CHAPTER 2

More Collyridian Déjà vu

One of the most striking phenomena about the early Jesus people is that women appear to have been exceptionally involved in the spread of the movement. Almost all the house churches named in the New Testament are identified by the name of the women who apparently led them: Chloe, Nympha, Apphia, Priscilla, Lydia, and Mary the mother of Mark.¹ In Romans 16, Paul recognized the work of several women—Phoebe, Prisca, Mary, Junia, Tryphaena, Tryphosa, Rufus’s mother, Julia, and Nereus’s sister.² Debunking the idea that only men were apostles, Paul called Junia an apostle.³ There Junia stands, in plain view: a woman apostle. Paul introduces her as an apostle without comment or explanation, suggesting none was needed, as if everyone knew there were women apostles.⁴

Roman and Greek writers outside the Jesus movement also indicated that its women leaders were in the majority, or at a minimum, that they were more publicly visible than the men. For example, the first Roman to write about “Christians” was Pliny the Younger, the governor of Bithynia and Pontus. Around the year 113, Pliny questioned several Jesus followers—and when he wanted to know even more about their assemblies, he interrogated two women whom he called *ministrae*, or ministers,

This chapter is a follow-up to Ally Kateusz, “Collyridian Déjà vu: The Trajectory of Redaction of the Markers of Mary’s Liturgical Leadership,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 75–92. First-Place Prize Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza New Scholar Award 2013.

suggesting that he believed these women were the leaders from whom he could learn the most.⁵ Further indicating that women leaders were in the majority, later in the second century the Greek philosopher Celsus listed seven founders of various Christian groups—and *five* of the seven were women—Helen, Marcellina, Salome, Mariamne, and Martha. Only two were men: Simon and Marcion. The third-century Christian theologian Origen debated Celsus on a number of points, but he did not contradict Celsus' lopsidedly female list of Christian founders.⁶

Elizabeth A. Clark calls the absence of narratives about these important women “disturbing.”⁷ Where are the narratives, she asks, that depicted these holy women working miracles and performing “cures, exorcisms, and other wondrous feats” such as found in narratives about holy men?⁸

In fact, some long, full narratives depict holy women preaching, teaching, healing, exorcising, and baptizing (or sealing and washing) other people, just like narratives about male apostles depict them.⁹ These authors called their female protagonists apostles. Yet there are, as Clark says, *suspensions* about these long narratives about women.¹⁰ Why?

The reason for the suspicion about the long narratives about early Christian women, and the consequent dismissal of these narratives, is that for years, scholars have misapplied an old rule-of-thumb that was applied to NT texts—*lectio brevior potior*—that is, *the shortest reading is the preferred reading*—and applied it to all early Christian texts, including narratives about women. A short narrative, therefore, was thought to be older than a long narrative about the same person. As a result, most scholars, including Clark herself, and Hippolyte Delehaye in his influential work on the lives of early Christian holy men and women a century ago, have assumed that the shortest narratives about holy women were the oldest.¹¹ And therefore, they have ignored the longer narratives. In this chapter and the next, I will demonstrate that, *au contraire*, the longest, fullest, most detailed narratives about early Christian women leaders are usually the oldest.

By “narrative,” I mean a text whose author described the woman leader *doing things* during her ministry—not just lauding her and saying how pure and holy she was, but describing what she said, what she did, who she did it to, and where and when she did it. Fashions in writing styles changed from time to time; some generations preferred short and simple hagiography, others preferred high-style, elaborated, versions,

plus later theology was sometimes added to a text in order to sanitize it for reading in a later church. A Marian homily, for example, primarily told about Mary's many virtues as perceived by the later theologian, but a narrative depicted Mary in specific places, with specific people, and doing specific things, for example, entering the Temple, raising her arms and leading the prayer, exorcising demons, preaching the gospel. I restrict my analysis and conclusion—that the longest, fullest, most detailed narratives about early Christian women are the oldest—to *narratives* about these women.

In some cases, the long narratives about women leaders may have biographical content, with the clearest candidate the *Life of Nino*, a long narrative about a woman evangelist who various ancient authors credited with the conversion of ancient Iberia. Yet even the canonical gospels were written at least a generation after Jesus lived, and questions arise about which parts of them are or are not biographical. In my opinion, the most important reason to identify the oldest narratives about early Christian women leaders is not biography. It is because these narratives can be gleaned for kernels of historicity about the gender practices of various Jesus movements.

For example, as I will demonstrate in Chapter 3, each of the authors of four long narratives about a woman evangelist called their female protagonist an “apostle.” These four narratives about women apostles are consistent with latent tradition, most expressly with the naming of a woman, Junia, as an “apostle” in Romans 16. Each of these four authors also described the woman apostle baptizing the people she converted—and described her doing this without any explanation, as if no explanation was needed in their community regarding women baptizers. This suggests that these narratives were composed in Jesus communities where women apostles and women baptizing were considered the norm. These narratives, thus, preserve an important historical kernel regarding the gender practices of some Jesus communities. Also of potential interest to the historian is the way that later scribes censored these long narratives.

In this chapter, I will use redaction analysis to demonstrate that later scribes often censored passages that portrayed a woman in a leadership role, which led to shorter and shorter recensions of the original narrative. First, however, it is important to know that some well-respected text critics have recently issued important exceptions to the old rule-of-thumb.

THE OLD RULE-OF-THUMB: *LECTIO BREVIOR POTIOR*

Until recently, most textual critics of early Christian texts used the old NT rule-of-thumb—*lectio brevior potior*—that is, the shortest reading is the preferred reading. This rule was applied to all Christian texts, with the result that longer recensions were assumed to be later than shorter recensions. In recent years, however, influential experts in text criticism have issued strong caveats about this rule-of-thumb. New research has reversed the old assumptions about this rule. The rule can no longer be considered a rule at all, not even for New Testament texts.

In 2018, for example, Jennifer Knust and Tommy Wasserman wrote, “Recent studies of the most ancient copies of the New Testament books have uncovered a striking fact: scribes omitted portions of the texts they were copying more often than they added to them. This finding is especially startling given the by now centuries-old text-critical criterion *lectio brevior potior* (prefer the shorter reading).”¹² In 2016, Larry Hurtado similarly wrote: “At least in the NT papyri from the second and third centuries, contrary to the assumptions of some previous scholars, omission is notably more frequent than addition (calling into question the sometimes rigid use of the ‘prefer the shorter reading’ canon in assessing textual variants).”¹³ In 2012, Mark Goodacre abandoned the old rule-of-thumb when he argued that some short Jesus sayings in the *Gospel of Thomas* were shortened versions of older New Testament sayings. Goodacre argued that some of these short sayings have a “missing middle” and are a truncated version of the older, longer saying.¹⁴ Even earlier, Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee warned that the old rule should be used “with great caution because scribes sometimes made omissions in the text either for smoothness or to remove what might be *objectionable*.”¹⁵ Bruce Metzger also gave several reasons a longer reading should be preferred over a shorter, including if a scribe may have considered what was omitted “*offensive to pious ears*.”¹⁶

A variety of scholars of texts outside the canon also have issued warnings against using the old rule-of-thumb. Aaron Michael Butts recently wrote about his discovery that later copyists purged large sections of Ephrem the Syrian’s early fourth-century writings because these writings did not conform to later theology. According to Butts, Ephrem’s most complete writings survive only in the very oldest, and longest, manuscripts. The short versions that survived, Butts says, were “not a random

sample but, instead, a deliberate selection.”¹⁷ Richard Bauckham, in his research into Jewish and Christian apocalypses, similarly pointed out that “the textual tradition tended to abbreviation rather than expansion.”¹⁸

Scholars working on extracanonical narratives, including narratives about a woman named Mary, have issued even stronger caveats about using the old rule-of-thumb. François Bovon, who worked with multiple manuscripts of the *Acts of Philip*—which has a protagonist named Mariamne who baptizes and is called an “apostle”—explained why the opposite rule-of-thumb, that is, *longest is oldest*, is more appropriate for these narratives:

Contrary to the rule of thumb followed by most New Testament scholars, the shorter form of a recension is not necessarily the most ancient. It seems that apocryphal texts were sometimes perceived by their readers to be overly redundant or *even heretical* in places. Consequently these texts were often abbreviated.¹⁹

Bovon listed some of the ancient editors known to have abbreviated these narratives, such as Gregory of Tours, Nicetas of Thessaloniki, and Symeon Metaphrastes. He concluded, “The oldest Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles were very long.”²⁰ Richard Slater added, “The rules learned for textual criticism of canonical writings may not be relied upon ... for many apocryphal writings were abbreviated and excerpted for liturgical and commemorative purposes and edited to reduce or eliminate material offensive to orthodox editors.”²¹ Invoking Bovon and quoting Slater, Shoemaker likewise argued that the longest recension of a narrative about Mary the mother of Jesus is more likely to be the oldest.²²

What types of behavior in women might later scribes have found *objectionable*, or *offensive to pious ears*, or *even heretical*, and therefore excised as Epp, Fee, Metzger, and Bovon suggest? The evidence in this and the next chapter will demonstrate that later scribes excised depictions of female leadership and authority that did not accord with the later Christian gender model. Passages about women who did not follow later Christian gender norms are unusual in the manuscript tradition—both canonical and extracanonical—and in this chapter, I will demonstrate that these passages are unusual because later scribes so frequently excised them. Scribal excision is why later recensions are shorter.

REDACTION ANALYSIS OF MARY'S LITURGICAL LEADERSHIP

The path to viewing how later scribes censored texts about woman leaders is through redaction analysis. For this analysis, I employ Dormition manuscripts about the “falling asleep,” or death, of Mary. The Dormition manuscript tradition is particularly useful in a redaction analysis because the text of the oldest largely complete Dormition manuscript is longer than the text of any other Dormition manuscript, and also because the Dormition manuscript tradition is rich in manuscripts. This richness permits us to view changes made to the popular Dormition text as it passed through the hands of later scribes, translators, and copyists.

The traditional view of Dormition narratives is that they were composed after the Council of Chalcedon (451), a position most scholars today have abandoned. Dormition narratives were popular around the Mediterranean, as evinced by their survival in nine ancient languages.²³ The text of some of these manuscripts preserves literary elements that suggest their original composition was relatively early in the Christian era.

In the last decade or so, Shoemaker has taken the lead in arguing that if Dormition texts were dated in the same way that other texts with “gnostic” elements (such as the Nag Hammadi texts) are dated, then the composition of the Dormition narratives could likewise be dated at least to the fourth century, if not earlier—to the third, or possibly the second century.²⁴ For example, Shoemaker argues that the “gnostic” or Jewish concept of angel Christology, which is preserved in a handful of manuscripts in the *Liber Requiei* or “Palm” Dormition text tradition, is reason for an early dating because later scribes replaced the Great Angel in the text with Jesus. This text tradition is called the “Palm” tradition because while the oldest recension says that the Great Angel gave Mary a book of mysteries and told her to give it to the apostles, many later scribes replaced Mary’s book with a *palm branch*.²⁵ A variety of scholars have concluded an early dating from other archaic literary elements, with some suggesting that the Dormition narrative originated around Jerusalem, perhaps in an Ebionite Christian community or other community in close contact with rabbinic custom.²⁶

The oldest largely complete Dormition manuscript is in Old Syriac, a dialect of Aramaic.²⁷ It is not in the “Palm” text tradition, but in the Six Books text tradition, so-called because its text says the apostles wrote six books about Mary’s passing. Worth noting is that some scholars call the

Six Books tradition the Bethlehem tradition, because the text says Mary went from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and some have called it the incense and censers tradition, because it contains so many instances of censuring with incense.²⁸ Using a philological approach, some scholars conclude that the Six Books text may be even older than that of the “Palm” narrative with the Great Angel.²⁹ For example, one Six Books passage, which suggests both its antiquity and its composition around Jerusalem, describes a debate in Jerusalem between the “lovers of the messiah” and the “unbelievers,” with both factions depicted as ethnic Jews, but neither faction identified as “Christian” or “Jew,” epithets seemingly unknown to the author of this passage.³⁰ In addition, *both* factions call Jesus the “son of Mary,” a designation known from Mark 6:3. This passage therefore would appear to have been composed prior to the gradual parting of the ways, quite possibly prior to when the Jesus followers—or the “lovers of the messiah” as this author called them—were first called Christian.³¹ Further militating for an earlier rather than a later date of composition, Richard Bauckham notes that the apocalypse at the end of the Six Books preserves the early view that “the dead are conceived as in a state of waiting for the last judgment and the resurrection,” and points out that “there seems to be no other apocalypse expressing this earlier view which can plausibly be dated later than the mid-second century.”³²

Finally, as we will see below, the Six Books narrative depicts Jesus’s mother with considerable religious authority, including leading men in prayer as well as preaching, activities which Hans Förster and I have argued suggest a composition prior to the late second-century criticism of such female leadership, such as the middle of the second century. I further argue that the composition seems likely to have been based on first-century oral traditions about Mary.³³ Previous research demonstrates that later scribes in fact did not *add* scenes of Mary’s leadership, they *excised* them.³⁴ The second-century dating of the Six Books text, thus, appears to be consistent with other texts that are without much controversy dated no later than the second century, such as the *Protevangelium* and the *Gospel of Mary*.³⁵ The precise time that the Six Books narrative about Mary’s death was composed, however, is not critical for the following redaction analysis, because this analysis focuses on the manuscript tradition, and all of these manuscripts are of course later than the original composition.

Among the rich Six Books manuscript tradition exists a single largely complete Dormition manuscript. When analyzing the impact of later

scribal censorship, its text can be profitably compared to that of later recensions. This very early Six Books text was preserved apparently only because a ninth-century scribe scrubbed it and wrote over it, making it the underscript of a palimpsest. Some Old Syriac Dormition fragments, including some Six Books palimpsest fragments, may be older than this palimpsest, which itself is missing some folios, but this palimpsest is around a century older than any other largely complete Dormition manuscript.

Agnes Smith Lewis acquired the palimpsest manuscript in Egypt and edited, translated, and published its underscript in 1902 as *Apocrypha Syriaca* in *Studia Sinaitica* 11.³⁶ Smith Lewis is best known for publishing the underscript of another palimpsest, the famous Old Syriac Gospels.³⁷ She dated the paleography of the Six Books underscript to the second half of the fifth century, no later than the early sixth century, and her fifth-century dating is generally affirmed.³⁸

The text of this fifth-century palimpsest is very long—and it presents the mother of Jesus as if she were one of the women leaders about whom the North African apologist Tertullian (ca. 155–ca. 220) complained: “The very women of these heretics, how wanton they are! For they are bold enough to teach, to dispute, to enact exorcisms, to undertake cures—it may be even to baptize.”³⁹ The palimpsest’s narrative depicted Mary teaching, disputing, enacting exorcisms, undertaking cures—and maybe even baptizing. Andrew B. McGowan explains, “Baptism is often referred to in ancient texts as a ‘seal.’”⁴⁰ According to the palimpsest text, Mary “took water, and *sealed* them, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. And she sprinkled it upon their bodies.”⁴¹ Tertullian’s complaint, thus, has remarkable resonance with the way Mary is described in the palimpsest text.

Close readings of the palimpsest text against the texts of two important later Six Books manuscripts illustrate the trajectory of later scribal censorship—especially with respect to Mary’s markers of liturgical authority.⁴² The first is a late sixth-century Six Books manuscript that William Wright edited and translated. It is the second-oldest Dormition manuscript so far published (other than the small fragments mentioned above) and it is almost complete.⁴³ Its text was approximately sixty percent as long as that of the fifth century.

The second manuscript is a medieval Ethiopic translation, dated around the fourteenth century, which was first edited and translated into Latin by Marius Chaine, and later into English by Shoemaker, who

considers this Ethiopic text a faithful recension most likely translated in the sixth or seventh century.⁴⁴ Its text is approximately half as long as that of the palimpsest.

A SCENE OF MARY EXORCISING DEMONS

Side-by-side parallels of the text of these three Six Books manuscripts demonstrate a pattern of later scribal excision consistent with *longest is oldest*. For example, this pattern is illustrated by a scene in the palimpsest text that depicted Mary exorcising two demons from a woman named Malchū. In both of the later manuscripts, the passage is shorter—but each later scribe appears to have excised different parts (see Fig. 2.1).

Each of the two later scribes excised different parts of the longer text, presumably each in accordance with what they or their masters deemed *objectionable*, or *offensive to pious ears*, or *even heretical*. For example, the scribe behind the sixth-century Syriac retained Malchū's name and most of her family lineage—but excised almost all the elements of Mary's exorcism. By contrast, the scribe behind the Ethiopic text preserved many elements of the exorcism—but excised Malchū's name and family lineage. This scribe in fact excised not just Malchū's name, but the names of all the women who traveled to Jerusalem to see Mary—Malchū, Flavia, Abigail, and Yuchabar.⁴⁵

Redaction analysis both supplements and is supplemented by other research about Christian women leaders during this early era. For example, in excising all these women's names—women whom the author subsequently described as evangelists whom Mary sent out with books around the Mediterranean⁴⁶—the scribe behind the Ethiopic text may have been following a Late Antique scribal practice of anonymizing important women—a practice that essentially removed them from the history of the Jesus movement. This anonymization of women became particularly noticeable in the fifth-century church histories. Anne Jensen has analyzed how the fourth-century church history written by Eusebius, the bishop of Caesaria, in 325, had over twice as many named women as found in Sozomen's fifth-century church history, and *six times* more named women than found in either of the fifth-century church histories written by Socrates and Theodoret.⁴⁷ Sometimes not only these women's names, but also what they did, were erased. For example, around the year 330—five years after Eusebius completed his church history—a woman evangelist converted all of the country of Iberia (modern Georgia).

5th c. palimpsest MS	6th c. Syriac MS	14th c. Ethiopic MS
Malchū came also to her,	Came to her Malchū	Came another woman,
the daughter of Sabinus, the Procurator	the daughter of Sabinus,	omitted
in whom were two demons;	who had two devils,	who was beset by many demons
one that tormented her by night; and the other that came upon her by day, and buffeted her;	one that tormented her by night and another that came upon her by day;	omitted
and she entreated the Lady Mary;	omitted	and she cried out to Mary with a great voice, saying, ‘Have mercy on me, my master.’
and immediately when she had prayed over her, and had placed her hand upon her, and had spoken thus:	and she prayed over her,	She extended her hand and prayed, saying,
“I adjure thee, in the name of my Master Who is in heaven, at this time concerning this soul, that she may be healed.”	omitted	‘I adjure you, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, come out of this soul, and do not afflict her again.’
And straight away these demons came out of her, and they wailed, and cried out, saying,	and she was healed.	And at that moment, the demons went forth from that woman, crying out and saying,
“What is there between us and thee, O Mother of God?”	omitted	“What do you have against us Mary, the one who bore Christ?”
. . . Then the Lady Mary		. . . Then Mary
rebuked them in the name of our Lord Jesus the Christ.		omitted
And straightaway they departed towards the sea.		plunged them into the depths of the sea.

Fig. 2.1 Mary exorcized demons from Malchū

Both Sozomen and the early fifth-century church historian Rufinus, who added the later chapters to Eusebius's history, mentioned her extraordinary feat—but anonymized her, with Sozomen calling her “a Christian woman,” and Rufinus, “a woman captive.”⁴⁸ Socrates and Theodoret, the same historians who retained one-sixth as many women's names as Eusebius, ignored both her name *and* her missionary activities. This woman's name was Nino, which we know because she was considered so important in Iberia that a history about her survived in that area (a history we address in the next chapter).⁴⁹ Jensen points out that men's names generally remained intact in church histories. She asks, “What *male* missionary of an entire land has remained anonymous in church history?”⁵⁰

WOMEN USING CENSERS AND INCENSE

Below are two more close readings of passages across these three manuscripts, passages that portrayed Mary and other women using censers and incense. Luke 1:8–11, Exodus 30, and Leviticus 16:12–14 closely associate the high priest with the ritual of offering incense in the Jerusalem Temple. Suggesting that Six Books author likewise associated Mary with the Temple priesthood, the Six Books describes Mary using incense to make an offering, and setting out the censer of incense to God.

The presence of censers and incense burning is in fact so dominant in the Six Books that sometimes it is called the censers and incense Dormition text tradition.⁵¹ The phenomenon of later scribes excising depictions of female liturgical authority is again illustrated by three scenes that depicted Mary using a censer to make incense offerings.⁵² Mary with a censer apparently became problematic, because both later scribes severely cut or redacted these passages, sometimes excising the same passages and sometimes different passages⁵³ (see Fig. 2.2).

This chart illustrates that even when scribes retained a passage from the longer version, they did not always *fully* retain it. Sometimes they shortened it, significantly changing it, especially if it depicted a woman performing a liturgical activity, such as throwing incense on a censer or setting out the censer of incense to God. An example of shortening is in the first passage shown in the chart. The palimpsest text describes Mary going to her son's tomb, carrying incense and fire, and throwing incense on the censer.⁵⁴ The medieval Ethiopic text omits Mary's actions as well

5th c. palimpsest MS	6th c. Syriac MS	14th c. Ethiopic MS
These virgins were with the Lady Mary night and day, that they might minister unto her, and bring to her the censer of sweet spices.	omitted	omitted
Mary told them everything; and they spread her couch and washed her feet, and folded her garments, and arranged sweet spices.	omitted	She told them everything that they wanted to be taught by her. . . And they washed her feet and made her clothes fragrant with incense.
omitted	omitted	The blessed Mary summoned the virgin women and said to them, "Bring incense and clothing so that I may make an offering to God."
And she opened a chest and they took out her garments and the censer, and put everything in order.	omitted	omitted
And on the Friday the Blessed one was distressed, and said to them: "Bring nigh unto me the censers of incense, for I wish to pray" . . . and these virgins brought nigh unto her the censers.	And on the Friday my Lady Mary was distressed, and said to them: "Bring nigh unto me the censer of incense, for I wish to pray" . . . and they brought nigh unto her the censer of incense.	And on Friday at dawn, Mary became ill, and she said to the virgins, "Bring me a censer, because I want to make an offering". . . and they brought her one, and she placed incense in the censer.

Fig. 2.2 Mary with censers and incense

as the censer, yet preserves the *scent* of Mary's incense burning.⁵⁵ The sixth-century text omits even the scent of incense.⁵⁶

Another example of this shortening is in the last two passages in the chart. Here the palimpsest text depicts Mary with considerable liturgical authority—first praying while holding a censer in her hand and then preaching the gospel to the Governor of Jerusalem. According to the sermon that Mary preached, after the angel of the Annunciation departed, Mary herself “set forth the censer of incense to God”⁵⁷—an activity that Exodus 30 and Leviticus 16:12–14 say was performed by the high priest in the Jerusalem Temple. Demonstrating that the palimpsest scribe did not create this long passage about Mary's liturgical authority, the same passage is also preserved in an important Six Books manuscript fragment dated around the year 1000.⁵⁸ By contrast, the sixth-century scribe preserved that Mary prayed with a censer in front of her, but excised her preaching to the governor and setting out the censer of incense to God.⁵⁹ The scribe behind the Ethiopic text, however, excised everything.⁶⁰ Another passage, which describes women bringing censers to Mary so that she can make an offering, is in Fig. 2.3.

This passage related to women and incense is of particular interest because not only does the palimpsest preserve a passage which is not in the Ethiopic manuscript, the Ethiopic preserves a passage which is not in the palimpsest. When read together, they suggest that an even older and longer Dormition narrative is behind both. Both describe the women preparing Mary's garments with incense. Only the Ethiopic text preserves Mary telling the women, “Bring incense and clothing *so that I may make an offering to God.*” And, only the palimpsest text preserves that then the women took Mary's special garments out of a chest, and put the censer and everything in order—presumably preparing for that Mary's offering to God.⁶¹

Further suggesting an even older source narrative, the Ethiopic text twice preserves that Mary used her censer to make an *offering*, while the palimpsest and sixth-century texts instead say that she used her censer merely to *pray*. Mary's prayer itself could be considered an offering, but the action of offering incense implies more liturgical authority than prayer, and Mary offering incense in these two Ethiopic passages is consistent with the liturgical authority suggested by the palimpsest passage where Mary describes herself setting out the censer of incense to God (bottom of Fig. 2.2). It appears, thus, that some scribes sometimes censored Mary's liturgical authority by replacing her more overt liturgical

5th c. palimpsest MS	6th c. Syriac MS	14th c. Ethiopic MS
On the Friday Mary prepared herself to go to the tomb of the Lord	My Lady Mary came forth from her house, and went to the tomb of the Messiah	On Friday Mary came to pray at the tomb of Golgotha,
and she was carrying sweet spices and fire.	omitted	omitted
And while she was praying and had lifted up her eyes and gazed at heaven, suddenly the doors of heaven were opened and a scent of myrrh went up,	omitted	and as she prayed, she raised her eyes to heaven with the fragrant perfume of fine incense.
which the Lady Mary had thrown on the	omitted	omitted
Now the Lady Mary was standing and praying, the censer of incense being placed in her hand.	Now my Lady Mary was standing and praying, and the censer of incense was set before her.	omitted
[The governor] said to her: "I desire to learn from thee, Lady" . . . Mary said: "Hearken and receive my words" [<i>and she preached the gospel</i>] "And after the salutation with which he announced this to me, the angel departed from me. And I arose, and set forth the censer of incense to God."	omitted	omitted

Fig. 2.3 Women with censers and incense

activity with the more passive action of praying. This scribal strategy is also witnessed by the way the sixth-century text says Mary *prayed* over Malchū, while the fifth-century palimpsest and Ethiopic texts preserve the detail that she exorcised demons from Malchū (Fig. 2.1). Sometimes scribes remembered and sometimes they forgot to make the changes, but the presence of passages that describe similar female liturgical authority across multiple manuscripts suggests that an older Dormition narrative, the source, depicted Mary with even more liturgical authority than preserved in any single surviving manuscript.

Today women do not use censers liturgically in either the Eastern Orthodox or Catholic churches, and it is often taken for granted that Christian women never used censers liturgically. Yet here we have descriptions of the mother of Jesus using a censer to make an offering of incense. Does any supporting evidence indicate that these passages preserve a kernel of historicity—that Christian women used censers liturgically during this era?

KERNELS OF HISTORICITY: WOMEN USING CENSERS LITURGICALLY

Just as later scribes eliminated depictions of women with censers from the Dormition narrative, an extraordinary wall painting recently discovered beneath a layer of plaster in the Deir al-Surian monastery church southwest of Cairo shows that later artists did the same. This painting provides a good example of why art is called conservative—that is, art changes slowly, and therefore sometimes preserves much older traditions. This painting is one of the two very oldest examples of Dormition iconography, that is, the scene of Mary “falling asleep” on her deathbed with disciples around her.⁶² The Deir al-Surian painter illustrated Mary on her deathbed surrounded by women swinging censers, almost as if for a funeral liturgy. Three women are at her head and three at her feet, with Mary herself the holy seventh, the chiasitic center.⁶³ Three chains hold each censer, which are most clearly seen swung by each of the three women on the left and the first woman on the right. Three censers swing in the air just above Mary’s body, two over her chest and one at her knees (see Fig. 2.4).

The wall painting itself was painted sometime between the early 700s and the year 914.⁶⁴ The only older example of Dormition iconography with people around Mary is on a deteriorated pottery token from

Fig. 2.4 Women with censers at Mary's deathbed. Wall painting. Dated between early 700s and 914. Deir al-Surian Monastery, Egypt. Courtesy © Karel Innemée

northern Israel dated sixth century. This pottery token affirms the antiquity of the painting's iconography with women around Mary, because it also appears to have portrayed three women at Mary's head (the part with Mary's feet is broken off).⁶⁵ The wall painting's dating makes it older than any example of Dormition art that depicts *twelve male apostles* around Mary's deathbed—and almost all later examples depict men, not women, around her bed.⁶⁶

Around the year 800, Syrian monks began to arrive at the Deir al-Surian monastery, hence its name. During the next two centuries, the monks collected “an exceptionally rich” library of Syriac manuscripts.⁶⁷ One of these may have been a very early Dormition manuscript, perhaps illustrated. In any case, this painting preserves several nearly lost Dormition motifs: the Great Angel who came to Mary, women around Mary on her deathbed, the men outside, and the women around Mary censing with censers.

The early “gnostic” element of the Great Angel, as mentioned above, is preserved in a few Dormition manuscripts in the Palm text tradition. In the painting, the Great Angel with its brilliant red-tipped wings stands in the center of the scene, in the same place where Jesus stands in later Dormition art. This motif alone suggests that the painting preserves an old scene.

The women around Mary, and the men outside, is also a very early literary element of the Dormition narrative. By analyzing several Dormition manuscripts, Shoemaker demonstrated that the oldest layer of the Dormition text originally depicted women, not men, around Mary's deathbed—just like in this painting. In the original narrative, only women were with Mary because Jesus took the men outside, where the men fell asleep—and this painting depicts twelve men seated in the background with their chins on their hands as if sleeping. In the original narrative, when Mary died, a woman went out and told Jesus his mother had died, and then the men awoke. Later scribes, however, redacted the women's important role and gave it to the men. According to these versions, men surrounded Mary's deathbed. The women were silent. Quite humorously, a few manuscripts preserve that after the men announced Mary's death to Jesus, the men woke up!⁶⁸

Like the later scribes who changed the original Dormition narrative and replaced the women around Mary's bed with men, artists also replaced these women with men. A tenth- or eleventh-century ivory carving is representative of this later Dormition iconography, and it

Fig. 2.5 Men with Mary on her deathbed. Peter swings a censer. Tenth/eleventh-century ivory plaque. The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, accession no. 71.66. CC0

depicts twelve male apostles around Mary on her deathbed. The apostle Paul, identifiable because he is balding, kisses her feet. Jesus in the center holds a swaddled infant, representing her soul. One element suggests

that the changes may have had something to do with a change in who had authority to swing a censer. Not only are the women gone, but Peter, the chief apostle, swings the censer (see Fig. 2.5).

Given the trajectory of redaction with respect to women and censers in both texts and art, it seems possible that the depiction of women swinging censers around Mary in the Deir al-Surian painting may have been part of the original Six Books composition. Women swinging censers, and Mary herself doing so, may have reflected an actual practice of women using censers liturgically in and around Jerusalem. In any case, the text of the fifth-century palimpsest not only described Mary using censers to make offerings, it also described Mary taking a censer of incense to her son's tomb, and that "a scent of myrrh went up, which the Lady Mary had thrown on the censer, and its odour went about all the regions of heaven."⁶⁹ Consistent with this tradition, the late ninth- or early tenth-century Typikon, a liturgical book for the Holy Week and Easter Week liturgies in Jerusalem, specified that women did the censuring, including entering and censuring the holy sepulcher, that is Christ's tomb, inside the Anastasis Church, which is also known as the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.⁷⁰ The rather late attestation of women performing this liturgy in the Typikon is affirmed by a variety of sixth- and early seventh-century artifacts from around Jerusalem, which depict two women, usually identified as the two Marys, carrying a censer and walking toward the shrine over Christ's tomb inside the Anastasis rotunda, as if about to enter the shrine and cense the tomb with incense.⁷¹ This scene was especially common on small pewter ampoules for holy oil or holy water, usually dated sixth/seventh century, which pilgrims to Jerusalem carried to their homes around the Mediterranean.⁷² For two examples, see Figs. 2.6 and 2.7.

This Six Books scene of Mary praying and offering a cloud of incense at her son's tomb also resonates with the first recorded use of incense in the liturgy, which also took place at Jesus's tomb. The pilgrim Egeria, who visited Jerusalem around 381, described in her diary the early Sunday morning liturgy inside the Anastasis, that is, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Egeria indicated that this liturgy was performed each Sunday, but also said that it was similar to the Easter liturgy. She wrote that deacons and presbyters prayed and then "take censers into the cave of the Anastasis, so that the whole Anastasis basilica is filled with the smell."⁷³

Is it possible that women could have been among these clergy and that Egeria witnessed an early example of the censuring liturgy later

Fig. 2.6 Two Marys with censer at Anastasis shrine. Jerusalem ampoule ca. 600. Garrucci, *Storia*, pl. 6:434.5

preserved in the *Typikon*? Women deacons were active in churches in the East, and funerary epigraphs from around Jerusalem dated as early as the mid-fourth century attest that women deacons were active in the Jerusalem area specifically.⁷⁴ The female deacon at this time most likely had a high rank, perhaps higher than the presbyter, because the third- or fourth-century Syriac *Didascalia apostolorum* ranked deacons ahead of presbyters. It explains that the male deacon is the type of Christ, while the female deacon is the type of the Holy Spirit⁷⁵—Holy Spirit was feminine gendered in Ancient Syria until the end of the fourth century⁷⁶—and, it said, mere presbyters are the type of apostles.⁷⁷

Women, thus, potentially could have been among the censuring clergy. Egeria's diary, however, does not specify that any of these clergy were women. There are three reasons why Egeria's diary might not reflect that women were doing the censuring. First, ecclesial titles were not necessarily gendered; Valerie A. Karras documents that in the East up through the tenth century, both male and female deacons had the same masculine gendered title, *diakonos*.⁷⁸ The lack of gendered titles may have been even more widespread earlier, such as in the late fourth century when Egeria was in Jerusalem. Second, even if Egeria did specify that some of the clergy were women, a later copyist may have redacted it. Even modern editors have redacted the presence of women deacons; for example, Hans Förster recently documented that a feminine title used in

Fig. 2.7 Two Marys with censer at Anastasis shrine. Jerusalem ampoule ca. 600. Garrucci, *Storia*, pl. 6:434.6

a White Monastery manuscript, which in 1958 was translated as people “who refrain from the use of women,” actually reads in Coptic: “women serving as deacons.”⁷⁹ Third, and most interesting, Egeria may not have specified that women were doing the censening in the Anastasis because everyone knew women did this censening. A round ivory pyx carved just a few decades after Egeria was in Jerusalem depicts two women carrying censers to an altar⁸⁰—an altar that most likely represented the altar in the Anastasis rotunda or its basilica.⁸¹ A gospel book sets on this altar, a lamp hangs above it, and curtains and the spiral columns of a ciborium (or canopy) over the altar flank it. Two women approach it with censers (see Fig. 2.8a, b).

“The Visit to the Tomb” is how this round pyx is titled in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and its altar is usually identified as the altar inside the Anastasis rotunda shrine or its associated basilica.⁸² The two women with censers of incense are the primary reason for this identification, since there are many examples of the two Marys with a censer *outside* the shrine over Christ’s tomb at the Anastasis, such as seen in Figs. 2.6 and 2.7. These are thought to represent the gospel scene of the two Marys going to Jesus’s empty tomb. Yet, they are part of what appears to be a liturgical procession to the altar, a procession led by two women with censers, followed by three women with their arms raised.

Fig. 2.8 a Two women with censers flank the Anastasis altar. b Women in procession to the altar. Ivory pyx, 500s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, CC0

The ivory pyx is dated 500s. A church floor mosaic in Qasr el Lebya dated 539–540 depicts a woman with a censer.⁸³ This mosaic is older than what is most likely the oldest iconographic artifact to portray a Christian man with a censer, a mosaic in San Vitale in Ravenna dated around 550.⁸⁴ To my knowledge, the ivory pyx is the oldest iconographic artifact to portray anyone holding a censer at a church altar. It is also the oldest to portray people at a church altar in Palestine. In making these claims, I considered another fifth-century pyx that depicts two men (without censers) standing on either side of the Anastasis altar, but they were portrayed slightly turned away from the altar because they are part of adjacent gospel scenes.⁸⁵ For obvious reasons, I also exclude depictions of angels (also without censers) at the Anastasis altar. The pyx, thus, is the oldest artifact to depict people at an altar in Palestine, the oldest to depict people at an altar with a censer, and it most likely depicts the Anastasis, the most famous church in Palestine, as well as, arguably, the most famous in all of Christendom—and it depicts women there, not men.

There are various reasons to identify this liturgical scene as taking place at the Anastasis itself, including that the ivory pyx is round like the Anastasis rotunda that was built over the shrine above Christ's tomb. The pyx in fact evokes a variety of sixth- and seventh-century artifacts made around Jerusalem, including glass pilgrim vessels, mosaics, a painted reliquary box, and some ampoules, all of which represent the shrine *inside* the rotunda as polygonal, not square.⁸⁶ Some artifacts, for example, depict the front view of the shrine's roof with three triangular panels, like the roof over a hexagonal structure⁸⁷—as seen in Figs. 2.6 and 2.7. The round pyx with its impression of columned arcades imitates this polygonal shape, an architectural shape that would aesthetically fit inside the rotunda. Some ampoules and other artifacts portrayed the shrine with spiral columns⁸⁸—as seen on the ampoule in Fig. 2.6—and the pyx's sculptor likewise carved spiral columns.

Not only is this ivory pyx the sole artifact of this era to depict anyone inside the Anastasis processing toward its altar—it depicts only women in the procession.⁸⁹ In 431, women swinging censers led the celebratory procession after the Council of Ephesus.⁹⁰ Even earlier, in 312, Eusebius of Caesarea described a dedication ceremony for a church in Tyre that apparently involved incense and raised hands in its Holy of Holies⁹¹—and the ivory pyx depicts women with incense and raised hands,

suggesting that the Tyre church, just a hundred miles from Jerusalem, may have had a similar liturgy at the altar during its consecration.

From the beginning in Christian communities, almost certainly women were associated with censers and incense because Tertullian (ca. 155–220) said more incense was used in Christian burials than in Roman temples⁹²—and in Mediterranean culture women had the role of preparing and lamenting for the dead, including during the procession to the tomb. Thus the ritual censng that Tertullian described most likely was performed by women carrying censers, just as women with censers led the procession after the Council of Ephesus, just like women with censers led the procession to the altar at the Anastasis, as illustrated in the ivory pyx, and just like women with censers surrounded Mary on her deathbed in the Dormition source narrative, as illustrated in the Deir al-Surian painting.

After the Peace of the Church in the early fourth century, new churches were often built over the tomb of a holy person, such as the Anastasis, which was built over Jesus's tomb in Jerusalem, or Old Saint Peter's Basilica, which was built over Peter's tomb in Rome. Given the association of the body or relics of a saint with these new churches and their altars, the censng and other rituals that women performed appear to have continued quite naturally inside these beautiful new chapels and basilicas, at least as indicated by the depiction of women with censers at the altar on the ivory pyx. The composition of the Six Books narrative was second century at the latest, and we might reasonably conclude that it was based on first-century oral tradition. Its author's description of women using censers seems to have been consistent with what likely was the custom in some Christian communities, especially around Jerusalem where the Dormition narrative most likely was written.

Today these ancient artifacts—both written and iconographic—attest to an era when in some communities women used censers liturgically. Over the following centuries, however, the use of liturgical censers slowly became restricted to men. Quite possibly the reason some later scribes excised Six Books passages that depicted Mary and other women using censers was to create the historical illusion that only male clergy had ever used them. In any case, these passages appear to preserve a kernel of historicity about early Christian women's liturgical use of censers and incense.

REDACTION ANALYSIS OF THE MARKERS OF WOMEN'S AUTHORITY

A macro-analysis of twenty-one narrative elements across eight recensions of the Six Books provides additional evidence of later scribal redaction of the markers of Mary's liturgical leadership. This extended analysis further confirms that the fifth-century Six Books palimpsest has the most complete surviving Six Books text, albeit that it is still not the original composition, which was even more detailed and longer. The first three of the eight Six Books recensions that I analyzed are the same three manuscripts used in the close readings above: the fifth-century Syriac palimpsest, the sixth-century Syriac, and the medieval Ethiopic. The other five are described below.

Syriac "S-2" fragments: The fourth entry on the chart is comprised of two large Syriac manuscript fragments translated by William Wright, who published them together because of their archaic text, which, where it survives, is often very long. One fragment contains the beginning of the Six Books narrative and the other the end, although with many missing folios in the middle, as is shown in the chart.⁹³ The first of the two fragments is dated to around 1000, and the scribe of the second actually dated it 1197.⁹⁴ Despite that these fragments were penned relatively late, scholars of the Dormition narratives consider their surviving text archaic and therefore call them "S-2," signifying that their text is considered the second generation in the Six Books text.⁹⁵ As an example of its antiquity, the "S-2" text contains even more instances than the fifth-century palimpsest text of people calling Jesus the "son of Mary" in the debate between the "lovers of the Messiah" and the "unbelievers."⁹⁶ It also preserves the same long passage preserved in the palimpsest, but omitted in both the sixth-century text and Ethiopic text—Mary preaching to the governor about the Annunciation, including that she set out the censer of incense to God.⁹⁷

Medieval Syriac MS: The fifth entry is a medieval Syriac Six Books manuscript that E. A. Wallis Budge edited and translated, which comprises the ending to a history of Mary's life.⁹⁸ Again, despite that it is from a much later manuscript, its text is relatively long and preserves old narratives elements. For example, it preserves a scene in the fifth-century palimpsest which was often expurgated or redacted—the scene of Mary giving women small books to take back to their homes around the Mediterranean.⁹⁹

Medieval Arabic MS: The sixth entry is a medieval Arabic Six Books manuscript that was translated from the Syriac. It is titled “Transitus of John, the Evangelist,” but after a short preamble, contains a rather long Six Books text.¹⁰⁰ For example, its text preserves the *fullest* passage about Mary giving books to women evangelists, even fuller than that of the palimpsest.¹⁰¹

Greek Homily: The seventh entry on the chart is a short Greek homily in the Six Books tradition. This short text is usually attributed to “John the Theologian,” although occasionally it is attributed to the seventh-century patriarch John of Thessalonica.¹⁰² It is translated from Constantin von Tischendorf’s Greek edition of the text, which he compiled from five manuscripts, none older than the eleventh century.¹⁰³

Georgian *Life of the Virgin*: The eighth and final entry is from a long narrative about Mary called the *Life of the Virgin*. This book told the history of Mary’s life, from her birth, through her son’s ministry, to her death. It was originally composed in Greek, but survives only in an old Georgian manuscript tradition, with its oldest manuscript Tbilisi A-40.¹⁰⁴ Both Michel van Esbroeck and Shoemaker argued that its ending about Mary’s death was derived at least in part from the Six Books.¹⁰⁵ The analysis here demonstrates that the texts of the *Life of the Virgin* and the fifth-century Six Books palimpsest in fact have narrative elements in common—including elements not in the sixth-century Six Books, nor in the Greek homily.¹⁰⁶ These include Mary raising her hands to bless people other than just apostles,¹⁰⁷ Mary teaching women,¹⁰⁸ Mary sending out evangelists,¹⁰⁹ and Mary preaching.¹¹⁰ We will return to the *Life of the Virgin* in Chapter 6.

Most of the twenty-one archaic narrative elements I analyze are markers of liturgical authority associated with Mary or other women.¹¹¹ The designation “omitted” can reflect either complete excision or severe redaction; for example, if the text said Mary offered incense at her son’s tomb, whether with a censer or with fire, then I consider the narrative element “Mary offering incense” to be present—but if all that remains is Mary and the smell of incense, then I specify the element “omitted.” A gap at the relevant place in the manuscript, especially notable in the fragment “S-2,” is specified as a “lacuna.” Finally, I treat the passage about the “lovers of the Messiah” and the “unbelievers” differently. If the manuscript preserves the passage where Jesus was called the “son of Mary”—a term also found in Mark 6:3, but which later scribes tended to replace with “son of God”—then I specify the *number of times* the term

“son of Mary” appears. I also separately note if the scribe changed the term “unbelievers” to “Jews” (see Fig. 2.9).

Each of the narrative elements or motifs on the chart is found in at least two of the manuscripts. Notably, although the text of the fifth-century palimpsest contains nearly all the unusual literary elements found across later manuscripts, again we see that even the palimpsest text is not complete. It does not preserve one element preserved in the Ethiopic, Arabic, and Greek homily texts—Mary instructing the apostles to set out the censer of incense, as if she were their liturgical leader.¹¹² The Ethiopic text, as mentioned above, preserves the narrative element of Mary putting on special vestments to perform the offering, which the palimpsest text also does not have. Other passages, or fuller passages, were preserved in several of these manuscripts, but they are beyond the scope of the current study. The conclusion to be drawn is that the text of the fifth-century palimpsest is the most ancient, the longest, and the most complete surviving Dormition manuscript—but somewhere in its transmission history was a scribe who omitted certain narrative elements that almost certainly were in the original composition. We know this both because these narrative elements are preserved in other manuscripts, and also because they depict Mary with liturgical authority, and thus are consistent with the palimpsest text.

Based on the trajectory of scribal excision over time, which is illustrated by the Deir al-Surian wall painting, I hypothesize that the oldest version of the Dormition narrative most likely contained elements of both the Six Books and the Palm narratives.¹¹³ The chart in Fig. 2.9 illustrates most clearly how later scribes redacted the Dormition narrative before them, each apparently in accordance with what they or their masters did—or did not—consider objectionable. Philologically that means that archaic narrative elements *can* be preserved in a short text—such as the Greek homily, which preserves Mary instructing the apostles to set out the incense—but, as Bovon pointed out, the longest text of a narrative can be expected to preserve the most.¹¹⁴

Perhaps the main reason the Dormition narrative, as well as other texts about women leaders who became known as saints, was sanitized instead of destroyed was that they were traditionally read in church on specific days that commemorated their female protagonist. The liturgical manual embedded in the Six Books, for example, instructed that the Six Books was to be read in the church on the three days of the year that commemorated Mary’s passing.¹¹⁵ By the same criteria, however, the

Narrative Elements	Trajectory of redaction across eight manuscripts							
	5th c. palimpsest	6th c. Syriac	14th c. Ethiopic	Syr. "S-2" fragments	Medieval Syriac	Medieval Arabic	Greek Homily	Geor. <i>Life of Virgin</i>
Mary offers incense at her son's tomb	Yes	omitted	omitted	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes	omitted
Mary tells virgins to set out incense	Yes	Yes	Yes	omitted	omitted	Yes	Yes	Yes
Preserves names of virgins	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes	Yes	omitted	omitted	omitted
Mary raises hands, blesses people	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes	omitted	Yes
Mary raises hands, leads apostles in prayer	Yes	Yes	omitted	lacuna	omitted	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mary tells apostles to set censer	omitted	omitted	Yes	lacuna	omitted	Yes	Yes	omitted
After Mary prays, apostles prostrate	Yes	omitted	Yes	lacuna	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Mary teaches women	Yes	omitted	Yes	lacuna	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes
Mary gives books to women	Yes	omitted	omitted	lacuna	Yes	Yes	omitted	omitted
Mary sends out women evangelists	Yes	omitted	Yes	lacuna	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes
Mary adjures and exorcises demons	Yes	omitted	Yes	lacuna	Yes	Yes	omitted	omitted
Mary heals people with her hands	Yes	omitted	Yes	lacuna	Yes	Yes	omitted	omitted
Mary seals women	Yes	omitted	omitted	lacuna	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Mary sprinkles water on women	Yes	Yes	omitted	lacuna	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Preserves names of women Mary heals	Yes	Yes	omitted	lacuna	Yes	omitted	omitted	omitted
Mary prays with censer of incense	Yes	Yes	omitted	Yes	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Mary preaches gospel	Yes	omitted	omitted	Yes	omitted	omitted	omitted	Yes
Mary set out censer of incense to God	Yes	omitted	omitted	Yes	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted
Jesus is called "son of Mary"	6	2	0	8	2	1	omitted	omitted
"Lovers of the Messiah" & "Unbelievers"	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	"Jews"	omitted	omitted
Liturgy for offering bread to Mary	lacuna	Yes	Yes	lacuna	omitted	omitted	omitted	omitted

Fig. 2.9 Trajectory of redaction across eight manuscripts

public reading of these texts probably made them even more susceptible to having passages excised, particularly if a bishop or patriarch considered the passages objectionable. This is why so many Dormition manuscripts are merely short homilies.

Some scribes apparently were under pressure to explain to their readers why their new shorter recension of the old Dormition narrative was so short. One scribe, who identified himself as the seventh-century bishop John of Thessalonica, explained his excisions as removing “heretical” stones in the path of the faithful so that they would not stumble.¹¹⁶ Another, known as pseudo-Melito, justified his excisions by claiming that a “heretic” had added so many lies to the account of Mary’s passing that “it is unlawful not only to read but even to hear it in the church of God.”¹¹⁷ These scribes, thus, blamed “heretics” for the very passages they wanted to excise. Their defensiveness suggests that they may have been under some pressure from their church audiences, people who did not like the fact that the narrative traditionally read in the church was now much shorter.

Yet, as Fig. 2.9 illustrates, a few copyists of old manuscripts continued to faithfully, or nearly faithfully, copy passages that described Mary with markers of liturgical leadership. Perhaps by the time the older narrative was copied, earlier concerns about a woman depicted with liturgical authority had disappeared, especially, perhaps, for monk copyists residing in all-male monasteries. Alternatively, certain communities, including some female monasteries, may have remained more open to the depiction of a woman with liturgical authority; in any case, occasional descriptions of actual women who had some level of such authority, whether as abbess or in some other role, continued into the turn of the millennium.¹¹⁸

One of the most interesting archaic narrative elements in the Six Books is a passage that describes Mary sending out women evangelists with books, a passage that again suggests an even older shared source behind both the Six Books and the Palm Dormition text traditions, because according to the Palm narrative, the Great Angel gave Mary a book of mysteries and told her to “give it to the apostles.”¹¹⁹ According to the palimpsest text, Mary gave these women writings, or small books, and sent them to their home cities around the Mediterranean: Rome, Alexandria, Athens, Beirut, and Thessalonica.¹²⁰ The fullest passage is in the medieval Arabic manuscript, which says Mary gave these women “powerful writings” to take with them to their countries “so that their

people might believe and they might serve as testimony.”¹²¹ Women coming to Mary from around the Mediterranean to learn from her and Mary sending them out to serve as testimony are remarkably similar to several passages in the *Life of the Virgin*, which I argue in Chapters 6 and 7 was compiled from very early sources, and which, as can be seen in Fig. 2.9, shares other archaic narrative elements with the palimpsest text. The *Life of the Virgin* says that Mary sent out disciples, both male and female, to preach near and far, that she supervised their preaching, and that they always returned to Jerusalem to report what they had been doing and to receive her teachings.¹²²

The Six Books appears to preserve a cultural memory that women had been apostles around the Mediterranean—a cultural memory consistent with latent tradition and the earliest evidence regarding the prominence of women in the Jesus movement, including in particular the woman apostle Junia, whom Paul said was in Christ before he was (Romans 16:7). The case studies in the next chapter reveal four ancient authors who preserved the same cultural memory—the memory of women apostles.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence and indicate if you modified the licensed material. You do not have permission under this licence to share adapted material derived from this chapter or parts of it.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons licence and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.