

Preface

Mary Magdalen¹ has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years. A number of comprehensive studies of the saint have been published and include examinations of her role as the first witness to the Resurrection, her portrayal in Gnostic Gospels, Eastern legends associating her with John the Baptist, and her influential and sometimes controversial cult and legend in Western Europe during the Middle Ages.² Most recently, she has also received popular attention with the discovery of the so-called *Gospel of Jesus' Wife*, a forged Coptic fragment that implied she and Jesus had been married.³ Martha of Bethany, too, has been the focus of recent studies that concentrate on her cult and legend in the Middle Ages. Other scholars have analysed the important symbolic role of the “sisters” in the rhetoric of the early and medieval Christian Church, as well as their cults and legends in Western European tradition.⁴

1. This book uses “Magdalen” in accordance with the spelling convention of recent scholarship on the saint in Susan Haskins, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor* (New York, 1993); and Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages* (Princeton, 2001). This spelling is also the one used by Sherry L. Reames in her recent edition of Middle English lives of Mary Magdalen, Sherry L. Reames, ed., *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (Kalamazoo, 2003).

2. See, for example: Victor Saxer, *Le culte de Marie-Madeleine en occident des origines à la fin du moyen-âge* (Auxerre-Paries, 1959); Haskins, *Myth and Metaphor*; Katherine Ludwig Jansen, “Maria Magdalena,” in *Women Preachers and Prophets through Two Millennia of Christianity*, ed. Beverly Mayne Kienzle and Pamela J. Walker (Berkeley, 1998), 57–96; Jansen, *Making of the Magdalen*; and Karen King, trans., *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Santa Rosa, 2003).

3. See Ariel Saber, “The Scholar Who Discovered the ‘Jesus’s Wife’ Fragment Now Says It’s Likely a Fake,” *The Atlantic*, 16 June 2016.

4. See, for example: Giles Constable, *Three Studies in Medieval Religious and Social Thought: The Interpretation of Mary and Martha, The Ideal of the Imitation of Christ, The Orders of Society* (Cambridge, 1995); David Mycoff, trans., *The Life of Saint Mary*

This study adds to existing scholarship on the so-called sister saints by examining their representations in medieval Scandinavia. It focuses on the prose tradition of medieval Iceland and the Old Norse-Icelandic legend of Martha and Mary Magdalen, *Mǫrtu saga ok Mariu Magðalenu*, discussing the legend's sources, authorship, genre, and postmedieval poetic manifestations. The study presents a normalized edition of the only complete redaction of the text *Mǫrtu saga ok Mariu Magðalenu I*, followed by an English translation that makes the text accessible to nonspecialists in Old Norse-Icelandic.

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Magdalene and of Her Sister Saint Martha (Kalamazoo, 1989); Reames, *Middle English Legends*; Theresa Coletti, *Mary Magdalene and the Drama of Saints: Theater, Gender, and Religion in Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, 2004); Joanne Findon, *Lady, Hero, Saint: The Digby Play's Mary Magdalene* (Toronto, 2011); and Jane Cartwright, ed. and trans., *Mary Magdalene and Her Sister Martha: An Edition and Translation of the Medieval Welsh Lives* (Washington, DC, 2013).

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