶⁶ Gómara, *Cortés*, 57.

⁶⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82 singles out and names Doña Marina while describing her baptism. Gómara does not describe the baptism, nor name any of the women when they are given to the Spanish. He does, however, uniquely name Marina when he mentions the baptized women in a subsequent chapter. See Gómara, *Cortés*, 57.

comparison to the women that the Spanish received, “among them a most excellent person who when she became a Christian took the name of Doña Marina.”⁶⁸ And at the baptism, Díaz claims that he cannot remember any of the other women’s names, and in fact, there is no reason to do so.⁶⁹ It is thus clear from her introduction into the narrative that Doña Marina will play a key role in the unfolding events. Díaz further states that “she was truly a great princess, the daughter of *Caciques* [chiefs] and the mistress of vassals, as was very evident by her appearance,” and that she was “good-looking, intelligent, and self-assured.”⁷⁰ As will become even more evident in Díaz’s chapter on Doña Marina, this praise of her in part supports his portrait of her as the ideal indigenous convert and subject of New Spain. In the baptismal scene, however, where Díaz mentions that Doña Marina will eventually live with Cortés and bear him a child, the emphasis on her noble background and good character also portrays her as a fitting mother for the great conqueror’s first-born son.⁷¹

We can only speculate as to why Gómara, as Cortés’s secretary, would not be equally concerned to show Marina this way. Perhaps it is because, as mentioned above, his work centers on Cortés’s merits, not those of others involved in the Conquest. Indeed, Gómara typically follows Cortés in only using the name *Marina*, without the honorific *Doña* that Díaz employs. And because Cortés had children by many women, and his first-born son by Marina would not become his heir, perhaps Gómara did not feel the need to portray this child’s mother in particularly glowing terms.

Significantly, the name *Marina* that she is known by in the chronicles is first given to her upon her baptism, and becomes the source of the other names she is commonly known by:

⁶⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 80. Serés, the editor of *Historia Verdadera*, dates the gifting of Marina and the other women to April 15, 1519. See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1264.

⁶⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82.

⁷⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82.

⁷¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82.

Malintzin and La Malinche. This gives the sense that Marina, as portrayed in the Spanish chronicles, comes into existence together with the nascent New Spain. There is an unavoidable tension in the fact that Marina's very identity emerges from her becoming a slave to the Spanish army, while at the same time it is deeply linked with the new society that she will help establish through her intelligence and linguistic skills. It is not entirely surprising, therefore, that Marina will later be viewed as the symbolic mother of the Mexican nation.

In contrast to Díaz, Gómara does not describe the baptism of the women or praise Doña Marina initially, but instead is quite blunt about these women's status in a way that Díaz is not: they are slaves.⁷² He states that the men of Potonchán considered giving the women to be a great favor to the Spaniards, since they had no women "to grind and bake maize bread daily, a necessary occupation that keeps the Indian women busy a good part of their time."⁷³

Both Díaz and Gómara state that Cortés distributed the women to his men after they were baptized, but here too, they portray this differently. Díaz explains that, because of her good looks and character, Doña Marina was initially given to Alonso Hernández Puertocarrero, whose noble status he is careful to note.⁷⁴ Again, he seems concerned to portray positively the woman who will play a key role in the Conquest, showing her to possess some desirable qualities that made such a match appropriate. Gómara, by contrast, simply states that Cortés, after warmly receiving the women and giving them gifts, "distributed the twenty female slaves among his men for companions."⁷⁵ He does not name or distinguish Marina from the other women at this point, and

⁷² Gómara, *Cortés*, 48. This English translation states that the men of Potonchán gave the Spaniards "twenty female slaves" to work for their army. A Spanish edition of the text makes it even more explicit that these women had been slaves in Potonchán, stating that the men gave the Spanish "veinte mujeres de sus escalvas" (emphasis mine), or, "twenty women from among their slaves." See Francisco López de Gómara, *Historia de la Conquista de México*, Colección Clásica 65 (Caracas: Biblioteca Ayacucho, 2007), 46.

⁷³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 48.

⁷⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 37 suggests that Cortés considered Puertocarrero as the most distinguished member of the expedition in terms of his family status.

⁷⁵ Gómara, *Cortés*, 48.

is again explicit about their status as slaves (he later refers to Marina as “the slave girl”).⁷⁶

Clearly, this is not a case of noble indigenous men giving their female relatives in marriage to form an alliance with the Spanish, but of female slaves being transferred to new masters.⁷⁷

Scholars have noted that being given as “companions” to the Spaniards meant that these female slaves were not merely to bake their bread, but also to serve them sexually.⁷⁸ In fact, it seems likely that this is the reason the women first needed to be made into Christians, before being given to the Spanish men.⁷⁹ The idea that Christian baptism was a prerequisite to the Spaniards having sexual access to indigenous women who were not their wives is full of tensions; yet, this is not the only time it appears in the chronicles. For instance, to secure an alliance with the Spanish, some chiefs in Cempoala offer them eight of their daughters and nieces to bear them children.⁸⁰ The Spaniards do not object to this on grounds that they could only have relations with women who are their wives, but rather insist that they can only receive the women if they become Christians.⁸¹ Eventually, the women are baptized and distributed to Cortés’s men.⁸² Although Cortés will later reject Moctezuma’s offer to take one of his daughters as his legal wife because he is already married, insisting that Spanish men are allowed to have only one wife, there is apparently no issue with him and his men taking women with whom they will have sexual relations outside of marriage.⁸³ In Cempoala, for example, both Cortés and

⁷⁶ Gómara, *Cortés*, 57.

⁷⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 36.

⁷⁸ E.g., Karttunen, “Rethinking Malinche,” 301–302; Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 36.

⁷⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 36.

⁸⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 121. Serés’s timeline places the Spanish visit to Cempoala at the beginning of June 1519. See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1264.

⁸¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 121–122. Likewise, the Spanish state that they will only consider the Cempoalan men as brothers if they abandon their idols and human sacrifices.

⁸² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 125.

⁸³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 276. Cortés nonetheless agrees to take Moctezuma’s daughter into his custody and treat her honorably, but only after she becomes a Christian, “as other ladies, the daughters of chieftains, had done.” Moctezuma consents. Some of Cortés’s captains later report that Moctezuma had given them more than one of his daughters (Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 286). This may have been a type of protective custody, since the Spanish had placed Moctezuma under arrest at this point and were plotting to take his capital, Tenochtitlan.

Puertocarrero, the man to whom Marina has already been given, each receive a female relative of the chiefs.⁸⁴

It is unclear whether such women, kept in part by the Spanish to assure an alliance with the men who gave them, or Marina, who played a key role in the Conquest, were treated any better by the Spanish than less distinguished native women they took captive. Díaz later describes an incident in which Cortés decides that all of the slaves the Spanish have acquired should be branded, so as to set aside the portion due to the Spanish king and to himself.⁸⁵ His soldiers are therefore ordered to bring forth the native women they had been “sheltering.”⁸⁶ When the moment to do so arrives, it becomes clear that some soldiers kept the prettiest women hidden away for themselves, causing others to complain that there are no good ones left. To supposedly make matters fair, Cortés decides that from there forward, all captive native women will be auctioned off, with the best ones going to the highest bidders. This story portrays captive native women as mere property, at the mercy of the Spanish men who possessed them. It seems likely, therefore, that even if Marina received some preferential treatment because the Spaniards came to rely on her linguistic and cultural skills, she still remained vulnerable by virtue of being an enslaved indigenous woman.

Doña Marina would not serve as Puertocarrero’s “companion” for long. According to Díaz, she lived with Cortés after Puertocarrero left for Spain on official business, just a few

And/or, Moctezuma may have been trying to secure an alliance with the Spanish, especially by offering Cortés one of his daughters in marriage. In any case, in 1526—six years after Moctezuma died—Cortés ends up taking Moctezuma’s daughter, Doña Isabel, into his household after the Spanish husband Cortés had previously married her off to dies. Shortly thereafter, Doña Isabel became pregnant with Cortés’s child. Before their daughter was even born, Cortés married Doña Isabel off to another Spaniard that he knew. See Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 164–165.

⁸⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 125.

⁸⁵ Cohen, the editor of Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 310–311 gives a summary of these events. For the full text, see Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 521–523.

⁸⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 310.

months after he received Marina.⁸⁷ Gómara provides more details about Marina's transfer to Cortés, attributing it to the discovery of her linguistic skills.⁸⁸ At this point, Cortés already had an interpreter: a Spaniard named Jerónimo de Aguilar, who had come to explore the Americas but was shipwrecked on the Yucatán Peninsula and enslaved by a Maya community, together with Gonzalo Guerrero.⁸⁹ When Cortés found the men in the Yucatán, he rescued Aguilar, but Guerrero, who had married a Maya woman and adapted to the culture, decided to stay. Since Aguilar had learned the language spoken by his captors, he was able to interpret for the Spanish when they encountered Maya peoples in the Yucatán and Tabasco regions. He did not, however, know Nahuatl, another prominent indigenous language that Cortés and his army encountered in San Juan de Ulúa, a town northwest along the Gulf Coast to which they sailed after leaving Potonchán.⁹⁰ This frustrated Cortés, but he was soon relieved when he heard Marina speaking effortlessly with the messengers of the governor of San Juan de Ulúa, apparently in Nahuatl. Cortés then reportedly offered her "more than her liberty" if she would be his interpreter and secretary, and thereby establish a friendship between him and the people of her land.⁹¹ Gómara does not report a response from Marina to this request, but the earliest records all show that she became an important interpreter and cultural intermediary for the Spanish, with Gómara stating that she and Aguilar were the only trustworthy interpreters between the Spanish and indigenous peoples.⁹²

Before Marina learned Spanish, she had to interpret through Aguilar. Although the Chontal Mayan language that Marina learned in Tabasco was different than the Maya that

⁸⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82; Serés places Puertocarrero's return to Spain at the end of July, 1519, roughly three months after he received Marina in Potonchán. See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1264.

⁸⁸ Gómara, *Cortés*, 56.

⁸⁹ See Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 60–66 for Aguilar's story.

⁹⁰ Gómara, *Cortés*, 56.

⁹¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 56.

⁹² Gómara, *Cortés*, 57.

Aguilar would have learned in the Yucatán, they were still able to understand one another in some form of Maya.⁹³ So, Marina would interpret Nahuatl speech to Aguilar in Maya, and he would communicate the message to Cortés in Spanish; responses went through the same chain in the opposite direction.⁹⁴ Marina did eventually learn Spanish, but it is unclear when exactly this occurred. Some episodes in the chronicles portray her communicating messages from indigenous people back to the Spanish without the assistance of Aguilar. It is not clear, however, whether Aguilar is not mentioned because he was not present, therefore implying that Marina was speaking in Spanish, or, because the emphasis lies on Marina's role at that point in the narrative.

As we will see, Marina's linguistic skills were especially valuable to the Spanish because the Mexica of the Triple Alliance spoke Nahuatl. By taking Marina as his interpreter, Cortés secured a means of communicating with Moctezuma, the ruler of Tenochtitlan.

Díaz's Characterization of Doña Marina

Díaz affirms the importance of Doña Marina as interpreter in his chapter on her life.⁹⁵ He explains that Cortés always took her with him because she had proven to be “such an excellent person, and a good interpreter in all the wars” that the Spanish fought to establish New Spain.⁹⁶ He also says that she was “obeyed without question by all the Indians of New Spain.”⁹⁷ In fact, he says that he makes a point of telling Doña Marina's story at the beginning of his account of

⁹³ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 26 claims that Marina also learned Yucatec Maya—a substantially different language than Chontal Maya—suggesting she may have picked it up from another servant in the household where she lived and worked in Tabasco.

⁹⁴ E.g., Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 86–87.

⁹⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85–87.

⁹⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85–86.

⁹⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 86.

the Conquest “because without Doña Marina we could not have understood the language of New Spain and Mexico.”⁹⁸

It also seems that Díaz’s extended presentation of Doña Marina at the outset of his chronicle serves to portray her as an exemplary indigenous convert to Christianity and subject of New Spain, already hinted at in her baptism.⁹⁹ Here Díaz tells her background story (described above), including that her parents were the chiefs of her native town, rather than merely related to them, as Gómara claims. It may indeed be the case that Marina was born a princess, and that she made this known to Díaz. It is also possible that Díaz exaggerates her status somewhat, so that the woman who represents the earliest Christian converts and subjects of New Spain comes across as a noble figure. Scholars have noted how Díaz’s account of Marina’s childhood resonates with that of the exemplary Christian knight, Amadís de Gaula, who is the main character in the popular medieval chivalric romance that bears his name.¹⁰⁰ Díaz may draw this comparison to emphasize Doña Marina’s nobility and Christian virtue.

This characterization is more explicit in Díaz’s comparison of Doña Marina to the biblical Joseph. It begins with the explanation of how Doña Marina was passed from the merchants of Xicalango, to the Tabascans, to Cortés, all because of an alleged concern to protect her half-brother as heir to his father’s noble position.¹⁰¹ While Díaz does not mention Joseph’s story yet, this description does resonate with his being sold to Midianite traders by his jealous half-brothers and ending up as a servant in a foreign land, Egypt (Gen 37:1–28; 39:1–2). Another general similarity between Doña Marina and Joseph is that they both prove useful to the foreign

⁹⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 87.

⁹⁹ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 31 states that Díaz describes both Marina’s initiation into, and assimilation of, Spanish culture in this chapter on her life in order to give the context within which the reader is to interpret all of her subsequent acts.

¹⁰⁰ E.g., Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 28–31; Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 23.

¹⁰¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85.

people they come to live among, taking up an important role in their service—Marina as interpreter for the Spanish, and Joseph as Vizier of Egypt (Gen 41:39–45).

Díaz’s account jumps from Doña Marina’s transfer to Cortés to a reunion she allegedly has with her mother and half-brother in 1524, on a journey to Honduras that Díaz also made.¹⁰² Her mother’s second husband had died by this time, so she ruled the town with her son, Marina’s half-brother. Díaz claims they took the names Marta and Lazaro (Spanish for *Martha* and *Lazarus*) after becoming Christians.¹⁰³ When Cortés’s expedition passes through the Coatzacoalcos region, where Marina was born, Marta and Lazaro are among the chiefs that Cortés gathers to hear about Christianity.¹⁰⁴ Recognizing Doña Marina, Marta and Lazaro became afraid that she will have them put to death for having handed her over as a child to the men of Xicalango, so they weep. To the contrary, Doña Marina forgives them, comforts them, and gives them gifts, stating that they had acted in ignorance by giving her away.

As she sends them home, Doña Marina reportedly tells them how gracious God had been to her in freeing her from her previous idolatry and making her into a Christian, as well as in “giving her a son by her lord and master Cortes,” and in marrying her to the gentleman Juan Jaramillo, one of Cortés’s men, on this same expedition.¹⁰⁵ She further states that, even if she were to be given control of all of New Spain, she would refuse, because “she would rather serve her husband and Cortes than anything else in the world.”¹⁰⁶ At this point, Díaz concludes that this whole story is like that of Joseph meeting his brothers again in Egypt. As the biblical text

¹⁰² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85 claims that this trip occurred in 1523, but scholars have dated it to 1524. E.g., Serés, in Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1266; Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 152.

¹⁰³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85.

¹⁰⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 86.

¹⁰⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 86.

¹⁰⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 86.

states, Joseph forgives them for having sold him into slavery, claiming that it was part of God's plan, and sends them home with provisions (Gen 45).

We cannot be sure if the family reunion Díaz recounts actually occurred, or how Marina viewed the Christianity she was initially coerced to embrace. In legal testimony after her death, more than one witness claims that she was a good Christian, and many testify that she was a major factor in many native people becoming Christians and subjects of New Spain.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the reality was, Díaz's explicit use of Joseph's story to shape his telling of Doña Marina's helps cast her as an exemplary indigenous convert to Christianity (which acknowledges the same God as did Joseph), and as a faithful subject of the Spanish Crown, under which she was both a slave and a valued interpreter. Unlike Joseph, however, Doña Marina whole-heartedly embraces the religion of her owners and renounces any desire for social status. Written decades after the Conquest ended and New Spain was established, Díaz seeks not only to foreshadow in Doña Marina the ideal response of other native people to the arrival of the Spanish, but also to retrospectively justify the Conquest as a benevolent move to turn the natives from idolatry to Christianity, and to establish a society that even a noble, indigenous princess would prefer to her previous way of life.

La Malinche during the Conquest

Spanish and indigenous sources alike portray Marina as a capable interpreter who was present for the major events of the Conquest, and who participated in important conversations

¹⁰⁷ "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios e Fidelidad con que Sirvió en la Conquista de Nueva-España la Famosa Doña Marina, India, Casada con Xoan Xaramillo despues de la Dicha Conquista," in *Colección de Documentos Inéditos, Relativos al descubrimiento...de Las Antiguas Posesiones Españolas de América y Oceanía: Sacados de los Archivos del Reino, y Muy Especialmente del de Indias*, eds. Luis Torres de Mendoza, Francisco Cárdenas y Espejo, and Joaquín F. Pacheco (Madrid: Manuel G. Hernandez, 1884), 41:188–277. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015072492401;view=1up;seq=196>.

and negotiations. As we will see, she not only interprets the precise words given to her in one language into those of another, but at times, she also communicates the general wishes of Cortés or various indigenous groups without being told specifically how to do so. In addition, Marina acts as a cultural interpreter and intermediary, aptly assessing the meaning of encounters between the Spanish and native peoples so that she can advise both sides as to the preferable course of action. Sometimes she carries out these tasks on her own initiative. How exactly Marina is characterized in these roles varies according to the source. The Spanish chronicles portray her positively overall, while the indigenous sources are a bit more ambivalent. To get a better picture of Marina's role in these sources, I will address key events of the Conquest in which she reportedly takes part. Since Díaz's chronicle contains the most references to her, I will follow it as a general geographical and chronological guide for the march of Cortés's army from the Gulf Coast inland, toward Tenochtitlan.

The Early Days of the Conquest

San Juan de Ulúa, where Marina's linguistic skills are discovered, was one of many towns that submitted to Moctezuma as its lord. Díaz does not explain how her talents came to light here, as does Gómara, but instead illustrates her using them. While the Spanish are still on their ship in the port, Díaz describes how many "Mexican Indians" (apparently referring to those who speak the Mexica language of Nahuatl) come aboard and ask for the captain.¹⁰⁸ Díaz writes that Doña Marina understood their request, since she spoke their language very well, and immediately pointed out Cortés. Marina thereby acts as an intermediary between the Spanish and native people, even when she is not directly instructed to do so.

¹⁰⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 88.

Marina's characteristic ability to think on her feet is subsequently demonstrated when the Spanish are approached by some Totonac men, whose language neither Marina nor Aguilar understood.¹⁰⁹ Nonetheless, it occurs to Marina to ask the group, in Nahuatl, if there are any Nahuatl interpreters among them. Two men understand her and come forward, and Marina interprets a conversation between them and Cortés.¹¹⁰

According to Gómara, Marina also proves to be a valuable cultural interpreter in San Juan de Ulúa.¹¹¹ Cortés sees some unknown indigenous men in the distance who seem curious about the Spanish, but do not come near or interact with the people of San Juan de Ulúa. His hosts tell him that they are just farmers passing by, but Cortés does not believe this. So, he summons the unknown men and speaks to them through Marina. They tell him that they are from Cempoala, a town farther up the Gulf Coast. To finally learn why they will not associate with the people of San Juan de Ulúa, Cortés asks Marina directly. She explains to him that they both have a different language and a different lord than the people of San Juan de Ulúa, since they fought to stay independent of Moctezuma's control. Cortés "was overjoyed with this bit of intelligence," facilitated by Marina, because he realized that Moctezuma, ruler of the city he hoped to take—Tenochtitlan—had enemies in the land.¹¹²

Cortés further questions the men from Cempoala through Marina, and learns that there is more than one town that had been forcefully made into vassals, or even slaves, of Moctezuma.¹¹³ They resent paying him obedience and tribute, and some, like Cempoala, are currently fighting to escape his tyranny. Cortés is pleased to learn that various groups in the land are fighting each

¹⁰⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 197 speaks of Doña Marina's typical "quickwittedness."

¹¹⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 98–99.

¹¹¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 61–63.

¹¹² Gómara, *Cortés*, 62.

¹¹³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 62.

other, since this would help him realize his purposes.¹¹⁴ Marina is thus depicted as instrumental in helping Cortés understand the reality that not all the people in the land are a unified political entity—a piece of knowledge that he would use to gain indigenous allies and play off against each other communities with differing loyalties.

In fact, Cortés subsequently visits Cempoala, and its people become allies of the Spanish, along with many other Totonac communities in the region.¹¹⁵ They air their grievances against Moctezuma to Cortés, telling him how the Triple Alliance leader takes their children for slaves and human sacrifices, and how his tax collectors rape their wives and daughters.¹¹⁶ Cortés promises to assist them in any way he can, and the Totonacs in turn pledge their allegiance to the Spanish crown.¹¹⁷

Alliance with the Tlaxcalans

The people of Tlaxcala would also become key allies of the Spanish, but not before heavy fighting took place between the two groups. From Cempoala, on the Gulf Coast, Cortés and his army began their march inland toward Tenochtitlan. The Cempoalans advise the Spanish to take the route that passes through Tlaxcala, since they are their friends, and send some of their own men along to assist the Spanish.¹¹⁸ Tlaxcala had developed into a great federation of four sub-states, and through warfare managed to stay independent of the empire of the Triple Alliance, which nearly surrounded it. As Díaz puts it, the Tlaxcalans were “deadly enemies” of the Mexica

¹¹⁴ Gómara, *Cortés*, 63.

¹¹⁵ Gómara, *Cortés*, 69–76; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 107–114.

¹¹⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 108, 110; Gómara, *Cortés*, 73.

¹¹⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 113. Díaz mentions other indigenous allies of the Spanish on page 140.

¹¹⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 134–135.

of the Triple Alliance, and did not pay them tribute.¹¹⁹ It seems that this would make the Tlaxcalans eager to ally with the Spanish, but this proved not to be the case.

As the Spanish enter Tlaxcalan territory, it becomes clear that the Tlaxcalans and some of their neighbors are prepared for battle. According to Díaz, since the Spanish had gained allies in towns that had been loyal to Moctezuma, and some of their men were now marching with the Spanish, the Tlaxcalans believed the Spanish to be allied with the Triple Alliance and intent on attacking them.¹²⁰ The Tlaxcalans therefore attempt to prevent the Spanish from entering their capital city by force. Fighting breaks out between the two groups, and the Spanish are able to put the Tlaxcalans on the defensive, despite being massively outnumbered.¹²¹

It is at this point that Doña Marina's role becomes key. She had marched on the long journey from the coast toward Tlaxcala, through rugged terrain and changing climates. On the way, she and Aguilar were the mouthpieces through which proclamation of the Christian faith and calls for the locals to submit to the Spanish Crown went out.¹²² These are tasks at which Marina would become adept during the Conquest, so that Díaz comments that both Marina and Aguilar could interpret messages about the Christian faith very clearly, since they had so much practice doing so.¹²³ After the initial fighting between the Spanish and Tlaxcalan warriors, the Spanish send a message to the Tlaxcalan commander, Xicotenga the Younger, stating that the

¹¹⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 134–135.

¹²⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 140–141.

¹²¹ We cannot be certain exactly how many Tlaxcalans and their allies battled against the Spanish, but Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 144 speaks first of a group of six thousand warriors opposing them, and then of forty thousand of Xicotenga's soldiers waiting to ambush them. Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 148 numbers the Spanish soldiers at four hundred. Gómara, *Cortés*, 119 claims that the province of Tlaxcala consisted of one hundred and fifty thousand heads of household. Although Díaz may exaggerate the disparity in troop numbers between the Spaniards and Tlaxcalans to make their victory seem even more impressive, it was the case that Cortés's army alone did not have nearly as many soldiers as did many of the indigenous groups they battled, making their indigenous allies extremely valuable in the Conquest.

¹²² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 135, 137. Marina regularly interpreted Christian proclamation on behalf of the Spanish.

¹²³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 176.

Spanish only want to pass through Tlaxcalan land, and intend them no harm.¹²⁴ Doña Marina and Aguilar also “spoke kindly” to some Tlaxcalan prisoners that the Spanish were releasing, telling them not to be foolish and to make peace with the Spanish, who want to treat them as brothers.¹²⁵ Marina knew the fighting power of the Spanish, and apparently attempted to prevent more Tlaxcalans—as well as Spaniards—from losing their lives.

Yet, Xicotenga the Younger, whom Díaz later characterizes as angry, stubborn, and bloodthirsty, refuses to make peace with the Spanish, so the fighting continues.¹²⁶ In the midst of the bloodshed, Díaz makes a point of noting Doña Marina’s courage. He comments that, although Marina is a native woman, she has manly valor so great that, despite hearing daily threats from the natives to kill the Spanish and eat their flesh, and seeing the wounded and sick Spaniards surrounded in battle, “she betrayed no weakness but a courage greater than that of a woman.”¹²⁷ Afterwards, Doña Marina and Aguilar explain to Tlaxcalan messengers that if the Tlaxcalans do not make peace with the Spanish within two days, the Spanish will kill them in their own city and destroy their country.¹²⁸ This entire scene, however stylized it may be, points out the real trials and dangers that Marina undoubtedly faced by serving the Spanish on their military campaigns.¹²⁹ It also shows the significance of her role in communicating with indigenous peoples at key moments.

¹²⁴ Xicotenga is also spelled as *Xicoténcatl*; Xicotenga the Younger is also known as Xicotenga II.

¹²⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 147.

¹²⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 147, 154–155.

¹²⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 153.

¹²⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 153.

¹²⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 156 claims that Doña Marina and Aguilar were with the Spanish troops on all their military expeditions, even at night, further emphasizing the danger and harsh conditions they would have faced.

A subsequent episode in Díaz's chronicle reflects the reputation Marina gained for acting as an informant to the Spanish about the intentions of various indigenous groups.¹³⁰ It recounts how Xicotenga the Younger sent spies into the Spanish camp, attempting to disguise their ill intentions by acting in a friendly fashion. Although some of the Spaniards' Cempoalan allies realize the men are spies, and a couple of men from the region confirm these suspicions, claiming that Xicotenga planned to attack the Spanish by night, the Cempoalans do not take this threat seriously and say nothing to Cortés. Marina, however, finds out about the spies and immediately reports them to Cortés.¹³¹ While this characterizes her positively from the perspective of the Spaniards, whose lives were potentially saved by her shrewdness and initiative, the indigenous people who were physically punished for their alleged espionage and plotting may not have viewed her this way.¹³² Significantly, Gómara's version of this episode has a Cempoalan warrior becoming suspicious of the Tlaxcalans in the Spanish camp and warning Cortés about them, rather than Marina.¹³³ She and Aguilar do act as interpreters for Cortés's subsequent interrogation of the spies, but Gómara ascribes her a lesser role in the uncovering of the alleged plot against the Spanish.

Back in the Tlaxcalan capital, Xicotenga the Elder (father of Xicotenga the Younger), and Mase Escasi,¹³⁴ two principal Tlaxcalan chiefs, receive the Spaniards' request for peace and are ready to accept it, in part because they have repeatedly attacked the Spanish and failed to

¹³⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 161–163. This characterization also derives from Marina's alleged role in the Cholula massacre, and was attested to by several witnesses after her life. See "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:216, 217, 223, 231, 238, 247, etc.

¹³¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 162.

¹³² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 163 states that, after questioning some of the Tlaxcalans and hearing their confession of the plot against the Spanish, Cortés has seventeen of the spies arrested and either their hands or thumbs cut off and sent to Xicotenga to demonstrate the punishment for spying. Gómara, *Cortés*, 107 claims that Cortés had the hands of all fifty Tlaxcalan spies cut off and sent back to their army as a warning.

¹³³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 106–107.

¹³⁴ The Spanish version of Díaz's chronicle spells his name as *Maseescasi*. See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 255. Some texts also refer to him as *Magiscatzin* or *Magiscasin*.

conquer them.¹³⁵ They also realize that the Spanish and their indigenous allies really are opposed to Moctezuma's rule, and that allying with them will provide them protection and access to the basic goods they have been cut off from in their resistance to the Triple Alliance.¹³⁶ Although according to Díaz Xicotenga the Younger initially continues fighting, peace is eventually affirmed in late September of 1519.¹³⁷

Significantly, Díaz portrays Xicotenga the Elder addressing Cortés as *Malinche*, one of the names for Marina that is derived from *Malintzin*.¹³⁸ He explains that all the indigenous people called Cortés by this name because Doña Marina was always with him, especially when he met with chiefs and other dignitaries, and spoke to them in the Mexica language.¹³⁹ Díaz asserts that he will also refer to Cortés as Malinche from this point forward when recording Cortés's conversations with indigenous peoples. In a striking reversal, therefore, the leader of the Spanish invaders comes to be identified with the woman who acquired her first documented name by becoming a slave to the Spaniards. This highlights the importance of Marina's role as a linguistic and cultural intermediary—any communication between Nahuatl-speaking peoples and the Spanish had to go through her. There would eventually be other native people who learned Spanish, and Spaniards who learned Nahuatl. But in the key events of the Spanish campaign to take Tenochtitlan, Marina as intermediary was front and center, so much so that another Spaniard

¹³⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 153–154.

¹³⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 154.

¹³⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 166–188; Gómara, *Cortés*, 114–118.

¹³⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 171. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 242, n. 3 lists other texts where Cortés is referred to as Malinche.

¹³⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 172. Díaz further explains that the native people began referring to Cortés as “Marina's Captain,” which was shortened to “Malinche,” but Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 242, n. 3 argues that this could not have been the case, since Nahuatl speakers would not have formed a possessive in this way, and would not have yet known the word for *captain*. On page 242, n. 1, Townsend explains instead that *Malinche* was how the Spanish heard the irregular Nahuatl vocative form *Malintze* of *Malintzin*, the name that indigenous people often used for Marina.

who followed Marina and Aguilar around to learn the native language was also referred to as *Malinche*.¹⁴⁰

The Spaniards' alliance with Tlaxcala provided them with thousands of warriors who would prove key to their victory in Tenochtitlan. It also reportedly spread fear of the Spaniard's military might throughout the region, including to Moctezuma himself, who had already been sending emissaries to the Spanish.¹⁴¹ Since the Tlaxcalans extensively portrayed their special relationship with the Spanish in visual texts, I turn to these now in order to examine how one indigenous group interpreted Malintzin over time.

Malintzin in Indigenous Codices

Malintzin's significance as interpreter and cultural intermediary is clearly reflected in the indigenous codices that depict the Conquest.¹⁴² She commonly appears in scenes along with Cortés, often standing between him and the indigenous people he meets, large in size and well dressed. Malintzin's speaking role, which ascribes a degree of authority to her, is indicated by speech glyphs emanating from her mouth, or, by her hand elevated in the direction of those she addresses. These images also show her receiving tributes and gifts from indigenous people, sometimes in greater quantities than Cortés.¹⁴³ The codices differ, however, in the details of their portrayals of Malintzin, often based on the relationship to the Spanish of the groups that produced them.

¹⁴⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 172. This was a settler in Puebla named Juan Perez de Artiaga, whom Díaz says was known as Juan Perez Malinche de Artiaga.

¹⁴¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 166.

¹⁴² Even after adapting written language using the Roman alphabet, Mesoamerican indigenous people continued to communicate by means of visual texts in the post-Conquest period. See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 63, and Gordon Brotherston, *Painted Books from Mexico: Codices in UK Collections and the Worlds They Represent* (London: British Museum Press, 1995), 33–44 for a summary of Malintzin's portrayals in the sixteenth century codices.

¹⁴³ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 33–34.

The Tlaxcalan images of Malintzin provide a unique glimpse into how one group's remembrances of her shifted over time.¹⁴⁴ Beginning roughly in the 1530s or 1540s (some ten to twenty years after the Conquest ended), the Tlaxcalans produced several series of images that variously depict their initial encounters with the Spanish and their subsequent participation with them in the Conquest. Since both Malintzin and the Tlaxcalans assisted the Spanish, it is not surprising that the Tlaxcalan texts on the whole interpret Malintzin more positively than do other indigenous sources.

The earliest set of images, known as the *Tizatlan Codex* or *Texas Fragment*, depict the Spanish arriving in and making peace with Tizatlan, the first of the four Tlaxcalan sub-states that the Spanish came upon in their journey to Tenochtitlan.¹⁴⁵ Produced perhaps as early as the 1530s, these images omit any reference to the Tlaxcalans' initial armed resistance to the Spanish.¹⁴⁶ The omission makes sense in light of the special status that Cortés granted Tlaxcala in return for its assistance to the Spanish. Since the Tlaxcalans may have sent these images to Spain in the 1530s along with a petition to formalize their status, there would be no benefit in portraying their early and fierce resistance to the Spaniards. Instead, these images document the tribute or gifts the Tlaxcalans gave to the Spanish as part of peace negotiations, asserting their allegiance to the Spaniards who were the rulers of New Spain at the time the images were created.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ This summary of Malintzin's portrayals in Tlaxcalan texts draws on Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 33–34, and Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 67–76. For a thorough study of the different versions of the Tlaxcalan images, see Travis Barton Kranz, "The Tlaxcalan Conquest Pictorials: The Role of Images in Influencing Colonial Policy in Sixteenth-Century Mexico" (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 2001).

¹⁴⁵ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 37.

¹⁴⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 67–68.

¹⁴⁷ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 38 argues that the goods depicted here as being transferred to the Spanish are tributes, and that this image is best understood as an accounting record of what the Spanish owed the Tlaxcalans, which could be used in court to seek repayment. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70 understands the situation expressed here to be a bit more ambiguous—it could be that the Tlaxcalans saw these as gifts offered to the Spanish as a means of making peace, or, as tribute they were required to pay as the defeated party.

Malintzin plays a prominent role in these early images as a key mediator of the first contact and peace arrangements between the Spaniards and Tlaxcalans.¹⁴⁸ She is with Cortés as he meets the Tlaxcalan ruler for the first time, her head tilted upward as she speaks with the accompanying Tlaxcalan men. Another scene shows Cortés meeting with Xicotenga in the latter's home, with Malintzin right beside them, speaking to both of these distinguished men.

The last scene in this series shows the exchange of gifts between the two groups as part of peace negotiations, with Malintzin playing an especially prominent part. Filling a significant portion of the space are the three groups of Tlaxcalan women that their men offer to the Spanish. Townsend explains that the first, finely dressed group consists of Tlaxcalan princesses, including two daughters of Xicotenga the Elder.¹⁴⁹ The second is made up of daughters of Tlaxcalan noblemen, while the third group apparently consists of commoners—perhaps slaves.¹⁵⁰ This mix of women, Townsend suggests, may reflect an ambivalent early understanding of the Tlaxcalans' defeat by the Spanish and the nature of their new relationship, since a ruler's daughters could be offered to war victors as a way to build an alliance, but offering slave women could imply submission.¹⁵¹

Strikingly, Malintzin, who was herself given to men of alien communities, stands in the center of this image to receive and instruct the Tlaxcalan women.¹⁵² Her head is tilted upward as she stands before them in native clothing, but with European shoes that contrast with the

¹⁴⁸ For reproductions of the four images that comprise the *Tizatlan Codex* or *Texas Fragment*, see Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 69–73.

¹⁴⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70, 72.

¹⁵⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70.

¹⁵¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70, 72. Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 175–176, 178 mentions Tlaxcalan chiefs offering five of their daughters, all virgins, to Cortés and his men as wives, so as to become the Spaniards' brothers. They include a daughter of Xicotenga, whom the Tlaxcalan leader offers to Cortés. Díaz describes the women as richly adorned and “handsome for Indian women” (176), and also notes that each one brought along a maid to serve her. The Spanish men only receive the women after they are baptized. Gómara, *Cortés*, 118 comments that many of the Tlaxcalan lords offered their daughter to the Spaniards “as a token of true friendship, so they might bear children by such valorous men and bring into the world a new warrior caste; or perhaps they gave their daughters because it was the custom, or merely to please the Spaniards.”

¹⁵² Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 70.

Tlaxcalan women's bare feet. Malintzin's hands are raised as an indicator of her speech, while the Tlaxcalan princesses stand in a line before her with their hands clasped. The other Tlaxcalan women sit on the ground. Here Malintzin clearly appears as an authoritative figure who does not seem to merely interpret Cortés's words; the Spanish captain is shown at the top of the page speaking to the Tlaxcalan leaders while Malintzin works independently with the women at the center of the image, suggesting that the Tlaxcalans remembered her in the early colonial period as an important agent in the establishment of their alliance with the Spanish.

Over time, the *Tizatlan Codex* was integrated into a larger set of images that came to be known as the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala*.¹⁵³ These images were in turn reproduced several times, with changes that reflected the shifting concerns of the Tlaxcalans as they remembered their role in the Conquest. A mid-sixteenth century version of the *Lienzo* no longer emphasizes political marriages as a means of the Tlaxcalans securing an alliance with the Spanish, but instead highlights their crucial assistance to the Spanish in the Conquest as the basis of their relationship and request to the Spanish Crown for more privileges in New Spain.¹⁵⁴ Gordon Brotherston argues that the *Lienzo* seeks to portray the Tlaxcalans as early Christian converts and *conquistadores* in their own right, showing the Spanish as dependent on them not only in the battle for Tenochtitlan, but also in their campaigns across Mesoamerica.¹⁵⁵

Malintzin also plays a fairly prominent role in these texts. She is at the center of negotiations between the Tlaxcalans and Spanish, and supervises the receiving of tribute on

¹⁵³ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 38.

¹⁵⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 74–75; Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 38–39. See Alfredo Chavero, *El Lienzo de Tlaxcala* (Mexico City: Editorial Cosmos, 1979) for reproductions and explanations of all the images in this version of the *Lienzo*.

¹⁵⁵ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 38–39. Both Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 177–178, and Gómara, *Cortés*, 120–121 portray the Tlaxcalans as initially resistant to rejecting their ancestral gods and accepting the Christianity of their new Spanish allies.

behalf of the Spanish.¹⁵⁶ Significantly, with the exception of her Spanish footwear, Malintzin is at times dressed in the same clothing as Tlaxcalan women, and is often shown wearing the colors red and white that characterized the headbands of Tlaxcalan noblemen.¹⁵⁷ So, even though Malintzin was not Tlaxcalan, and is still commonly pictured alongside Cortés and the Spanish, she retrospectively comes to represent the Tlaxcalan alliance with the Spanish. As interpreter and cultural mediator, she is remembered positively as a key link between the two groups.

Another version of the *Lienzo* was prepared in 1585 to travel with a Tlaxcalan delegation to meet with Philip II of Spain.¹⁵⁸ By this point, New Spain was well-established, most people who had known Malintzin were gone, and there was not the same pressing need for interpreters as in the earlier colonial period. Understandably, therefore, Malintzin's role in these texts is diminished compared with earlier versions.¹⁵⁹ Strikingly, she is replaced in many scenes by a cross; the Tlaxcalans' early conversion to Christianity and purported evangelistic activity now represent their allegiance to the Spanish and claim to status in New Spain, rather than the person of Malintzin.¹⁶⁰ Perhaps this replacement reflects an understanding of Malintzin as emblematic of early indigenous converts, similar to Díaz's portrayal of her, so that with time, the cross can function analogously to Marina as the Tlaxcalans' earliest link to the Spanish.

Moctezuma and the Spanish

After making peace with the Spaniards, the Tlaxcalans finally invite them into their capital city, where they spend about three weeks resting and gathering intelligence on

¹⁵⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 74–75.

¹⁵⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 75–76.

¹⁵⁸ Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 41.

¹⁵⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 76.

¹⁶⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 76. Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 41–44 elaborates on Malintzin's replacement by the cross.

Moctezuma and Tenochtitlan.¹⁶¹ Moctezuma, who knew of the Spanish from their expeditions to Mexico in 1517 and 1518, had been sending messengers to Cortés and his army since they first arrived on the Gulf Coast. The *Florentine Codex* shows Malintzin interpreting between the Spanish and Montezuma's messengers at their initial encounter, and she would continue to do so as the Triple Alliance leader sent many subsequent delegations to the Spaniards.¹⁶² They tried to ascertain the intentions and military might of the newcomers, so that Moctezuma could determine the best course of action.

Moctezuma's stance toward the Spanish differs in the earliest sources, and his approach to dealing with them may change over the course of a single narrative in response to unfolding events.¹⁶³ Despite these differences, the Spanish chronicles repeatedly show him attempting to keep the Spaniards from entering Tenochtitlan, as they had insisted they were intent on doing.¹⁶⁴ It had become clear to Moctezuma that they were a military force to be reckoned with, especially with the assistance of the Tlaxcalans. Understandably, then, Moctezuma did not want to give the Spaniards and their allies easy entrance to Tenochtitlan, a well-fortified city built on an island.¹⁶⁵ He reportedly sends lavish gifts to the Spaniards as a gesture of friendship intended to prevent them from entering Tenochtitlan, claiming that doing so would not be in the Spaniards' best

¹⁶¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 183 states the Spanish were in Tlaxcala for seventeen days, while Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70, and Gómara, *Cortés*, 118 claim it was twenty days.

¹⁶² See *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 48 for the image of Malintzin speaking with Moctezuma's emissaries at Veracruz, as well as Brotherston, *Painted Books*, 25 for the image and a brief explanation of it.

¹⁶³ As with Malintzin, it is difficult to know from the post-Conquest sources what Moctezuma actually thought about the Spanish and how he responded to them at the time he was dealing with them. For instance, the *Florentine Codex* portrays the arrival of the Spanish in Mexico as predicted to the Mexica by many omens, as well as the Mexica taking Cortés and the Spaniards to be gods (See *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 48–63, 82–83). That Moctezuma and the Mexica actually perceived the Spanish this way upon first contact has been questioned by historians—for instance, Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 45–49 suggests that the post-Conquest generation of Mexica crafted this perception as a credible way to explain the defeat of their fathers and uncles by the Spanish. Similarly, Lockhart, *We People Here*, 17 argues that the *Florentine Codex* portrayal of Moctezuma as indecisive and passive during the Conquest reflects a standard reaction of defeated people to blame their leader for this outcome.

¹⁶⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 183.

¹⁶⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 180.

interests.¹⁶⁶ The Tlaxcalans, who were bitter enemies of Moctezuma and the Mexica, warn the Spanish not to trust Moctezuma's promises, just as his envoys warn them not to trust the Tlaxcalans.¹⁶⁷

When Moctezuma's messengers see that the Spaniards will not be deterred from advancing toward Tenochtitlan, they encourage them to travel from Tlaxcala to Cholula, a city about a day's journey away that bordered Moctezuma's territory and was allied with him.¹⁶⁸ The messengers state that this is a friendly place where the Spaniards can await Moctezuma's reply to their request to visit him in Tenochtitlan.¹⁶⁹ Both Gómara and Díaz claim they said this—and plied the Spaniards with gifts—to get the Spaniards out of Tlaxcala, since the alliance between these two groups posed a threat to Moctezuma.¹⁷⁰ Although the Tlaxcalans warn the Spaniards not to pass through Cholula, they decide to do so anyway.¹⁷¹ Díaz claims that this would enable them to assess how to enter Tenochtitlan without having to fight the fearful Triple Alliance army.¹⁷² Or, perhaps Cortés simply wanted to spend some time among Moctezuma's allies to assess matters before advancing on to Tenochtitlan.¹⁷³ In any case, what happened when the Spanish finally entered Cholula would prove to be one of the most controversial episodes of the Conquest, and one that especially fuels later interpretations of Malintzin as a traitor to indigenous people.

¹⁶⁶ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 69 reports a large envoy from Moctezuma telling Cortés that the Triple Alliance leader wants to become an ally of Cortés and a vassal of the Spanish king, even offering to pay annual tribute in gold, jewels, cotton, and slaves. The only condition is that Cortés not go into Moctezuma's territory, since it was supposedly lacking in provisions and Moctezuma would be grieved to see the Spaniards in need. Gómara, Cortés's secretary, recounts a similar scene in *Cortés*, 108. It is questionable whether or not Moctezuma would have gone so far at this point as to willingly submit to the Spanish crown.

¹⁶⁷ E.g., Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 170, 174, 184.

¹⁶⁸ E.g., Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 179, 185–186; Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70.

¹⁶⁹ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70; Gómara, *Cortés*, 123.

¹⁷⁰ Gómara, *Cortés*, 123; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 186.

¹⁷¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 123; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 185.

¹⁷² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 185.

¹⁷³ As Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 80 suggests.

The Spanish in Cholula

The controversy centers on Cortés's army and some of their allies, particularly the Tlaxcalans, reportedly massacring thousands of Cholulans in their own city.¹⁷⁴ The Spanish sources attribute this attack to an alleged plot by the Cholulans, on the orders of Moctezuma and with the assistance of his army, to kill the Spaniards in Cholula, or, as they left that city for Tenochtitlan. Since, according to some sources, Marina informs Cortés of this alleged plot before it is carried out, some later interpreters portray her as a traitor not only to the indigenous people of Cholula, who suffer the deadly punishment that Cortés inflicts for their supposed treachery, but to all the native residents of Mexico.

The earliest sources, however, suggest that Marina's alleged role in the events at Cholula is not that straightforward. She is not even mentioned in the *Florentine Codex* version of the massacre, which does not claim that the Spanish discover a clear Cholulan plot against them.¹⁷⁵ In contrast to the Spanish chronicles, this Mexica account portrays the Spaniards' Tlaxcalan allies as inciting the Spaniards to attack Cholula, its enemy, by painting them as evil and a potential threat to the Spaniards.¹⁷⁶ According to this source, both the Spaniards' Tlaxcalan and

¹⁷⁴ Gómara, *Cortés*, 128–129 mentions Tlaxcalans, Cempoalans, and “other friends” assisting the Spanish in their attack on Cholula, although the Tlaxcalans clearly seem to be the most numerous ally. Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 72 claims that one hundred thousand Tlaxcalan warriors had followed him to Cholula, but that he asked them to wait outside of the city, with only five or six thousand of them remaining with him. Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 190, and Gómara, *Cortés*, 125 explain how the Cholulans, initially extending an apparently friendly invitation for the Spaniards to enter their city, convince the Spaniards to leave their Tlaxcalan allies outside of Cholula, since they are enemies of the Cholulans. Cortés concedes this request, but Gómara, *Cortés*, 128 states that it had in fact been made with evil intent, in order for the Cholulans to carry out the alleged plot against the Spaniards. When the Spanish learn of the plot and plan a preemptive attack on the Cholulans, Gómara and Díaz state that they summoned their Tlaxcalan and other indigenous allies to come into the city to assist them (Gómara, *Cortés*, 128–129; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 199–200). Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 74 states that only the five thousand Tlaxcalans who remained with him assisted in the slaughter, along with four hundred men from Cempoala.

¹⁷⁵ See *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 94–97. The Spanish version of the text (but not the Nahuatl) does state that the Spaniards began to suspect some treason on the part of the Cholulans because of the poor treatment they received in the city, but there is no mention of any Cholulans confirming this plot, as in the Spanish chronicles. This is one place in the *Florentine Codex* where one might suspect that Sahagún, or someone else involved in the Spanish paraphrase of the Nahuatl text, may have tried to conform the account of this event somewhat closer to what is found in Spanish sources.

¹⁷⁶ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 94–95.

Cempoalan allies take part in killing the Cholulans.¹⁷⁷ It is plausible that the Tlaxcalans would want to exact revenge on Cholula, since the Cholulans had only recently abandoned their alliance with Tlaxcala in favor of one with Moctezuma, leaving Tlaxcala in a more vulnerable position.¹⁷⁸ In fact, Gómara's account tells of a Tlaxcalan captain colluding in the alleged plot to kill the Spanish in Cholula.¹⁷⁹

And several Spanish accounts show others warning Cortés of the alleged plot before Marina does, complicating simplistic notions of her culpability in the attack on Cholula. For example, Cortés writes that the Tlaxcalan chiefs warn him, while he is still in their land, not to go to Cholula because a trap has been set to kill him and his army there.¹⁸⁰ They claim that Moctezuma has already stationed fifty thousand of his troops outside of Cholula to attack the Spanish army, and have laid traps for them both in Cholula and on the roads outside of the city. In Gómara's account, the Tlaxcalans issue a similar warning against going to Cholula. It subsequently states that some of the Tlaxcalan women who had been given to the Spaniards learn of a plot to kill them in Cholula, and word of this reaches Cortés through one of the women's Spanish husband.¹⁸¹ And Díaz reports that the Spaniard's Cempoalan allies first warn Cortés about the hostile stance of the Cholulans toward the Spaniards, telling him of signs that indicate an impending attack.¹⁸² Cortés himself starts to suspect that these warnings of a plot may be merited, since Cholula had not sent ambassadors to visit him in Tlaxcala, as other neighboring cities had done, and once in Cholula, the local hospitality toward the Spaniards lessens by the

¹⁷⁷ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 94–95.

¹⁷⁸ See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 49 for this view.

¹⁷⁹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 124.

¹⁸⁰ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70.

¹⁸¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 123–124.

¹⁸² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 194.

day.¹⁸³ Andrés de Tapia's account stands out in portraying Marina, along with Aguilar, as the first to learn of the plot and to inform Cortés.¹⁸⁴

Nonetheless, many sources do portray Marina as playing a significant role in the discovery of the alleged plot and its revelation to Cortés. Díaz's account, which on the whole reports Marina's involvement in more events than do the other chronicles, describes how Cortés, after initially being informed of the plot, sends Doña Marina to bring two Cholulan priests back to him for questioning.¹⁸⁵ Citing her capacity for friendly speech, as well as the presents Cortés had sent for the priests, Díaz portrays Doña Marina as successfully convincing the priests to come to Cortés.¹⁸⁶ When he questions them, they reveal that Moctezuma is preparing to ambush and kill the Spaniards as they leave Cholula for Tenochtitlan.¹⁸⁷ Acting upon Cortés's orders, but also exercising her own judgment and communication skills, Doña Marina proves to be key here to Cortés confirming the alleged plot against the Spaniards.

A portrayal of Marina's alleged role in the discovery and divulgence of the Cholulan plot that is common to several Spanish sources involves an old Cholulan woman taking Marina aside and informing her of the plot so that she can save her own life. She is a noblewoman by several accounts, and agrees to shelter Marina for reasons that vary according to the source.¹⁸⁸ Cortés gives no explanation of the woman's offer.¹⁸⁹ Gómara states that it was either because she pitied Marina or "liked the looks" of the Spaniards.¹⁹⁰ Andrés de Tapia claims it was because the old

¹⁸³ E.g., Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 70, 73; Gómara, *Cortés*, 124; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 192.

¹⁸⁴ "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," 35.

¹⁸⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 194.

¹⁸⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 194.

¹⁸⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 194–195.

¹⁸⁸ E.g., the Cholulan woman is the wife of one of the notable men in the city in "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," 35; she is a chief's wife in Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 196; and she is a nobleman's wife in Gómara, *Cortés*, 127.

¹⁸⁹ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73.

¹⁹⁰ Gómara, *Cortés*, 127.

woman was fond of Marina and would be sad to see her killed.¹⁹¹ And Díaz states that the woman offered to marry Marina to her son because she was young, good-looking, and rich, advising her to gather her possessions and come to her home.¹⁹²

Marina's reaction to learning of the plot also varies according to the source. Cortés states that she passes the information on to Aguilar, who reports it to Cortés, while Andrés de Tapia suggests that Marina herself immediately informs Cortés.¹⁹³ Gómara states that upon hearing of the plot, Marina hid her emotions and drew details about the alleged attack out of the old woman. Afterward, she reportedly finds Aguilar and the two of them inform Cortés.¹⁹⁴ Díaz's unique portrayal of this event has Doña Marina acting "with her usual quickwittedness."¹⁹⁵ Addressing the old woman as "mother," she plays along with the marriage offer by expressing her gratitude and stating that she will come to her home once she finds someone trustworthy enough to help her carry her clothes and numerous golden jewels.¹⁹⁶ Doña Marina then gets the details of the plot out of the woman. Afterward, Díaz describes Marina alone as bursting into the room where Cortés is and telling him everything about her encounter with the Cholulan noblewoman.¹⁹⁷

However Marina may have participated in revealing the alleged plot to Cortés, the Spanish sources show him subsequently questioning the old Cholulan woman or some other residents of the city, who confess that the reports are true.¹⁹⁸ According to some accounts, Cortés then confronts some of the Cholulan chiefs about their alleged treachery, disguised as friendship, and they insist that Moctezuma put them up to it.¹⁹⁹ Marina reportedly is present at this important

¹⁹¹ "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," 35.

¹⁹² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 196.

¹⁹³ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73; "The Chronicle of Andrés de Tapia," 35.

¹⁹⁴ Gómara, *Cortés*, 127.

¹⁹⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 196–197.

¹⁹⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 197.

¹⁹⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 197.

¹⁹⁸ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73; Gómara, *Cortés*, 127; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 197.

¹⁹⁹ E.g., Gómara, *Cortés*, 128–129; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 199.

encounter and interprets Cortés's speech, making the Captain's intentions perfectly clear: as punishment for their deceit and plotting against the Spaniards, he will kill the Cholulans and destroy their city.²⁰⁰ He then has some of the Cholulan chiefs bound in a room, and orders an ambush on the people of Cholula.²⁰¹

Cortés reports that more than three thousand Cholulans were killed in two hours, while Gómara claims it was at least six thousand, with others fleeing the city as the Spaniards burned it down.²⁰² The *Florentine Codex* portrays the Spanish ordering the Cholulans to gather in the city temple's courtyard, then sealing the entrances so that no one could escape, and killing them without notice.²⁰³ In some Spanish sources, Cortés orders the women and children to be spared, and, according to Díaz's account, he is eventually moved with compassion and restrains the Tlaxcalans from killing even more of their Cholulan enemies.²⁰⁴ After the massacre, some of the surviving Cholulan chiefs beg Cortés for forgiveness, stating that Moctezuma forced the plot against the Spanish upon them, and he grants it, ordering the city to be repopulated.²⁰⁵ Cortés claims that he also restored friendly relations between the people of Tlaxcala and Cholula.²⁰⁶

Given the discrepancies in the sources, it is difficult to know for sure what ultimately motivated the Spanish attack, let alone to discern Marina's precise role in uncovering the alleged plot and how this was perceived by the various groups involved.²⁰⁷ The claim that she is a traitor

²⁰⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 199; cf. Gómara, *Cortés*, 128.

²⁰¹ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73; Gómara, *Cortés*, 128–129; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 199.

²⁰² Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 73; Gómara, *Cortés*, 129.

²⁰³ See *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 94–95.

²⁰⁴ Gómara, *Cortés*, 129; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 200.

²⁰⁵ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 74; cf. Gómara, *Cortés*, 129.

²⁰⁶ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 74; cf. Gómara, *Cortés*, 130.

²⁰⁷ See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 81 for her assessment of the historicity of the plot and the Spaniards' motive for the attack. Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 203 cites the critique of the massacre by Bartolomé de las Casas, bishop of Chiapas, who claimed that the Spaniards either punished the Cholulans for no reason at all, or attacked merely to amuse themselves. Díaz defends against this criticism by appealing to his eyewitness status, which de las Casas lacks, claiming that the Spaniards' lives would have been in great danger had they not attacked the Cholulans.

to the indigenous peoples of Mexico cannot ultimately be substantiated based on this episode, since none of the earliest accounts describe Marina in this way, and there are many ambiguities. As will be further explored in the next chapter, this claim seems to wrongly assume a monolithic identity of the diverse groups of native peoples in Mexico. It also overlooks the complex question of who Marina would have considered to be her own people, since she had already been passed to different indigenous communities before ending up in the service of the Spanish. She was not from Cholula, so there is no reason to assume that she felt she owed them any loyalty. Yet, from the perspective of the Spanish, the Cholulan woman apparently perceived the Nahuatl-speaking Marina, dressed mostly in native clothing, as one who might identify more closely with the Cholulans than with her Spanish masters. Something definitely stood out about the indigenous woman who traveled with, and spoke on behalf of, the Spanish newcomers whose physical appearance, weapons, and horses were distinct from anything with which the native people were familiar. This episode thereby highlights the ambiguous, or perhaps polyvalent, nature of Marina's identity and cultural affiliations.

An image from the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* effectively expresses this complexity.²⁰⁸ Depicting the Cholula massacre, the left side of the image shows the pyramid in Cholula, on top of which sat the temple of Quetzalcoatl. Cortés, pictured at the bottom right, charges toward the temple with his soldiers going ahead of him, killing the Cholulans along the way. Dismembered bodies lie at the foot of the pyramid, Cortés's horse tramples the head of one fallen Cholulan, and a Spanish soldier in full armor is about to spear the Cholulan priest, who is dressed in a loincloth and attempting to defend himself with a shield and club. A Tlaxcalan soldier in native clothing also moves to attack the Cholulan priest. Two other Tlaxcalans, also in native dress, stand in the

²⁰⁸ See Chavero, *El Lienzo de Tlaxcala*, 26–28 for this image and an explanation of it.

middle of the scene, with one addressing Marina and the other communicating with the Cholulan priest.

Marina stands as a large figure on the center-right of the image, alongside Cortés. She wears native clothing with Spanish shoes, and her pointed figure is raised, signaling her speech, apparently in response to the Tlaxcalan soldier. How Marina is to be interpreted in this scene inevitably depends on one's perspective. To a Cholulan, she would likely appear as an accomplice to the Spanish in their vicious attack on the city. The Spaniards' Tlaxcalan allies, who produced these images, seem to depict her as a faithful ally who helped them exact revenge on an enemy, or, who at least helped them advance the Spanish campaign toward Tenochtitlan.

As a slave to the Spaniards, Marina likely saw informing Cortés of the alleged plot against his army as her duty, as well as the means to save her own life. Even if one assumes the story of the old Cholulan woman offering to shelter Marina to be true, there is no clear reason why Marina would trust her and her intentions, or want to be handed off to yet another man—the woman's son. Perhaps the woman wanted to take the Spaniards' key interpreter away from them so that her people could carry out the alleged plot.²⁰⁹ So, Marina acting as an informant to Cortés can be seen as her using her wit and linguistic skills to save both herself, and the people she had come to live with and work for, from potential destruction.

If Marina had instead chosen to take the Cholulan woman up on her offer, it may also have worked out for her, if in fact the Cholulans were successful in defeating the Spanish, and if no one else informed them of the alleged plot. The sources, however, suggest that even if Marina had not been involved, Cortés likely would have received word of the plot through other means. If this occurred, and if Marina had joined the Cholulans, Cortés could have come after her and potentially punished her for rebellion.

²⁰⁹ As Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 10 suggests.

There is, in fact, precedent for matters ending badly for an unfaithful indigenous interpreter in the story of Melchior, which Díaz tells earlier in his chronicle. Melchior was one of two indigenous men captured on the Yucatán Peninsula during the Córdoba expedition (1517) who were taken back to Cuba to learn Spanish and served as interpreters on subsequent Spanish expeditions to Mexico.²¹⁰ When Cortés and his army were in Tabasco—before Marina had been given to them—Díaz reports that Melchior fled by night to the people of Tabasco, having left his Spanish clothing hanging in a palm grove.²¹¹ This annoyed Cortés, who feared that Melchior “might tell his fellow Indians things that would be damaging to us.”²¹² His fears became reality when the defeated people of Tabasco subsequently explain to Cortés that they attacked the Spaniards, instead of accepting their requests for peace, in part because Melchior had advised them to do so.²¹³ Cortés demands that Melchior be brought to him, but Díaz reports that the Tabascans had already offered him as a human sacrifice because his advice led to their defeat by the Spaniards.²¹⁴

Whether or not Marina might have met a similar fate if she had allied with the Cholulans and they were subsequently defeated by the Spanish is a matter of speculation. What is clear, according to the Spanish chronicles, is that she always remained loyal to her Spanish masters, even when doing so may have put her in personal danger. The story of Melchior both highlights her trustworthiness to the Spaniards and suggests that she could in fact have chosen to abandon them in Cholula. But she did not; perhaps out of loyalty to the Spanish, or fear of the price of disobedience; perhaps out of distrust of the Cholulans, feeling especially vulnerable as a woman in an unknown city; perhaps because she thought it was her best possibility of survival, knowing

²¹⁰ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 20; Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions*, 140.

²¹¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 72.

²¹² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 72.

²¹³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 73, 81.

²¹⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 81.

what she did about the Spanish military might and intentions to colonize the land. We simply cannot know.

The Spanish in Tenochtitlan

After leaving Cholula, the emissaries of Moctezuma that were travelling with Cortés's army continue their attempts to dissuade the Spaniards from going to Tenochtitlan. When they realize that Cortés will not be deterred, they send word to Moctezuma, who must now accept the inevitability of the Spaniards entering his city, one way or another. So, he decides to welcome them, first sending his nephew, Cacamatzin, the lord of Texcoco, to greet the Spanish after they, along with Marina, have trekked across a snowy mountain en route to Tenochtitlan.²¹⁵ When the great Mexica city finally comes into view, the Spanish are so amazed by its grandeur that Díaz claims they did not know if what they were seeing was real.²¹⁶ The island "city of Mexico," as Díaz calls it, was surrounded on land by many great cities, with causeways connecting some of them to the Triple Alliance capital.²¹⁷ Bridges dotted the causeways, so that the many canoes filling the lake could pass under them at points. The Spaniards cross a causeway into the city of Coyoacan, where Marina would have interpreted for Cortés and the prominent chiefs Moctezuma sent to greet him.²¹⁸

Eventually, Moctezuma himself comes to welcome Cortés and his army into Tenochtitlan, and Marina is the interpreter who makes this crucial first meeting possible. As noted above, she apparently understood courtly Nahuatl, enabling her to facilitate the initial exchange of pleasantries and gifts between the leader of the Spanish army and the leader of the

²¹⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 209–214.

²¹⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 216.

²¹⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 216.

²¹⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 216.

Triple Alliance.²¹⁹ This occurred on November 8, 1519, when Moctezuma also led the Spanish into Tenochtitlan.²²⁰

In the meantime, Marina continued to act as interpreter between Cortés, Moctezuma, and other Mexica leaders. Díaz emphasizes the crucial role she plays in interpreting for Cortés during his subsequent meetings with Moctezuma in Tenochtitlan.²²¹ At times Cortés sends her, along with Aguilar and another Spaniard training to be an interpreter, to make requests of Moctezuma, such as when Cortés wants to build a church where the Spanish are staying in Tenochtitlan.²²² And Marina continues to interpret Cortés's Christian proclamation, including his rebuke of Moctezuma for worshipping gods that he claims are really devils.²²³

Marina also plays a prominent role in the events in Tenochtitlan according to the *Florentine Codex*, which, unlike some other indigenous sources, refers to her by her Spanish name. Before the Spaniards enter the city, the translation of the Nahuatl text states that Moctezuma's messengers report to him that "a woman, one of us people here," accompanies the Spanish as an interpreter.²²⁴ This suggests that, at least in retrospect, some Mexica distinguished Marina from her Spanish masters as a native woman who, at the very least, shared their language. The text further states that her home had been on the coast, where the Spanish first "took her," thus reinforcing the notion that Marina had not chosen to become a servant of the Spanish.²²⁵

After the Spaniards plunder the gold, jewels, feathers, and other precious items from both Moctezuma's palace and his personal storehouse, the *Florentine Codex* describes in writing and

²¹⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 217–218.

²²⁰ See Serés's timeline in Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1264.

²²¹ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 315, 317.

²²² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 231, 235–236, 241; cf. Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 341.

²²³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 237.

²²⁴ See *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 86. The translation of the Spanish text on page 87 refers to Marina instead as a "Mexica [Nahuatl-speaking] Indian woman."

²²⁵ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 86.

depicts in a drawing how Marina summons all the Mexica noblemen to bring the provisions that the Spaniards need.²²⁶ The drawing in the *Florentine Codex* shows Marina standing on a rooftop while she commands the noblemen below, with Cortés standing behind her and apparently communicating to the noblemen through her.²²⁷ The Nahuatl text, however, makes no mention of Cortés in this scene and reports Marina’s direct speech,²²⁸ thereby giving the sense that Marina is more of an authoritative figure than in the Spanish version, which states that “Captain don Hernando Cortés gave orders through Marina.”²²⁹ The Spanish text does state that Marina calls loudly to summon the noblemen, and in the Nahuatl text, she accuses them of not bringing provisions to the suffering and exhausted Spaniards because they are angry. A Nahua folk-song written down after the Conquest also references this incident, describing Marina as shouting at the Mexica men.²³⁰ The overall sense, then, of this episode is that Marina, the Nahuatl-speaking woman whom the Mexica initially recognized as one of them, was a forceful presence helping to carry out the Spaniards’ wishes among the Mexica.

After spending some time enjoying Moctezuma’s hospitality in Tenochtitlan, and despite a mutual fondness between him and the Spaniards, Cortés and his roughly four hundred and fifty Spanish men reportedly start to get nervous about their vulnerable situation within the well-protected island city.²³¹ They remember the warnings of their indigenous allies not to trust Moctezuma, and suspect that perhaps he invited them into his city to destroy them there.²³² Reports also reach Cortés of an alleged plot by the people of Tenochtitlan to kill the Spaniards,

²²⁶ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 124–125.

²²⁷ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 125.

²²⁸ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 124.

²²⁹ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 125.

²³⁰ Miguel León-Portilla, ed., *Cantares Mexicanos*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2011), 833. This song is often called the “Water-Pouring Song” in English. See John Bierhorst, *Cantares Mexicanos: Songs of the Aztecs* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985), for an English translation of the song/poem collection.

²³¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 171.

²³² E.g., Gómara, *Cortés*, 168–169; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 242–243.

and of Mexica attacking other Spaniards outside of the city on the orders of Moctezuma.²³³

Whether or not such reports were true, they provided the pretext for Cortés to arrest Moctezuma, at least in part as a means of keeping the Tenocha (i.e., the residents of Tenochtitlan) from turning on the Spaniards.

According to Díaz, Doña Marina accompanies Cortés and a few of his men to seize Moctezuma, serving as interpreter for yet another critical moment of the Conquest.²³⁴ When Moctezuma denies ordering the attack on the Spaniards and refuses to go with Cortés to be placed under house arrest, Cortés's men become upset and impatient, preferring to kill Moctezuma than to keep trying to negotiate with him.²³⁵ At this tense moment, Moctezuma asks Doña Marina directly to explain to him what is happening, and Díaz ascribes to her another quick-witted response that she apparently devises on her own: in a very polite way, she advises Moctezuma to submit to imprisonment in the Spanish quarters, guaranteeing that he will be treated well there and the truth will come out. Otherwise, she warns, "you will be a dead man."²³⁶ This is another instance of Doña Marina not merely interpreting Cortés's words, but rather of her using her own understanding of the Spanish to act as an intermediary between them and indigenous people, who apparently trust her to some extent.

Eventually, Moctezuma concedes to his imprisonment and tries to continue to rule from his confinement, but the Tenocha begin to lose confidence in his leadership and are not pleased with the Spaniards. The situation reaches a tipping point in May of 1520, when Cortés and some of his men travel to the Gulf Coast to engage a sizeable fleet, led by Pánfilo de Narváez, sent by Governor Velázquez of Cuba to arrest Cortés for exceeding the authority granted to him by his

²³³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 169–170; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 243–244.

²³⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 245.

²³⁵ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 246.

²³⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 247.

actions in Mexico.²³⁷ Cortés leaves Pedro de Alvarado in charge in Tenochtitlan, along with two hundred soldiers to guard Moctezuma.²³⁸ Despite being outnumbered, Cortés defeats Narváez and gains the loyalty of some of his men, but in his absence, bloodshed breaks out in Tenochtitlan. While returning to the city in June of 1520, Cortés receives news that it is in rebellion against Alvarado and the Spaniards who remained there. The cause was an allegedly unprovoked attack led by Alvarado on the celebrants of a religious festival in the main temple courtyard, which killed many of them, but Alvarado gives Cortés his reasons for the Spaniards' aggression.²³⁹ The fighting that erupts between the Mexica and the Spaniards kills Moctezuma.²⁴⁰ Cuitláhuac, ruler of Iztapalapa, replaces his older brother as ruler of Tenochtitlan, and the hostilities continue.

The Night of Sorrows

The Spanish forces are greatly depleted in the fighting, and run short of supplies. When the Tenocha reject their request for peace, Cortés decides that their best chance of survival is to escape the city by night.²⁴¹ He has a portable bridge build to help them flee on the causeways, whose bridges had been lifted. He also has as much of the city's gold and jewels as possible loaded up to be taken with them.²⁴² Three hundred Tlaxcalans and thirty Spanish soldiers are assigned to guard the prisoners, as well as Doña Marina and Doña Luisa, Xicotenga the Elder's daughter.²⁴³

²³⁷ Gómara, *Cortés*, 193 claims that Narváez arrived with some seventeen ships, eighty horses, and nine hundred men, which would be twice the number of Cortés's army.

²³⁸ Gómara, *Cortés*, 201.

²³⁹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 205–208; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 283, 285.

²⁴⁰ Gómara, *Cortés*, 212–214; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 294.

²⁴¹ Gómara, *Cortés*, 219; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 296.

²⁴² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 297–298.

²⁴³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 297.

When the Spaniards flee by night on the causeways, in the rain, warriors from both Tenochtitlan and Tlatelolco pursue them, shooting arrows at them from canoes and rooftops.²⁴⁴ Many Spaniards and their allies are shot, and some fall into the lake and drown. Due to the great losses the Spanish suffered, the night of June 30–July 1, 1520 became known as the *Night of Sorrows* (literally, *La Noche Triste* or *The Sad Night*). About two-thirds of the Spanish forces, four thousand indigenous allies, and all of their prisoners died that night.²⁴⁵ Remarkably, Doña Marina survived this horrifying event. Díaz expresses how glad the Spaniards were to see “our Doña Marina” still alive, along with Doña Luisa and Maria de Estrada, the only Spanish woman in Mexico.²⁴⁶ They were rescued by some of the Tlaxcalan allies, but, Díaz notes, most of the “women servants” given to the Spaniards in Tlaxcala and Tenochtitlan were left behind.²⁴⁷ It seems, therefore, that Doña Marina escaped this bleak fate of other captive native women because her valuable service to the Spanish led to her receiving special protection.

The Fall of Tenochtitlan

The Spaniards manage to retreat to Tlaxcala, pursued all the way by Mexica warriors and their allies.²⁴⁸ There too the people rejoice at seeing Doña Marina and Doña Luisa safe, and Cortés and his army have a chance to regroup and prepare for a new attack on Tenochtitlan.²⁴⁹ Ships with supplies and reinforcements arrive from Spain. The Tlaxcalans help the Spanish build their own ships, and thousands of indigenous allies are ready to assist the Spaniards in the new

²⁴⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 298–300.

²⁴⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 107; Gómara, *Cortés*, 221–222. Some Triple Alliance warriors also lost their lives on the Night of Sorrows.

²⁴⁶ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 302.

²⁴⁷ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 302.

²⁴⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 111.

²⁴⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 307.

campaign.²⁵⁰ In addition to the Spaniards' numerous indigenous allies and their superior tools of battle, the Spanish were also assisted in their eventual victory over Tenochtitlan by a smallpox epidemic that broke out in the fall of 1520—a disease they brought to the land.²⁵¹ Cuitláhuac dies of it in November of 1520, and Cuauhtémoc, another relative of Moctezuma II, is elected as the last ruler of Tenochtitlan.²⁵² According to Díaz, the Spanish army sets out on the day after Christmas, 1520, on an expedition against Texcoco, “one of the biggest cities in New Spain,” and one of the three city-states that formed the Triple Alliance.²⁵³

Marina was along for this expedition, as well as for the entire Spanish campaign that finally gave them control of central Mexico. She interpreted the negotiations that took place between the Spanish and the allies they won on their march back to Tenochtitlan, including Texcoco.²⁵⁴ Marina communicates important messages throughout the campaign, including the Spaniards' request for Tenochtitlan to make peace with them instead of being killed, and, once the Spanish are victorious, the terms of peace between the two groups.²⁵⁵ The victory of the Spaniards over Tenochtitlan took about two-and-a-half to three months of fierce warfare, and was sealed by Cuauhtémoc surrendering to the Spanish on August 13, 1521.²⁵⁶ Not many Mexican warriors remained, and the rest of the residents of Tenochtitlan were starving after the extended fighting.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 113–114.

²⁵¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 109–114.

²⁵² See Serés's timeline in Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 1265.

²⁵³ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 311–312.

²⁵⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 313–316.

²⁵⁵ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 548; *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 250–251; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 120–121.

²⁵⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 120.

²⁵⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 120–121.

La Malinche after the Conquest

According to the *Florentine Codex*, Cortés's immediate concern after the hostilities cease in Tenochtitlan is recovering the gold that the Spanish had taken from Moctezuma, but were forced to abandon at a canal on the Night of Sorrows.²⁵⁸ Marina is portrayed here as assertively conveying Cortés's demands for the gold, accusing the defeated Tenocha of holding some of it back and insisting that all of it be turned over.²⁵⁹ This brief scene, together with the portrayal of Marina demanding food from the Mexica noblemen found earlier in the *Florentine Codex*, suggests that the informants for this text saw Marina as aligned with the Spanish conquerors and their aggressive actions toward the people of the former Triple Alliance.

Life in Coyoacan

After the Conquest, the Spanish began to reorganize society, with themselves as the new rulers. Cortés put the *encomienda* system in place early on, distributing the native city-states to his followers, who were to see to the residents' welfare in exchange for reaping tributes and labor from them.²⁶⁰ States that were not already allied with the Spanish had to be brought under their control. It took several years for the Spaniards to build their capital, Mexico City, on top of war-torn Tenochtitlan. In the meantime, Cortés resided with Marina in Coyoacan, a city-state on the southern shore of Lake Texcoco.

The chronicles do not say much about the personal relationship between Cortés and his trusted interpreter. Díaz merely comments that Marina went to live with Cortés after Puertocarrero, the man Cortés initially gave her to, returned to Spain, and that she bore Cortés a

²⁵⁸ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 250–255.

²⁵⁹ *Annals of Tlatelolco* in *WPH*, 256–273 (page 271 referenced here) paints a similar portrait of Marina in this episode, describing her as becoming angry, along with Cortés, about the missing gold.

²⁶⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 128.

son.²⁶¹ They were never officially married; in fact, at the time that Cortés began to live with Marina, he already had a Spanish wife back in Cuba, Catalina Suárez. Whether or not all of the rumors were true, Cortés had a reputation for affairs with many women, including in the house where he lived with Marina in Coyoacan.²⁶² Gómara, Cortés’s own biographer, comments that he “was much given to consorting with women, and always gave himself to them.”²⁶³

Even if Marina was not the only woman in Cortés’s life, she did continue to play a significant role in partnership with him during the early colonial period, as she had during the Conquest. For example, she interpreted for him and helped him negotiate the terms by which native city-states would come under Spanish control.²⁶⁴ She also helped collect tribute, a role in which indigenous sources often depict her.²⁶⁵

An indigenous painting from the sixteenth century also suggests the key role Marina played alongside Cortés. Commonly referred to as the *Manuscrito del Aperreamiento*, or the *Manuscript of the Dogging*, this painting from Coyoacan depicts a Spaniard holding a native priest from Cholula on a chain while a dog mauls him to death.²⁶⁶ On the right side of the image stand six lords of Cholula bound together by a chain, waiting to be savaged as well. Cortés stands in the top-left corner in fancy dress, making a sign with his hands to communicate with the lords. Marina stands behind him, holding out a rosary with her left hand, suggesting that instruction in Christianity is being given to the prisoners.²⁶⁷

²⁶¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 82.

²⁶² Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 135.

²⁶³ Gómara, *Cortés*, 409.

²⁶⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 128–133.

²⁶⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin’s Choices*, 133.

²⁶⁶ For reproductions and interpretations of the painting, see Lori Boornazian Diel, “The Spectacle of Death in Early Colonial New Spain in the *Manuscrito del aperreamiento*,” *Hispanic Issues On Line* 7 (2010): 144–163; Gordon Brotherston, *Image of the New World: The American Continent Portrayed in Native Texts* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1979), 37–38.

²⁶⁷ Diel, “The Spectacle of Death,” 146; Brotherston, *Image of the New World*, 38.

Since we do not know whose perspective this painting represents, or the extent to which it portrays actual events as they occurred, it is hard to interpret its meaning and intended purpose. Scholars have suggested that it reflects the situation of the 1520s, when Cortés and Marina lived in Coyoacan and not all of the city-states near Tenochtitlan had submitted to the Spanish.²⁶⁸ It could reflect public punishment of native people who resisted Spanish rule and religion—perhaps with a final attempt to convert them to Christianity before their deaths—and could be seen as either outrageous or justified, depending on the relationship of the viewer to the Spaniards.²⁶⁹ From the perspective of someone from Cholula, for example, the work may portray Marina negatively, since she appears to be complicit, at the very least, in the cruel savaging taking place in her presence. For people who had allied with the Spanish early on, however, the painting might represent Marina as an exemplary native convert and subject of New Spain, as Díaz portrays her, who now has a position of authority in ordering society under Spanish rule. In any case, the painting suggests that some native people in the early colonial period saw Marina as actively involved in helping Cortés establish Spanish rule in New Spain, along with the Christian religion that she also reportedly accepted.

²⁶⁸ Brotherston, *Image of the New World*, 37 dates the image to about 1529. Diel, “The Spectacle of Death,” 145–146 argues that the painting was produced around the mid-sixteenth century, but depicts events that occurred in 1523.

²⁶⁹ Diel, “The Spectacle of Death,” argues that this painting was not originally intended as an indictment of Cortés’s cruelty, but rather to legitimize the new ruler of Cholula that Andrés de Tapia, its *encomendero*, put in place (as depicted in the bottom-left corner of the painting) when the others were supposedly executed, and in general, to justify Spanish rule over native peoples and assert Christianity over native religions. Stephanie Wood, *Transcending Conquest: Nahuatl Views of Spanish Colonial Mexico* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 32–33 suggests how various indigenous groups may have perceived the painting differently, and cautions against assuming from a modern perspective that all viewers would have been outraged at this seemingly disturbing scene.

Marina and Cortés's Son

Cortés's wife arrived in Mexico from Cuba in the summer of 1522. She had not borne any children to Cortés when she died in early November of 1522, under suspicious circumstances. Some accused Cortés of killing her during the night after an argument, but this was never proven.²⁷⁰ Marina reportedly lived in a separate house at this time, and bore Cortés his first acknowledged son by the end of the year, Martín Cortés, named after Cortés's father.²⁷¹ Although Martín was not in fact the first racially-mixed indigenous and European child, or *mestizo*, to be born in Mexico, he would come to be seen as such in later generations, since he was the son of two people who played a key role in the foundation of New Spain.²⁷² Marina would not spend much time with her only son, in part because he went to live with Cortés's cousin around age two so that she could accompany Cortés on an expedition to Honduras.²⁷³ It seems that Cortés esteemed his first-born son, since he brought him to Spain at age six to have him legitimized by the pope and serve in the royal court.²⁷⁴ Marina, who died about a year later (1529), would never again see her son.

Cortés and Marina's son may have become his father's heir if Cortés had not remarried a Spanish noblewoman, Doña Juana de Zúñiga, in 1529 and had a son by her, also named Martín. Don Martín Cortés, as he was called, became Cortés's heir, and Juana also bore him three daughters. Since Cortés did not write about his personal relationship with Marina, it is impossible to know how he viewed her or their time together. She is one of several women, both

²⁷⁰ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 136–139.

²⁷¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 138.

²⁷² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 65 tells the story of Gonzalo Guerrero, the other Spaniard that was shipwrecked on the Yucatán Peninsula in 1511 and that Cortés tried to rescue along with Jerónimo de Aguilar. Guerrero declined to leave the Maya people because he had married a Maya woman and had children with her. They are one known example of mestizo children born in Mexico before the son of Marina and Cortés.

²⁷³ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 152.

²⁷⁴ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 171.

Indian and Spanish, with whom he fathered children outside of marriage.²⁷⁵ Gómara does not even name Marina when listing Cortés's children and their mothers, but merely refers to her as “an Indian woman.”²⁷⁶

The Expedition to Honduras

In the fall of 1524, Cortés plans to go to Honduras in response to the rebellion of Cristóbal de Olid, who was one of his lieutenants in the Conquest but had subsequently established an independent colony in Honduras, in defiance of Cortés.²⁷⁷ Instead of taking the usual sea route, Cortés decides to go by land, perhaps to exhibit his authority to the indigenous peoples who lived along the way.²⁷⁸ Marina accompanies Cortés on this grueling and dangerous journey, again serving as a faithful interpreter and cultural intermediary.²⁷⁹ She helps him ask the local people about the best routes to take and request the provisions they desperately need—besides some of his own men, Cortés also brought over three thousand Mexica warriors on the journey, as well as Cuauhtémoc and other native leaders, to prevent them from causing a revolt in central Mexico in his absence.²⁸⁰ Since Aguilar was not on this trip, Marina interpreted both Nahuatl and Maya for the Spaniards, including a variety of Maya other than the Chontal Maya she had learned in Tabasco. This further exhibits her linguistic skills, and suggests that she knew Spanish by this point.²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ Gómara, *Cortés*, 408 claims that Cortés had a son by another Spanish woman, and three daughters by three different Indian mothers, in addition to his children with Doña Juana and Marina.

²⁷⁶ Gómara, *Cortés*, 408.

²⁷⁷ See Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 832–851.

²⁷⁸ Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 18; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 152.

²⁷⁹ Cortés, *Letters from Mexico*, 376 actually mentions Marina by name when describing this journey, indicating the important role she played.

²⁸⁰ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 839–840, 856; Gómara, *Cortés*, 355.

²⁸¹ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 839 states that Aguilar had died by this point, but Serés, the editor (n. 4) comments that Díaz has this wrong, and that Aguilar simply was not on this trip. Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 20

This is the trip, according to Díaz, when Marina forgives her mother and stepbrother while passing through her native land in the Coatzacoalcos region.²⁸² It is also shortly after the outset of this journey that Marina marries the Spaniard Juan Jaramillo, one of Cortés's captains. How this marriage came about is unclear. Díaz simply states that Jaramillo married Doña Marina, the interpreter, before witnesses in a small village in what is now the state of Veracruz.²⁸³ And Gómara, when describing the journey through the Tabasco region, comments as an aside that it "was here, I think, that Juan Jaramillo married Marina while drunk. Cortés was criticized for allowing it, because he had children by her."²⁸⁴ The lack of detailed eyewitness testimony to the marriage makes it hard to evaluate these claims by Cortés's secretary, who is typically reluctant to portray him negatively. And there is no additional evidence that Cortés and Marina had more than one child together, leaving Gómara's use of the plural *children* cryptic.

Townsend suggests that Marina bargained for a Spanish husband as a way to secure her status and interests in a society now controlled by the Spaniards.²⁸⁵ By marrying the well-born Jaramillo, she argues, Marina gained legal rights and security that she lacked as an indigenous mistress.²⁸⁶ Legal documents from an inheritance dispute after Jaramillo and Marina's deaths state that Cortés had married her to Jaramillo, and that she was Jaramillo's first and legitimate wife, having been married according to the requirements of the church.²⁸⁷

Several witnesses also testify that Cortés gave Marina the towns of Olutla and Tetiquipaque, in the Coatzacoalcos region, as a dowry upon her marriage to Jaramillo, and as a

states that Marina successfully communicated with the ruler of Tayasal, Canek, who spoke Itza rather than Chontal Maya.

²⁸² Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85–86.

²⁸³ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 841.

²⁸⁴ Gómara, *Cortés*, 346.

²⁸⁵ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 154.

²⁸⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 155.

²⁸⁷ "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:188, 189, 228, 230.

reward for her service in the Conquest.²⁸⁸ This not only portrays Cortés acting in a paternal role towards Marina, but if the reports are true, also further indicates that Marina exercised some authority in early colonial Mexico. She would have been one of very few indigenous people to hold permanent *encomiendas* (although some Spaniards reportedly later took them from her), and would have had native vassals under her control.²⁸⁹ And if, as has been suggested, Olutla or Tetiquipaque were in fact Marina's birthplace, then she would have become the lord of her hometown. Cortés had already given Jilotepec as an *encomienda* to Jaramillo to reward his service, and he and Marina reportedly lived there after they were married.²⁹⁰ So, at least for a time, Marina and her husband enjoyed a certain degree of comfort and status in New Spain.

Another significant event that took place on the journey to Honduras was the execution of Cuauhtémoc in February of 1525. According to Díaz, two Mexica chiefs report to Cortés that Cuauhtémoc and some other chiefs, exhausted by the journey and nearing starvation, planned to kill the Spaniards and return to Mexico City.²⁹¹ When confronted, Cuauhtémoc claims that they had only been discussing this possibility, but did not intend to carry it out. Without further evidence, Cortés orders Cuauhtémoc and his cousin, the lord of Tacuba, to be hanged. Before this occurs, friars commend the prisoners to God and have them confess through Marina. Díaz declares that he and others on the journey saw the execution as unjust, and is grieved by the loss of the honorable Cuauhtémoc, who castigates Cortés for his false friendship before he dies. Gómara's account, which does not mention Marina, portrays Cuauhtémoc as decidedly guilty, but Cortés does try him before he is hanged.²⁹²

²⁸⁸ E.g., "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:189, 215, 218, 227; cf. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 155–157.

²⁸⁹ "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:189; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 155–156.

²⁹⁰ "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:189–190.

²⁹¹ Díaz, *Historia Verdadera*, 857–859.

²⁹² Gómara, *Cortés*, 355–357.

Both of these Spanish accounts describe one or more Mexica men as revealing the alleged plot to Cortés. The indigenous *Annals of Tlatelolco*, however, portrays Malintzin as learning of the plot, in which she is also to be killed, and as the one to inform Cortés.²⁹³ The text also states that both she and Cortés sentence Cuauhtémoc and other Triple Alliance leaders to death.²⁹⁴ Both of them, therefore, are culpable for this unjust execution, which occurs without any corroboration of the plot or trial.²⁹⁵ Whether or not this account accurately represents Malintzin's role in Cuauhtémoc's death, it does reflect how closely some native people saw her to be linked with Cortés, so that they apparently understood her service to him as her actual participation in some of the violence he inflicted upon indigenous peoples.

Once the expedition finally reaches Honduras, Cortés learns that Olid had already died. At some point on the journey back to Mexico City in 1526, Marina gives birth to Jaramillo's daughter, whom they name María. Marina would die when María was no more than three years old.²⁹⁶ Jaramillo then married Doña Beatriz de Andrada, who did not bear him any children.²⁹⁷ María married Don Luis de Quesada while she was still a teenager, and, after Jaramillo's death, the two brought a lawsuit in the 1540s to gain control of Jilotepec, rather than settle for the one-third they had been given, while two-thirds of it went to Jaramillo's second wife.²⁹⁸ They appealed to the fact that Marina, as Jaramillo's first wife, brought two *encomiendas* into the marriage, and argued that, because of Marina's great service to the Spanish during the Conquest, it was not fair for her daughter to be denied the property that her father and mother had administered together. Although the couple ultimately lost the case in 1573, the testimony

²⁹³ *Anales de Tlatelolco*, 33.

²⁹⁴ *Anales de Tlatelolco*, 35.

²⁹⁵ *Anales de Tlatelolco*, 35.

²⁹⁶ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 171 states that people in Mexico City knew of Marina's death by January of 1529, although the exact date she died is unknown.

²⁹⁷ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 172.

²⁹⁸ See Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 172–187 for a detailed description of María and Luis's lawsuit.

collected for it from many people who personally knew Marina affirms the overall positive picture of her found in the Spanish chronicles.²⁹⁹ Several witnesses claim that she was instrumental to the Spanish victory in the Conquest: as an essential interpreter; as one who was well-respected by indigenous people and who used her astuteness and industriousness to convince them to give the Spaniards the provisions they needed; as always faithful to the Spaniards; and by revealing several plots by native people against the Spanish to Cortés.³⁰⁰

Marina's life ended by January of 1529, likely before she reached thirty years of age.³⁰¹ She was survived by her husband, Juan Jaramillo, her two children, and four grandchildren.³⁰²

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the earliest sources consistently portray La Malinche as a Nahuatl woman who became a captive to both a Maya community and to the Spanish army, which she faithfully served as a skilled linguistic interpreter and cultural intermediary. Although the specific details of her life and service to the Spanish differ in each source, the earliest evidence leaves no doubt that La Malinche played a key role in the Spaniards' victory over Tenochtitlan. She was their only Nahuatl interpreter for a time, and even as others were trained, both the Spanish and indigenous peoples still trusted her in particular to facilitate communication and negotiations at critical moments. La Malinche demonstrated her capacity to move between various linguistic and cultural worlds, as well as to endure the hardships of warfare and traveling long distances in harsh conditions.

²⁹⁹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 186; "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:188–277; cf. Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 172–187.

³⁰⁰ E.g., "Probanza de los Buenos Servicios," 41:232, 248.

³⁰¹ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 171.

³⁰² Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 180 states that María, Malintzin's daughter, had two surviving children, and 204 states that her son, Martín had a daughter by his wife, Bernardina de Porrás, and a son by another woman.

Related to her roles as interpreter and cultural liaison, La Malinche also acts as an informant to Cortés about the intentions of native people on several occasions in the earliest sources. Her alleged role in the Cholula massacre will especially fuel later interpretations of her as a traitor to the indigenous people of pre-Hispanic Mexico. The roots of such an understanding can indeed be found in the earliest sources, but the full conclusion that La Malinche betrayed the native people of Cholula, or of other places in Mesoamerica, is an interpretive move that goes beyond the primary data and depends on the perspective of the interpreter.

In fact, this chapter demonstrates that all early portrayals of La Malinche are informed by the relationship of the interpreter to the events in which she participated. The Spanish chronicles understandably paint her overall in a positive light, since she provided the Spaniards with valuable assistance in the Conquest. Even though Cortés and Gómara do not praise Marina as Díaz does, since this would not serve the purposes of their accounts, they do indicate that she played an important role in service to the Spanish, and do not openly criticize her at any point.

The indigenous sources, however, display more mixed attitudes toward La Malinche. For instance, the Spaniards' Tlaxcalan allies depict her positively overall as a valuable ally in the Conquest. Other native groups that were subjugated by the Spanish, however, reflect more ambivalent, or even negative, understandings of La Malinche. The *Florentine Codex*, for example, agrees with the Spanish sources that Marina played an important role communicating between the Mexica and the Spanish. It is not clear, however, whether her portrayal as demanding provisions from the Mexica noblemen or insisting that the Tenocha turn over their gold to the Spanish might reflect a bit of resentment on the part of the Nahuatl-speaking informants whose account initially identifies Marina as "one of us people." The account of Cuauhtémoc's death in the *Annals of Tlatelolco* more clearly suggests that some native people

viewed Marina's alliance with Cortés and the Spanish negatively, implicating her in some of the Spaniards' cruelties against indigenous peoples.

Díaz's treatment of Doña Marina is unique among the earliest sources. He alone repeatedly praises her intelligence, beauty, character, and service to the Spanish, and in doing so makes her a more developed character than in the other Spanish chronicles. Díaz portrays Doña Marina as an honorable lady who is fit to be the mother of Cortés's first son. In addition, he depicts her as the exemplary indigenous convert to Christianity and subject of New Spain. Avoiding Gómara's explicit description of Marina as a slave, Díaz portrays Doña Marina as willingly renouncing her prior noble status and life among indigenous peoples in order to embrace her Spanish masters and their Christian religion. To be sure, other early sources describe Marina as a good Christian, and some show her to be an evangelistic figure who not only interprets others' proclamation of the Christian faith, but who also is able to explain it on her because she knows it so well. Díaz, however, goes even further by portraying Doña Marina as a quasi-biblical character through his comparison of her to the biblical Joseph. The image of a decidedly Christian Doña Marina is thereby established in Díaz's account.

Given the discrepancies in the early sources, and the sparse evidence, there are many aspects of La Malinche's character, actions, and beliefs that we can never know for sure. How subsequent interpreters fill in the "gaps" in this evidence is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter 5

La Malinche Interpretations, from the Fifteenth Century to the Present

Introduction

Similar to Mary Magdalene's interpretive history, generations of interpreters reshape the relatively sparse descriptions of La Malinche found in the primary sources according to changing contexts and concerns. The shifts in interpretation mainly follow changing perspectives on the Conquest and the new social and political entity that resulted: New Spain, and eventually, the modern Mexican nation. The Nahuatl woman who is portrayed in the earliest texts as a loyal interpreter and cultural intermediary for the Spanish in the Conquest eventually becomes a symbolic means for Mexicans and Chicano/as to wrestle with both their *mestizo* identity and their understandings of females.¹

These negotiations reflect an increasing emphasis placed on La Malinche's personal relationship with Cortés and the first-born son that she bore him, who became widely acknowledged—at least symbolically—as the first mixed native/European *mestizo* child born in New Spain. In this view, La Malinche and Cortés form the symbolic founding couple of modern Mexico. Although some interpreters view this couple positively, others denounce La Malinche's allegiance to Cortés and the Spaniards as a betrayal of Mexico's pre-Hispanic peoples. In the nineteenth century, a prominent understanding develops of La Malinche as paradigmatic traitor

¹ I use the term *Chicano/as* a way to be explicitly inclusive of both females and males of Mexican American heritage when using this plural noun, since Spanish uses the masculine form of a noun—in this case, *Chicanos*—for groups of mixed genders. The same holds for my use of *Chicano/a community* to refer to the community consisting of both males and females. The term *Chicana* refers to a female, and *Chicanas* to more than one female, since the *-a-* in the ending makes it grammatically clear that the noun does not refer to a single male, or to a group that includes males. Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 4 explains that, although the terms *Chicano* and *Mexican American* are used interchangeably at times, more conservative people—especially in the 1970s—saw themselves as *Mexican Americans* and considered *Chicanos* as those with radical political views, or, identified them with a particular social location rather than primarily with their shared ethnic origin. In this project I use the terms interchangeably. I use the term *Chicano movement* to refer specifically to the socio-political movement that solidified in the 1960s. Here I retain the masculine *-o-* ending on *Chicano*, since *Chicano/a* would not have been widely used at the time the movement first developed, and, as discussed below, its founders operated with a largely male perspective.

to the indigenous people of Mexico because her assistance to the Spaniards in the Conquest was seen as facilitating native people's subjugation to the foreigners. Her supposed sexual openness to Cortés is often considered to be at the core of her betrayal, and in this regard, La Malinche becomes a type of Eve who represents deviant female sexuality as a major source of evil.

Such interpretations lead in turn to the use of the term *malinchista* for someone who sells out their people or culture in favor of anything foreign. La Malinche becomes the negative archetype of womanhood: she is the sexually immoral mother who stands in contrast to the Virgin Mary as the good, sexually pure mother in Mexican and Chicano/a consciousness. In this regard, La Malinche plays a similar ideological function to Mary Magdalene, in contrast to the Virgin Mary, as the paradigmatic "fallen woman" through whom ideals of womanhood and female sexuality are negotiated. In fact, as we shall see, La Malinche is even identified at times with Mary Magdalene in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures.

As with Magdalene's interpretive history, many late twentieth and twenty-first century scholars attempt to counter what they consider to be myths that have built up around the historical person of La Malinche. They return to a close examination of the earliest sources to show the lack of support for many of the negative, later portrayals of her, and also question the patriarchal assumptions that continue to fuel such images.

The first section of this chapter examines portrayals of La Malinche in historical works on the Conquest written from the second half of the sixteenth century until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when Mexico gained independence from Spain. Independence precipitated a major shift in La Malinche interpretation, which is the focus of the chapter's second section; namely, the emergence of a decidedly negative portrayal of La Malinche's assistance to the Spanish in the Conquest that emphasizes her sexuality as a means to manipulate men and betray

native people in favor of the European intruders. The third section addresses Octavio Paz's landmark interpretation of La Malinche in *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, which solidifies La Malinche's reputation as symbol of betrayal to native Mexicans and as negative archetype of the female sex. The fourth section deals with interpretations of La Malinche that develop after Paz's, or that have solidified over the centuries in popular culture. Many of these interpretations respond to, and often challenge, Paz's image of La Malinche, most notably by Chicana interpreters who see reclaiming a positive image of Malinche as important to affirming their own identity and experiences as women who also live in more than one cultural space.

La Malinche in Colonial-Era Historical Writings

Historical Context

Fascination with the Spanish Conquest of Mexico did not end with its earliest chroniclers, but rather continued to be expressed in historical works written throughout the period of colonial New Spain (1521–1821). These texts partly served to present important past people and events to new generations, and to correct aspects of earlier works that their authors deemed to be erroneous. A particular motive for writing histories of the Conquest in the colonial era was to try to establish a cohesive sense of national identity for a new society that was comprised of diverse indigenous groups, Europeans, Africans (who were brought to New Spain as slaves), and people born to parents of diverse backgrounds.

In fact, while Spaniards continued to write histories of the Conquest that are similar to earlier chronicles, New Spain produced its own indigenous, *criollo* (someone of Spanish descent born in New Spain), and *mestizo* (someone of mixed European and indigenous ancestry)

historians who wrote from a perspective not represented in most of the earliest Spanish texts.² To be sure, many of these authors received European-style educations and were Christians, resulting in works that share some of the viewpoints and structural elements of Spanish histories of that era. Affinity for their place of birth, however, and its native residents motivated indigenous, *criollo*, and *mestizo* historians to write accounts not only of the Conquest, but also of the history and culture of Mesoamerican indigenous civilizations, both before and after the Conquest.³

Doing so was important for several reasons. One was the fact that many pre-Hispanic indigenous codices were destroyed before or during the Conquest, so that new texts on native history and culture would make them available to new generations.⁴ Since the Conquest was the foundational event of colonial New Spain, native-born historians often treat it in-depth, as do Spanish authors. But by addressing this event in a longer history of Mesoamerica and its peoples, they claim some continuity between the land's pre-Hispanic past and its colonial present. These authors also sought to provide a native perspective on the Conquest that was lacking in the earliest Spanish chronicles. They accomplished this through their knowledge of Nahuatl and other native languages, as well as by associating with indigenous peoples of New Spain, which

² This summary of *criollo* and *mestizo* historical works draws in part on González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 41–56, 66–76. For more on colonial Mexico's racially determined caste system, see R. Douglas Cope, *The Limits of Racial Domination: Plebeian Society in Colonial Mexico City* (Madison, WI: University of Madison Press, 2010).

³ There are a few earlier texts, such as the *Florentine Codex* and *Annals of Tlatelolco*, which document pre-Hispanic native cultures and their perspectives on the Conquest, but such works become more widespread in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

⁴ See, for example, the Nahuatl historian don Domingo de San Antón Muñón Chimalpahin Quauhtlehuanitzin (ca. 1579–1660; often referred to as Chimalpahin), who rewrites Gómara's chronicle of the Conquest in Nahuatl, adding and editing parts to more accurately represent Nahuatl culture and perspectives. He was concerned in this, and in his other historical writings, with preserving earlier histories and making them accessible to new audiences. See Susan Schroeder, "The History of Chimalpahin's 'Conquista' Manuscript," in *Chimalpahin's Conquest: A Nahuatl Historian's Rewriting of Francisco López de Gómara's La conquista de México*, ed. and trans. Susan Schroeder, Anne J. Cruz, Cristián Roa-de-la-Carrera, and David E. Tavárez (Stanford University Press, 2010), 3–16; David E. Tavárez, "Reclaiming the Conquest: An Assessment of Chimalpahin's Modification to *La conquista de México*," in Schroeder, Cruz, Roa-de-la-Carrera, and Tavárez, *Chimalpahin's Conquest*, 17–34. Chimalpahin, who lived in the Mexico City area, rewrote Gómara's chronicle sometime in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, roughly one hundred years after the Conquest. All references to this work, titled in English as *The Conquest of Mexico*, are from the edition/translation in *Chimalpahin's Conquest*, cited above.

gave them access to oral and written native sources in addition to earlier Spanish ones. Some of these histories, with their more sympathetic presentations of Mesoamerican cultures, were commissioned as tools for evangelizing native residents of New Spain.⁵

More generally, criollo and mestizo histories tend to reflect a nationalistic sentiment that increased among native-born residents of New Spain throughout the colonial period.⁶ While searching for a cohesive national identity, tensions grew among the various groups that populated a socially stratified New Spain. For instance, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries some indigenous people rose up against the abuses of the *encomenderos*. And since people of Spanish ancestry who were born in Spain (i.e., *peninsulares*) typically occupied the highest positions in government and society, even criollos, some of whom were the offspring of the original *conquistadores*, began to feel like second-class citizens.⁷ In this context, histories that find some roots for New Spanish society in its pre-Hispanic past reflect the growing distance that criollos and mestizos felt from both their Spanish ancestry, and especially, from the Spaniards who governed New Spain.

Given that both indigenous and Spanish sources and perspectives shape indigenous, criollo, and mestizo histories, it is not surprising that these works show some tension in their attitudes toward the Conquest. As with Spanish authors, these historians generally portray the Conquest as a positive, providential event that led to the foundation of New Spain and the

⁵ One example is Diego Durán, *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, trans. Doris Heyden, Civilization of the American Indian Series 210 (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994). Durán (ca. 1537–1588) was a Dominican friar who was born in Spain, but moved as a child first to Texcoco, and then to Mexico City, where he learned Nahuatl and conversed with both Spanish and indigenous eyewitnesses to the Conquest. He was criticized by the Spanish for the sympathetic view of native peoples expressed in his *History*, published in 1581. See Doris Heyden, preface and translator's introduction to *The History of the Indies of New Spain*, by Diego Durán, trans. Doris Heyden, xxi–xxxvi. All references to Durán's work are from the edition cited above.

⁶ E.g., Germán Vázquez, introduction to *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, by Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, ed. Germán Vázquez, *Crónicas de América* 11 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1985), 7–41.

⁷ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 52; Vázquez, introduction, 23.

conversion of many indigenous people to Christianity. Even so, they do at times criticize Cortés and some of the violent methods the Spanish used to achieve their goals.⁸ Strikingly, however, some of these authors only briefly mention, or omit altogether, controversial episodes of the Conquest, such as the violence at Cholula and the death of Cuauhtémoc, which the earliest chronicles document. Such omissions make sense when considering that some criollo and mestizo authors apparently celebrate the Conquest as a heroic event, carried out by their not-so-distant ancestors, in hopes of receiving rewards or improved status in New Spain as a result.⁹

Portrayals of La Malinche

Generally speaking, histories of the colonial era portray La Malinche positively, focusing on the important role she played as an interpreter and cultural intermediary during the Conquest. Although she may not be mentioned in these works as frequently as she is in Díaz's chronicle, colonial authors often explicitly praise her and expand upon her significance to the Spaniards more than do many earlier chronicles. Some authors even downplay La Malinche's role in the controversial Cholula episode, while others omit her participation in it altogether. This contributes to a portrait of her as a faithful servant to the Spanish *conquistadores* who is not directly blamed for some of the abuses perpetrated by her masters.

General Impressions

Many of the colonial era histories rely heavily on Bernal Díaz's expanded and complimentary presentation of La Malinche. Like Díaz, they praise her intelligence, beauty, and skill with languages, as well as highlight her supposedly noble background. For instance, in his

⁸ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 49–50.

⁹ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 53.

Historia de Tlaxcala, Diego Muñoz Camargo states that it is very well known that Malintzin (he uses her Nahuatl name) was a native Mexica woman of great valor, import, and intelligence.¹⁰ Writing roughly two hundred years later, Francisco Javier Clavijero (sometimes Francesco Saverio Clavigero) calls Marina (whom he sometimes refers to using the honorific *doña*) “a young girl of noble birth, beauty, quick genius, and great spirit” who was “always faithful to the Spaniards,” so that her service to them cannot be overrated.¹¹ He credits her with facilitating negotiations with various indigenous peoples and with frequently saving the Spaniards’ lives “by warning them of dangers, and pointing out the means of escaping them.”¹² The Spanish historian Antonio de Solís, whose 1684 work on the Conquest became popular both in Spain and its American colonies, presents a similar characterization of Doña Marina, claiming that she and

¹⁰ Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, ed. Germán Vázquez, Crónicas de América 26 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1986), 187–88. All references to this work are from this edition. Muñoz Camargo (ca. 1528–1599) was a mestizo who grew up in Mexico City and moved to Tlaxcala around 1545. He married a Tlaxcalan noblewoman, Leonor Vázquez, who belonged to the family of Maxicatzin, one of the four Tlaxcalan chiefs at the time of the Conquest. Muñoz Camargo became an important figure in Tlaxcalan economic and political life, serving as an interpreter for a Tlaxcalan delegation to Spain in 1585. This is apparently when some of the later images of the *Lienzo de Tlaxcala* were taken with a petition to the Crown for more privileges, and they may also have been used as illustrations in Muñoz Camargo’s *Historia*, written between 1576 and 1591. See Germán Vázquez, introduction to *Historia de Tlaxcala*, by Diego Muñoz Camargo, ed. Germán Vázquez, Crónicas de América 26 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1986), 7–65; Luis Reyes García, introduction to *Historia de Tlaxcala* (Ms. 210 de la Biblioteca Nacional de París), by Diego Muñoz Camargo, ed. Luis Reyes García and Javier Lira Toledo, *Historia de Tlaxcala 5* (Tlaxcala: Universidad Autónoma de Tlaxcala, 1998), 5–61.

¹¹ Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, trans. Charles Cullen, 2nd ed. (London: J. Johnson, 1807), 2:9–10. All references to this work are to this edition, which is an English translation of the Italian text that was the first published version of this work (1780–1781). Clavijero, however, first wrote a Spanish manuscript that he then translated into Italian. For a Spanish edition of this manuscript, see Francisco Javier Clavijero, *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, ed. Mariano Cuevas, 8th ed. (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1987). Clavijero (1731–1787) was born in Veracruz, Mexico, to a Spanish father and a *criolla* mother. He learned native languages, including Nahuatl, from his father’s subjects, and gained great affection for indigenous peoples, which motivated him to write historical works. Clavijero also became a Jesuit priest, and resettled in Bologna, Italy, after King Charles III of Spain expelled the Jesuits from Mexico in 1767. There he compiled his *History* based on the many Spanish and indigenous sources he had studied in Mexico, books he acquired in Europe, and information he obtained through correspondence with friends in Mexico. See Francesco Saverio Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, trans. Charles Cullen, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (London: J. Johnson, 1807), vii–xi; Mariano Cuevas, prologue to *Historia Antigua de Mexico*, by Francisco Javier Clavijero, ed. Mariano Cuevas, 8th ed. (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1987), ix–xiii.

¹² Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, 10.

Aguilar, as the main instruments of the Conquest, were the ones who found a way to escape the Mexica attacks during the Night of Sorrows.¹³

Solís also describes Doña Marina’s background story in a way that is not found in the earliest sources. Explicitly drawing on Díaz’s account, Solís states that young Marina was separated from her family and taken to Xicalango through some “accidents of life,” and was raised in a way not appropriate to her noble birth.¹⁴ He describes her subsequently becoming a slave to the chief of Tabasco as a “fresh misfortune.”¹⁵ While not explicitly expressing sympathy for Doña Marina, Solís’s description does hint at her being a victim of her circumstances, and foreshadows the nineteenth century Romantic literary portrayals of Marina’s destiny being prescribed by fate.

Historians of the colonial era often wrestle with determining certain details of La Malinche’s life, and some come to conclusions that contradict the earliest sources. For instance, some historians acknowledge the discrepancies in earlier texts about La Malinche’s birthplace, and do not always try to straighten them all out.¹⁶

A more consequential aspect of La Malinche’s life on which colonial era authors disagree is whom she married. Most works follow the earliest chronicles in stating that she was married to Juan Jaramillo, but the mestizo authors Diego Muñoz Camargo and Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl claim that she married Jerónimo de Aguilar, the shipwrecked Spaniard who was

¹³ Antonio de Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards*, ed. Nathanael Hooke, trans. Thomas Townsend (London: printed for T. Woodward...; and H. Lintot, 1738), 2:210–211. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001445744> (original from University of Michigan). All citations of volume 2 of this text are from this edition. Antonio de Solís (1610–1686) lived in Spain and was known as both a historian and a writer of Spanish Baroque literature.

¹⁴ Antonio de Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards*, ed. Nathanael Hooke, trans. Thomas Townsend (London: printed for John Osborn..., 1738), 1:116–117. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001445744> (original from University of Michigan). All citations of volume 1 of this text are from this edition.

¹⁵ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:117.

¹⁶ E.g., Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 187, who defers to Díaz’s chronicle for details.

rescued from his Mayan captivity by Cortés and interpreted together with Marina before she learned Spanish.¹⁷ Historian Cristina González Hernández suggests that such errors may be due in part to authors' use of oral sources.¹⁸ And given the portrait in the earliest chronicles of Marina and Aguilar often interpreting together at important moments of the Conquest, it is not hard to imagine that traditions in which they were married to one another developed. Nor is it entirely surprising that some would romantically link two people who both adapted to languages and cultures other than their own in such a way that proved essential to the success of the Conquest. It is nonetheless highly improbable that Marina and Aguilar were married—both because it contradicts the earliest sources, and because Aguilar belonged to a religious order and therefore would not have been allowed to get married.¹⁹

Another departure from the primary sources is Chimalpahin's attachment of *Tenepal* to the end of *Marina* or *Malintzin* (he uses both), apparently taking it to be her lineage name.²⁰ It seems, however, that *tenepal* may have been a Nahuatl metaphor for someone who speaks, similar to the Spanish term *la lengua* ("the tongue") that was used of interpreters, including Marina.²¹ In any case, some subsequent works on Marina/Malintzin use *Tenepal* as part of her name.

¹⁷ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 188–190; Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, ed. Germán Vázquez, *Crónicas de América* 11 (Madrid: Historia 16, 1985), 229. All references to Ixtlilxochitl's *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca* are from this edition. Ixtlilxochitl (ca. 1578–1648), a *castizo* (a child of a Spaniard and a mestizo), was a direct descendent of Cuitláhuac, penultimate ruler of Tenochtitlan, and of rulers of Texcoco, a partner in the Triple Alliance. He lived in the Mexico City area and knew both Spanish and Nahuatl. His *Historia* presents a history of the people of Texcoco and of the Conquest from their perspective. See Germán Vázquez, introduction to *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, 18–41.

¹⁸ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 53.

¹⁹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 67; cf. Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, 229, n. 115, where the editor, Vázquez, states that some manuscripts of Ixtlilxochitl's text add a marginal note explaining that Aguilar was a member of the clergy, and therefore could not marry Marina, who in reality married Juan Jaramillo.

²⁰ E.g., Chimalpahin, *The Conquest of Mexico*, in *Chimalpahin's Conquest*, 105–106, 108; see Karttunen, "Rethinking Malinche," 302 for this interpretation of Chimalpahin's use of *Tenepal*.

²¹ Karttunen, "Rethinking Malinche," 302.

Interpreter

As with the primary sources on La Malinche, the second-generation texts agree that the young Nahua woman given to the Spaniards as a slave became an invaluable interpreter between them and various indigenous groups. Although some authors do not place any more emphasis on La Malinche than does the rather matter-of-fact Gómara, others exalt her interpreting role in terms reminiscent of, or even exceeding, Díaz's high praise of her. For example, while the earliest Spanish chronicles do not clarify when Marina learned Spanish, several of the colonial era histories explicitly state that she learned this language in a very short time. This further highlights her skill with languages, and augments her overall positive characterization. Solís, for example, states that Marina's wit and natural gifts, consistent with her noble birth, enabled her to learn Spanish quickly, so that she only needed Aguilar's help in the interpretation chain for a short time.²²

Even more striking is how some texts portray the discovery of Marina's linguistic abilities, and her subsequent interpreter role, as the product of divine providence, by which the Spanish were victorious in the Conquest. Describing the episode in San Juan de Ulúa, where Aguilar is unable to understand the Nahuatl language of the people, Solís states that providence relieved Cortés's distress by the discovery of Doña Marina's language skills. Judging simply by the looks on the faces of Cortés and Aguilar she immediately understands the issue at hand, and explains to Aguilar in Mayan that the people in that town speak the Mexica language.²³ Cortés

²² Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:117. Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:10 also states that Marina learned Spanish in short time.

²³ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:116.

then thanks God, who, by his infinite goodness and against all hope, gave him an instrument in Marina by which to communicate with the natives.²⁴

God's provision of Marina as interpreter was not only to help the Spaniards in their military campaigns, but also in their efforts to convert the native residents of Mesoamerica to Christianity. While the portrait of Marina as an instrument of evangelization is present to an extent in the earliest chronicles, it is made even more explicit in some colonial era histories. For example, Ixtlilxochitl writes that Marina's ability to learn Spanish in a short time seemed miraculous, and that it was not only a great help to Cortés, but also very important for converting native people and establishing the Catholic faith in the land.²⁵ And Muñoz Camargo states that Marina was the instrument through which the Tlaxcalans converted to the holy Catholic faith, as God had ordained.²⁶

In fact, Marina appears even more prominently in the second generation histories as a paradigmatic native convert to Christianity who uses her own understanding of the faith to help evangelize native people. As in the earliest texts, here too Marina interprets the Christian preaching of Cortés and others.²⁷ Solís, however, expands upon such portraits by showing Doña Marina not only interpret the words of Cortés and Father Olmedo when they try to convert Moctezuma, but also add her own reasons to try to persuade him, since she was a new Christian who still had the motives for her conversion fresh in her mind.²⁸ This suggests even more clearly than in the earliest sources that Marina understood and embraced the Christianity presented to her by her Spanish masters.

²⁴ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:116.

²⁵ Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, 229.

²⁶ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 186–187.

²⁷ E.g., Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, 238.

²⁸ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:471; 2:165.

Indeed, while Díaz and Gómara state that Marina, along with the other women given to Cortés, were the first Christian converts in New Spain, Clavijero presents her alone as “the first Christian of the Mexican empire, who makes so distinguished a figure in the history of the conquest, and whose name has been and still is so celebrated, not less among the Mexicans than the Spaniards.”²⁹ It seems, therefore, that some two hundred and fifty years after the Conquest, Marina functions for Clavijero as symbolic first native convert to Christianity whose good character and loyal service to the Spaniards still make her praiseworthy.

Other aspects of Marina’s interpreter role in colonial era histories follow the path of the primary sources. For example, Chimalpahin notes that she was always there to help Cortés, and emphasizes her truthfulness and loyalty.³⁰ She does not just interpret words that are given to her by others, but also takes initiative to speak at times on behalf of the Spanish by using her own judgment and words.³¹ Marina is present to interpret at key moment of the Conquest, such as Cortés’s first encounter with Moctezuma and his entrance into Tlaxcala with Xicotencatl.³² And Hernando (sometimes Fernando) Alvarado Tezozómoc’s *Cronica Mexicana* portrays Moctezuma as admiring Marina’s ability to speak Spanish.³³

Cultural Intermediary and Informant

As in the earliest sources, La Malinche also acts as an important cultural intermediary and informant to the Spanish in colonial texts. Muñoz Camargo states that, because she knew the

²⁹ Clavijero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:11.

³⁰ Chimalpahin, *The Conquest of Mexico*, in *Chimalpahin’s Conquest*, 99–100, 279.

³¹ E.g., Durán, *History of the Indies*, 499, 555.

³² E.g., Durán, *The History of the Indies*, 530; Chimalpahin, *The Conquest of Mexico*, in *Chimalpahin’s Conquest*, 194.

³³ Hernando Alvarado Tezozómoc, *Cronica Mexicana*, ed. Manuel Orozco y Berra (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1975), 690. Tezozómoc was a mestizo grandson of Moctezuma II who wrote in this work the history of the Mexica people and of the Conquest from a Tenocha perspective. His father was the first colonial governor of Mexico City/Tenochtitlan.

language and inner-workings of the people of central Mexico well, she was able to pass information about Moctezuma and his empire on to the Spanish.³⁴ She also is able to convince native peoples—sometimes on her own initiative—about the courses of action they should take in light of the power and intentions of the Spanish.³⁵ For instance, Solís expands somewhat on Díaz’s account of Doña Marina convincing Moctezuma to submit to house arrest by the Spaniards. Reportedly speaking with a discretion that never fails her, Solís gives Doña Marina a paragraph-long speech that establishes her trustworthiness, and finally prevails upon Moctezuma.³⁶

On other occasions, Marina perceives signs of danger that the Spaniards miss, and helps them understand aspects of indigenous cultures of which they are ignorant.³⁷ One instance of this involves the women that the Tlaxcalan chiefs initially offered the Spaniards upon making peace with them. While Díaz and Gómara state that they were daughters of chiefs and noblemen, given as wives or concubines to the Spanish,³⁸ Muñoz Camargo states to the contrary that they were slaves, condemned to die as human sacrifices for crimes they committed, who were offered instead to the Spaniards as servants.³⁹ This change seems intended to protect the reputation of the Spanish in a way not found in Díaz or Gómara by claiming that the women were not intended to be sexual partners, but rather mere servants.⁴⁰ Similar to Díaz’s account, where the women are only accepted after being baptized, Muñoz Camargo’s text has the Spaniards refuse to take the

³⁴ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 188.

³⁵ E.g., Clavigero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:27 shows Marina finally persuading the Cempoalans to ally with the Spanish and allow their idols to be destroyed, after Cortés had already tried to convince them.

³⁶ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:462–463.

³⁷ E.g., Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 2:224.

³⁸ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 175–176, 178 mentions Tlaxcalan chiefs offering five of their daughters to Cortés and his men as wives; Gómara, *Cortés*, 118 comments that many of the Tlaxcalan lords offered their daughters to the Spaniards “so they might bear children by such valorous men and bring into the world a new warrior caste; or perhaps they gave their daughters because it was the custom, or merely to please the Spaniards.”

³⁹ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 195–196.

⁴⁰ Although Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 196–197 says that later on the Tlaxcalan chiefs did offer their daughters to the Spaniards as well.

women at first, since their religion would only allow it if they were baptized, and then only if each one were to be the sole wife of a man.⁴¹ The Tlaxcalans insist, however, and Malintzin warns the Spaniards that native people are offended if their gifts are not accepted, and take it as a sign of enmity.⁴² Her proper understanding of the cultural situation convinces the Spaniards to accept the Tlaxcalan women, but only on the condition that they are to be servants to Malintzin, not the men. While this too seems primarily intended to protect the Christian honor of the Spaniards, it also renders an image of Malintzin as an indigenous noblewoman, who Camargo notes would be accompanied by many women to serve her.⁴³

Controversial Aspects of the Conquest

One of the most striking aspects of colonial era histories regarding La Malinche is that some of them omit, or minimize, her role in the more controversial aspects of the Conquest, such as Cuauhtémoc's death and the Cholula massacre.⁴⁴ Whether to protect the reputation of the Spanish conquistadores, or because it does not serve the purposes of a particular work, the death of Cuauhtémoc is not even recounted in some texts that deal with other aspects of the Conquest, so that La Malinche's presence at this event is obviously omitted as well. Duran, for example, does tell of Cuauhtémoc's death, but only dedicates a short paragraph to it in which La Malinche is not mentioned.⁴⁵

Likewise, some texts briefly describe the Cholula massacre, but do not include La Malinche in the account. For example, since Duran praises the conquistadores as brave and

⁴¹ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 178; Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 196.

⁴² Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 196.

⁴³ Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, 196.

⁴⁴ Cf. González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 55.

⁴⁵ Durán, *History of the Indies*, 562.

heroic, he is hesitant to recount the many cruel acts they committed. He states, however, that his goal of writing the stories of native peoples obliges him to touch on the Cholula massacre.⁴⁶ So, he describes the whole event in just a few sentences, portraying Cortés as responsible for the violence.⁴⁷ In contrast to some of the earliest chronicles, which show Cortés sparing women and children, Durán states that he spared no one.⁴⁸ Notably absent in this concise account is any mention of La Malinche, including the story of the Cholulan noblewoman informing her of a plot against the Spaniards that is so widespread in the earliest chronicles.⁴⁹

Other histories follow more closely the accounts of events at Cholula found in the earliest accounts, including La Malinche playing a role in discovering the alleged plot. Some accounts of La Malinche's involvement are much briefer than in the earliest chronicles. Clavijero, for example, sums up the interaction between Marina and the Cholulan noblewoman who informs her of the plot in one sentence, which positively characterizes Marina by stating that the woman was enamored with her spirit, beauty, and discretion.⁵⁰ Solís, by contrast, gives a longer account with details that are not found in the earliest texts. He states, for instance, that the noblewoman had developed a friendship with Doña Marina and that she visited her daily. On one of these visits she laments Marina's captivity by the Spanish, referring to them as "abominable strangers" and encourages Marina to escape to her house. Strikingly, Solís then describes the ingenious Doña Marina as pretending to be oppressed by the Spanish, supposedly traveling with them

⁴⁶ Durán, *History of the Indies*, 528.

⁴⁷ Durán, *History of the Indies*, 528–529.

⁴⁸ E.g., Gómara, *Cortés*, 129 tells of Cortés ordering women and children to be spared; Durán, *History of the Indies*, 529.

⁴⁹ Cf. Ixtlilxochitl, *Historia de la Nación Chichimeca*, 276. Here the author mentions the cruelties that Cortés committed against the Cholulans, but does not elaborate on them or mention Marina.

⁵⁰ Clavijero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:49.

against her will, in order to convince the noblewoman that she will go along with her escape plan and to extract from her the details of the Cholulan plot.⁵¹

As in the earliest chronicles, many colonial texts also show others informing Cortés of the plot before Marina does, so that she is not the only means by which he learns of it. In fact, some accounts ultimately attribute the discovery of the plot not to any specific human being, but to the divine providence that helped the Spaniards throughout the Conquest. Reflecting the common understanding in many of these histories of the Conquest as divine judgment on the native peoples' idolatry, Muñoz Camargo portrays the Cholulans as superstitious and foolishly confident in their idols, so that the Spanish victory over them is understood to be divinely guided in order to rescue the people from the powers of evil.⁵²

Whatever the reason these texts may give for the violence that occurred at Cholula, they do not suggest that La Malinche betrayed the native peoples of Mexico by her involvement with the conquistadores—an idea that will become prevalent in later centuries. The absence of such a view is significant because some of these texts' authors were themselves indigenous or mestizo, and/or, based their works on native sources and perspectives, so that if there were an early understanding of La Malinche as a traitor to indigenous peoples, it seems that they would have had reason to include it in their works.

The minimization, or omission, of La Malinche's role is especially striking in the Cholula episode, since colonial era histories generally affirm her importance as a cultural intermediary and informant to the Spaniards about the intentions of native peoples. It could be intended, as González Hernández suggests, to portray in a more positive light the woman who was an instrument of spreading the Catholic faith to indigenous peoples, which was the goal that these

⁵¹ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:334–335.

⁵² Muñoz Camargo, *La Historia de Tlaxcala*, 211.

authors believed justified the Conquest.⁵³ This suggestion makes sense when considering that, as for Díaz, La Malinche also functions as an ideal indigenous convert to Christianity and subject of New Spain in some of these histories.

Minimizing La Malinche's role in the more controversial events of the Conquest also facilitates the criollo and mestizo authors' goal of showing some continuity between colonial New Spain and its pre-Hispanic past, since it presents new generations with a positive characterization of the indigenous woman who both competently interacted with various native groups and adapted to Spanish culture, bearing a mestizo child to the captain of the Conquest.

Even so, it is possible that these changes from some of the earliest sources reflect the general tendency in many colonial era histories to view the Conquest as heroic, and therefore, to minimize episodes that portray the conquistadores negatively. In this regard, La Malinche's role may be cut short, or omitted, in some instances simply because authors do not dwell on these episodes. And since there were more people who spoke both Nahuatl and Spanish in the time these texts were written, making skilled interpreters more commonplace, perhaps these authors did not see the need to highlight the interpreting and intermediary roles of Marina in these events. In any case, the texts that do show Marina having an informant role in the Cholula episode portray her in generally positive ways, consistent with her overall characterization as a loyal servant to the Spaniards.

La Malinche's Relationship with Cortés

Many colonial era histories do not expand the earliest sources' sparse descriptions of La Malinche's personal relationship with Cortés. It was common knowledge that she bore him a son, and therefore that she was not merely his interpreter; but in contrast to some later

⁵³ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 55.

interpretations, they do not speculate about the details of La Malinche and Cortés's personal involvement. Some texts, however, do seem to critique Cortés for taking Marina as a mistress, and perhaps hint at sympathy for her being caught in an arrangement not of her own choosing. Solís, for example, describes Marina as exceptionally loyal to Cortés, but suggests that he took her as a mistress in order to secure her loyalty, calling it a move that was not entirely decent.⁵⁴ And Clavijero, commenting on how Marina was with Cortés on all his expeditions, states that she served "sometimes as an interpreter, sometimes as a counsellor, and sometimes to her misfortune as a mistress."⁵⁵

Before moving on to the period of Mexican independence, it should be noted that Clavijero's work stands out among historical texts of the colonial era because of its broader, explicit criticism of the Conquest as a whole, even though he too writes as a Christian and at times sees the actions of the conquistadores as necessary for their own defense. His account of the Conquest ends with Cortés taking Tenochtitlan, at which point it challenges the common view of the Conquest as divine providence working through the supposedly civilized Spaniards to punish the Mexicans for their history of cruelty and superstition. Clavijero writes that the Spaniards, "in one year of merciless massacre, sacrificed more human victims to avarice and ambition, than the Indians during the existence of their empire devoted in chaste worship to their native gods."⁵⁶ He further challenges the European notion of "justice" and the desire to spread the Christian religion that were often used to justify violently taking land from the indigenous peoples, enslaving them, and destroying their ancient cultures, which he portrays as noble. Thus, Clavijero's text reflects the tension common in other criollo works of the time between embracing New Spain as a society undeniably produced by the Conquest, while also seeking to

⁵⁴ Solís, *The History of the Conquest of Mexico*, 1:117–118.

⁵⁵ Clavijero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:10.

⁵⁶ Clavijero, *The History of Mexico*, 2:194.

elevate pre-Hispanic civilizations as admirable, and to some extent, continuous with New Spain. Writing toward the end of the colonial era, Clavijero expresses a strong nationalistic sentiment that will eventually lead to wars for independence from Spain in the early nineteenth century.

La Malinche after Mexican Independence: 1821–1950

The overall positive image of La Malinche in colonial texts drastically changes after Mexico becomes independent of Spain in 1821. Instead of widespread praise for her noble character and significant interpreting role during the Conquest, nationalistic writings often depict her service to the Spaniards as a betrayal to the native peoples of Mexico that leads to their defeat by the foreigners.⁵⁷ La Malinche's sexual relationship with Cortés cements her image as a traitor, since it comes to signify her complete submission to the invaders in a way that represents the subjugation of American lands by Europeans. It also makes La Malinche the symbolic mother of the racially and culturally mixed, or mestizo, Mexican nation. Although more positive portrayals of La Malinche are also created in the postindependence era, it is her depiction as treacherous and sexually immoral that becomes most influential in subsequent generations. This negative interpretation of La Malinche is not clearly substantiated by the primary texts, but rather relies on interpreters filling gaps in this sparse data. In this way, the expanded portrayals of La Malinche that develop in the postindependence period parallel the solidification of full legends about Mary Magdalene in the medieval era.

⁵⁷ The excellent works of Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 41–67, and González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 41–118, both discuss in detail this prominent shift in La Malinche interpretations.

While colonial literature rarely mentions La Malinche, she is widely incorporated into both literary and historical texts of the postindependence period.⁵⁸ A representative sampling of these will be examined below in order to illuminate her major portrayals in this era.

Historical Background

Although there were some protests against Spanish rule in Mexico during its three hundred years as a colony (1521–1821), it was the 1810 movement led by the criollo priest, Miguel Hidalgo, that finally resulted in Mexican independence in 1821, after many battles and changes in leadership. To affirm the identity of a Mexico no longer ruled by the Spanish monarchy, it was necessary to revise the national foundation narrative in order to distance Mexico culturally and ideologically from its Spanish roots.⁵⁹ Even more than in the colonial era, it became important for nationalist writers to locate the origins of the Mexican nation not in the Conquest, but rather in its pre-Hispanic civilizations.⁶⁰ This affirmed the indigenous and mestizo residents of postindependence Mexico, and portrayed continuity between Mexico's past and present so as to assert that Mexican identity did not entirely derive from the Spanish Conquest, nor depend on Spanish ideals or governance for its survival.

This was an undertaking full of tensions, especially since many of the key figures in the independence movement, and subsequently, those who held greater social status and political power in Mexico, were in fact criollos—people of Spanish ancestry who were born in Mexico. The Conquest, carried out by Spaniards, could not be ignored as a major event in Mexican history. Nationalist writers, however, had to distance the contemporaneous criollo elites from the

⁵⁸ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 9.

⁵⁹ See Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 41–42 for more details.

⁶⁰ See Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 42.

past event that proved devastating to indigenous societies if they were to be seen as the rightful representatives of a Mexican nation that was continuous with its pre-Hispanic past.

A related issue was explaining how a relatively small number of Spaniards were able to defeat tens of thousands of native warriors, without ascribing general weakness or inferiority to the latter.⁶¹ While various explanations were posited, and they are more complex than can be detailed here, one involved blaming a representative group of indigenous peoples for assisting the Spanish and thereby facilitating their victory over all of Mexico. As a native woman who provided significant support to the Spanish in the Conquest, some authors portray La Malinche as paradigmatic of this supposed betrayal.⁶² By faulting the complicity of a small group of native people—or even just one, in the figure of La Malinche—interpreters could maintain an admirable image of most pre-Hispanic indigenous people, while also critiquing to some extent the Spanish conquistadores for their unwelcome intervention in Mesoamerican life and history.

Excursus: The Virgin of Guadalupe

Significantly, Hidalgo and others in the independence movement appealed to the Virgin of Guadalupe as emblematic of Mexican identity. Since she becomes the positive archetype of womanhood that is later placed in contrast to the negative archetype ascribed to La Malinche, a brief description of this figure in Mexican history and identity follows.⁶³

The legends and cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico trace back to 1531, when the Virgin Mary reportedly appeared to an indigenous peasant, Juan Diego, on Tepeyac hill, in what

⁶¹ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 90.

⁶² Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 43; González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 90–91.

⁶³ For a more detailed examination of the origins of, and sources for, the Virgin of Guadalupe, see Stafford Poole, *Our Lady of Guadalupe: The Origins and Sources of a Mexican National Symbol, 1531–1797*, rev. ed. (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2017).

is now northern Mexico City.⁶⁴ Through a series of apparitions, she identified herself both as the mother of God and as Diego's mother, offering her protection, miraculously healing his uncle, and asking him to have a church built for her on the site. The Virgin also reportedly instructed Diego to gather some roses from the hill, which would not normally have flowers in December. Diego found the roses and gathered them in his cloak, where they reportedly left an image of the dark-skinned Virgin of Guadalupe. He presented the flowers and cloak to the first bishop of Mexico, Juan de Zumárraga. Soon afterwards, a chapel was erected to the Virgin on Tepeyac hill, and it became a major pilgrimage site over the centuries, especially for her feast day on December 12. A large, modern basilica now stands near Tepeyac hill and houses Diego's original cloak.

Scholars debate the historicity of the apparition accounts, and suggest that the cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico instead derived from that of Our Lady of Guadalupe of Extremadura, Spain—a dark-skinned Virgin who was popular with the conquistadores. It has also been noted that the Nahua mother goddess, Tonantzin, was already revered on Tepeyac hill at the time of the reported Marian apparitions. This leads some to suggest that the apparition story may have been promoted by the Spaniards to help the Catholic religion gain acceptance by indigenous people, since it linked the Virgin Mary with the cult of the native mother goddess.

Whatever the case may have been, belief in a darker-skinned Virgin Mary appearing to an indigenous man in the immediate post-Conquest period eventually established the Virgin of Guadalupe as the spiritual mother and patron saint of Mexico, functioning as an important

⁶⁴ This summary draws on Robert M. Buffington, "Virgin of Guadalupe," in *Mexico: An Encyclopedia of Contemporary Culture and History*, by Don M. Coerver, Suzanne B. Pasztor, and Robert Buffington (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004).
https://proxy.library.emory.edu/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/abcmexico/virgin_of_guadalupe/0?institutionId=716.

affirmation of its indigenous roots. Her popularity may in fact stem in part from her association with Tonantzin, since this casts Guadalupe as a *mestiza* figure that represents the linking of aspects of both indigenous and Spanish religion and culture.

Miguel Sánchez published the first written account of Juan Diego and the Marian apparitions in 1648, arguing that the Virgin of Guadalupe did originate in Mesoamerica. This helped her become an even more significant symbol of Mexican identity, as distinct from its Spanish heritage, especially for the criollos of Mexico, who increasingly resented the rule of those born in Spain. So, when Father Hidalgo rallied a group of insurgents to fight for Mexican independence in 1810, he did so around an invocation and banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe. Her importance continues to this day as both spiritual mother and protectress of the Mexican people, and as a representative of Mexican autonomy and identity.

La Malinche in Mexican Literature and Drama: 1821–1950

Doña Marina in Xicoténcatl

The anonymous 1826 historical novel, *Xicoténcatl*, is the first known postindependence work to portray La Malinche, and the one that is widely credited with establishing the image of her as a traitor to the native peoples of Mexico, especially by means of her sexual relations with the foreign captain, Cortés.⁶⁵ Written in Spanish and first published in Philadelphia, literary scholars debate whether a Mexican or a Spanish-American wrote the novel.⁶⁶ Its anonymity may stem from its clear support for a republican form of government in a newly independent Mexico

⁶⁵ *Xicoténcatl: An Anonymous Historical Novel about the Events Leading Up to the Conquest of the Aztec Empire*, trans. Guillermo I. Castillo-Feliú (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999). All citations of this novel are from this edition. For a Spanish edition, see Felix Varela, *Jicoténcatl*, ed. Luis Leal and Rodolfo J. Cortina (Houston: Arte Público, 1995). The Cuban Felix Varela is considered by the editors to be the author of the novel.

⁶⁶ For discussion of these possibilities, see Guillermo I. Castillo-Feliú, introduction to *Xicoténcatl: An Anonymous Historical Novel about the Events Leading Up to the Conquest of the Aztec Empire*, trans. Guillermo I. Castillo-Feliú (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 1–6; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 43–44.

that also had proponents of governance by monarchy, and that had to fight against Spain's attempts to regain control of the country immediately following its independence. *Xicoténcatl*'s influence in Mexico is evidenced by several dramas it inspired in the first few years after its publication.⁶⁷

Following Solís's basic narrative of the Conquest, *Xicoténcatl* uses the Spaniards' conflict, and eventual alliance, with Tlaxcala as representative of the issues and values at stake in the entire Conquest, and more importantly, in nineteenth century Mexico.⁶⁸ Tlaxcala, with its four city-states each led by its own chief, represents the republican form of government that the author promotes, while the Aztecs (i.e., Triple Alliance), led by a supposedly tyrannical monarch, Moctezuma, represents the authoritarianism that the author warns destroys nations.⁶⁹ According to the novel, the Tlaxcalans have an uneasy alliance with the Aztecs when the Spaniards arrive.⁷⁰ Magiscatzin leads a faction of the Tlaxcalans who want to ally with the Spaniards in hopes that this will free them from Aztec oppression. He is characterized as an evil traitor to the nation who eventually convinces the Tlaxcalan senate to ally with the malevolent Spaniards.

Both Xicoténcatl the Elder and Younger represent the majority of noble, patriotic Tlaxcalans who initially resist a partnership with the Spaniards, as much as they also detest Aztec rule.⁷¹ As in the earliest chronicles, here too Xicoténcatl the Younger, the general of the Tlaxcalan army, is portrayed as holding out longer than his father in allying with the Spaniards.

⁶⁷ See González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 109 for these works.

⁶⁸ For a more thorough summary of *Xicoténcatl* and a convincing interpretation of Doña Marina's role in it, see Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 41–67.

⁶⁹ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 45.

⁷⁰ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 44.

⁷¹ Cohen's edition of Díaz's chronicle, referenced in this project, spells "Xicoténcatl" as "Xicotenga."

In contrast to Díaz, however, who portrays this as unreasonable stubbornness, *Xicoténcatl* depicts the young general positively as brave and fiercely loyal to his nation and its autonomy.

Given the resolution of the senate, the Elder Xicoténcatl eventually convinces his son to ally with the Spanish, stating that it is better than a civil war that will even more certainly deprive their nation of freedom.⁷² Through the drama that unfolds, the Tlaxcalans fully realize the duplicity and moral corruption of the Spaniards, represented by the self-serving authoritarianism of Cortés. *Xicoténcatl* thereby warned nineteenth century Mexican readers of the dangers of monarchy, civil strife, and selling out to foreign powers and values.⁷³

Literary scholar Sandra Messinger Cypess argues that La Malinche functions as a scapegoat in *Xicoténcatl* that represents the reasons why the Spanish were able to defeat the indigenous peoples of Mexico, including internal divisions in the face of authoritarian rule, as well as the alliance of some indigenous people with the malignant Spanish invaders.⁷⁴ The novel always calls La Malinche by her Spanish name, Doña Marina, since she represents the fully Europeanized indigenous person who betrays other native people through her allegiance to the Spanish.⁷⁵ This portrait does not adequately account for the differences between indigenous groups in pre-Hispanic Mexico, since Marina was neither Tlaxcalan, where the action of the novel takes place, nor a resident of Tenochtitlan, where Moctezuma's empire was centered. Indeed, her portrayal in *Xicoténcatl* is largely fictitious, even if it is based on earlier chronicles of the Conquest.

As in the primary sources, Doña Marina's background story is recounted in *Xicoténcatl*. Reflecting aspects of Solís's account, her becoming a slave in Tabasco is described as the

⁷² *Xicoténcatl*, 44–45.

⁷³ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 43–47.

⁷⁴ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 43.

⁷⁵ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 44–45.

product of “several accidents of fate.”⁷⁶ The narrative, however, does not express sympathy for her subsequent enslavement by Cortés, portraying Marina both as actively supporting his actions and claiming to be the victim of fate, without family, friends, or support.⁷⁷ And though the text cites Doña Marina’s “fine talents and charms” as what gained her favor with Cortés, her central role in the primary sources as his linguistic interpreter is entirely missing in *Xicoténcatl*, where Spaniards and indigenous people are depicted as communicating fluently with one another without an interpreter.⁷⁸ Instead, she served Cortés first as a slave, and then became his concubine and confidante in a very short time.⁷⁹ It was neither her linguistic skills nor her understanding of Mesoamerican cultures that facilitated her success in the latter role, but rather her use of European guile and deceit with unsuspecting natives.⁸⁰ Overall, the novel portrays Doña Marina as morally corrupt, deceptive, manipulative, and promiscuous, having been contaminated by her association with the Spaniards.⁸¹ The few characteristics or actions of Marina that are also found in earlier sources, where they are typically praised, are negatively evaluated in *Xicoténcatl*.

Doña Marina thus provides the negative contrast to the purity, innocence, and patriotism of Teutila, the other major indigenous female character in the novel. Like Marina, Teutila, a native of Zocotlan, becomes enslaved to a leader of another nation—in her case, to Xicoténcatl the Younger of Tlaxcala, with whom she genuinely falls in love. Unlike Marina, however, Teutila rejects Spanish ways and remains committed to native people and culture, heightening the portrait of Marina as treacherous. This contrast appears when Cortés captures and imprisons

⁷⁶ *Xicoténcatl*, 37.

⁷⁷ E.g., *Xicoténcatl*, 47, 59.

⁷⁸ *Xicoténcatl*, 37.

⁷⁹ *Xicoténcatl*, 37.

⁸⁰ *Xicoténcatl*, 37.

⁸¹ *Xicoténcatl*, 98.

Teutila as leverage for negotiating with Xicoténcatl the Younger and charges Marina with attending to the captive Teutila in the Spanish quarters in Tlaxcala.

Whereas earlier sources generally portray Marina's conversion to Christianity positively, in *Xicoténcatl* it is part of her detestable capitulation to the foreign invaders, highlighted by Teutila's vehement refusal to accept Christianity.⁸² It seems, however, that it is not Christianity itself that the author critiques through Teutila, and later on, through Marina as well, but rather the corrupted version of the religion that the conquistadores reflect in their selfish ambition and violence. Such a nuanced critique would have made sense in the context of postindependence Mexico, since it distances the conquistadores and their values from the newly independent Mexican nation that initially established Roman Catholicism as its only official religion.⁸³

Furthermore, as Cypess notes, the innocent and virtuous Teutila seems to represent the Virgin of Guadalupe, despite refusing Christianity.⁸⁴ By contrast, the narrative explicitly links Doña Marina with the serpent of Genesis that is commonly associated with deception, referring to her as an "astute serpent" because of her skill in deceiving and manipulating people on all sides.⁸⁵ This image provides a striking contrast to Díaz's positive comparison of her with an admirable biblical figure, the patriarch Joseph. Marina's characterization as an astute or treacherous serpent also implicitly links her with the biblical Eve, who is blamed at times for leading Adam into the serpent's temptation, in part through her sexuality. As will be explored below, *Xicoténcatl* portrays Marina as a lascivious woman who manipulates men sexually—in particular, Spanish men, creating another point of contrast with Teutila, who remains faithful to the native Xicoténcatl despite being pursued by powerful Spanish men.

⁸² *Xicoténcatl* 36–37.

⁸³ Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "La Transición de Colonia a Nación: Nueva España, 1820–21," *Historia Mexicana* 43 (1993): 265–322.

⁸⁴ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 55.

⁸⁵ *Xicoténcatl*, 41.

It is precisely Doña Marina's duplicity, and especially her sexuality, that make her a traitor to the native peoples of Mexico in *Xicoténcatl*. In contrast to some other nationalistic works of the period, Marina's treachery in this novel is not portrayed as a product of her role in revealing the alleged plot in Cholula.⁸⁶ In fact, the narrative does not even mention her in relation to the Cholula massacre, which it strongly condemns.⁸⁷ It instead blames the vicious attack solely on Cortés and his army, stating that when the Tlaxcalan army learned of the assault, they rushed to try to stop it, but were too late.⁸⁸ *Xicoténcatl* the Younger even explains the Cholulan noblewoman's confession of an alleged ambush prepared for the Spaniards as being forced by Cortés, who captured, threatened, and tortured the elderly and weak woman, in order to obtain the information he needed to justify his angry actions.⁸⁹

Instead of showing Doña Marina as a traitor because of her direct role in key events of the Conquest, *Xicoténcatl* depicts her treachery playing out on the level of personal relationships, which represent the broader dynamics of the Conquest. For instance, in contrast to earlier sources, in which Marina's wit and astuteness are positively evaluated as serving the Spaniards in the Conquest, *Xicoténcatl* depicts her using these qualities to deceive and manipulate Spaniards and natives alike, purely for her own benefit.

And while the primary sources do not comment in-depth on Marina's intimate relationships with Cortés or anyone else, *Xicoténcatl* depicts her as a promiscuous seductress. After the narrative has stated that she was Cortés's concubine, Doña Marina professes her love to Diego de Ordaz, one of Cortés's captains and the only virtuous Spaniard in the novel.⁹⁰ She

⁸⁶ See González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 91 for more on the reasons why La Malinche is portrayed as a traitor to indigenous peoples in nationalist histories.

⁸⁷ *Xicoténcatl*, 83–84.

⁸⁸ *Xicoténcatl*, 81.

⁸⁹ *Xicoténcatl*, 83–84.

⁹⁰ *Xicoténcatl*, 39–40.

claims that she is merely Cortés's slave and not his lover, but Ordaz rejects her advances as an insult to his honor.⁹¹ Ordaz has, in fact, fallen in love with Teutila, whose virtue that contrasts Marina's vice leads him to elevate her "to the level of a divinity."⁹² Marina deceives both Teutila and Ordaz in hopes of keeping them from one another and carrying out her own "amorous intrigue" with Ordaz.⁹³ She eventually lures the honest Ordaz into a dark, locked room and succeeds in seducing him into a sexual encounter.⁹⁴ Ordaz is portrayed as an honorable man, victimized by the scheming Marina, who immediately denounces what occurred, and repudiates her.⁹⁵ This concept of the native Marina freely giving herself sexually to a Spaniard becomes a pillar of Malinche's popular mythical portrayal, which will be elaborated by subsequent interpreters. Despite her status as a slave to the Spanish, *Xicoténcatl* portrays Marina as exercising a considerable degree of agency in her pursuit of one of her Spanish masters, although this move is condemned as evil and selfish.

It is Doña Marina's sexual relations with Cortés, however, that play the biggest role in forwarding an understanding of her as betraying native Mexicans through her alliance with the Spanish. Although Doña Marina is Cortés's slave in *Xicoténcatl*, her move to concubine and confidante makes her complicit in his actions, and her assertions that she is merely his slave and not willingly his lover come across as insincere.⁹⁶ So, setting aside historical questions of her options as a slave, *Xicoténcatl* depicts La Malinche's sexual submission to Cortés as representative of the native people who allied with the Spanish—alliances that the novel forwards as a major cause of the Spanish victory over all of Mexico. It also warns nineteenth

⁹¹ *Xicoténcatl*, 40.

⁹² *Xicoténcatl*, 40.

⁹³ *Xicoténcatl*, 41.

⁹⁴ *Xicoténcatl*, 47–48.

⁹⁵ *Xicoténcatl*, 47–48.

⁹⁶ *Xicoténcatl*, 59.

century Mexican readers of the dangers of accepting foreign intervention and values into the newly independent nation.⁹⁷

In regard to Cortés, Teutila's character and conduct also implicitly critique those of Doña Marina. As the narrative moves forward, Cortés becomes enamored of Teutila and seeks a romantic encounter with her. While the text has stated that the enslaved Marina became Cortés's concubine in a short time, the captive Teutila forcefully rejects Cortés's advances, even though her hostile outcry as a prisoner of a powerful military commander seems implausible: she expresses that she would rather die than be involved with Cortés, calls him a monster and a barbarian, curses his birth, and asks him, "in what kind of hell have you learned such hypocrisy and evil?"⁹⁸ Later, Teutila flees Cortés's attempt to be alone with her by jumping out of the window of her prison, with the narrator commenting that, "great spirits never lack resources, and a determined will defeats all obstacles."⁹⁹ That Marina remains in the room as Teutila escapes strengthens the narrator's implication that, like Teutila, Marina too could have resisted being Cortés's lover, and thereby also have avoided colluding with the Spaniards. She is not, however, portrayed as the virtuous woman that Teutila is, and seems consigned by the narrative to her shameful role.

Doña Marina's involvement with the detestable Spaniards leads Xicoténcatl the Younger to ask her if she is still an American (i.e., native of Mexico), or if she has been "corrupted and contaminated" by the Spaniards' "magical arts" that upset all notions of good and evil.¹⁰⁰ Marina responds by painting herself as the victim of fate, and the compassionate Xicoténcatl begins to

⁹⁷ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 56.

⁹⁸ *Xicoténcatl*, 50.

⁹⁹ *Xicoténcatl*, 100.

¹⁰⁰ *Xicoténcatl*, 59.

fall “into the web being spun by his able and astute compatriot.”¹⁰¹ Although he still loves Teutila, the realization that she may choose to be with Ordaz instead opens Xicoténcatl up to the idea of marrying Doña Marina, who has fooled him into believing she may be virtuous, even though she is “much loved by the foreigners.”¹⁰²

Xicoténcatl’s illusions are shattered when he learns that Doña Marina is pregnant, apparently unaware that she is Cortés’s concubine.¹⁰³ The fact that Doña Marina carries the child of the foreign commander is the ultimate symbol of her betrayal to indigenous people in *Xicoténcatl*. Realizing he has been deceived by Marina’s appearance of virtue, Xicoténcatl decries the extent of her duplicity and treachery, calling her an “unworthy American . . . a thousand times more detestable than those who have corrupted her,” and an unworthy betrayer, prostituted to a tyrant, who is carrying “the fruit of her criminal love.”¹⁰⁴ He too explicitly contrasts the “poisonous serpent” Marina with the “pure and heavenly Teutila.”¹⁰⁵

This scene reflects Marina’s symbolic function in the text as exemplary of indigenous people who ally with, and thereby sell out to, the Spanish invaders. It is significant that this occurs not primarily through her role as an informant to Cortés about the plans of native nations, as one might expect based on her portrayals in the primary texts, but rather through her sexual activity and subsequent motherhood. The image of La Malinche betraying the native peoples of Mexico through immoral sexual activity fuels the negative stereotypes of her that develop in this time, and continue into the present.

Xicoténcatl’s negative initial portrayal of La Malinche’s pregnancy also seems to reflect the struggle in postindependence Mexico with how to understand the mestizo identity of the

¹⁰¹ *Xicoténcatl*, 59.

¹⁰² *Xicoténcatl*, 63.

¹⁰³ *Xicoténcatl*, 64–65.

¹⁰⁴ *Xicoténcatl*, 65, 70.

¹⁰⁵ *Xicoténcatl*, 65.

nation. While not everyone in Mexico was racially mestizo, there was no denying the cultural hybridity that existed in aspects of society, or the reality that this was brought about through the violence of the Conquest. In *Xicoténcatl*, as in other works, La Malinche functions as the symbolic mother of mestizo Mexico, since her son with Cortés often represents the first mestizo child born in New Spain. *Xicoténcatl*'s initial denouncement of Doña Marina's pregnancy, therefore, also casts the mestizo offspring she produces in a negative light, especially since there are questions at first about the paternity of the child.

Upon giving birth to her son, however, Doña Marina repents of her former evils, providing some hope for the future of her mestizo son. Her extreme labor pains are compounded by her spiritual anguish over her past sins, which she confesses to Father Olmedo and others as she faces both death and Hell.¹⁰⁶ Claiming that there is no remedy for such a great sinner as herself, Marina states that her torment serves as a lesson to others who also "abandon the path of virtue."¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, the sight of her newborn son stokes a maternal affection in her that brings her peace, and she eventually regains her strength.

Although Marina's motherhood, as well as the example of Teutila, begins to lead her on the path of virtue, it is not until she witnesses Magiscatzin's death that her full conversion takes place. Lying on his deathbed, the Tlaxcalan traitor is tormented by his crimes and the thought of the punishment that awaits him.¹⁰⁸ When he dies in agony, Doña Marina sobs tears of true repentance for her past evils that she now rids from her soul.¹⁰⁹ Whereas her prior moment of penitence seemed to be cast as part of her adherence to Christianity, the text now portrays

¹⁰⁶ *Xicoténcatl*, 97–98.

¹⁰⁷ *Xicoténcatl*, 90.

¹⁰⁸ *Xicoténcatl*, 119–120.

¹⁰⁹ *Xicoténcatl*, 120.

Marina's full conversion as coming only with her renouncing Christianity completely.¹¹⁰ When Father Olmedo comes to minister to her in her sorrow, Doña Marina claims that it was her "ambition of going from servitude to lover of a powerful man" that led her to renounce her ancestors' religion in favor of his.¹¹¹ She goes on to reject the religion of Olmedo and the conquistadores forever, stating that its kind teachings are accompanied by atrocious and sinful actions, and that her turn from a virtuous to a criminal life began when she left her "simple and pure worship" as a supposed idolater behind for Christianity.¹¹² Marina then boldly proclaims that, while she remains Cortés's slave and will do domestic chores for him, she "will no longer be the party to his ambitious plans or the accomplice to his excesses."¹¹³ In a stunning reversal, therefore, Marina's return to the virtuous life involves her becoming more like the non-Christian, yet pure, Teutila, who had already rejected Spanish influence in her life.

When Cortés learns of Marina's conversion, he threatens her for her sudden prudishness, not wanting to lose the native woman whose assistance is very useful to him.¹¹⁴ Realizing that her resolve is firm, Cortés lashes out at Marina for wanting to abandon the man who has supposedly done so much good for her and is the "tender father" of her son.¹¹⁵ Marina responds that she is grateful for what he has done for her, but that Nature has brought about this change in her; Cortés does not persist.

At the end of the novel, after the death of the noble Teutila, Marina tries to convince Cortés to also turn from vice to virtue.¹¹⁶ She almost prevails upon him when Father Olmedo

¹¹⁰ *Xicoténcatl*, 120–121.

¹¹¹ *Xicoténcatl*, 120.

¹¹² *Xicoténcatl*, 120.

¹¹³ *Xicoténcatl*, 121.

¹¹⁴ *Xicoténcatl*, 123–124.

¹¹⁵ *Xicoténcatl*, 124.

¹¹⁶ *Xicoténcatl*, 155–156.

gives him a Christian exhortation to repentance and following of divine commandments.¹¹⁷ This has the opposite effect of reaffirming Cortés in his previous ways, and, ambitious as ever, he resumes his march to conquer Tenochtitlan, which suggests that Marina's words could have prevented him from doing so. The contrast in this scene between Olmedo's Christian exhortation and that of Marina, which comes from her harmony with Nature, seems to present a striking reinterpretation of Marina's Christian evangelistic role found in earlier texts.

La Malinche in Other Postindependence Literary Works

Xicoténcatl is the earliest, and perhaps most influential, text of the era to put forward what becomes the common understanding of La Malinche as a traitor to the indigenous peoples of Mexico, in large part because of her perceived sexual immorality. There are, however, other nineteenth and early twentieth century works of literature and drama that deal with La Malinche and the Conquest. Some of these maintain a similar basic portrayal of her as is found in *Xicoténcatl*, while varying certain aspects of it. Others provide a more marked contrast to this portrait.¹¹⁸

As seen in *Xicoténcatl*, Cypess notes the tendency in several nineteenth century narratives to use Marina, an indigenous woman, as a metaphor for the native lands that the Spaniards conquer—an action represented by her sexual relations with the captain of the Conquest, Cortés.¹¹⁹ She further argues that portraying the Conquest in terms of sexual domination and submission has implications not only for understanding Mexican history, but

¹¹⁷ *Xicoténcatl*, 156.

¹¹⁸ See Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 57–97 for more details on some of the significant works of this era.

¹¹⁹ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 89–90. Cypess also notes a wider tendency to use *woman* as metaphor for land in other Latin American texts dealing with colonization.

also for prescribing male-female relations in such a way that reinforces the patriarchal structures of society in Mexico, by which the supposedly weaker female submits to the dominant male.¹²⁰ While such a dynamic is not expressed in all the texts of the era, it influences later interpretations of La Malinche that become widely accepted.

According to Cypess, the historical novel by Ireneo Paz (1836–1924), *Doña Marina* (1883), provides a strong contrast to the negative portrait of La Malinche found in *Xicoténcatl*, even though aspects of this portrayal remain.¹²¹ She argues that, similar to *Xicoténcatl*, *Doña Marina* uses sexual relationships between native women and Spanish men to represent the dynamics of the Conquest.¹²² Writing some fifty years after Mexican independence, however, Paz takes a more positive view of Spanish culture and influence than does *Xicoténcatl*, as well as of Doña Marina. In *Doña Marina*, Paz expands on Díaz's positive characterization of her, including her wit and skill as an interpreter, as well as her manly valor, demonstrated especially when she wrests a dagger out of the hand of a man who is trying to kill Cortés.¹²³ Paz also expresses more sympathy for Doña Marina than does *Xicoténcatl*, describing her as a victim of various setbacks since she was a child.¹²⁴ He even goes so far as to state that she was an ideal human being for the time and circumstances in which she lived.¹²⁵

Consistent with the earliest sources, Paz shows Doña Marina as an extremely faithful servant of Cortés. He also takes up themes seen in other literature of the era, such as the idea that

¹²⁰ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 90. Here Cypess draws on the work of Annette Kolodny, *The Lay of the Land: Metaphor as Experience and History in American Life and Letters* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1975).

¹²¹ See Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 76–90.

¹²² Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 10, 70, 89.

¹²³ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 77, 78; Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 153; Ireneo Paz, *Doña Marina: Novela Histórica* (Mexico City: Ireneo Paz, 1883), 1:24–30, 1:325–327. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/009775101/Home> (original from University of Virginia). All references to this novel are to this edition.

¹²⁴ Paz, *Doña Marina*, 1:30.

¹²⁵ Paz, *Doña Marina*, 1:30.

both the Conquest and Marina's role in it were predestined, and that Marina was truly in love with Cortés.¹²⁶ Such characterizations help justify her alliance with the Spaniards, as does Paz's presentation of other native women who also choose Spanish over native men.¹²⁷ In contrast to *Xicoténcatl*, Paz's work depicts this opting for European culture and values positively—at least for the women involved—as embracing a more civilized way of life.¹²⁸

Paz also portrays Doña Marina in her role as symbolic mother of mestizos more positively than does *Xicoténcatl*.¹²⁹ For example, although she is clearly Cortés's lover in Paz's works, he portrays her as modest in her sexual encounters with the man she loves, in contrast to the lustful Doña Marina of *Xicoténcatl*.¹³⁰ And Doña Marina even decides to sacrifice her true love, Cortés, for the well-being of her son. This occurs after Cortés's wife, Doña Catalina, arrives in Mexico from Cuba, and dies not long afterward, with some suspecting that Cortés killed her. Marina, therefore, decides to marry Juan Jaramillo, whose reputation is not in question and will supposedly be a better father to her son.¹³¹ While the earliest chronicles agree that Marina did marry Jaramillo after bearing a son to Cortés, Paz's explanation of how it came about paints a more empowered portrait of Marina than does Gómara, who claims it was because Jaramillo was drunk, or of other authors, who conclude that Cortés got tired of Marina and passed her off to another man.¹³²

¹²⁶ E.g., Paz, *Doña Marina*, 1:247; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 76, 79, 80, 84, 89.

¹²⁷ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 76.

¹²⁸ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 97–90.

¹²⁹ Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 10, 77.

¹³⁰ Paz, *Doña Marina*, 1:281–282; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 78–79.

¹³¹ Paz, *Doña Marina*, 1:396–397; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 85–86.

¹³² E.g., González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 113 cites Alfredo Chavero's drama, *Xochitl*, as one work in which Cortés marries La Malinche off to Jaramillo once he was done using her.

La Malinche in Historical Works of Independent Mexico

There are some similarities among novels, dramas, and historical writings of postindependence Mexico in terms of their portrayals of La Malinche. This is to be expected, since the popularity of certain works infuses their interpretations of her into the wider culture. There are significant differences, however, between how nationalist and pro-Hispanic histories view La Malinche, as discussed below.

La Malinche in Nationalist Histories

Some historical writings of the nineteenth century reflect the notion of La Malinche as a traitor to indigenous peoples, even though they may differ with literary works in the details. As González Hernández notes, nationalist Mexican historians are typically the ones to forward this view, in part because they tend to present an idyllic portrait of the pre-Hispanic civilizations that La Malinche's cooperation with the Spanish supposedly helped destroy.¹³³ In this context, a Malinche who is complicit with Cortés becomes emblematic of the indigenous people who supported the Spanish in the Conquest and thereby facilitated the subjugation of pre-Hispanic Mexico. González Hernández states that the nationalist view of history dominates in this era, making its way into many school textbooks and influential historical works, in large part because many prominent historians were also politicians.¹³⁴

One such figure was the nationalist Carlos María de Bustamante (1774–1848). In his sizeable history of the Mexican independence movement, he tells how Francisco Javier Venegas, the Spanish viceroy of New Spain when the push for independence began, had a mistress whom

¹³³ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 90–91.

¹³⁴ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 91–92.

he called his “Malinzin” or “Malinche.”¹³⁵ Bustamante explains that she earned this name because, just as La Malinche passed secrets on to Cortés, so too did Venegas’s mistress learn the plans of those in the independence movement by acting like she was one of them, and then shared them with Venegas, who opposed Mexican independence. The text therefore describes Venegas’s mistress as a bad or evil woman who put what she owed to her country after what she owed to her lover.¹³⁶ It further calls her crazy, and claims that her actions contributed to the enslavement of Mexico.¹³⁷ Here too Bustamante draws a comparison with Doña Marina, explicitly stating that she betrayed her homeland by revealing to Cortés the plot against the Spaniards in Cholula.¹³⁸

These references to La Malinche reflect a basic understanding of her informant role in the Conquest as that of a spy who contributes to the defeat of her native land—a claim that is apparently based on the notion of all pre-Hispanic peoples as a unified entity, since Cholula was not La Malinche’s native city-state. They also show that, by this time, Malinche is not just a woman who played a role in Mexico’s past, but also a paradigm for treacherous behavior that is used to characterize others—especially women.

Mexican historian Manuel Orozco y Berra (1816–1881) also forwards a view of Marina as treacherous for her supposedly major role in the Cholula massacre. His *Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de Mexico* (*Ancient History and of the Conquest of Mexico*; 1880) both praises and criticizes the Spaniards’ role in the Conquest. Although he largely follows Díaz for his description of Doña Marina, he gives quite a different interpretation of her role in the Cholula

¹³⁵ Carlos María de Bustamante, *Cuadro Histórico de la Revolución de la América Mexicana, Comenzada en Quince de Septiembre de Mil Ochocientos Diez* (Mexico City: Imprenta de la Aguila, 1823–1832), vol. 1, letter 19, p. 4. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008649882> (original from New York Public Library). All citations of this work are from this edition.

¹³⁶ Bustamante, *Cuadro Histórico*, vol. 1, letter 19, p. 4.

¹³⁷ Bustamante, *Cuadro Histórico*, vol. 1, letter 19, p. 5.

¹³⁸ Bustamante, *Cuadro Histórico*, vol. 1, letter 19, p. 5.

episode.¹³⁹ After recounting the details of the alleged attack prepared for the Spanish in Cholula, as described in the earliest sources, Orozco y Berra gives his own assessment of the veracity of this narrative.¹⁴⁰ He concludes that there was no full-scale, premeditated ambush prepared for the Spanish in the way that many of the earliest Spanish chronicles describe it.

He discounts, for example, the signs of an imminent insurrection that Cortés's Tlaxcalan allies supposedly perceived in Cholula, claiming they were normal precautions a city would take when it was about to be invaded by its enemies—in this case, not the Spaniards, but rather the Tlaxcalans.¹⁴¹ In fact, Orozco y Berra claims that the Tlaxcalans exaggerated the alleged dangers for the Spaniards in Cholula, and accused its residents of treachery, in order to incite the Spaniards to exact revenge on this enemy town.¹⁴² This understanding that the alleged plot was actually contrived by the Spaniard's Tlaxcalan allies in order to exact revenge on Cholula was already expressed in the *Florentine Codex*.¹⁴³ Díaz also affirms that the Tlaxcalans were especially eager to kill their Cholulan enemies.¹⁴⁴

What is distinctive about Orozco y Berra's account (as well as others of the era) is how he perceives La Malinche's role in these events. He claims that the Tlaxcalans succeeded in their aims primarily through the assistance of Doña Marina, who he states had aligned herself with the Tlaxcalans' interests. The core of her treachery, according to the author, is that she invented the story of the Cholulan noblewoman who supposedly divulged the existence and details of the plot to her—a story that is presented as true in many of the earliest Spanish accounts of the

¹³⁹ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 93–95.

¹⁴⁰ Manuel Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua y de la Conquista de Mexico* (Mexico City: Esteva, 1880), 4:237–257.

¹⁴¹ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:252.

¹⁴² Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:252–253.

¹⁴³ *Florentine Codex* in *WPH*, 94–95.

¹⁴⁴ Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 200.

Conquest.¹⁴⁵ Since this story included the woman offering to shelter Marina in her house and marry her to her son, Orozco y Berra suggests that Marina may have concocted it in order to make Cortés jealous.¹⁴⁶ In any case, he strengthens his notion that Marina was culpable for the massacre that followed her reporting the alleged plot to Cortés by dismissing the confessions of the other Cholulans, recounted in the primary sources, claiming that it is implausible that they would have divulged this information so readily.¹⁴⁷ Marina thus goes from being a faithful interpreter in the earliest sources and colonial era texts to being a false one in Orozco y Berra's account.

So, according to Orozco y Berra, the treachery of the Tlaxcalan allies of the Spaniards, and especially of Doña Marina, is ultimately responsible for the Cholula massacre. He argues that the Spaniards are not to blame for believing the reports of both Marina and their indigenous allies that convinced them the plot was real, so that their subsequent violence against the Cholulans was self-defense. They did, however, act excessively and cruelly in inflicting their punishment.

The assessment of La Malinche as a traitor because of her role in Cholula is found in other nationalist historical works of the era, including the idea that she made up the supposed plot altogether. Some works also accuse her of being a partial interpreter who changed her translations for her own benefit.¹⁴⁸ While one could debate whether this interpretation is a matter of scapegoating La Malinche, or of simply evaluating the evidence differently than in earlier sources, it is a clear departure from her earliest portrayals and those of the subsequent colonial era. We cannot know for certain whether or not the La Malinche made up the plot, or the story of

¹⁴⁵ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:252–253.

¹⁴⁶ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:253.

¹⁴⁷ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:252.

¹⁴⁸ Orozco y Berra, *Historia Antigua*, 4:252; González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 100.

the noblewoman, any more than we can know if the first Spanish chroniclers made them up to justify their own actions. In any case, the image of a treacherous La Malinche became more influential from the nineteenth century onward than her positive portrayals as an apt interpreter and cultural intermediary.

The view that the Tlaxcalans who allied with the Spanish are also responsible for the subjugation of all native peoples of Mexico can also be found in nationalist histories, but, as noted above, such an understanding can be more clearly substantiated from the earliest sources than can the image of a treacherous La Malinche.

La Malinche in Pro-Hispanic Histories

As discussed above, nationalist historians tend toward an understanding of La Malinche as responsible, to some degree, for the downfall of the pre-Hispanic civilizations that they claim as the progenitors of the modern Mexican nation. It is not surprising, therefore, that historians who take a more positive view of Spanish intervention in Mexico tend to affirm La Malinche for her key role in the Conquest, echoing the earliest Spanish chronicles.¹⁴⁹

One influential conservative Mexican politician and historian was Lucas Alamán (1792–1853). In his *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana (Discourses on the History of the Mexican Republic; 1844–1849)*, he portrays the Conquest positively as the foundational event of the Mexican nation, rather than tracing the country's origins to its pre-Hispanic past. He argues that the supposed civilization and Christianization of Mexico justified

¹⁴⁹ For an overview of works that take this view, see González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 119–131.

the Conquest, of which violence was an inevitable part, and that subsequent Spanish rule was also beneficial.¹⁵⁰

In terms of La Malinche, Alamán follows Díaz's description and praise of her as a faithful and intelligent interpreter who played a key role in the Conquest. One of her great contributions to Cortés's success was her ability to establish relationships with other native peoples, which enabled Cortés to turn them against each another.¹⁵¹ What Alamán thereby evaluates as positive is clearly something that nationalist historians could use in support of their image of La Malinche as betraying native peoples. Even so, Alamán further states that Doña Marina, as he calls her, also served her compatriots (i.e., other native people) by acting as an intermediary between them and Cortés.¹⁵² He also disputes Solís's claim that Cortés took Marina as his mistress in order to secure her loyalty—an act he agrees would be reprehensible—and instead attributes this move to Cortés's propensity for women.¹⁵³

In Alamán's text, Doña Marina is acculturated to Spanish ways, sharing not only the language but also the ideas of the conquistadores. As in Díaz's account, Alamán portrays Doña Marina as an exemplary Christian convert, recounting the story of her forgiving her mother for selling her into slavery in terms of the biblical Joseph.¹⁵⁴ He also follows Díaz in ascribing manly courage to her, by which she gave exhortations to the Spaniards' indigenous allies to trust in the Christian God, even in the most dangerous circumstances.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 119–120.

¹⁵¹ Lucas Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana: desde la Época de la Conquista que los Españoles Hicieron a Finés del Siglo XV y Principios de las Islas y Continente Americano hasta la Independencia* (Mexico City: J. M. Lara, 1844), 1:210. Accessed on HathiTrust, <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000278241> (original from University of Michigan). All citations of this work are from this edition.

¹⁵² Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana*, 1:210.

¹⁵³ Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana*, 1:210.

¹⁵⁴ Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana*, 1:209.

¹⁵⁵ Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana*, 1:91.

In regard to the Cholula massacre, Alamán agrees with the earliest chronicles' description of Doña Marina learning of the plot against the Spaniards by a Cholulan noblewoman and communicating this to Cortés, who confirms it with other citizens.¹⁵⁶ The text neither praises nor critiques her actions here, but they are implicitly positive, since Alamán presents the plot as real and the Spaniards' and Tlaxcalans' violence as justified punishment.¹⁵⁷

Overall, Alamán's work maintains a portrait of Marina that is fairly consistent with those found in the earliest chronicles, and is representative of the generally positive way she is viewed in pro-Hispanic historical works.

La Malinche as the Mexican Eve

As alluded to in *Xicoténcatl*, an understanding of La Malinche as the Mexican Eve develops in the centuries following the Conquest. While *Xicoténcatl* hints at this connection in regard to Doña Marina's deceptive and seductive nature, other interpretations link the women because of La Malinche's symbolic function as the mother of the Mexican nation. She takes on this role as the mistress of Cortés, who played an undeniable role in events that led to modern Mexico's formation. The two are depicted at times as the founding couple of Mexico because of the mestizo son they bear, symbolically viewed as the first in New Spain, who comes to represent the mestizo nature of the modern Mexican nation. This understanding encapsulates some of the tensions between nationalist and pro-Hispanic views of Mexican identity and history, since affirming *mestizaje* (i.e., racial and/or cultural mixing) means not only uplifting the

¹⁵⁶ Alamán, *Disertaciones Sobre la Historia de la República Mexicana*, 1:98.

¹⁵⁷ William H. Prescott, a historian from the United States, presents a definitely positive view of Doña Marina's role in revealing the Cholula plot, calling her the "good angel" of the Spanish Conquest. See William H. Prescott, *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortez* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1864), 2:16.

indigenous and mestizo elements of Mexican society, but also acknowledging the Spanish influence on it.

Cortés and Malinche, a 1926 mural by José Clemente Orozco, captures this tension. Painted over a staircase in the National Preparatory High School in Mexico City, it shows a naked Cortés and Malinche standing side-by-side in a natural setting that recalls the biblical Garden of Eden (Gen 2:4–25). Cortés’s white skin contrasts La Malinche’s darker complexion and hair, clearly depicting her as a native woman. With one hand, Cortés grasps Malinche’s right hand, while he places his other arm across her body, restraining or protecting her from stepping on the naked body of a native person that is lying at their feet. Similar to some modern paintings of Mary Magdalene, the position of Cortés’s arm leaves one of Malinche’s breasts exposed. Her eyes are closed as Cortés looks off into the distance while he takes a step over the indigenous body.

This mural has often been interpreted as a portrait of Cortés and La Malinche as the Mexican Adam and Eve who give birth to the mestizo Mexicans.¹⁵⁸ It is not so clear, however, whether it is taking a positive, negative, or ambivalent view of the founding couple and their offspring. While it certainly acknowledges the mestizo reality of modern Mexico, it also seems to suggest that this came about through the violent subjugation of pre-Hispanic indigenous peoples, likely represented by the faceless body of a native person that appears to be underneath Cortés’s foot. Indigenous mother Malinche survived this fate, apparently protected by the Spanish conquistador, but their body language suggests that she too is subject to the dominant European male.

¹⁵⁸ For a reproduction and one interpretation of this mural, see Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 92–94.

La Malinche in Octavio Paz's *The Labyrinth of Solitude*

Octavio Paz's 1950 book-length essay, *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, presents an interpretation of La Malinche that solidifies her image as a traitor to the Mexican people and as the negative archetype of both motherhood and the female sex, in contrast to the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹⁵⁹ It is arguably the most influential presentation of La Malinche since *Xicoténcatl*, or even since Bernal Díaz's sixteenth century portrait of her.

The grandson of Ireneo Paz, Octavio Paz (1914–1998) was an influential Mexican writer who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1990. He also served as a Mexican diplomat for over twenty years, and first wrote *The Labyrinth of Solitude* in 1945 while stationed in Paris. The work provides a thorough analysis of Mexican identity and history, which Paz sees as fundamentally linked.

In a chapter entitled “The Sons of La Malinche,” Paz provides an analysis of the Mexican person in relation to Mexican history that reflects aspects of both Hegelianism and existentialism.¹⁶⁰ He describes the Mexican as an enigma even to himself, who almost always wears a mask before others to cover his true self.¹⁶¹ The Mexican is in a state of self-alienation due to internal struggles that have roots in, and can be understood from, history, but that can ultimately only be dealt with through confronting himself in the present.¹⁶² The core of the

¹⁵⁹ The book was originally published in Spanish. For an expanded edition in Spanish, see Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la Soledad, Postdata, Vuelta a El Laberinto de la Soledad*, 3rd ed. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999). For an English translation, see Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude; The Other Mexico; Return to the Labyrinth of Solitude; Mexico and the United States; The Philanthropic Ogre*, trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Phillips Belash (New York: Grove, 1985). All citations of *The Labyrinth of Solitude* are to this English edition.

¹⁶⁰ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 65–88. The name of the chapter in Spanish is “Los Hijos de La Malinche.”

¹⁶¹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 70. I use the masculine pronoun *he* here to refer to the Mexican person in general, since Paz writes from a masculine perspective that specifies the female *other* when she is directly referenced.

¹⁶² Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 70–73.

problem, according to Paz, is that “the Mexican does not want or does not dare to be himself,” except in solitude.¹⁶³

To get at the tension inherent in the Mexican person, Paz explores what he considers to be certain universal realities of human beings, and specifically, of Mexican males and females, of which there are specific instantiations in history. He focuses on the Spanish verb *chingar*, which has a variety of meanings in different cultures, but that in Mexico always denotes doing violence to another. It is “an emergence from oneself to penetrate another by force ... to injure, to lacerate, to violate—bodies, souls, objects—and to destroy.”¹⁶⁴ While not synonymous with the act of sex, Paz argues that *chingar* can allude to it, in which case it connotes violation or deception.¹⁶⁵ Although Spanish verbs do not have grammatical gender, Paz defines *chingar* as masculine: it is active and cruel; it wounds, stains, and “provokes a bitter, resentful satisfaction.”¹⁶⁶

Paz then describes the paradigmatic Mexican male and female in terms of the verb *chingar*. The one who does the action implied by the verb is the *chingón*, which Paz equates with the male, or the *macho*, who is closed. He enacts the verb *chingar* upon the female, the *chingada*, ripping open the one who is “pure passivity, defenseless against the exterior world.”¹⁶⁷ The male and female—the *chingón* and the *chingada*—relate to each other violently in a dialectical relationship of the closed and the open. For Paz, *chingar* ultimately means “the triumph of the closed, the male, the powerful, over the open.”¹⁶⁸ This dialectic plays out in all aspects of

¹⁶³ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 71, 73.

¹⁶⁴ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 76–77.

¹⁶⁵ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 77.

¹⁶⁶ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 77.

¹⁶⁷ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 77.

¹⁶⁸ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 78.

Mexican society, in which every person is either a *chingón* or a *chingada*, defined not only in terms of sex, but also in terms of power relations.

Paz frames Mexican identity in terms of this dialectic, citing the phrase “*hijos de la Chingada*” (“sons of the violated/penetrated woman”)¹⁶⁹ as reflective of the internal tensions in Mexican identity. The ultimate *Chingada* for Paz is an archetypal Mother, defined as “forcibly opened, violated or deceived.”¹⁷⁰ She is so passive that she does not even resist the violence perpetrated by the *macho* or *chingón*, who undeniably resembles the conquistador.¹⁷¹ This figure of the violent father/macho/*chingón* is defined by exercising power in an arbitrary, insensitive, and aggressive way.¹⁷² The son or child of the *Chingada*, therefore, is the “offspring of violation, abduction or deceit.”¹⁷³ At the general level of humanity, Paz sees all women as the *Chingada*, since, even if a woman gives herself willingly to a man, she is still torn open by him in the sexual act. In this regard, since all people are born of woman, all people are offspring of the *Chingada*, or “sons of Eve.”¹⁷⁴

For Paz, however, this reality takes on particular characteristics and expression in Mexico that have roots in the Conquest. His analysis centers on the *Chingada*, the violated mother, who is naturally associated with the Conquest, since it too was a violation—both in the historical sense, and “in the very flesh of Indian women.”¹⁷⁵ As Cortés’s mistress, La Malinche is the “*Chingada* in person,” symbol of “the Indian women who were fascinated, violated or seduced

¹⁶⁹ This my translation; the Spanish noun *hijos* is masculine, and can refer either to sons alone, or to both sons and daughters, since the masculine form is used for groups of mixed genders. I translated it as *sons* rather than *children* to reflect the translation of the chapter title, “The Sons of La Malinche.”

¹⁷⁰ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 79.

¹⁷¹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 82, 85.

¹⁷² Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 81.

¹⁷³ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 79.

¹⁷⁴ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 80.

¹⁷⁵ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86.

by the Spaniards.”¹⁷⁶ Although Paz defines Malinche as one who was violated, he also states that she “gave herself voluntarily to the conquistador,” not addressing the complexities of her potential agency as a slave.¹⁷⁷ From the perspective of the Mexican consciousness, which Paz represents, the implication is that La Malinche is to blame at some level for her submission to Cortés. Even though he discarded her once she was no longer useful to him, La Malinche is not a victim of her circumstances for whom Mexicans have sympathy. Instead, as the symbolic mother of the first mestizo, and therefore of all Mexicans, the Mexican people see La Malinche as having betrayed them by allowing herself to be seduced or violated by the Spanish invader—a betrayal for which they still have not forgiven her. This treachery of giving herself sexually to the foreigner is what defines La Malinche, or Doña Marina, in this essay, rather than any particular aspect of her role as an interpreter and informant in the Conquest. In fact, Paz describes how the noun *malinchista*, derived from the name Malinche, became common in his time as a name for, and denunciation of, anyone corrupted by foreign influence. These *malinchistas*, who want Mexico to open to the outside world, are the “true sons of La Malinche.”¹⁷⁸ La Malinche’s alleged betrayal thus becomes a metaphor that can apply to anyone seen as preferring what is foreign to what is Mexican.

At the same time, Paz’s metaphorical use of La Malinche’s sexually active body to represent the subjugation of indigenous lands by the Spanish conquistadores has lasting implications for her image in particular. To be sure, this metaphor has appeared in previous works, such as *Xicoténcatl*, but there at least one of Doña Marina’s sexual encounters arose from her own initiative, and she exercises a degree of agency and a prominent speaking role

¹⁷⁶ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86.

¹⁷⁷ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86.

¹⁷⁸ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86.

throughout the narrative. By contrast, Paz's essay makes La Malinche a completely silent and passive figure, whose only "volitional" act is to allow herself to be violated by Cortés; essentially, her betrayal is her being raped, which opened all of Mexico to foreign influence. This portrait of La Malinche as archetypal violated mother reduces the historical woman who had prominent speaking and cultural intermediary roles in the Conquest to her body and its usefulness to others. Sexual violence is inherent in this image, consistent with the dialectic of open and closed that Paz sees at the heart of Mexican life.

Paz's understanding of La Malinche/*La Chingada* also creates a stereotype that potentially affects all women. As the prime instantiation of the violated Mother, La Malinche embodies openness to such a degree that she is completely passive.¹⁷⁹ Such openness leads to a loss of identity and ultimately, to annihilation.¹⁸⁰ To be the *Chingada* is to be nothing, so that La Malinche, as paradigmatic *Chingada*, represents this negation. Since Paz describes the *Chingada* more generally as "the cruel incarnation of the feminine condition," La Malinche represents the negative pole of female sex itself, and indeed, casts any female who opens herself sexually to a male in a negative light.¹⁸¹

As the violated mother, La Malinche stands in contrasts to the Virgin Mother, who in Mexico is best known as the Virgin of Guadalupe. While La Malinche loses her native identity—and indeed, her very self—through her complete openness to the foreigner, Guadalupe is definitively an Indian Virgin, making it understandable that Mexican Catholicism centers on her cult, according to Paz. He also attributes the "swift popularity" of Guadalupe's cult to its location at the same place where Tonantzin, the native mother goddess of fertility, was (and still is)

¹⁷⁹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85.

¹⁸⁰ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85–86.

¹⁸¹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86.

worshipped.¹⁸² In contrast to Tonantzin, however, Guadalupe does not ensure good harvests, but rather is the mother who helps the poor, weak, and oppressed. As the universal Mother, the Virgin also functions as intermediary between “disinherited man” and the “inscrutable power.”¹⁸³ Although Paz describes Guadalupe as “pure receptivity,” taking on the relatively passive roles of consoling, drying tears, and calming passions, she is not nearly as passive as the violated Mother, the *Chingada*, whose openness-into-annihilation has been noted.¹⁸⁴ Paz goes so far as to describe the *Chingada* as “an inert heap of bones, blood, and dust,” with her taint residing in her very sex.¹⁸⁵ So, while both Mothers exhibit openness because of their femaleness, there is a clear contrast presented between the sexually pure Virgin Mother, and the willfully violated *Chingada* Mother, who is embodied in La Malinche and represents the negative element of the female sex.

As the violated Mother, La Malinche is central to the Mexican crisis of identity. According to Paz, “the strange permanence of Cortés and La Malinche in the Mexican’s imagination and sensibilities reveals that they are something more than historical figures: they are symbols of a secret conflict that we have still not resolved.”¹⁸⁶ Citing Orozco’s mural, Paz acknowledges the reputation that La Malinche has acquired as the Mexican Eve. The *hijos de la chingada*, or the offspring of Malinche, as the violated Mother, are ultimately for Paz the mestizo Mexicans who cannot forgive their mother for giving herself to the foreigner. Paz sees in the Mexican’s repudiation of La Malinche a condemnation of their origins and hybrid identity; they have not reconciled with the fact that they are the offspring of a violation, which is also construed as a betrayal by their mother.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85.

¹⁸³ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85.

¹⁸⁴ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85.

¹⁸⁵ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 85.

¹⁸⁶ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 87.

¹⁸⁷ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 86–87.

Paz writes in the period following the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920), which was a time of radical political and social change in Mexico that included years of civil war. It had some roots in the liberal Reform movement of the mid-nineteenth century, which sought, among other things, greater inclusion in society of poor and indigenous peoples, as well as limiting the Catholic Church’s influence and power. Paz sees the Reform as having created a state with ideals that differed from both those of pre-Hispanic Mexican cultures and of New Spain. It was a necessary rupture from the past, but one that left Mexicans in a state of separation and negation.¹⁸⁸ By creating a society that supposedly no longer distinguishes between Indians, mestizos, and criollos, Paz argues that the Reform created an abstract, universal concept of the human that ultimately leads to solitude and nothingness. The rejection of La Malinche and Mexican hybridity reflects this larger issue, according to Paz, of Mexicans not wanting “to be either an Indian or a Spaniard,” or to be descended from them.¹⁸⁹ Mexicans are thus orphans; on one hand, defined by their solitude, and on the other, searching to “transcend this state of exile.”¹⁹⁰

In sum, Paz’s essay provides at least three pivotal points in La Malinche interpretation. First, it takes the sixteenth century person of Marina and, while dealing with her historical role to some extent, undeniably makes her a symbol of core realities of Mexican life and identity. In this regard, Paz’s work is analogous to that of Gregory the Great, which cements the legends of Mary Magdalene as a penitent prostitute in such a way that she functions for him as a symbol of penitence, and subsequently, of perceived female deviant sexuality and the issues associated with it. With both Magdalene and La Malinche, becoming a symbol means that their reported

¹⁸⁸ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 88.

¹⁸⁹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 88.

historical roles almost completely give way at times to them being identified with their bodies and their purported sexual activity.

Second, Paz's essay solidifies the notion that La Malinche is a traitor to native Mexicans because of her sexual activity, even though he describes this as a violation. This is significant not only as an interpretation of the historical Doña Marina, but also of all females. As noted above, Paz makes La Malinche into a symbol, the *Chingada*, that represents all females on one level, and especially those who have been sexually active, or "penetrated," by a male. In this regard, La Malinche becomes a paradigmatic whore figure that both reflects and projects an understanding of the female sex in Mexican society. La Malinche as the violated Mother and Mexican Eve also makes her an archetype of motherhood, but again, this role is evaluated negatively since it comes about by her giving herself over to the foreigner. Consequently, La Malinche as the seduced or violated Mother is the anti-type to the Virgin Mother—specifically, the Virgin of Guadalupe—whose purity and native identity contrast Malinche's sexual stain and loss of identity.

Third, Paz's portrayal of La Malinche as the violated Mother who has lost her indigenous identity furthers reveals the contested nature of the mestizo identity of the Mexican people, and reinforces her symbolic value as the mother of mestizos, whether for good or for ill.

La Malinche Interpretations after 1950

A wide range of La Malinche interpretations have been created since the publication of *The Labyrinth of Solitude*. They find expression in literature, drama, historical works, visual art, and popular culture, reflecting the fact that La Malinche remains both a prominent figure from Mexican history and an influential cultural symbol—in Mexico and beyond. Many of her portrayals draw on, and/or respond to, those expressed in earlier works; some alter these portraits

in minor ways in order to address changing contexts, while others seek to more drastically reconfigure her image in ways that challenge previous interpretations.

Similar to the post-1970 phase of Mary Magdalene interpretation, the latter twentieth and twenty-first centuries see increasing numbers of female authors in particular challenging the negative image of La Malinche as a sexually deviant traitor, exposing the patriarchal biases that inform it. Constructing more positive understandings of La Malinche becomes especially important for Chicana interpreters, who at times compare themselves to Malinche, or are compared to her by others, because of her ability to function in more than one culture. Chicana works on Malinche, therefore, represent a unique phase of her interpretive history, since they wrestle with the real-life implications of these interpretations for a specific community of people, besides the entire Mexican nation. In doing so, they explore the influence that La Malinche has acquired in a new context—namely, the lives of Chicano/as and Mexican Americans living in the United States.

Due to the large volume of material produced from 1950 to the early twenty-first century that deals with La Malinche, the following discussion will only address a small number of specific works while outlining the major trends in Malinche interpretation.

La Malinche in Twenty and Twenty-first Century Drama and Literature

Since La Malinche plays a key role in the foundational narrative of Mexico, it is no surprise that she continues to appear in a variety of works that reinterpret that narrative for new audiences. Cypess provides an insightful analysis of twentieth century dramas that rework the basic historical data of the Conquest in order to present positive portraits of Mexican identity that

respond to some of the issues that Paz's essay raised in this regard.¹⁹¹ Their depictions of La Malinche, according to Cypess, vary in terms of whether or not she is a traitor to the Mexican nation, but many of them are still constrained by the same patriarchal framework present in Paz's essay. One notable aspect of some of these plays is that La Malinche represents universal *woman* at some level, as she does in Paz's essay. This portrayal especially comes through in her role as symbolic mother of the first mestizo, by which a new race formed. Overall, the dramas Cypess discusses portray the mestizos in a more clearly positive way than does Paz's essay, forwarding the progeny of La Malinche as the hope for a unified Mexico, or at least as something potentially positive that arose from the Conquest. Similar to *Xicoténcatl*, some of these dramas also show La Malinche finding redemption through motherhood.¹⁹²

Rosario Castellanos's *El Eterno Femenino* (*The Eternal Feminine*) seeks to more thoroughly revise the negative images of La Malinche by reinterpreting the patriarchal framework that contributes to them.¹⁹³ This satirical drama features the return to life of seven women who have shaped social norms for women in order to challenge these norms and the ideologies that sustain them. The biblical Eve appears first and exercises independence from Adam in her choice to eat the forbidden fruit, which starts the course of human history.¹⁹⁴ Subsequently, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, the great Mexican nun, intellectual, and writer states that each of the remaining six women who played important roles in Mexican history will present themselves as they actually were, in contrast to the official, stereotypical portraits of

¹⁹¹ See Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 98–122. Some of the dramas she discusses are Celestino Gorostiza, *La Malinche* (or, *La Leña está Verde/ The Firewood is Green*; 1958); Rodolfo Usigli, *Corona de Fuego* (*Crown of Fire*; 1960); Carlos Fuentes, *Todos los Gatos son Pardos* (*All Cats are Gray*; 1970).

¹⁹² Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 113 cites Gorostiza's *La Malinche* as one work that displays this theme.

¹⁹³ For more detailed analysis, see Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 123–128. Rosario Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1975).

¹⁹⁴ The women are the biblical Eve, La Malinche, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, Josefa Ortiz de Domínguez, Empress Carlota, Rosario de la Peña, and Adelita. See Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino*, 85.

them.¹⁹⁵ La Malinche begins these appearances by reenacting one of her interactions with Cortés during the Conquest. The author does not portray her as a traitor to the native people of Mexico and satirizes the notion that she shared a romantic love with Cortés.¹⁹⁶ La Malinche appears instead as the intelligent and strategic mind behind an episode that the Spanish chronicles of the Conquest attribute to Cortés's military astuteness—namely, the burning of the Spanish ships off of the Gulf Coast so that the Spanish army could not retreat to Cuba. In *El Eterno Femenino*, Cortés laments the fact that the ships burned accidentally because one of his men fell asleep while smoking in one of them. La Malinche then suggests that Cortés take advantage of the situation by claiming that he had the ships burned on purpose in order to prevent his army from retreating, as depicted as in the chronicles.¹⁹⁷

Numerous novels and biographies have also been written about La Malinche in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Some of these perpetuate portrayals of her that are not clearly grounded in the historical data, while others seek to correct her earlier negative portraits. Here it becomes especially difficult to draw a line between historical and literary works on La Malinche, since attempts to write full biographies on the sixteenth century Nahua woman based on the sparse historical data almost inevitably slip into the category that Townsend calls “novelized biographies.”¹⁹⁸

Some of the pro-Hispanic historical works that González Hernández analyzes fit this category.¹⁹⁹ As she discusses, La Malinche biographies may attempt to counter her image as a

¹⁹⁵ Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino*, 87.

¹⁹⁶ Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino*, 92.

¹⁹⁷ Castellanos, *El Eterno Femenino*, 88–89.

¹⁹⁸ Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 281.

¹⁹⁹ See González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 126 for these works. Among them are Felipe González Ruiz, *Doña Marina: La India que Amó a Hernán Cortés* (Madrid: Ediciones Morata, 1994), and Mariano G. Somonte, *Doña Marina, “la Malinche”* (Mexico City: Somonte, 1969). Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*, 281 credits Somonte with trying to critically evaluate the historical evidence, but also states that “he was unable to escape his own fantasies and imaginings” regarding La Malinche's life.

traitor or as sexually deviant, but in doing so, they often read beyond what is substantiated by the primary evidence by depicting a strong, romantic love between Marina and Cortés that justifies all her actions on behalf of the Spanish in the Conquest.²⁰⁰ In this regard, they resemble some nineteenth century historical novels, even while their justifications for Marina's role in uncovering the alleged plot in Cholula are reasonably deduced from the earliest chronicles.

The tendency to romanticize Marina and Cortés's relationship is also reflected by the editor of one edition of Muñoz Camarago's *Historia de Tlaxcala*. In a footnote that summarizes La Malinche's background and role in the Conquest, Vázquez states that, "the beautiful Mexican not only served as adviser and interpreter, but also had a passionate romance with Cortés, a man who was an aficionado of the conquest of exotic lands and female hearts" (translation mine).²⁰¹

While it is possible that Marina developed romantic feelings for Cortés, the silence in the earliest sources about the details of their relationship (beyond stating that they had a son together) warrants caution in assuming that they had the kind of passionate romance that makes for an interesting novel. Her multiple enslavements to men, which almost certainly involved providing sexual services, also suggests that Marina may have seen her intimate involvement with Cortés as part of her obligation to him as his slave.

La Malinche in Post-1950 Historical Works

Having noted the overlap between historical and novelistic works on La Malinche, there are some post-1950 historical treatments of her that try to adhere more closely to the early data for her life, and that respond to some extent to what the authors see as previous

²⁰⁰ González Hernández, 126–127.

²⁰¹ See Germán Vázquez's editorial comment in Diego Muñoz Camargo, *Historia de Tlaxcala*, ed. Germán Vázquez, 188, n. 266: "La bella mexicana no sólo sirvió de consejera e intérprete, sino que, además, vivió un apasionado idilio con Cortés, hombre aficionado a la conquista de tierras exóticas y corazones femeninos."

misinterpretations of the historical evidence. Some of these historians' work informs this project, such as that of Cristina González Hernández, Camilla Townsend, and Frances Karttunen.²⁰² These scholars seek to understand La Malinche in her own sixteenth century context, addressing some of the common interpretations of her that they argue are not supported by the earliest evidence.

González Hernández carefully examines a wide range of historical sources from across the centuries, and provides a convincing analysis of why La Malinche interpretations developed as they did in relation to Mexico wrestling with its own identity. Townsend's *Malintzin's Choices* is unique as a full historical reconstruction of La Malinche's life that is based on a wide range of early Spanish and indigenous sources. Although making informed speculations about what Malintzin may have been thinking or feeling at certain moments requires Townsend, like the biographical novelists, to fill in gaps in the sparse primary data, she attempts to do so in ways that are plausible within the socio-political contexts in which Malintzin lived, and which she has carefully researched.²⁰³ She also attempts to humanize the woman she considers to have been denigrated by her many misinterpretations. Townsend's overall portrait of Malintzin is as an intelligent, complex, and culturally and politically astute woman who used these qualities to try to ensure for herself the best life possible, given the realities of her enslavement and difficult life circumstances.

Another more recent historical approach to La Malinche is to analyze her life and service to the Spanish in relation to other people who also served as interpreters and cultural intermediaries between native and European peoples. Two book-length examples are Frances

²⁰² González Hernández, *Doña Marina*; Townsend, *Malintzin's Choices*; Karttunen, *Between Worlds* and "Rethinking Malinche."

²⁰³ A Spanish-language work that moves in this direction is Juan Miralles, *La Malinche: Raíz de México* (see chapter 1 for full citation).

Karttunen's *Between Worlds: Interpreters, Guides, and Survivors*, and Rebecca Jager's *Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea: Indian Women as Cultural Intermediaries and National Symbols*.²⁰⁴ Pamela Scully's article, "Malintzin, Pocahontas, and Krotoa: Indigenous Women and Myth Models of the Atlantic World," also uses a comparative approach to address larger issues surrounding the historical study of indigenous women who shaped the Atlantic world.²⁰⁵ These works provide a useful perspective from which to reassess La Malinche because they show that the role she played in helping the Spanish conquistadores was not entirely unique, but rather was one instance of native women acting as intermediaries with Europeans upon first contact. They therefore shed light on why native women found themselves in these roles, on how their actions may have been perceived in their own times and cultures, and on how certain historiographical and ideological conventions make it difficult to understand the complexities of their lives from outside the lenses of European males.

La Malinche in Popular Culture

Dramas and novels about La Malinche reflect only part of her ubiquitous presence as a pop culture icon in Mexico and beyond. She has inspired characters in both movies and traditional dances that enact the Conquest.²⁰⁶ A volcano in the Mexican state of Tlaxcala, which became a crucial ally to the Spanish in the Conquest, has been named for her. It is still common to hear people in Mexico, or who are of Mexican background, refer to La Malinche as a traitor, and it is not unusual for encyclopedias of Mexican history or culture to have an entry for both her and the term *malinchista*. Generally speaking, La Malinche's prominent image as paradigmatic

²⁰⁴ Rebecca K. Jager, *Malinche, Pocahontas, and Sacagawea* (see chapter 1 for full citation).

²⁰⁵ Pamela Scully, "Malintzin, Pocahontas, and Krotoa: Indigenous Women and Myth Models of the Atlantic World," *Journal of Colonialism and Colonial History* 6:3 (2005).

²⁰⁶ Karttunen, *Between Worlds*, 1–4.

traitor to native Mexicans, and therefore, as problematic symbolic mother of mestizos, is especially persistent, despite many efforts to dislodge it.

La Malinche and La Llorona

One popular myth surrounding the figure of La Malinche that is worth mentioning is her identification with another female archetype in Mexico: La Llorona, or “the weeping woman.”²⁰⁷ While La Malinche was a real woman, La Llorona is a pre-Hispanic mythical figure that was associated with several indigenous goddesses, and that at the most basic level is said to be sad or weeping over her children that she was somehow separated from, at times by dying in childbirth.²⁰⁸ Paz’s chapter, “The Sons of La Malinche,” cites La Llorona, the “long-suffering Mexican mother,” as one Mexican representation of motherhood, along with the *Chingada*.²⁰⁹ More negative understandings of La Llorona eventually developed, including the notion that she is a ghost-like figure whose wailing at night scares children, that she lures men into dangerous situations or death, and that she drowned her illegitimate child in a river after she was rejected by her lover.

Over time, La Malinche has become associated with La Llorona, although exactly when or how this occurred is not clear. A collection of Llorona myths that was published in 1950 contains one version in which Doña Marina kills her son and buries him next to her to prevent Cortés from taking him to Spain.²¹⁰ When Marina’s spirit leaves her body it wanders about, crying out in anguish, so that people call her La Llorona. It is easy to see from this tale how La

²⁰⁷ For more on La Llorona and her associations with La Malinche, see González Hernández, *Doña Marina*, 150–162; Luis Leal, “La Malinche-Llorona Dichotomy: The Evolution of a Myth,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 134–138.

²⁰⁸ Leal, “La Malinche-Llorona Dichotomy,” 134–136.

²⁰⁹ Paz, *Labyrinth of Solitude*, 75.

²¹⁰ Leal, “La Malinche-Llorona Dichotomy,” 137–138. Leal cites the source of these published myths as *Mesoamerican Notes I* (Mexico City: Mexico City College, 1950).

Malinche/La Llorona became associated with the mythical Medea, who is also said to have killed her children by some accounts.²¹¹ These links reflect, and/or contribute to, a metaphorical understanding of La Malinche as having “killed” pre-Hispanic civilizations by her assistance to the Spaniards, which supposedly led to the defeat of indigenous peoples. The integration of this notion into the lore of Mexican and Chicano/a cultures reinforces interpretations of La Malinche as a seductress who betrays native peoples, and as the archetypical bad mother whose mestizo children are conflicted about their origins.

Chicana Interpretations of La Malinche

The Chicano movement that solidified in the 1960s pushed for equal rights, economic opportunities, and social recognition for people living in the United States who claim ancestral and/or cultural roots in Mexico. Its early leaders were mostly men, and Chicana feminists argue that it operated on traditional Mexican patriarchal understandings of the family and society that limited Chicanas’ participation in the movement. In fact, Amanda Nolacea Harris summarizes how the classic documents and literature of the Chicano movement, written by males, as well as a more recent retrospective work on the movement, attest to this androcentric dynamic.²¹² While Chicano males determined the goals of the movement and were its public voices and activists, Chicanas were generally expected to play less-visible support roles that respected male authority and thereby conformed to gender stereotypes for women. The Chicana was typically accepted into the movement to the extent that she faithfully served its male revolutionaries by cooking for

²¹¹ For more on La Malinche’s associations with La Llorona and Medea, see Sandra Messinger Cypess, “‘Mother’ Malinche and Allegories of Gender, Ethnicity and National Identity in Mexico,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 14–27.

²¹² Amanda Nolacea Harris, “Critical Introduction: La Malinche and Post-Movement Feminism,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, ix–xxv.

them, taking notes at meetings, serving as their sexual partners, and/or acting as nurturing mothers for the next generation of male leaders.²¹³

At first glance, these roles and expectations resemble some of those associated with the Malinche known from the earliest sources; for example, she too was expected to provide domestic and sexual services to the males who had authority over her, and gained broad acknowledgement in large part due to her role as mother to the head conquistador's son. Nonetheless, in a context in which La Malinche is known primarily as a traitor to the native people of Mexico because she allied with foreigners, a Chicana could be considered a *malinche* or *malinchista* for asserting herself in a variety of ways that were interpreted as selling out to the values of the dominant culture at the expense of unwavering commitment to the ethno-nationalist agenda of the Chicano movement.²¹⁴ For example, advocating for feminist concerns or wanting a public leadership role in the movement could make a Chicana a *malinchista*, *agringada* (one who is like the *gringos*, or white people), or *vendida* ("sellout"), since such aspirations had largely been associated with white women.²¹⁵

In this light, Chicanas perceived that their desire for their own liberation and equality with Chicano men was seen, especially in the earlier phases of the movement, as putting their individual goals in opposition to those of the Chicano community, and in fact, as challenging its

²¹³ E.g., Harris, "Critical Introduction: La Malinche and Post-Movement Feminism"; Mary Louise Pratt, "Yo Soy La Malinche": Chicana Writers and the Poetics of Ethnonationalism," *Callaloo* 16 (1993): 859–873.

²¹⁴ E.g., Armando B. Rendon, *Chicano Manifesto* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 96–97 names *malinches* as enemies to Chicanos that are part of this same community. He describes how this name comes from Doña Marina/La Malinche, Cortés's concubine and "interpreter and informer against her own people" (96). He then states that, "in the service of the gringo, malinches attack their own brothers, betray our dignity and manhood, cause jealousies and misunderstandings among us, and actually seek to retard the advance of the Chicanos, if it benefits themselves—while the gringo watches" (97).

²¹⁵ E.g., Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 44–57.

patriarchal foundation.²¹⁶ As Malinche's "preference" for the foreigner is thought to have led to the near destruction of pre-Hispanic Mexican cultures, so too could a Mexican American woman's choice to have children with a white man or leave her community to pursue a higher education present a perceived threat to the very existence of Chicanos by her supposed assimilation to the dominant culture and its values.²¹⁷ Lesbian Chicanas assert that they have especially been seen as treacherous malinches, since their opting out of sexual relations with males, and therefore, potentially from bearing children, presents a direct threat to patriarchal structures and male authority over women and their sexuality.²¹⁸ These negative applications of the figure of La Malinche to Chicanas led prominent Chicana scholar Cherríe Moraga to assert in the early 1980s that, "there is hardly a Chicana growing up today who does not suffer under Malinche's name," even if she has never heard of her directly.²¹⁹

In response to such derogatory uses of La Malinche in the dominant discourse of the Chicano movement and wider Chicano/a community, Chicana feminists in particular have worked to reclaim her image as a positive expression of Chicana identity and experience.²²⁰ Similar to La Malinche, Chicanas typically speak more than one language and negotiate life in various cultural and social spheres. Rather than interpreting this as reason for suspicion, Chicanas often portray Malinche instead as an intelligent woman who used her wit and skill to navigate trying situations in a way that reflects upon their own experiences more constructively.

²¹⁶ Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 48–49.

²¹⁷ Pratt, "Yo Soy La Malinche," 862.

²¹⁸ E.g., Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 52–53; Cherríe L. Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: South End, 2000), 103–109.

²¹⁹ Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 92.

²²⁰ For a range of Chicana reinterpretations of La Malinche, see, for example, *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*; Cypess, *La Malinche in Mexican Literature*, 138–152; Pratt, "Yo Soy La Malinche," 859–873; Moraga, *Loving in the War Years*, 82–133; Del Castillo, "Malintzin Tenépal"; Norma Alarcón, "Traduttora, Traditora"; Norma Alarcón, "Chicana's Feminist Literature"; *Infinite Division: An Anthology of Chicana Literature*, eds. Tey Diana Rebolledo and Eliana S. Rivero (Tucson, AZ: University of Tucson Press, 1993), 189–215. See chapter 1 for full citations of some of these works.

They thereby highlight the agency that La Malinche was able to exercise as interpreter and cultural intermediary, for example, even though she was a slave—a fact that some Chicana authors take more into account than others. Adelaida Del Castillo asserts that, instead of being responsible for the destruction of all native Mexicans, La Malinche’s use of her intelligence, persuasion, and initiative allowed her to mitigate potential violence between Spaniards and indigenous people.²²¹ Chicana writers also challenge the notion that La Malinche was a traitor to the Indian “nation” or people by pointing out that the indigenous peoples of sixteenth century Mesoamerica did not comprise one unified state, or share the modern concept of *nation* that developed in independent Mexico, thereby making accusations that La Malinche sold out her nation anachronistic at best.²²²

Beyond criticizing specific aspects of the dominant, negative interpretations of La Malinche, Chicana feminists problematize the very foundations of these images, which they see as fueled by androcentrism, or even misogyny. Such critiques strike directly at the understanding, solidified by Octavio Paz, that La Malinche’s betrayal came primarily through her sexual activity, which, even though a violation, still makes her a paradigmatic whore because she supposedly gave in to it. Instead of translating Paz’s main epithet for La Malinche, the *Chingada*, as the *penetrated* or *violated one*, some Chicanas instead render it as the *fucked one*, thereby expressing their understanding that the term is one of denigration and violence, both to Malinche and Chicana women.²²³

²²¹ Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenépal,” 133.

²²² E.g., Del Castillo, “Malintzin Tenépal,” 131–132, 141; Gaspar de Alba, “Malinche’s Revenge,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 54.

²²³ E.g., Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 22; Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 8.

Understandably, therefore, many Chicana feminists explicitly criticize Paz's interpretation of La Malinche as exemplary of the patriarchal perspective that not only undergirds popular Malinche images, but that also contributes to the culture-wide image of women in general as inferior human beings to men, and of their sexual activity as inherently problematic and potentially treacherous. As Norma Alarcón states, "the male myth of Malintzin is made to see betrayal first of all in her very sexuality, which makes it nearly impossible at any given moment to go beyond the vagina as the supreme site of evil until proven innocent by way of virginity or virtue, the most pawns around."²²⁴ Deconstructing Paz's influential portrayal of La Malinche as the violated Mother or Mexican Eve (which essentially makes her every woman), therefore, is a key facet of Chicana efforts to counter negative stereotypes of themselves and represent their identities and experiences on their own terms.

Chicana feminists also consider La Malinche as a key resource for critically analyzing the "interaction and interdependence of race, class, and gender," since her life and subsequent interpretations intersect all of these categories.²²⁵ In this regard, La Malinche provides a means to "deconstruct the separation of spheres"—a separation that Chicana scholars claim enabled the mainstream Chicano movement to reject, or be very skeptical of, feminist concerns as external, and potentially harmful, to the racial/ethnic concerns of the movement.²²⁶

Since the wide variety of Chicana works dealing with La Malinche cannot be addressed in-depth here, I focus on two examples that reflect her usefulness for thinking through the intersection of spheres mentioned above, and that address La Malinche's symbolic link with Mary Magdalene.

²²⁴ Alarcón, "Chicana's Feminist Literature," 183.

²²⁵ Harris, "Critical Introduction: La Malinche and Post-Movement Feminism," ix.

²²⁶ Harris, "Critical Introduction: La Malinche and Post-Movement Feminism," x.

Gloria Anzaldúa's "The Wounding of the india-Mestiza"

Gloria Anzaldúa's 1987 book, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, has become a Chicana feminist classic that reflects the author's own struggles and perspectives on living between different cultural and social worlds. As a Chicana lesbian who wrestled with acceptance in both Chicano/a and white cultures, Anzaldúa's intersectional analysis addresses not only race, class, and gender, but also sexual orientation. She expresses the alienation that Chicanas, and all women of color, often experience from white culture, as well as from males of all races, who "hunt" them "as prey."²²⁷

Although Anzaldúa strongly identifies with the Mexican/Chicano/a culture she was raised in, she criticizes aspects of it that she sees as harmful to her, such as the male notion that the highest virtue for women is to serve others.²²⁸ She also recognizes that people of Mexican background tend to diminish their Indian heritage, even while they are not completely at home in white culture. Living in, as well as on the margins of, multiple cultures and facets of identity makes the concept of "going home" difficult, so that the creation and claiming of a new space—"*una cultura mestiza*" ("a mixed culture")—becomes necessary.²²⁹ Her book's intermingling of various styles of Spanish and English, as well as some indigenous words, reflects her negotiations of hybrid identity, and also makes it most accessible to those who share her bilingual, multicultural location.

In her poem within the book, "The Wounding of the india-Mestiza," Anzaldúa critiques what she sees as the Mexican's condemnation specifically of the Indian woman within them, which is ultimately a condemnation of both their Indian mother, La Malinche (whom Anzaldúa

²²⁷ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 20.

²²⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 21.

²²⁹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

refers to as Malinali or Malintzin), and of themselves, a “defeated race.”²³⁰ The poem exposes and reframes negative interpretations of the historical Malintzin in order to do the same for negative understandings of indigenous/*mestiza* women of the past and present. The repeated line, “not me sold out my people but they me,” is thematic for the poem.²³¹ It implies that the historical Malintzin should not be seen as a traitor, but rather as the betrayed, since her own mother reportedly sold her into slavery when she was just a child. Anzaldúa employs this reversal of the dominant interpretation of Malinche as a traitor to criticize its negative implications for Indian and *mestiza* women across the centuries. She acknowledges that Paz’s interpretation of Malinche as the *Chingada*, or “fucked one,” has become widely accepted in Chicano culture.²³² According to Anzaldúa, such stereotypes, perpetuated by male culture, lead *india/mestiza* women to “brutalize and condemn” the Indian woman within themselves.²³³ She thereby highlights the way in which negative interpretations of La Malinche not only result in prominent stereotypes of women, but also of indigenous or mestizo people, resulting in a double marginalization of *india/mestiza* women, who have been conditioned to internalize contempt for both of these aspects of their own identity.²³⁴

Anzaldúa goes on to denounce the abuse and exploitation that “the dark skinned woman” has been subjected to for centuries.²³⁵ She has been silenced and colonized by many, including her own people.²³⁶ In what may be an implicit contrast to the prominent historical role of La Malinche as interpreter, Anzaldúa writes that the Indian woman has for a long time remained

²³⁰ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22, “raza vencida,” my translation above.

²³¹ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

²³² Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

²³³ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

²³⁴ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

²³⁵ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22.

²³⁶ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 22–23.

“faceless and voiceless.”²³⁷ Despite her history of oppression, however, this woman has not lost hope; rather, she waits for the right moment to fight for herself and a homeland where she can thrive.²³⁸

In sum, Anzaldúa uses the figure of Malintzin in “The Wounding of the india-Mestiza” largely as representative of the misunderstandings, marginalization, and abuse of Indian and mestiza women since the Conquest and into the present. By reversing the notion of Malintzin as paradigmatic traitor to her people, the author denounces the real ways in which india-mestiza women have been betrayed by others, including by their own communities. The poem thereby challenges the negative stereotypes of the india-mestiza that go hand-in-hand with her oppression. Although the poem portrays the betrayal and victimization of the india-mestiza as a means of denouncing this abuse, her resolve to fight suggests that she will not ultimately be defined merely as a victim; instead, consciousness of oppression propels her to create a space of her own that affirms her identity and aspirations.

La Malinche in the Works of Alicia Gaspar de Alba

Alicia Gaspar de Alba’s work on La Malinche also involves an intersectional analysis of how her image has been constructed from an androcentric, patriarchal perspective, as well as deconstructed by Chicana feminists. In her article, “Malinche’s Revenge,” she responds in part to Paz’s interpretation of La Malinche as the paradigmatic *Chingada*, drawing on the work of Emma Pérez.²³⁹ Gaspar de Alba points out the tensions inherent in the Chicano male’s perceptions of both his archetypal father, the conquistador, and his archetypal mother, the

²³⁷ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 23.

²³⁸ Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 23.

²³⁹ Gaspar de Alba, “Malinche’s Revenge,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 44–48.

violated Indian woman. Although they are mestizos, Gaspar de Alba argues that Chicano males have nonetheless internalized their white father's racial stigma against the indigenous element within their own selves, while simultaneously "claiming their Indian-ness" as the very source of their Chicano pride and politics.²⁴⁰ This leaves them in a bind in regard to their symbolic mother, La Malinche, who has been viewed as the problematic source of their indigenous identity. Since Paz's paradigm associates "Indian-ness" with the feminine element—that is, La Malinche, the paradigmatic *Chingada* or violated Mother— Gaspar de Alba argues that Chicano males had to "transform the root of their pride from something passive and feminine, like Malinche, into something aggressive and masculine," such as emperor Moctezuma, or a great Aztec warrior.²⁴¹ The use of stereotypically masculine figures to represent the Indian element of the Chicano, she continues, became prominent in the Chicano Art Movement, and reflects "not only the repudiation of Malinche" and her Chicana daughters, "but also, the reenactment of the colonial father's rape and the mestizo son's disdain for his Indian mother."²⁴²

In response to this ongoing dynamic, fueled by patriarchal understandings of La Malinche, Gaspar de Alba describes how Chicana feminists have seen in Malinche's story a "mirror of Chicana resistance against female slavery to patriarchy," and calls for reclaiming the term "Malinchismo" to define "a new theory of Chicana identity politics that takes the pejorative term, 'Malinchista,' and turns all of its negatives into positives."²⁴³ Her work contributes to this goal by deconstructing the dominant negative interpretations of La Malinche, as well as the patriarchal assumptions they are founded on, and by positing Malinche instead as a symbol of "a

²⁴⁰ Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 47.

²⁴¹ Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 47.

²⁴² Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 48.

²⁴³ Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 55.

woman's freedom to use her mind, her tongue, and her body in the way that she chooses and to cultivate her intellectual skills for her own survival and empowerment."²⁴⁴

This reinterpretation does highlight some of the positive portrayals of La Malinche found in the earliest sources, which show her exercising a degree of independence and intelligence when interpreting or negotiating between the Spaniards and native peoples. And perhaps, from a twenty or twenty-first century perspective, her sexual activity outside of marriage could be seen as defying Euro-American patriarchal norms to some extent; however, it seems that further explanation is needed here of how what we know of the historical Malintzin is an affirmation of women's freedom to use their bodies how they choose, since her multiple enslavements suggest that she may have been coerced to use her body for the pleasure of her male captors, rather than pursuing intimate relations as an act of sexual freedom.

An element of Gaspar de Alba's work on La Malinche that is especially relevant to this study is her discussion of the popular symbolic identification of La Malinche with Mary Magdalene in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures.²⁴⁵ She mentions it in her writings when addressing the three biblical archetypes that she sees patriarchal Mexican and Chicano/a cultures using to construct women's gender and sexuality.²⁴⁶ According to this pattern of stereotyping, which she calls the "Tres Marías Syndrome" ("Three Marys Syndrome"), women are categorized as virgins, mothers, or whores.²⁴⁷ The biblical women that represent these attributes are three Marys that are with Jesus at his crucifixion: the Virgin Mary (Jesus's mother), the "other" Mary,

²⁴⁴ Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 55.

²⁴⁵ de la Mora, *Cinemachismo*, 21–33 also references this popular identification of La Malinche with Magdalene. See chapter 1, note 50 for full citation.

²⁴⁶ E.g., Gaspar de Alba, "Malinche's Revenge," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 51–52; [Un]Framing the "Bad Woman," 116–117 (where she notes that La Llorona is also included at times in the virgin/mother/whore trilogy, along with the Virgin of Guadalupe and La Malinche), 158–162.

²⁴⁷ Gaspar de Alba, [Un]Framing the "Bad Woman," 158–162.

who Gaspar de Alba identifies as the mother of James and Joseph, and Mary Magdalene, “the reformed prostitute.”²⁴⁸

In reality, the analogy only needs the Virgin Mary (or Guadalupe) and Mary Magdalene to represent the categories to which women are supposedly subjected. The Virgin Mary/Guadalupe represents the high value that the cultures place on woman’s virginity, which, according to Gaspar de Alba, denotes her innocence and obedience, as well as the expectation that she dresses and behaves “decently,” and waits to have sex until she is married.²⁴⁹ The Virgin is also, paradoxically, the archetype of the nurturing, self-sacrificing mother who only has sex for procreation and lives for her family, not herself.²⁵⁰ Mary Magdalene, by contrast, is the paradigmatic prostitute/whore. As such, she is the female archetype for deviant women who can be identified by any number of traits or actions: doing whatever she pleases, having sex for pleasure or money, corrupting men, bringing shame upon her family, being loose, and ultimately, getting what she deserves.²⁵¹ The constraints and stigma these stereotypes place on real women, Gaspar de Alba argues, only serve to reinforce the patriarchal structures and assumptions that created them.²⁵² Since a woman’s control over her own sexuality reflects her empowerment and agency, it is perceived as a threat to patriarchy, so that any woman who is sexually active outside of marriage/procreation can be labeled a prostitute and be punished through rape and bodily

²⁴⁸ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 159. As noted in chapter two, the New Testament Gospels are not entirely consistent in their lists of the named women who are at Jesus’s crucifixion. While Mary Magdalene’s presence at the cross is implied in all four Gospels, Mary, Jesus’s mother, is only there according to John (19:25), and a Mary clearly identified as the mother of James and Joseph appears only in Matthew 27:56. The other Mary present at the crucifixion in John’s Gospel is called Mary of Clopas.

²⁴⁹ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 160.

²⁵⁰ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 159–160.

²⁵¹ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 159–160.

²⁵² Gaspar de Alba, “Malinche’s Revenge,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 55.

harm. Gaspar de Alba states that, “as archaic as it may seem, the Tres Mariás Syndrome runs rampant in our twenty-first-century lives.”²⁵³

Although Gaspar de Alba does not address the history behind the root image of Magdalene as a former prostitute, she is clearly working with the still prominent identification of Magdalene with the repentant woman of Luke 7:36–50, who is often understood to have been a prostitute. We see here, therefore, that this interpretation of Magdalene has become part of the cultural fabric in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures, just as it has in Europe and the rest of North America. This has implications not only for Magdalene interpretations, but also for those of La Malinche, which in turn reshape images of Magdalene. After naming Magdalene as the paradigmatic whore figure, Gaspar de Alba states that La Malinche, another archetypal mother of Mexican and Chicano/a cultures who has come to be known as “the Fucked One,” descended directly from the reformed prostitute, Mary Magdalene.²⁵⁴ In this way, La Malinche is effectively identified as the Mexican Mary Magdalene—an identification that links the historical women behind these names with what may be considered as their most negative, and perhaps most historically unfounded, interpretations.

Conclusion

From the late sixteenth to the early twenty-first century, La Malinche’s interpretive trajectory undergoes several key transformations that correspond in large part to understandings of Mexican national and/or cultural identity, as well as to notions of the female sex.

Significantly, what may be seen as a positive attribute of La Malinche in one context, such as her role as cultural intermediary in the Conquest, can be negatively evaluated in another, so that her

²⁵³ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 160.

²⁵⁴ Gaspar de Alba, *[Un]Framing the “Bad Woman,”* 159.

purported liaison role is interpreted instead as treacherous espionage. This reflects the overarching tendency of different people of various social locations and historical/cultural contexts to interpret the sparse primary evidence for La Malinche's life in ways that support the overall theme or purpose of their particular works. The sixteenth century Nahua woman becomes, to a large degree, a symbol of national, ethnic, and personal identity, as well as of gender stereotypes, that is reconfigured according to the needs of certain contexts and concerns. As mentioned above, there is an explicit link in Mexican and Chicano/a culture between La Malinche and Mary Magdalene as paradigmatic deviant females, or whores. A closer examination of this link, as well as a fuller comparison of these two women's interpretive histories, follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Comparative Analysis of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche's Interpretive Histories

Introduction

As the previous chapters have detailed, the figures of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche have been variously interpreted over the centuries according to the shifting contexts and concerns of different interpreters. Chapter 5 explained, in fact, that La Malinche became identified in Mexican and Chicano/a consciousness with Mary Magdalene because of their shared portrayal as paradigmatic whores. As earlier chapters have shown, however, each woman's interpretive history is much more varied and nuanced than their popular images as archetypal, sexually deviant females suggests. Drawing on this complexity, this final chapter provides a fuller comparative analysis of these women's interpretive histories that highlights additional similarities between them, beyond their most notorious representations.

I then demonstrate how this analysis yields valuable findings and raises important questions that apply to several areas of academic inquiry. First, I argue that it encourages expanding the traditional scope of studies of biblical reception history and accounting for a wide range of factors when engaging in contextual biblical hermeneutics. Second, I argue that it provides additional resources for critical reassessments of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories, especially in relation to practical and ethical concerns that feminist and Chicana scholars in particular have raised. Third, drawing on these reassessments, I argue that my comparison highlights and informs hermeneutical and ethical questions that are seemingly inherent to any attempt to reinterpret foundational texts for new audiences.

Prominent Similarities and Differences in Mary Magdalene and La Malinche's Interpretive Histories

A close comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories reveals striking similarities in their overall arcs, and in specific representations of the women. This section addresses the main similarities, and differences, on both of these levels (see previous chapters for details of specific interpretations).

One key characteristic that these women's interpretive arcs share is their predominantly male framework. Until the 1970s, male interpreters constructed the vast majority of the portraits of each woman, including those that proved to be the most influential. Principal among these is the image of the women as whores. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, this image does not have a clear foundation in the earliest historical sources for the women's lives, leading many interpreters in the past fifty years or so—both male and female—to challenge it. Contemporary female interpreters—especially those working from a feminist stance—challenge not only the historically problematic whore image, but also the androcentric interpretive framework that created it. The implications of their work will be explored in more detail below.

Magdalene and La Malinche in the Primary Sources

According to the primary sources, both Magdalene and La Malinche play important roles as witnesses, intermediaries, and to some extent, evangelists, in the foundational events of new groups of people. Chapter 2 detailed Magdalene's rather consistent function in the New Testament Gospels as an eyewitness to Jesus's ministry, crucifixion, and the events surrounding his resurrection—all of which proved foundational to Christianity. According to some of these Gospels, Magdalene also acted as an evangelist and apostle, being the first, or among the first, to learn of and tell Jesus's other disciples about his resurrection. Her speaking role, therefore, is

significant, even though it is only briefly mentioned and appears to be exhausted once others receive (or resist) her message.

Likewise, chapter 4 discussed La Malinche's presence as a constant eyewitness to the Spanish Conquest of Mesoamerica that led to the establishment of New Spain, and eventually, modern Mexico. The earliest sources portray her as having a broader speaking role than Magdalene in the New Testament, acting as a reliable interpreter for the Spaniards throughout the Conquest. By interpreting Christian preaching, La Malinche takes on an evangelistic function that is analogous to Magdalene's, since she too helps the Christian faith spread. In fact, early descriptions of La Malinche as among the first Christian converts in New Spain resonate with the New Testament portrayals of Magdalene as one of the first Christians ever because of her belief in Jesus's resurrection. La Malinche also has a significant role as a cultural intermediary that does not find a precise parallel in Magdalene's New Testament roles. There is, nonetheless, some resonance between the portrayals of both women as intermediaries who play secondary roles to the main, male characters in each founding story: Magdalene to Jesus and his twelve closest disciples, and La Malinche to Cortés and the various indigenous leaders he encounters. Both women's speech facilitates these male leaders' objectives.

Overall, both sets of primary sources generally portray the women in neutral to positive ways, with some negative notes in a couple of indigenous sources on La Malinche. The early data about both women is sparse, and each woman appears as one of only a relatively few female characters in their communities' foundational narratives.

In the Earliest Generations of Reinterpretation

For several centuries after the primary sources on Magdalene and La Malinche were compiled, both women continue to be interpreted in basically positive ways. At times, in fact, their roles are expanded from the earliest sources and appear to be held in even higher esteem. And both women's speaking roles receive special emphasis in these early reinterpretations.

Chapter 3 described how several extra-canonical texts portray Magdalene as a leader among Jesus's disciples because of her close relationship with him. Her spiritual authority derives in part from visions that the Lord gives her and that she interprets with her keen understanding. And she teaches male disciples using beautiful speech (*Pist. Soph.* 1.24) that incites resistance from some of them to a woman having a significant speaking role. The *Acts of Philip* also portrays Magdalene as a missionary and evangelist. This text, as well as *An Encomium on Mary Magdalene*, describes Magdalene as virtuous and pure, thus positively expanding upon her descriptions in the Gospels.

Similarly, chapter 5 described how several colonial era texts praise La Malinche's roles as interpreter and cultural intermediary during the Conquest more extensively than in most of the primary sources. Like Magdalene, La Malinche is also construed at times as a spiritually empowered interpreter (of speech, rather than of visions) and evangelist. Her preaching of the Christian faith is no longer limited to interpreting the words of others; rather, she also speaks of her own volition about the faith she has embraced. This increased agency resonates with the leadership and evangelistic roles Magdalene takes on in early generations of reinterpretations. La Malinche's virtue and intelligence is also praised, as is Magdalene's purity and understanding.

The Shift to “Fallen” Women

A major shift occurs in both Magdalene and La Malinche’s interpretive arcs several centuries after their initial, mostly positive, portrayals. Deviating from what the primary sources substantiate, interpreters begin to portray them as archetypal whores because of alleged deviant sexual activity that violates communal norms or values. Whether intending to portray Magdalene negatively or not, Gregory the Great’s conflation of her with the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50 leads to the prominent medieval understanding of Magdalene as a former prostitute, or lascivious woman, who represents the worst of human sinfulness (see chapter 3). And in Mexico’s early years of independence, a view of La Malinche as paradigmatic traitor to indigenous people emerges because of her allegiance to the Spaniards during the Conquest, and especially because of her sexual relationship with the Spanish captain, Cortés (see chapter 5). Octavio Paz’s 1950 interpretation cements La Malinche’s image as a treacherous whore by claiming that she willingly gave herself to be violated and subjugated by foreigners—a betrayal the Mexican people have still not forgiven.

Although the specific circumstances that give rise to the image of each woman as a whore differ, there are similarities in the development of these images, as well as in their social and ideological functions. For example, the fall of both Magdalene and La Malinche into disgrace is set against the backdrop of interpretations of them as beautiful, virtuous, and well-spoken young women who were born into noble or wealthy families.¹ Medieval legends first cast Magdalene as having both this virtuous past and a fall into promiscuity and other sins (see chapter 3). With La Malinche, Díaz’s conquest narrative provides the early, influential portrait of her as a native princess who becomes a virtuous interpreter for the Spaniards, while postindependence writers interpret her as a traitor and whore (see chapter 5). In what seems to be

¹ E.g., *The Life of Saint Mary Magdalene and of her Sister Saint Martha*, trans. Mycoff, 30–31.

a striking coincidence, in some accounts Martha and Lazarus are said to be relatives of both Magdalene and La Malinche.²

A more significant overlap is that the interpretations of both women as whores lack clear foundation in the earliest sources, making them more reflections of their authors' own contexts and concerns than strict interpretations of the primary data. In this regard, it is especially significant that it is mostly male interpreters who develop the portraits of both women as paradigmatic of the most despised characteristics and behaviors that a member of either the church or the Mexican nation could possess. Because these portraits stand in sharp contrast to what the primary sources state about each woman, feminist assertions that androcentric perspectives play a role in their development are justified, even though other factors are involved. On a basic level, one might argue that it was easier for these male authors to wrestle with notions of religious or societal transgression through figures perceived to be "other," at least in terms of their sex. As chapters 3 and 5 detailed, several portrayals of Magdalene and La Malinche that males developed draw on prominent cultural stereotypes of the female sex. It is fair to ask whether these images would have developed in these ways if female interpreters had exerted more influence in the interpretive process over the centuries.

Eventually, Magdalene and La Malinche become malleable symbols that are used to negotiate and enforce communal values and identity across shifting contexts, remaining only loosely connected to the first evidence for these women's lives. Their earliest portrayals as important witnesses, speakers, intermediaries, and evangelists are often overshadowed, or even completely obscured, by interpretations that focus on their bodies—specifically, on their purported deviant sexual activity and/or their bearing of children. In this regard, both women

² *The Golden Legend*, for example, has this view of Magdalene's family. See Díaz, *The Conquest of New Spain*, 85–86 for this view of La Malinche's family.

also come to represent, and are used to advocate for, ideal female attributes and behaviors—either by serving as positive or negative examples of these. For example, the Magdalene Houses established in the medieval and modern eras to “reform” prostitutes, single mothers, or other women perceived as transgressing societal female norms are inspired by the image of Magdalene as a penitent whore, rather than as a witness to Jesus’s resurrection (see chapter 3). And the postindependence portrait of La Malinche as the archetypal “bad” mother/female because of her supposed promiscuity and treachery serves as a foil to traditional understandings of the Virgin of Guadalupe as the archetypal “good” mother/woman, which can be used to promote female chastity and submissiveness to males.

To be sure, the previous chapters have shown that the earliest representations of the women as sexually deviant may be more complex than they often appear today in popular culture. For instance, Gregory’s emphasis was on Magdalene as a *former* prostitute who exemplified true penitence and love of Christ. And alongside images of the fallen Magdalene and treacherous Malinche stand contrasting interpretations of each woman across the centuries. Even so, the image these women acquired as whores has arguably been their most influential, evidenced by the fact that most subsequent interpreters engage this view, even if their goal is to simply reject it.

Critical Reassessments of the Women and Their Interpretive Histories

The latter half of the twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries have seen many efforts to critically reassess Magdalene and Malinche in light of their interpretive arcs, as discussed in chapters 1, 3 and 5. They reflect a shared concern to “set the record straight” about each woman in response to earlier interpretations that are seen as going irresponsibly beyond what the primary

data substantiates. Feminist scholars have been especially motivated to dislodge the whore stereotype of each woman, in part because they believe these interpretations continue to negatively impact women in the present. This scholarship will be discussed in more detail below.

Additional Shared Images of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche

Across these major phases of interpretation, some shared images of Magdalene and La Malinche emerge. Many of these have already been noted, such as portrayals of both women as witnesses, intermediaries, evangelists, prominent speakers, and paradigmatic whores. The last portrait reflects the tendency to make both Magdalene and Malinche representative of all females at times, or, at the very least, to make them emblematic of deviant female behavior. Comparisons of both women to the biblical Eve and Virgin Mary also express their symbolic value as representatives of the female sex, or of some stereotypical female attribute, and/or as representatives of entire groups of people.

A New Eve

Chapter 2 demonstrated how patristic authors often understand Mary Magdalene's role as first proclaimer of the resurrection as necessary compensation for the deceitful speech of Eve, the primordial woman, who led humanity into sin. Magdalene thus functions for some authors as a new prototypical woman, righting the wrong of the first woman. Although not all patristic authors explicitly treat Magdalene as representative of *woman*, by contrasting her action's with Eve's, many associate her with the first woman in ways that highlight her gender and thereby expand on her explicit New Testament portrayals. For example, Hippolytus's *Commentary On the Song of Songs* shows Magdalene (as conflated with Martha) as a faithful, new Eve because

her obedience in announcing Christ's resurrection reverses old Eve's disobedience. This image, together with the text's portrayal of Magdalene desiring spiritual union with Jesus, effectively depicts Jesus and Magdalene as the new founding couple of a restored humanity that is comprised of those who believe in the resurrected Jesus. This resonates with the portrayal of Magdalene as a close, spiritual companion to Jesus in early extra-canonical and medieval texts. Although such portrayals express spiritual realities, they are meaningful in their contexts because they use imagery of an intimate, male-female relationship, or even marriage, that depends as much on Magdalene being female as on her New Testament roles as first resurrection witness and evangelist.

As chapter 5 discussed, La Malinche has also been compared with Eve, whether positively or negatively. While some patristic writers interpret Magdalene's truthful proclamation of Jesus's resurrection as contrasting Eve's deceptive speech, some postindependence portraits of La Malinche attribute deceptive speech to her—against the testimony of the earliest sources—through allusions to the biblical Eve. And the earliest sources state that La Malinche was a biological mother, thus paralleling the biblical Eve in a way that Magdalene in the New Testament does not. Because La Malinche's son with Cortés commonly functions as the symbolic first mestizo child born in New Spain, she is often portrayed as the mother of the modern Mexican nation, and thus, she and Cortés function as the Mexican Eve and Adam. Consequently, some interpreters also portray La Malinche as typical of *woman* in general, as seen in Paz's *Labyrinth of Solitude*.

Magdalene and La Malinche, therefore, share a comparison with the biblical Eve that casts them at times as part of a primordial couple that gives birth to a new community—either the Christian community that is born through proclamation of Jesus's resurrection, or modern

Mexico, which symbolically stems from Cortés's relationship with La Malinche. This comparison also makes both women representative of all females in certain instances, and is used to comment on the veracity of their speech.

Symbols of Communities

Magdalene and La Malinche's symbolic value is also apparent in works that portray them as representatives of entire communities or groups of people. Gregory the Great, for example, uses Magdalene as a positive symbol for the believing Gentile church, while Peter Chrysologus casts her as a type of the church in order to explain why a woman, naturally inferior to men, was the first resurrection witness (see chapter 3). Similarly, La Malinche is pervasively portrayed as emblematic of the modern Mexican nation, so that evaluations of her character are inextricably linked to perceptions of the racially mixed society that she is often credited with helping bring into existence (see chapter 4). Despite the similarities between Magdalene and La Malinche serving as representatives of their communities, it should be noted that the use of La Malinche to wrestle with questions of racial and ethnic identity does not have a clear analogy in the Magdalene interpretive traditions. While at times both women function positively in their symbolic roles, the very act of using them to represent groups of people can obscure the identities of the women behind the symbols, and/or objectify them, whether intentionally or not.

Ambivalent Associations with the Virgin Mary and Other Female Figures

As discussed in chapters 3 and 5, both Magdalene and La Malinche become closely associated, or even identified, with other female figures in significant ways. Notably, both women have been compared and contrasted with the Virgin Mary at various points in their

interpretive histories. Popular understandings of them as whores, or fallen women, can cast them as the negative pole of womanhood that starkly contrasts the purity and virtue of the Virgin Mary. This contrast remains especially powerful in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures regarding La Malinche.

Both women's relationship with the Virgin Mary, however, is more nuanced than it often appears in popular understandings. For instance, several texts and traditions describe Magdalene as a lifelong virgin and as having other attributes commonly associated with the Virgin Mary, such as purity and virtue. Even though the legendary medieval Magdalene is portrayed as a former sexual sinner, some thought her repentance made her an honorary virgin and placed her in the heavenly choir of virgins, second only to the Virgin Mary (see chapter 3). In similar fashion, some works on La Malinche, such as *Xicoténcatl*, also portray her as repenting of her sinful sexual past and thereby acquiring a virtue and purity like that of the Virgin of Guadalupe (see chapter 5). This sometimes occurs when Malinche becomes a mother, thus strengthening her comparison with the Virgin Mother. Although the earliest sources say nothing about Magdalene being a biological mother, over time she too is portrayed in maternal roles, thus bringing her into closer association with the Virgin Mary (see chapter 3). For instance, in the Middle Ages Magdalene functions as a spiritual mother to women pursuing a religious vocation, and some people pray to her for assistance in childbirth. Magdalene and Malinche's ongoing associations with the Virgin Mary further illustrate their functions as archetypal females, or as representatives of some gendered characteristic or role, such as virginity, motherhood, or promiscuity.

Both Magdalene and La Malinche also become blurred with other female figures over time, resulting in composite figures that often bear little resemblance to the women portrayed in the earliest sources. For two women whose significant roles in foundational events and narratives

have arguably been minimized over the centuries by the prominence of legendary portraits of them, this blurring can be seen as yet another way in which the women's real identities are obscured. As discussed in chapter 3, Magdalene's identity in relation to other New Testament Marys has long been the subject of debate, and in the Middle Ages she was explicitly conflated with Mary of Bethany and the penitent sinner of Luke 7:36–50. The story of her repentance from a life of promiscuity and pursuit of asceticism also blurred with that of Mary of Egypt. La Malinche's identity has also been merged with that of other female figures from Mexican history and lore, such as La Llorona.

Implications of Reading the Women's Interpretive Histories Together

Study of this comparative analysis of Magdalene and Malinche's interpretive histories yields important insights for several areas of inquiry, including the relationship between gender constructions and communal identity and historical approaches to studying marginalized groups. I limit my analysis to areas that are relevant to Biblical Studies, interpretations of the women that respond to feminist concerns, and the general use of foundational narratives to shape meaning in the present.

Biblical Reception History and Contextual Interpretation

The comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories powerfully demonstrates the mutually formative interaction of Bible and culture. We see this in the explicit link that had already been made in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures between the women as sexual deviants who together function as the negative female archetype, placed in contrast to the ideal female, the Virgin of Guadalupe (see chapter 5). The roots of this identification of

Magdalene with Malinche are not traced in-depth in the works cited in chapter 5, but it seems to depend on the Gregorian conflation of Magdalene with the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50 and her subsequent interpretations as a whore.³ This shows, then, how widely influential the medieval European image of Magdalene as a whore has been, shaping contexts and cultural narratives that are often not included in standard examinations of biblical reception history, which tend to focus on Europe, Canada, and the United States when discussing the modern era. This in turn suggests that further investigation into Magdalene’s reception history in Mexico may yield new insights for reassessing the legacy of this biblical woman, who continues to fascinate contemporary audiences.

To be sure, it seems that La Malinche first functioned as the archetypal deviant woman in Mexico because of the social and ideological needs that such an image filled in nationalistic works of Mexico’s early independence period; in other words, I have found no explicit evidence that Magdalene’s reputation as a former prostitute directly inspired La Malinche’s portrayal as Mexico’s sexually deviant national traitor. Nonetheless, Malinche’s eventual identification with Magdalene, a biblical character, adds further religious sanction to her negative image and its implications for the real women who are placed under it, along with her common portrayal as the anti-type to a praiseworthy biblical woman, the Virgin Mary.

It is possible, in fact, that Magdalene and La Malinche’s reputations as whores fuel each other in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures precisely because this interpretation of a biblical woman resonates with a prominent interpretation of a women from their historical and cultural narratives. When we also account for the additional similarities between these women’s

³ There is some evidence in colonial Christian texts from Mexico, including some written for the Nahuatl people, that the European conflation of Magdalene with either the penitent woman of Luke 7:36–50 or Mary of Bethany came to Mexico with the Spanish colonizers. See, for example, Louise M. Burkhart, *The Slippery Earth: Nahuatl-Christian Moral Dialogue in Sixteenth-Century Mexico* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1989), 65–68.

interpretive histories, it becomes clear that understanding how a biblical text or figure might be interpreted in a certain context requires understanding something of that context's broader cultural narratives and values, and how a wide range of factors shape interpretation of biblical texts. In this regard, the comparative analysis of Magdalene and Malinche's interpretive histories contributes to work in the area of contextual biblical hermeneutics, which assesses how diverse communities (including non-academically trained readers) interpret biblical texts in light of their unique social locations and experiences.

Perspective Matters

The comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories, in fact, highlights how all interpretation is contextual, or perspectival, to some extent. Chapters 3 and 5 detailed how the images of both Magdalene and La Malinche shift across time and place in large part because interpreters see the women through the lenses of their own contexts and concerns, and tend to shape them in ways that make them relevant to their particular audiences. To varying degrees, therefore, their portraits are reflections of interpreters and their social settings, rather than strictly historical investigations into who were the real Mary Magdalene and La Malinche. Even the most recent phase of scholarship on both women, which critically reassess their previous reception histories, is often not only concerned with historical accuracy, but also with how history can produce images of the women that meaningfully inform contemporaneous concerns. In other words, studies of Magdalene and La Malinche across the centuries have sought to appropriate these women as representatives of present-day groups of people and concerns, rather than to merely understand their lives in the past—a point I will discuss in more detail below.

The comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs emphasizes how the influence of personal perspectives and communal concerns in the interpretive process can lead to problematic results. This is especially apparent in the prevalent images of Magdalene and La Malinche as paradigmatic whores. As chapters 3 and 5 detailed, these images develop largely out of stereotypical understandings of females and the perceived need that they meet in their interpretive contexts, rather than out of close readings of the primary sources on the women.

As the most recent phase of Magdalene and La Malinche interpretation shows, however, the influence of personal perspectives and contextual factors can function not only to distort interpretation, but also as a corrective tool to such distortions. Many works on these women of the past fifty years challenge their images as whores not only on historical grounds, but also as ideological constructs that are fueled by patriarchal or androcentric perspectives. It is not surprising that many of these more recent works are written by women who draw on their own experiences of marginalization in patriarchal communities to identify the influence of sexist ideologies in Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs (see chapters 1, 3, and 5). While it is impossible to prove the extent to which patriarchal or androcentric perspectives, as opposed to other factors, shape the stereotypical interpretations of Magdalene and La Malinche, the fact that males were largely responsible for the formative stages of both women's interpretive histories warrants taking their influence seriously. This does not mean that only those who identify as women or with a feminist stance are able to adequately challenge problematic interpretations of the women. But comparing the most recent phase of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs does suggest that people who can identify with some element of these women's lives, whether because of their gender or, in La Malinche's case, their indigenous identity, bring valuable perspectives and insights to the interpretive process. Applied more broadly, this

phenomenon reinforces the importance of people of diverse backgrounds participating in historical research and Biblical Studies.

Resources for Critically Reassessing Magdalene and La Malinche's Interpretive Histories

Bringing together Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories also provides additional perspectives and resources for critical reassessments of these histories and their present-day implications. An over-arching point it highlights is that some popular interpretations of the women—especially as paradigmatic whores—are not only historically problematic, but also ethically questionable because of how they can objectify real people of the past and present.

It is powerful to see how two women from different contexts and foundational narratives come to similarly function as paradigmatic deviant females—to the point of being linked with each other as whores—against the weight of the primary evidence. Especially because both women function at times as the negative contrast to the virtuous Virgin Mary, this highlights the apparent need that all cultures or communities have of archetypal female figures—both positive and negative—and their willingness to create them based on real people from the past. The fact that both Magdalene and La Malinche are real, known individuals from foundational narratives may, indeed, make them more attractive to be used for such normative functions, rather than completely fictitious characters. Given their portrayals as negative female archetypes, it is not surprising that both Magdalene and La Malinche have been associated in some fashion with the biblical Eve, who often functions as the primordial mother and negative archetype of *woman*.

It is also telling to bring together the separate criticisms of each woman's image as a whore that are prevalent in more recent scholarship. A common element of this criticism is that portraying real women from the past as prostitutes or promiscuous without clear basis in the

earliest sources unfairly turns them into sexualized objects and obscures their more historically grounded roles as witnesses, speakers, and shapers of new communities (see chapters 1, 3, and 5). Such criticisms have merit as they apply to each woman's interpretive history separately. I argue, however, that they become even stronger when these histories are brought together and a pattern emerges of mostly male interpreters effectively silencing important women from founding narratives over time through inordinate and speculative focus on their bodies and sexuality.

Examining the most recent phase of scholarship on Magdalene and La Malinche emphasizes the importance of continuing to critically examine stereotypes of the women because of their potential to impact people's lives in the present. A common point of departure for many interpretations of both women over the past fifty years or so is criticism of their prior interpretive histories as mythical, meaning that they deviate significantly from the primary evidence and, therefore, do not present historically grounded representations of the women's lives (see chapters 1, 3, and 5). Recent interpreters, therefore, often seek to recover the real women of the past from beneath what they consider to be legendary, and at times, irresponsibly excessive, portrayals of them. Their methods are largely historical, and reflect the modern impulse to return to a close reading of primary texts in their historical contexts as the basis for truth claims about a past event or person, rather than relying on received traditions.

A major motivator for many contemporary interpreters to challenge the presumably more mythical understandings of Magdalene and La Malinche is that they deem them to objectify, or dehumanize, real people from the past who are members of historically marginalized groups. Feminist and Chicana interpreters in particular make such ethical criticisms of the women's interpretive traditions, noting how their popular representations as whores and/or a traitor

perpetuate harmful stereotypes in the present of women, and in Malinche's case, of indigenous people as well (see chapters 3 and 5). So, in addition to historical methods, they also employ various types of ideological criticism to name the biases of earlier interpreters and deconstruct their portrayals of the women.

I argue, in fact, that Chicana feminist treatments of La Malinche provide an especially concrete, contemporary example of why continually challenging such stereotypes matters. As discussed in chapter 5, popular interpretations of La Malinche as a treacherous whore have reportedly been used to assail Chicana women's identity and agency in ways that made constructing their own, more positive understandings of La Malinche urgent. Because La Malinche lived much more recently than did Magdalene, and because a particular group of women in our own setting have been affected by her negative images, I argue that her interpretive history makes even more tangible the reasons why challenging stereotypes of figures from biblical or national founding narratives still matters.

Bringing the women's interpretive arcs together provides additional resources for challenging their prevalent whore stereotype. Because Magdalene and La Malinche have been explicitly linked in Mexican and Chicano/a cultures by means of this stereotype, exploring their other shared images provides an additional strategy to challenge it. For instance, as noted above, both Magdalene and Malinche take on characteristics of the Virgin Mary in some interpretations, rather than functioning as a negative contrast to her. Highlighting these interpretations further disrupts the strong dichotomy between the sexually deviant Magdalene/Malinche and the virtuous Virgin. Similarly, reading Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs together reinforces the prevalence of their roles as important witnesses, speakers, and shapers of new communities in various interpretations over the centuries. Because these women have been

explicitly linked by means of their largely ahistorical images as whores, one strategy to counter these portrayals is to link and reassert the women based instead on the roles for which they were first known, and which emphasize their character and skills instead of their bodies.

A comparison of the women's interpretive histories also highlights how a variety of factors, beyond the influence of patriarchal perspectives, shape the problematic images of the women. I argue that understanding these factors is important to further dislodging the images from popular imagination. This is especially clear with La Malinche's interpretive trajectory, which shifts according to changing understandings of Mexican national identity (see chapter 5). To be sure, the image of Malinche as a treacherous seductress did arise from a male interpretive framework and does depend on stereotypical understandings of the female sex. This image, however, is also a way for Mexicans to wrestle with questions of national identity stemming from the Conquest and the resulting mestizo population. In this regard, Malinche's indigenous identity is as much a factor in her usefulness for reinterpreting Mexico's foundational story as is her sex. To understand her representation as a whore, therefore, interpreters' conceptions of race and Mexico's ethnic diversity need to be critically evaluated, along with androcentric bias. Like pulling one thread in a knitted blanket, trying to isolate androcentrism or misogyny in La Malinche's interpretive history reveals that they are intricately linked with other factors.

Rereading Magdalene's interpretive history through Malinche's encourages similar examination of a wide range of factors that contribute to the development and longevity of her image as a whore. As chapter 3 discussed, for example, male interpreters developed the widespread medieval portrait of Magdalene as a penitent whore whose promiscuity represents the most despicable of sins. It draws on the common understanding of the era of females as the weaker sex, inherently more prone to temptation. In a context where biblical interpretation was

mostly the prerogative of celibate priests and monks, whose contact with actual woman may have been limited, one can make a good case that androcentrism was a factor in developing this characterization of Magdalene. Its popularity throughout the Middle Ages, however, is also due to the powerful example of penitence, passionate discipleship, and divine forgiveness it provides. Although stereotypical understandings of females may have motivated the choice of Magdalene as the paradigm of penitence, rather than Peter, for example, once this image becomes a stock part of medieval hagiography it is often employed as positive inspiration for Christians to be sincere in penitence and in following Christ. Given the importance of the sacrament of penance in Christendom, it is understandable that preachers and writers draw on the penitent Magdalene's example to comfort anxious souls, even while some also do so to put forward norms for female behavior. And more recent portrayals of Magdalene as formerly promiscuous, seen in works such as *The Last Temptation of Christ*, show her usefulness for considering the extent of Jesus's full humanity, including whether or not he was subject to sexual temptation. While this image lacks historical basis, it proves useful yet again for wrestling with larger questions in a new context.

The fact that the whore images of Magdalene and Malinche are used to negotiate various social and theological concerns helps explain their persistence, despite growing criticism in the past century of their lack of historical basis and the sexist ideologies that fuel them. This suggests that the underlying issues or concerns that these women are used to address need to be taken seriously in order to further disrupt the usage of these problematic images. Chicana interpreters of La Malinche have contributed significantly to such efforts by showing how conflicting understandings of communal identity and gender roles are negotiated through the figure of La Malinche (see chapter 5). By suggesting alternative ways to deal with the real

concerns she represents, interpreters help alleviate the need of Malinche as a treacherous scapegoat or paradigmatic whore. Further work of this sort could also be undertaken with Magdalene.

Reading the women's interpretive histories together also shows how the line between understanding the women either as sinners or saints is hazier than the dominant narratives of them as archetypal deviant females suggest. Medieval Magdalene legends, for example, show Magdalene's transformation from paradigmatic sinner to exemplary Christian in the same text, while images of La Malinche as both a heroine and a traitor exist contemporaneously in Mexico's postindependence era, depending on the perspective of the interpreter (see chapters 3 and 5). In this regard, a full comparison of the women's interpretive arcs contributes to scholarly attempts to move beyond dichotomous examinations of the women as either heroines or harlots, and to see them instead as real, multi-dimensional women.⁴

Hermeneutical and Ethical Issues Raised by the Comparison

Bringing Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories together is also instructive because it reveals certain hermeneutical and ethical issues that may be inherent to any attempt to make foundational narratives and figures meaningful in changing contexts. Some of these issues have already been raised by interpreters of each woman and have been discussed in part above. Additional dimensions of these issues and further questions arise precisely when carefully considering previous attempts to reclaim the women from beneath their supposedly mythical portrayals. They center on the dynamic relationship between history, myth, ideology, and ethics in the interpretive process. Specifically, I argue that the line between history and myth may not

⁴ E.g., Sandra Messinger Cypess, "Mother? Malinche and Allegories of Gender, Ethnicity and National Identity in Mexico," in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*.

be as clear as some previous studies of the women suggest, and that any use of a person from the past to address contemporaneous concerns risks objectifying them. I further argue that the sparse nature of the primary data on the women and the unavoidably perspectival nature of all interpretation make it difficult to determine the criteria for historically accurate, ethically viable interpretations. I then posit critically analyzing one's interpretations in conversation with diverse interpretive communities as a strategy to address these issues.

It is helpful to return to the claims and methods of the more recent studies of Magdalene and La Malinche that aim to rehabilitate historically accurate portraits of the women against centuries of purportedly mythical images of them—especially as whores, and, in La Malinche's case, as a traitor as well. As discussed above, several of these studies level both a historical criticism against these images as lacking basis in the earliest sources and an ideological criticism that patriarchal perspectives, among other biases, help shape them. These criticisms, in fact, seem to be linked in the construction of these images, so that patriarchal ideology can be considered as one factor leading to misreading, or disregarding, the historical evidence for the women's lives. The ideological criticism is often tied to ethical criticisms that certain interpretations of the women—especially those that focus on their supposedly deviant sexuality—objectify real women from the past.

When carefully considering the more recent scholarship on both women, it becomes clear that the ideological and ethical criticisms apply not just to the construction of the “mythical” images of the women in a time past, but also to the way in which these images are appropriated or deployed in changing contexts, with potentially harmful effects on real people's lives. So, for example, more recent interpreters object to the conflation of Magdalene with the penitent woman of Luke 7 not only because it is a historically baseless construct, but also because her resulting

image as promiscuous has been used to portray all female sexual activity as dangerous, both in the past and present. Chicana scholars, similarly, are not troubled by interpretations of La Malinche as a traitor to native peoples simply as a matter of Mexican history, but also because this interpretation has been used to criticize their own actions and identities. A larger concern that emerges from examining more recent scholarship on both women is, therefore, that their so-called *mythical* images have acquired a popularity or usefulness that has enabled them to transcend the settings that shaped them and be appropriated for potentially harmful ends in new settings.

The ongoing relevance of foundational texts and figures, indeed, largely lies in their ability to be reinterpreted to meaningfully address changing circumstances. Magdalene and La Malinche's long and varied interpretive arcs testify to this, including the many twentieth and twenty-first century scholarly works on the women that arguably would not have a wide audience without these colorful interpretive arcs to critically reassess. As I will address more fully below, however, it seems that some limits need to be placed on the scope of acceptable interpretations. The status that both Magdalene and La Malinche have acquired as archetypal whores illustrates the problematic nature of interpretations of the women that have become almost completely detached from the primary sources and historical contexts in which the women lived. In order to function as archetypes, it is necessary for the women's individuality as real people to be diffused and the details of their past actions to be obscured. They become symbols that can be employed for various ends, resulting in the objectification of real women from the past. This de-individualizing likewise occurs when the stereotypical images of the women are applied to contemporary settings. To label someone negatively as a *malinche*, for example, requires that that person's individuality—and, arguably their humanity as well—be

diminished in order to fit into a larger category that has derogatory connotations. To be sure, not all interpretations of Magdalene and La Malinche are as problematic as their image as paradigmatic whores. This example does, nonetheless, illustrate why it is important to wrestle with questions of interpretation and appropriation of real people from the past.

Recent reassessments of Magdalene and La Malinche have effectively shown that historical research functions as a powerful critical tool to challenge such ideologically-laden legendary images and their ongoing appropriation for troubling normative uses, such as identifying female sexual activity as inherently problematic. Many of these reassessments conduct a close examination of the primary sources on the women in relation to their socio-historical settings to show that the whore image, for example, has no solid basis in the available historical evidence. In other words, an effective way to reign in excessive or mythical interpretations of the women is to call them to account to the primary sources. The distance between presumably mythical interpretations and the primary sources helps reveal potential contextual and ideological factors that play roles in these interpretations. Clearing these away, in turn, is a strategy recent interpreters use to recover historically accurate portraits of the women of the past.

As described in chapter 1, however, several of these more recent works on Magdalene and La Malinche seek not only to debunk these women's earlier legendary interpretations, at least partly by reasserting more historically grounded understandings of them, but also for these understandings to meaningfully address contemporaneous contexts and concerns. So, for example, Haskins argues that the "true" Mary Magdalene as seen in her New Testament roles could function as a powerful symbol to contemporaneous women because of her "independence,

courage, action, faith and love.”⁵ And Gaspar de Alba has stated that La Malinche, once stripped of her patriarchal interpretations, represents “a woman’s freedom to use her mind, her tongue, and her body in the way that she chooses and to cultivate her intellectual skills for her own survival and empowerment.”⁶ In this regard, some of the recent critical works on the women also suggest appropriating them to inspire present-day audiences, not entirely unlike how the women’s earlier “mythical” portraits were appropriated to address their own contexts.

A major question this raises is how contemporary appropriations of the women can avoid repeating some of the same historical and ethical problems seen in previous appropriations? This is a multi-faceted question that I suggest reveals the ambiguous relationship between history, myth, ideology, and ethics in attempts to make founding texts and figures relevant to changing contexts. Regarding history, I agree with recent interpreters of the women that problematic interpretations have resulted from straying significantly from what the earliest sources substantiate. Chapters 3 and 5, in fact, have shown how ideology and various cultural factors can play a powerful, or even overwhelming, role in interpretations of Magdalene and La Malinche. While recent attempts to reclaim the women from these problematic interpretations are clearly more historically grounded than many previous attempts, it seems fair to ask how ideology might also influence their historical analysis.

I touched on this question in chapter 3 in regard to Schaberg’s assessment of the historical Magdalene and the potential she claims for this recovered image to empower people in the present. Applied more broadly to any work that seeks historical, yet also normative, portraits of the women, it could certainly be the case that the results of historical analysis are what lead interpreters to conclude that the women can have a positive or exemplary function for present-

⁵ Haskins, *Mary Magdalen*, 400.

⁶ Gaspar de Alba, “Malinche’s Revenge,” in Romero and Harris, *Feminism, Nation and Myth*, 55.

day audiences. But could it not also be the case that approaching the study of these women (or other people from the past) with the goal of challenging negative or mythical interpretations, or with hopes of finding a more positive image of them, unduly influences the historical investigation?

Take, for example, Schaberg's privileging of John 20 for her reconstruction of Magdalene. There may in fact be solid evidence for concluding that this text reflects early and historically reliable traditions about Magdalene, thereby making it a logical foundation upon which to reconstruct Magdalene's first century roles. An interpreter's goal of finding a more positive image of Magdalene, however, could also influence her privileging of John 20, which presents the clearest portrait in the primary sources of Magdalene in the important roles of first witness and proclaimer of Jesus's resurrection. In this regard, historical methods and ideological factors likely work together in such revised portraits, just as they did in the earlier objectionable portraits.

Feminist interpreters such as Schaberg would, in fact, readily acknowledge that the author's experiences and ideologies play a role in their interpretations. I agree with the feminist assertion that there is no value-free, objective standpoint from which to view history or make normative claims. I am also aware of the criticism that feminist biblical or theological scholarship's "advocacy" stance negates its historical or scientific validity, and in no way intend to suggest that feminist methods inevitably distort historical analysis toward unreliable results.⁷ To the contrary, I believe that feminist approaches can provide a useful corrective to centuries of historical scholarship that has, consciously or not, assumed the male subject and perspective as normative. What I am suggesting, however, is that it is important for anyone who is interested in

⁷ For this criticism, see, for example, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Bread Not Stone: The Challenge of Feminist Biblical Interpretation* (Boston: Beacon, 1984), 45–49.

how women from the past, such as Magdalene and La Malinche, could meaningfully interact with contemporaneous audiences to also critically examine the assumptions and aims that they bring to the interpretive process, and consider how these might predispose them to certain conclusions. Doing so is one way to try to prevent misreading or over-reading the primary evidence in such a way that could eventually create a new mythical version of the women—a phenomenon that raises ethical as well as historical issues, as recent reassessments of the women's interpretive histories show.

Based on analysis of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories, this study has argued that all interpretation is shaped to some extent by the contexts and aims of particular interpreters. The apparently unavoidable influence of ideology or contextual factors in historical reconstruction thus leads me to believe that perhaps the line between history and myth is more ambiguous than some recent reassessments of Magdalene and La Malinche suggest. As stated above, for example, both Haskins and Gaspar de Alba suggest that these women can have positive symbolic functions that are based on their more-historically grounded roles than in earlier, patriarchally-shaped interpretations. A key question this raises, however, is whether any appropriation of people from the past to serve as exemplary or normative in the present risks making them into icons that, similar to archetypes, obscure the real women behind the symbols and detach them from their historical roles to some extent? This again raises the ethical issue of whether contemporary interpreters might unintentionally re-objectify the women by projecting their own concerns onto them, just as previous interpreters arguably have done. It also raises the question of how historical analysis can retain its critical function if used to yield icons or symbols that address contexts and concerns that are foreign to the subject matter under investigation.

The repetitive nature of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive trajectories also suggests that in this case, history and myth perhaps stand in more of a dynamic than linear relationship. For example, the more historically-grounded images that many recent interpreters put forward of Magdalene as early evangelist and witness to Jesus's resurrection and of La Malinche as a reliable interpreter and cultural intermediary during the Conquest were, in fact, prominent during the earliest centuries of their interpretive arcs, and could still be found in subsequent eras alongside other images—in other words, they are not entirely new discoveries of the past century (see chapters 3 and 5). Similarly, pushing back on supposedly legendary images of the women has also occurred before the twentieth century, such as in Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples's sixteenth century call for Magdalene to be distinguished from Mary of Bethany and the woman of Luke 7:36–50, and for her New Testament roles to be reasserted (see chapter 3). These women's interpretive arcs, in fact, have shown that people tend not to remain satisfied with the women's purportedly more historically-grounded images, evidenced by the fact that popular or legendary images continue to emerge (or re-emerge) that meet the needs or fascinations of new audiences. This dynamic continues into the twenty-first century, when there is a wealth of both scholarly studies that seek to understand Magdalene and La Malinche in their own historical contexts and popular works that present a variety of images of them.

The swinging of the pendulum between more historical and mythical portraits of the women reflects the seeming inevitability of multiple interpretations of them. As discussed above, careful exegesis of the primary sources provides an important control on interpretations of the women, but these sources are open to more than one plausible interpretation, especially given their sparse nature. The previous chapters demonstrated that the relatively sparse primary evidence for each woman's life does not provide sufficient basis for developing complete

historical reconstructions or biographies of them. Consequently, all interpreters must fill in some gaps in the earliest data if they are to produce sketches of the women that are rich enough to meaningfully address new audiences (see chapter 1). In other words, a bare description of the sparse primary data about Magdalene and Malinche's lives is not what has kept audiences fascinated with them for centuries. The comparative analysis of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories shows that a key issue is, therefore, how these gaps are filled.

This brings us back to the nebulous relationship between history, myth, ideology, and ethics. If we accept that all interpretation is ideological or perspectival to some extent, and that some gaps in the primary sources will be filled in order to create portraits of Magdalene and La Malinche (or other people from the past), what criteria could be used to construct a historically plausible interpretation that is both relevant to contemporary audiences and avoids the ethical pitfalls of some previous interpretations?

Even though primary sources are open to multiple plausible interpretations, I argue that their ongoing use provides some important controls on efforts to reinterpret founding texts or figures. As the previous chapters have shown, some of the most objectionable images of Magdalene and La Malinche developed when close analysis of the primary evidence for their lives was not used as a major source. At the very least, use of primary sources can clarify that a given interpretation aims to have some foundation in the lives of real people from the past, rather than being fictional portrayals that are only loosely inspired by these lives. A common data set, therefore, provides an important baseline upon which different interpretations of that data can critically engage. Without such a shared grounding point, we may be consigned to accepting all interpretations as equally valid expressions of the perspectives of a particular individual or

community. Such absolute relativity would leave no clear basis for ideological or ethical challenges to specific interpretations.

By contrast, having some shared data and hermeneutical assumptions makes acknowledging the relativity of all interpretations into a tool for dislodging the power of any one of them that is determined to be more harmful than useful. Many contemporary reassessments of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories demonstrate this: by seeking to identify the cultural and ideological factors that contribute to interpretations they find problematic, they reveal that these interpretations are not timeless universals, but rather arise from particular contexts and concerns and therefore are subject to revision. A full comparison of Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories further illuminates the extent to which all interpretation arises from particular perspectives, and thereby suggests that acknowledgment of this reality can prevent the hegemony of any one interpretation of important texts or figures.

In order to determine which interpretations are both appropriately grounded in historical data and are ethically acceptable, I argue that it is also crucial for interpreters of diverse communities and perspectives to critically engage each other's work. This includes attempting to understand what contextual factors, practical concerns, and hermeneutical methods shape particular interpretations. As the previous chapters have demonstrated, what one group of interpreters deems to be an ethically problematic interpretation may have been motivated by positive concerns in its own context. This does not mean that this interpretation should be uncritically adopted, but rather suggests that arriving at a deeper understanding of its meaning in its original context can help interpreters see if there is anything of value left in the image that could be reshaped for new audiences. If it is deemed that the image should be completely rejected, it is at least important to try to understand why the image held traction in its own

context—both as a way to dislodge its power, and to be able to find new ways to address any underlying, important concerns that the image may have expressed.

Such empathetic, yet critical, engagement with diverse contexts of interpretation can also help contemporary interpreters recognize the culturally and temporally bound nature of our own interpretations. In this regard, engagement with diverse interpretive communities provides a lens through which interpreters can critically examine their own hermeneutical assumptions and the potential impact of their work on real life—in their own contexts and beyond. Whether this occurs through face-to-face conversations, or through study of diverse interpreters' works, this interaction can raise awareness of how one's own interpretations might be received in a certain context, and thereby can help interpreters avoid the ethical issues involved in some of the most popular images of Magdalene and La Malinche. My comparative approach to Magdalene and Malinche's interpretive histories provides one model of how this critical conversation can occur; namely, not only with interpreters of diverse religious and cultural backgrounds in the present, but also with interpreters from different temporal contexts.

Finally, comparing Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive arcs suggests that, in the end, we may need to learn to accept the limits of what historical evidence can tell us about people from the past, as well as the distance between their lives and our own that may—or perhaps should—never be completely bridged.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a detailed comparison of Mary Magdalene and La Malinche's interpretive histories shows strikingly similar interpretive trends, despite the different contexts in which these women lived. Analysis of these trends yields insights that contribute to various areas of inquiry

within biblical studies, such as studies of reception history, work in contextual biblical hermeneutics, and critical evaluations of Mary Magdalene's interpretive history. The comparison also contributes to feminist work on the ethics of interpretation, especially as it relates to reinterpreting women from the past to address contemporary audiences. Finally, the critical comparison helps highlight, and respond to, hermeneutical and ethical concerns that arise when attempting to make founding narratives and figures relevant to changing contexts.

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