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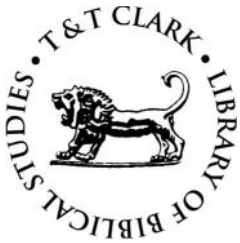

Rediscovering the Marys

Maria, Mariamne, Miriam

Edited by
Mary Ann Beavis
and Ally Kateusz

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Abbreviations

1 Apol.	Justin, *First Apology*
AAS	*Acta Apostolicae Sedis*
AB	Anchor Bible
Acts Phil.	*Acts of Philip*
ad Mar.	Eusebius, *Ad Marinum*
AJ	*Antiquaries Journal*
AJS	*Review – Association for Jewish Studies Review*
AnBoll	*Analecta Bollandiana*
ANF	*Ante-Nicene Fathers*
ANTC	Abingdon New Testament Commentaries
Atiqoh	*ʿAtiqot*
Aug	*Augustinianum*
b.Sotah	Babylonian Talmud, Tractate *Sotah*
BAIAS	*Bulletin of the Anglo–Israel Archaeological Society*
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*
BRev	*Bible Review*
BSAC	*Bulletin de la Société d'archéologie copte*
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CBQ	*Catholic Biblical Quarterly*
CHJ	Cambridge History of Judaism
Col	column
CSCO	Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium
CT	Codex Tchacos
CurTM	*Currents in Theology and Mission*
Dial. Sav.	*Dialogue of the Savior*
ERT	Electrical Resistivity Tomography
GOCOA	Greek Orthodox Church of the Annunciation
Gos. Mary	*Gospel of Mary*
Gos. Phil.	*Gospel of Philip*
Gos. Thom.	*Gospel of Thomas*
GPR	Ground-Penetrating Radar
Hist.	Herodotus, *History*
HThS	Harvard Theological Studies
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
ICMR	*Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations*
Int	*Interpretation*
JAC	*Journal of Ancient Christianity*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*

JES	*Journal of Ecumenical Studies*
JFSR	*Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JR	*Journal of Religion*
JRPC	*Journal of Religion and Popular Culture*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JSNTSS	Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplement Series
JSS	*Journal of Semitic Studies*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
MS	Manuscript
MW	*Muslim World*
NAB	New American Bible
NHS	Nag Hammadi Studies
NICNT	New International Commentary on the New Testament
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version
NT	New Testament
NTOA	Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
OECS	Oxford Early Christian Studies
PAAJR	*Proceedings of the American Academy of Jewish Research*
PEQ	*Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
PRSt	*Perspectives in Religious Studies*
POxy	Papyrus Oxyrhynchus
PRyl	Rylands Papyrus
PTS	Patristische Texte und Studien
RBL	*Review of Biblical Literature*
SBL	Society of Biblical Literature
SBLSS	Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SNTSMS	Society of New Testament Studies Monograph Series
SP	Sacra Pagina
StPatr	*Studia Patristica*
Strom.	Clement, *Stromateis*
StSin	Studia Sinaitica XI.
SVTQ	*St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*
ThH	Théologie Historique
TynBul	*Tyndale Bulletin*
VC	Vigiliae Christianae
Vulg.	*Vulgate*
WGRWSup	Writings from the Greco–Roman World Supplement Series
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchung zum Neuen
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum*
ZKT	*Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*

14

Dormition Urtext? Oldest Dormition Wall Painting Combines the Great Angel and Women with Censers

Ally Kateusz

Introduction

In 2002, a team of conservators working in the church of the Deir al-Surian monastery, about an hour southwest of Cairo, uncovered an extraordinary wall painting. It portrayed Mary, the mother of Jesus, on her deathbed surrounded by women swinging censers. In addition, a Great Angel with brilliant red-tipped wings stands by her. Twelve men sit in the background, as if sleeping. This painting is confidently dated prior to the year 925, making it one of the two very oldest scenes of the Dormition of Mary.[1] The other, a tiny sixth-century pottery token from Palestine, appears to be the same scene, for it also depicts three people at Mary's head, each of whom appears to be wearing a *maphorion*, that is, a woman's cloak with a hood.[2] For the painting, see Figure 14.1.

Art is conservative, that is, art sometimes preserves narrative motifs that are otherwise lost, or nearly lost. It is easier for scribes to excise passages in manuscripts than it is to replace art on the upper levels of church walls such as where this scene was painted. I argue that this painting likely represents a lost Dormition narrative, a source that underlies the three main Dormition textual traditions that survive today.

At the time the wall was painted, the monastery was populated at least in part by Syrian monks, who began arriving around the year 800 and over the next two centuries

[1] Karel Innemée and Youhanna Nessim Youssef, "Virgins with Censers: A 10th Century Painting of the Dormition in Deir Al-Surian," *BSAC* 46 (2007): 69–85, esp. 69–70.

[2] For this token, see L. Y. Rahmani, "Eulogia Tokens from Byzantine Bet She'an," *Atiqot* 22 (1993): 109–19, 113–15, fig. 10; note that Rahmani posited that the faces were bearded a decade before this painting was uncovered, yet now the painting demonstrates that it was women with head coverings—an explanation consistent with the photo of the token as well as Rahmani's sketch of it. For more discussion regarding this token, see Ally Kateusz, "Ascension of Christ or Ascension of Mary?: Reconsidering a Popular Early Iconography," *JECS* 23 (2015): 273–303, esp. 295, n. 73. For more dating discussion of the token, see Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The (Re?)Discovery of the Kathisma Church and the Cult of the Virgin in Late Ancient Palestine," *Maria: A Journal of Marian Studies* 2 (2001): 21–72, 45–8.

Figure 14.1 Women swing censers at Mary's deathbed. Wall painting. Dated before 925. Deir al-Surian, Egypt. Photo courtesy of Karel Innemée.

collected a rich library of Syriac manuscripts.[3] The top border of the painting is written in Syriac, but the inscriptions are Coptic within its larger composition, a composition that fills the whole wall with the ascension/assumption of Mary, as well as Mary and Jesus seated side by side.[4]

How extraordinary the painting is becomes clear when it is compared to an example of the later iconography of the Dormition of Mary, which depicts Mary surrounded by men. The oldest example of this later iconography is dated to the late tenth century, but it rapidly became popular in both East and West.[5] See the ivory carving in Figure 14.2, one of the older examples, dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. The wall painting itself was plastered over around the thirteenth century, approximately the same time that the later iconography was painted in the northern semidome.[6]

In the wall painting, a Great Angel with beautiful red-tipped wings stands in the center of the scene. In the later iconography, as seen on the ivory, Jesus replaces the Great Angel. In the wall painting, women swing censers around Mary. In the ivory, a man swings a censer. Finally, in the painting, six women are around Mary's deathbed and twelve men are seated in the background. No women, however, are on the ivory—only men are around Mary's bed. Each of the three motifs—the Great Angel, the women swinging censers, and the women around Mary—appear in various Dormition manuscripts. Each of these three motifs, however, was redacted in the later Dormition narrative tradition, as well as in its later iconography. The trajectory of this redaction suggests that the Deir al-Surian painting may have a very old Dormition narrative behind it, a narrative with all three of these elements.

The Three Main Dormition Textual Traditions

In his 2002 book about Dormition narratives, Stephen J. Shoemaker discusses the three main Dormition textual traditions.[7] The first of these is the "Palm of the Tree of Life" tradition, sometimes called the *Liber Requiei*, which in its oldest layer described a "Great Angel" giving Mary a sacred book. The popular homilies attributed to John of Thessalonica, as well as others, replaced the book with a palm branch and say the Great Angel gave Mary a *palm* branch, hence the name, Palm tradition.[8] Later scribes,

[3] Karel Innemée, "Dayr al-Suryan: New Discoveries," in *Claremont Coptic Encyclopedia*. Online. Claremont, CA: Claremont Graduate University, 2016, 1–50, 1. http://ccdl.libraries.claremont.edu/cdm/ref/collection/cce/id/2137 (accessed on May 15, 2018).

[4] Innemée and Youssef, "Virgins with Censers," 70, 72; for the elements of the larger composition, see Innemée, "Dayr al-Suryan," 30–2, figs. 27–9. For more on the iconography of the ascension/assumption of Mary, see Kateusz, "Ascension of Christ or Ascension of Mary?"

[5] J. Myslivec, "Tod Mariens," in *Lexikon der christlichen Ikonographie IV*, ed. Engelbert Kirschbaum et al. (Rome: Herder, 1972), cols. 333–8.

[6] Innemée, "Dayr al-Suryan," 34, fig. 33.

[7] Stephen J. Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 32, fig. 1; 46, fig. 2; 57, fig. 3. After these three main categories, he designates the few manuscripts that do not fall into one of these three as "atypical," etc.

[8] John of Thessalonica, *Homily on the Dormition* 3 (Brian E. Daley, trans., *On the Dormition of Mary: Early Patristic Homilies* [Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary, 1998], 57–70, 49).

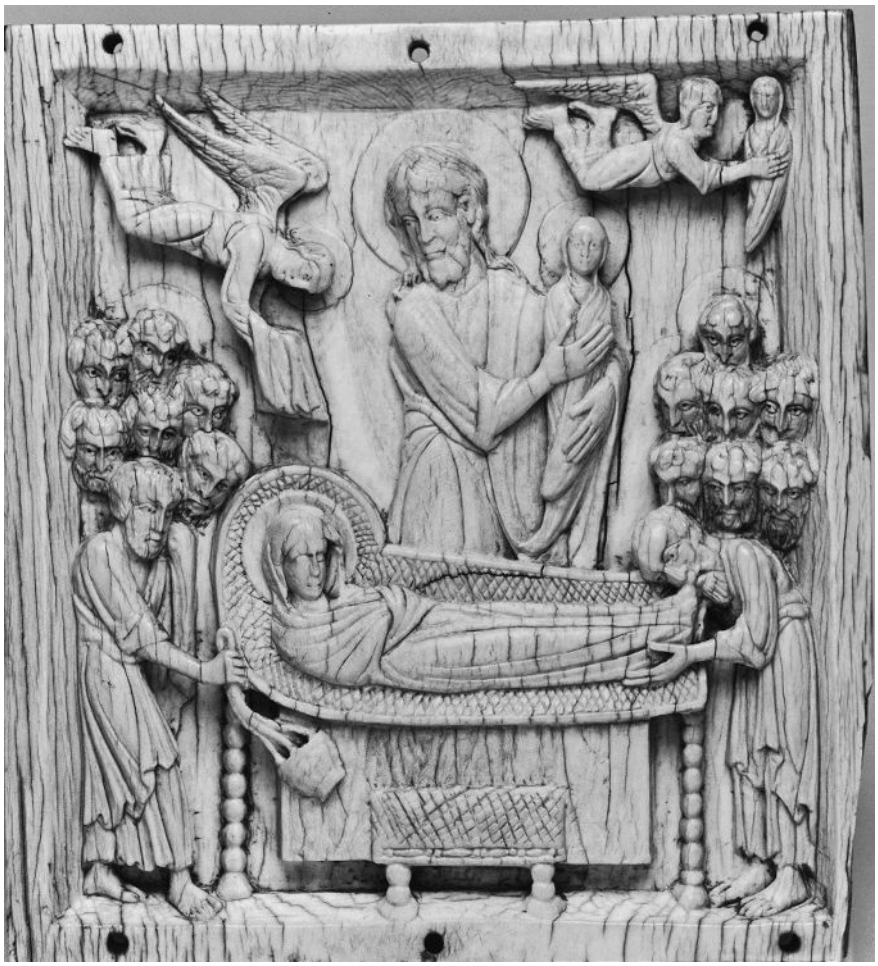

Figure 14.2 Twelve men surround Mary on her deathbed. Peter swings a censer. Tenth- to eleventh-century ivory. Image: The Walters Art Museum, Baltimore. Acquired by Henry Walters, 1926. Accession no. 71.135 (CC0).

apparently concerned about the early Jewish and gnostic motif of Jesus as a Great Angel, often replaced the Great Angel with Jesus, or alternatively harmonized this angel with the canonical angel who spoke to Mary at the Annunciation, "the angel Gabriel."[9] Shoemaker says, "The unmistakable efforts of later redactors to efface the primitive Angel Christology also attest to its antiquity."[10] Shoemaker proposes that an important fifth-century Syriac fragment sometimes called the "Obsequies" is probably

[9] Agnes Smith Lewis, ed. and trans., "*Transitus Mariae*," in *Apocrypha Syriaca: The Protevangelium Jacobi and Transitus Mariae* (StSin 11; London: C. J. Clay, 1902), 20.
[10] Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 215–18, quotation on 217.

the oldest remnant of this tradition; its value, however, is limited because the entire narrative is missing before the handful of folios that preserve the ending, after Mary has already died.[11] Shoemaker proposes that the oldest nearly complete recension of this text tradition is in a fourteenth-/fifteenth-century Ethiopic manuscript; indeed despite how late it is, this manuscript preserves the Great Angel giving Mary a book and telling her to give it to the apostles. It was translated first into Latin by Victor Arras and then by Shoemaker into English. Shoemaker calls it the Ethiopic *Liber Requiei*.[12] Given the confusing nomenclature, I call this text tradition the *Palm* tradition.

Shoemaker's second listed Dormition text tradition is what he calls the "Bethlehem" tradition because it describes Mary going to Bethlehem. Michel van Esbroeck called it the "Bethlehem and Incensing" tradition because of its frequent descriptions of censers, incense, and censing.[13] Most important with respect to the wall painting, its text describes both Mary and women around her with censers. Later scribes often excised these scenes with the result that subsequent recensions usually include fewer and fewer passages of women with censers. The oldest recension of this text tradition is the under script of a fifth-century Old Syriac palimpsest, which is the very oldest nearly complete Dormition manuscript in any of the three text traditions. This manuscript was edited and translated by Agnes Smith Lewis, who published it as the *Transitus Mariae*.[14] It preserves more passages depicting Mary with agency than any other Dormition manuscript, including that Mary raised her arms and led the apostles in prayer,[15] healed with her hands,[16] sprinkled, sealed, exorcised[17]—and preached the gospel, and set out the censer of incense to God.[18] Also of interest since the oldest Palm Dormition text described the Great Angel giving Mary a book of mysteries and telling her to give it to the apostles, the palimpsest text describes Mary giving women evangelists small books, or writings, to take to their home cities around the Mediterranean.[19] I have previously demonstrated the trajectory of scribal redaction with respect to these markers of Mary's liturgical leadership and further demonstrate it in Chapter 7 in this volume.[20] Shoemaker sometimes calls this text tradition the Six Books, so called because the narrator says that the apostles wrote six books; I also often

[11] William Wright, "The Obsequies of the Holy Virgin," in *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament: Collected and Edited from Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum*, trans. William Wright (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 42–51.

[12] Shoemaker, "Ethiopic *Liber Requiei*," in Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 290–350, 290; and for the Latin, see Victor Arras, *De Transitus Mariae Aethiopice*, vol. 1 (CSCO 342–3; Louvain: Secrétariat du Corpus SCO, 1973).

[13] Michel-Jean van Esbroeck, "Les textes littéraires sur l'Assomption avant le Xe siècle," in *Les actes apocryphes des apôtres*, ed. François Bovon (Publications de la faculté de théologie de l'Université de Genève 4; Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1981), 265–85, 273.

[14] Smith Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 12–69. Note that Smith Lewis used a second manuscript to fill in lacunae in the palimpsest text, which is distinguished by a smaller font.

[15] Ibid., 32.

[16] Ibid., 34, 35, 48.

[17] Ibid., 34.

[18] Ibid., 46–7.

[19] Ibid., 34.

[20] Ally Kateusz, "Collyridian Déjà Vu: The Trajectory of Redaction of the Markers of Mary's Liturgical Leadership," *JFSR* 29 (2013): 75–92.

call it the Six Books. In this chapter, however, I am going to call this text tradition as van Esbroeck described it: The *Censers* tradition.

The third tradition Shoemaker calls the *Coptic* tradition, which I also call it. Shoemaker's analysis of Coptic Dormition homilies attributed to Evodius of Rome is especially relevant to the iconography of the wall painting.[21] Shoemaker discovered that the oldest layer of the Dormition narrative in the Coptic described only women, no men, at Mary's deathbed. According to the narrator, Jesus had come down from heaven to take his mother back up with him after she died—and Jesus took the men outside, where the men fell asleep. Per the original narrative, which is witnessed in various seams across both Coptic and Palm manuscripts, after Mary died, Salome and Joanna went outside and told Jesus that his mother had died. Jesus then came back inside, while the men remained outside sleeping.[22] The women took care of Mary's body, placed it on her bier, and then the women woke up the men.[23] The wall painting appears to preserve the memory of this scene because the women are with Mary at her deathbed and the men are seated in the background, as if waiting outside, with several men resting their chin on their hand as if asleep. Shoemaker demonstrates that subsequent scribes redacted the women's agency by replacing the women with men. Quite humorously, in some later recensions, the *men* surround Mary's deathbed and the *men* announce to Jesus that his mother has died—*and then the men wake up*![24]

To recap, thus, between the eighth century and the year 925, a painter painted a wall mural in the Deir al-Surian church that included three of the oldest narrative elements from each of the three main Dormition traditions—elements that later scribes redacted or excised. Almost all later art of the Dormition of Mary also redacted these same elements. Later artists depicted Jesus at Mary's deathbed, not the Great Angel. They depicted men around Mary, not women. They depicted a man swinging the censer, not women.

Redaction Analysis of Passages Depicting Women with Censers

To demonstrate the trajectory of scribal redaction with respect to women using incense and censers, I will provide a redaction analysis of several passages across the text of three

[21] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "Gender at the Virgin's Funeral: Men and Women as Witnesses to the Dormition," *StPatr* 34 (2001): 552–8.

[22] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Sahidic Coptic Homily on the Dormition of the Virgin Attributed to Evodius of Rome: An Edition from Morgan MSS 596 & 598 with Translation," *AnBoll* 117 (1999): 241–83, 275, specifies on the Savior went in with the women: "And Salome and Joanna came to us and said to the Savior, 'Our Lord and our God, your mother and the mother of us all has died.' Then the Savior arose immediately and went in to the place where she was lying." Shoemaker, "Gender at the Virgin's Funeral," 553, incorrectly states that "Christ re-enters with the apostles."

[23] Shoemaker, "Gender at the Virgin's Funeral," 556; for the text, which is in the oldest Greek Palm manuscript (eleventh century), see Shoemaker, "Earliest Greek Dormition Narrative," in Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 351–69, 366.

[24] Shoemaker, "Gender at the Virgin's Funeral," 555–6; see also Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* 71 (Shoemaker, "Ethiopic *Liber Requiei*," 326).

published manuscripts in the Censers/Six Books tradition. The first is that of the fifth-century palimpsest, the very oldest nearly complete Dormition manuscript, as detailed above. The second is the second-oldest nearly complete Dormition manuscript so far published, a late sixth-century Syriac manuscript published in 1865 in the *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* by William Wright.[25] The third is a late medieval manuscript with an Ethiopic translation translated into Latin by Marius Chaine and into English by Shoemaker, which, despite the age of the manuscript itself, Shoemaker privileges as an old recension.[26]

To demonstrate this scribal redaction, I have selected three detailed passages preserved in the fifth-century palimpsest that portray Mary with a censer and incense. The first passage depicts Mary going to pray at her son's tomb, carrying spices, and throwing incense upon a censer.[27] The second depicts her praying with a censer in front of her. The third describes her preaching the gospel to the Governor of Jerusalem and telling him that after the angel of the Annunciation departed, she set out the censer of incense to God.[28] See Figure 14.3.

As can be seen, the fifth-century palimpsest preserves the most complete text, text redacted differently by each later scribe. In the first passage—the scene of Mary taking the censer and incense to her son's tomb—the scribe behind the medieval Ethiopic translation excised Mary's agency in throwing incense on the censer, and even the censer itself, but preserved the *smell* of incense. The sixth-century scribe, however, excised everything, even the smell.[29] In the second passage, however, the two scribes' excisions were opposite in severity. The sixth-century scribe preserved the scene of Mary praying in front of a censer, while the scribe behind the Ethiopic translation excised it. Both later scribes, however, excised all of the third passage, which included Mary's preaching to the governor of Jerusalem to whom she described setting out the censer of incense to God.[30] The pattern of these excisions demonstrates that indeed the oldest manuscript preserves the most original text. The two later scribes sometimes excised the same passages, but the proof is in the way that sometimes one excised a passage whereas the other did not, and vice versa.

The next chart contains excerpts from a long passage about the women who lived with Mary, women whom she taught, and who served her, including bringing censers and incense to Mary. The text of all three manuscripts includes the last passage, which

[25] William Wright, trans., "The Departure of My Lady Mary from This World." *Journal of Sacred Literature and Biblical Record* 7 (1865): 129–60. For its dating, see William Wright, trans., *Contributions to the Apocryphal Literature of the New Testament: Collected and Edited from Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1865), 8. This manuscript is in the British Library, catalogued as BL, syr. Add. 14 484, f. 16r.–45r.

[26] Stephen J. Shoemaker, "The Ethiopic Six Books," in *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 375–96, and 142–67 for discussion; also Marius Chaine, *Apocrypha de Beata Maria Virgine* (Rome: Karolus de Luigi, 1909), 17–42; this manuscript is Paris BN éthiop. 53, per Mimouni, *Dormition*, 242 n. 13.

[27] Smith Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 24–5.

[28] Ibid., 46–7.

[29] Ethiopic Six Books 26–7 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 378–9); Wright, "Departure of My Lady Mary," 135–6.

[30] Wright, "Departure of My Lady Mary," 146; Ethiopic Six Books 40 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 389).

5th-c. Syr. palimpsest	6th-c. Syr. ms	Medieval Ethiop. ms
On the Friday Mary had prepared herself to go to the tomb of the Lord, and she was **carrying sweet spices and fire**. 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*, which **the Lady Mary had thrown on the censer.**	Passage omits all fragrance	On Friday Mary came to pray at the tomb of Golgotha, and as she prayed, she raised her eyes to heaven with the *fragrant perfume of fine incense*.
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 recieve my words [she preaches the gospel]… 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

Figure 14.3 Redaction analysis: Mary with a censer and incense. Chart comparison of three manuscripts. © Ally Kateusz.

said that on Friday the women brought Mary a censer so that she could pray or make an offering.[31] With one exception, the other passages follow the same pattern as in the previous chart, that is, the two later scribes excised different parts. A passage only in the Ethiopic text, however, demonstrates that an even longer narrative source must

[31] Smith Lewis, "Transitus Mariae,"25; Wright, "Departure of My Lady Mary," 136; and Ethiopic *Six Books* 27 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 379).

be behind all three manuscripts. In this case, the fifth-century palimpsest preserves a passage describing that Mary kept special clothing in a chest, but not how she used these clothes[32]—yet the Ethiopic text, while omitting the chest, nonetheless refers to the special clothes and preserves that Mary wore these vestments when she made an offering to God.[33] See Figure 14.4.

The pattern of excisions in these two charts demonstrates that later scribes and copyists apparently had considerable latitude to abbreviate the text before them. The pattern of excisions suggests that scribes cut what they or their masters considered "offensive to pious ears,"[34] or "objectionable,"[35] or "heretical."[36] Such excisions may have been an effort to sanitize a text such as the Dormition narrative, which was read in the church on certain holy days of the year.

Women with Censers in the Dormition Narrative

The Dormition text of the fifth-century palimpsest, as well as of the sixth-century Old Syriac and medieval Ethiopic manuscripts, depicted women taking censers and incense to Mary while she was alive, but did not depict women with censers at her deathbed, as seen in the wall painting. A Coptic homily attributed to Theodosius of Alexandria, however, does preserve women with censers around Mary's deathbed. According to this homily, Mary had a dream in which her son told her that she was going to die, and when she woke up and told the people around her about the dream, they began to weep. Then came a knocking on the door. When they opened the door, "There came in many virgins from the mount of Olives, having choice censers and lamps."[37]

The medieval Ethiopic Palm manuscript that describes the women around Mary's deathbed also suggests that the narrative originally included the women carrying censers, for it preserves that a wondrous smell came around Mary on her deathbed—"a sweet, pleasant smell, like the odour of Paradise"[38]—and everyone fell asleep, except for the women. The oldest Greek Palm narrative preserves a similar passage. It says there was "a sweet-smelling fragrance so that everyone was driven off to sleep by the exceedingly sweet smell, except for only the three virgins … The three virgins attended to Mary's body and placed it on a bier. After that they woke up the apostles."[39]

[32] Smith Lewis, "Transitus Mariae," 24.
[33] Ethiopic *Six Books* 26–7 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 378–9, quotation on 379).
[34] Bruce Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 120.
[35] Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1993), 14.
[36] François Bovon and Christopher R. Matthews, eds. and trans., *The Acts of Philip: A New Translation* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 8.
[37] Theodosius of Alexandria, *Discourse on the Falling Asleep of Mary* 3 (Forbes Robinson, trans., *Coptic Apocryphal Gospels* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1896], 90–127, quotation on 99).
[38] Ethiopic *Liber Requiei* 66 (Shoemaker, "Ethiopic *Liber Requiei*," in *Ancient Traditions*, 290–350, 325).
[39] Greek *Liber Requiei* 33, 37 (Shoemaker, *Ancient Traditions*, 351–69, 364, 366).

5th-c. Syr. palimpsest	6th-c. Syr. ms	Medieval Ethiop. 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.**
And she opened a chest and **they took out her garments and the censer,** and put everything in order.	omitted	omitted
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 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 vigins 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.**

Figure 14.4 Redaction analysis: Women with censers and incense. Chart comparison of three manuscripts. © Ally Kateusz.

Thus, using three different text traditions, we can assemble fragments of the underlying source narrative that described women with censers around Mary on her deathbed. The Censers tradition preserves women bringing censers and incense to Mary but not to her deathbed. The Coptic preserves women with censers arriving at Mary's deathbed. The Palm retains the sweet scent at Mary's deathbed and that the women were awake while the men slept.

Historicity of Women with Censers

Is there a kernel of historicity about early Christian women's liturgical use of censers and incense that is evinced by the wall painting and its underlying narrative? The mere fact that the women with censers were replaced in both art and narrative suggests that something about the scene later became a concern. Did this later concern correspond to a change in women's liturgical roles? Below I will provide evidence that suggests women in the early Christian era had a role associated with censers and incense, a liturgical role that later became restricted to men.

The origin of liturgical censing in Christian churches is not well understood.[40] Yet the North African theologian Tertullian (ca. 155–240) was the first to record that Christians used incense in their funerals; he claimed that as much incense was used "in the burying of Christians as in the fumigating of the gods."[41] Given that in Mediterranean cultures women had the primary role for preparing and lamenting the dead, it seems likely that Christian women were doing this censing. It thus would be consistent for an author of the Dormition narrative to describe women with censers around Mary's deathbed—just as the painting illustrates and just as the Coptic Dormition homily ascribed to Theodosius of Alexandria describes. The cultural tradition of women censing the dead could also account for the narrative tradition that described Mary taking censer and incense to her son's tomb.

In the early Christian era, chapels and basilicas were often built over the tomb or relics of a holy person, most famously the Anastasis over Christ's tomb and Old Saint Peter's over Peter's bones.[42] It seems possible that the liturgical censing that Christian women performed for the dead may have moved inside along with these saintly relics. Although later church practice might lead us to suppose that women never used censers liturgically, ancient narrative and art indicate that the practice was both very early, and also, later suppressed.

In Orthodox and Catholic churches today, women generally are not permitted to use the censers. Regardless of the modern practice, the late ninth-/early tenth-century *typikon* for the Easter Week liturgies in Jerusalem, which likely was taken from an older liturgical model, specified that women censed the holy sepulcher, that is, women censed the tomb of Christ in the Anastasis, the fourth-century rotunda church also called the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.[43] The iconography on a sixth-century pyx suggests that women had clerical roles associated with censing in the Anastasis centuries earlier.

The ivory sculptor carved two women with censers approaching the altar and also three arms-raised women around the back of the pyx as part of a liturgical procession

[40] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 11–90.

[41] Tertullian, *Apology* 42 (*ANF* 3:49).

[42] André Grabar, *Martyrium, recherches sur le culte des reliques et l'art chrétien antique*, 2 vols. (Paris: Collège de France, 1946), esp. 1:293–313, 400–10.

[43] For discussion, see Allie M. Ernst, *Martha from the Margins: The Authority of Martha in the Early Christian Tradition* (VS Supplements 98; Leiden: Brill, 2009), 152–8; and Valerie A. Karras, "The Liturgical Functions of Consecrated Women in the Byzantine Church." *Theological Studies* 66 (2005): 96–116, 109–15.

to the altar; in Christian iconography, the arms-raised pose is a liturgical pose.[44] The ivory pyx is as old as any art depicting a Christian man with a censer, and it is the oldest to depict anyone, man or woman, with a censer at a Christian altar[45]—and it depicts two women at the altar and a liturgical procession with only women participants. For several reasons, the altar on this sixth-century ivory pyx is thought to represent the altar in the Anastasis, not the least of which is that the round shape of the pyx suggests the Anastasis rotunda.[46] This identification is also due in part to the many sixth-century artifacts that depicted two Marys, one swinging a censer, walking toward what scholars agree depicted the Anastasis shrine over Jesus' tomb.[47] For the round ivory pyx, see Figures 14.5 and 14.5A.

This sixth-century liturgical procession led by women with censers lends credibility to a report that in the early fifth century, women with censers led another procession—the joyous procession that took place after the Council of Ephesus in 431 affirmed the title of Theotokos for Mary.[48] It also evokes a second report from 312, when Eusebius of Caesaria described the dreamlike consecration of a church in Tyre with a ritual that similarly included incense and raised hands at the altar.[49] In any case, Tyre is about a hundred miles from Jerusalem, and given the ivory pyx, it seems quite possible that the ritual involving censers and raised hands at the altar for the consecration of the Tyre church may have been performed by women.

The pilgrim Egeria's diary of her travels to Jerusalem in 381 is the oldest surviving definite report of incense used in the liturgy[50]—and Egeria described the Sunday morning service at the Anastasis, the same church apparently sculpted on the pyx. Egeria said on Sunday mornings the Anastasis rotunda was as crowded with people as it was at Easter. She wrote that the presbyters and deacons recited psalms and prayers, and that afterward "they take censers into the cave of the Anastasis, so that the whole Anastasis basilica is filled with the smell."[51]

[44] Alexi Lidov, "The Priesthood of the Virgin Mary as an Image–Paradigm of Christian Visual Culture," *IKON* 10 (2017): 9–26, esp. 10.

[45] See Princeton's Index of Christian Art for a review of the oldest dated artifacts; see another woman depicted with a censer in mosaics dated 539–540 in the Qasr el Lebya church.

[46] For discussion, see Archer St. Clair, "The Visit to the Tomb: Narrative and Liturgy on Three Early Christian Pyxides," *Gesta* 18 (1979): 127–35, 129–31, figs. 7 and 8; and Goldschmidt, who argues it is the Anastasis altar, in part from the sixth–century Piacenza pilgrim's description that it was carved from the stone that had sealed the cave, in A. Goldschmidt, "Mittelstüke fünfteiliger Elfenbeintafeln des V–VI Jahrhunderts," *Jahrbuch fur Kunstwissenschaft* (1923): 30–3, esp. 33. Also see Kurt Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century: Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19, 1977, through February 12, 1978* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979), 581, fig. 520, who curiously argues it might be the altar in some other nearby church.

[47] See André Grabar, *Les ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza – Bobbio)* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1958), plates 9, 11–13, 16, 18, 26, 28, and 47; Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Thrupp, UK: Sutton, 1999), figs. 17–19 and 26; and St. Clair, "Visit to the Tomb," figs. 1 and 4.

[48] John I. McEnerney, *St. Cyril of Alexandria: Letters 1–50* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1987), 107.

[49] Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History 10* 4.68.

[50] Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 77.

[51] *Diary of Egeria* 24.8–10 (John Wilkinson, trans., *Egeria's Travels*, 3rd ed. [Oxford: Oxbow Books, 1999], 144).

Figure 14.5 Women with censers at the Anastasis altar. Ivory pyx dated 500s. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City. Gift of J. Pierpont Morgan, 1917. Accession Number: 17.190.57a, b (CC0).

Figure 14.5A Women in liturgical procession to the Anastasis altar (back of pyx).

Could Egeria have been describing a liturgical ritual such as depicted in the *typikon* and on the censer? Mid-fourth-century funerary epigraphs from near Jerusalem attest that female deacons were active in churches near Jerusalem when Egeria was there.[52] In addition, women deacons then may have had roles even more important than female "deacons" today, because the third- or fourth-century Syriac *Didascalia apostolorum*, which itself was compiled from even older sources, paired a male deacon and a female deacon, and ranked them above presbyters. The *Didascalia* stated that the male deacon was the type of the Christ and the female deacon the type of the Holy Spirit—whom fourth-century and earlier scribes in Ancient Syria described as feminine-gendered and mother[53]—and then listed *presbyters* as the type of the apostles.[54] Women deacons thus appear potentially to have had very important roles in the Jerusalem Church while Egeria was there.

Yet if Egeria saw women clergy censing, such as sculpted on the pyx, her diary does not specifically reflect that women participated in the ritual. Three reasons could explain this seeming omission. First, a later copyist could have excised Egeria's mention of women clergy censing in order to make her account harmonize with later practice. The above two charts witnesses this trajectory of redaction with respect to women with censers, and even modern editors have been known to conceal the presence of female deacons. For example, Hans Förster recently documented that a feminine title for people in a procession in the White Monastery was translated in 1958 as people "who refrain from the use of women" when it actually means "women serving as deacons."[55] Second, in the East, the masculine-gendered *diakonos* was used for both female and male deacons through the tenth century;[56] thus, we cannot assume that in the fourth century, Egeria would have grammatically distinguished male and female deacons like we do today. Third, and most interesting of all, Egeria may not have mentioned women clergy at the Anastasis because it was nothing new. In addition to the ivory pyx, which portrays women at the altar, according to John Wilkinson, Egeria wrote as if she herself sometimes took part in making the Offering, that is, the second part of the Eucharist.[57] While in some cases Egeria wrote, "The presbyters made the Offering there at our request"[58]—in other cases, such as at a church with a stone altar where she believed

[52] Aimé Georges Martimort, *Deaconesses: An Historical Study*, trans. K. D. Whitehead (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius, 1986), 35–58; Ute E. Eisen, *Women Officeholders in Early Christianity: Epigraphical and Literary Studies*, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 2000), 158–62, esp. 160.

[53] For Holy Spirit as feminine gendered, see Sebastian Brock, *Holy Spirit in the Syrian Baptismal Tradition* (The Syrian Churches 9, enlarged 2nd ed.; Pune, India: Anita Printers, 1998), 19–26; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "Feminine Imagery for the Divine: The Holy Spirit, the Odes of Solomon, and Early Syriac Tradition," *SVTQ* 37 (1993): 111–39, 111–22; Robert Murray, *Symbols of Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, rev. ed. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2004), 312–20; and Ally Kateusz, *Finding Holy Spirit Mother* (Holt, MO: Divine Balance, 2014).

[54] Syriac *Didascalia apostolorum* 9 (Alistair Stewart-Sykes, trans., *The Didascalia apostolorum: An English Version with Introduction and Annotation* [Turnhout: Brepols, 2009], 150–1).

[55] Förster, Hans, "'Sich des Gebrauchs der Frauen enthalten': Eine Anfrage an die grammatikalische Struktur einer Interzession für Verstorbene im Grossen Euchologion aus dem Weissen Kloster," *ZAC / JAC* 9 (2006): 584–91.

[56] Valerie A. Karras, "Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church," *Church History* 73 (2004): 272–316, 280.

[57] Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 57 and 110, n. 1.

[58] *Diary of Egeria* 4.8 (Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 112).

Figure 14.6 Pola ivory reliquary box carved with a liturgical scene depicting the sanctuary of Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome, ca. 430s. Men and women flank the mensa in parallel. Museo Archeologico, Venice. © Alinari Archives-Alinari Archive, Florence.

Figure 14.7 Sarcophagus front with liturgical scene in the second Hagia Sophia, Constantinople, ca. 430s. Man and woman on opposite sides of the altar. Photo courtesy of Ally Kateusz and Archeological Museum of Istanbul.

Elijah had offered sacrifice, she instead wrote for the second Eucharist of Sunday, "*We* made the Offering there."[59] Wilkinson notes that in those instances, Egeria did not mention *receiving* communion, and he concludes, "Egeria seems to think that her presence at the Eucharist means that she is taking part in the sacrifice."[60]

Further affirming that indeed Egeria may have been accustomed to taking part in the sacrifice, the two oldest artifacts to depict Christians in the liturgy in a real church portray women and men in parallel flanking the altar.[61] These two artifacts, both discovered in the twentieth century, are usually dated to the decades around 430, approximately fifty years after Egeria was in Jerusalem. One, an ivory reliquary box dug up in Croatia, depicts the sanctuary in Old Saint Peter's Basilica.[62] The other, a huge sarcophagus front dug up in Istanbul, depicts the sanctuary in the second Hagia Sophia.[63] Art historians agree that both artifacts portray men and women with their arms raised flanking the ciborium over the altar.

The ciborium on the ivory reliquary box is of particular interest because it is not square but in the shape of a trapezoid, or half-hexagon, as is the shape of the ciborium over the altar sculpted on the ivory pyx. Galit Noga-Banai argues that during the Christianization of Rome, architects in the city of Rome used visual motifs from Jerusalem, so the half-hexagon ciborium over Peter's tomb in Old Saint Peter's may have been constructed to mirror the ciborium over Christ's tomb in the Anastasis.[64] Old Saint Peter's was built around a second-century shrine composed of an approximately 8-foot by 8-foot wall embedded with a stone mensa, which subsequent excavations beneath the high altar of the modern Saint Peter's Basilica conclusively demonstrated was the same seen under the ciborium on the ivory; for example, Vatican excavator Englebert Kirschbaum said the ivory scene was "so striking even in its details as to confirm conclusively its interpretation as the Constantinian apse in Saint Peter's."[65] Even an arched niche behind the mensa on the second-century shrine matched the arched niche behind the table on the ivory. In addition to the arms-raised women and men flanking the ciborium, almost all art historians identify a veiled woman (right) and a man (left) facing each other across the stone tabletop.[66]

[59] *Diary of Egeria* 4.3–4, 4.8 (Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 111), also 111 n. 4.

[60] Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travels*, 57.

[61] For more detail on these two artifacts, as well as others both literary and iconographic, see Ally Kateusz, "'She Sacrificed Herself as the Priest': Early Christian Female and Male Co-Priests," *JFSR* 33 (2017), 45–67, esp. 51–66.

[62] Ibid., 56–63.

[63] Ibid., 54–6.

[64] Galit Noga-Banai, *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), esp. 129–71.

[65] Engelbert Kirschbaum, *The Tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul*, trans. John Murray (New York: St. Martin's, 1959), 60.

[66] Kateusz, "'She Sacrificed Herself as the Priest'," 63; Fabrizio Bisconti, "La Capsella di Samagher: Il quadro delle interpretazioni," *Il cristianesimo in Istria fra tarda antichità e alto Medioevo* (2009): 217–31, esp. 230–1; Davide Longhi, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: iconografia e committenza* (Ravenna: Girasole, 2006), 109–12; Margherita Guarducci, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: un cimelio di arte paleocristiana nella storia del tardo impero* (Trieste: Società istriana di archeologia, 1978), 126–7; Carlo Cecchelli, *La vita di Roma nel Medioevo, volume 1: Le arti minori e il costume* (Rome: Palandi, 1951–2), 208; Giuseppe Wilpert, "Le due più antiche rappresentazioni della Adoratio Crucis," *Atti della Pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia*, series 3, memorie 2 (1928): 135–55, esp. 148; Henri

With respect to the sarcophagus front, Johannes Deckers and Ümit Serdaroğlu, who excavated it, concluded from the design of its column capitals that it represented the sanctuary of the second Hagia Sophia, which had the same type of capitals.[67] The man and woman flanking the ciborium over the altar with its early Christian cross appear to affirm the historicity of a report in the *Letter of Cosmas*, which said that Princess Pulcheria—who at the age of 14 was made regent for her 7-year-old younger brother, Theodosius II—was accustomed to standing in the holy of holies of the second Hagia Sophia with her younger brother. According to this letter, the new Patriarch of Constantinople, Nestorius, stopped Pulcheria from entering the Holy of Holies, saying only priests could enter—at which for her justification, Pulcheria invoked Mary, the Theotokos.[68] Three years later, the Council of Ephesus in 431 affirmed the title of Theotokos for Mary and exiled Nestorius, after which presumably Pulcheria resumed her custom—a custom that appears to have continued in Constantinople, if mosaics installed a century later in the holy of holies of San Vitale in Ravenna are any indication. On the left of the altar, these mosaics depict Emperor Justinian holding the gold paten for the bread, and on the right, Empress Theodora holding the gold chalice for the wine.[69] The image of Theodora holding the chalice with both hands resonates with the image of the woman sculpted at the mensa tabletop in Old Saint Peter's, whom various art historians have suggested is lifting some kind of container with both hands.[70]

In short, both of these artifacts appear to validate Wilkinson's conclusion that Egeria thought she was taking part in the sacrifice, because they depict women flanking altar tables along with men, suggesting that during this early era, women, as well as men, took part.[71] Thus, the depictions of women using censers in the Dormition narratives appear to be consistent with what we know about the origins of the liturgical use of censers in the church, as well the role of women in the liturgy during the early Christian era. This evidence includes both contemporary accounts, such as that of

Leclercq, "Pola," in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 14, part 1, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ané, 1939), cols. 1342–46, esp. 1345; Alexander CoburnSoper, "The Italo–Gallic School of Early Christian Art," *Art Bulletin* 202 (1938): 145–92, esp. 157; Pericle Ducati, *L'arte in Roma dalle origini al sec. VIII* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1938), 380; Pietro Toesca, *Storia dell'arte italiana*, vol. I (Turin: Unione, 1927), 322; Anton Gnirs, "La basilica ed il reliquiario d'avorio di Samagher presso Pola," *Atti e memorie della società istriana di archeologia e storia patria* 24 (1908): 5–48, esp. 34, 36–7, fig. 28.

[67] Johannes G. Deckers and Ümit Serdaroğlu, "Das Hypogäum beim Silivri–Kapi in Istanbul," *Jahrbuck für Antike und Christentum* 36 (1993): 140–63, 161.

[68] *Letter to Cosmas* 6 (François Nau, trans., *Histoire de Nestorius d'après la lettre à Cosme et l'Hymne de Sliba de Mansourya sur les docteurs grecs* [Patrologia Orientalis 13; Paris: Firmin–Didot, 1916], 275–86, esp. 279).

[69] Otto G. von Simson, *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 23–39, esp. 30–1, regarding Theodora's image in the holy of holies, and see plates 2–4 and 10 for Justinian, and plates 4, 10, 18, and 19 for Theodora.

[70] Longhi, *Capsella eburnea*, 100; Anna Angiolini, *La capsella eburnea di Pola* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1970), 29; Tilmann Buddensieg, "Le coffret en ivoire de Pola: Saint–Pierre et le Latran," *Cahiers archéologiques* 10 (1959): 157–95, 163; and Jelena Bogdanović, *The Framing of Sacred Space: The Canopy and the Byzantine Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 185, although note she sees a Roman priest (masc.) wearing a veil.

[71] For more argument regarding the eucharistic role of women, including literary references from the second to the eighth centuries that described women and men officiating in the eucharistic ritual, see Kateusz, "'She Sacrificed Herself as the Priest,'" esp. 45–51.

Tertullian and Egeria, as well as the portrayal of women with censers at the Anastasis altar, plus the artifacts that depict women flanking the altar table in parallel with men at other important basilicas. Later scribes redacted passages that depicted women with censers, and later artists replaced women with men in iconography, most clearly in the iconography of the Dormition of Mary. This censorship, along with the other evidence, strongly suggests that there is more than just a kernel of historicity behind these early depictions of women using censers liturgically. Depictions of women using censers in the Dormition narrative appear to have corresponded to women's roles in the early church. Later scribes and artists harmonized their texts and art with later practice which restricted the liturgical use of censers to men.

In conclusion, all three elements of the Deir al-Surian wall painting of the Dormition of Mary are found across two or more of the Dormition text traditions. Shoemaker demonstrated that the original source depicted women as the active agents at Mary's deathbed, passages most fully preserved in the Coptic but also seen in bits and pieces in the Palm tradition. The Censers tradition preserves more markers of female liturgical authority than any other tradition, but the element of women carrying censers to Mary's deathbed appears to be preserved primarily in the Coptic, most prominently the homily of Theodosius of Alexandria. The text of the fifth-century palimpsest in the Censers tradition, however, preserves several other passages that depicted women bringing censers to Mary while she was alive, and the Palm tradition preserves the sweet scent of incense at Mary's deathbed, as well as the women there. Finally, the Jewish and gnostic element of the Great Angel is preserved only in a few manuscripts in the Palm tradition, because most scribes either replaced the Great Angel with Jesus (Palm and Coptic) or gave this angel the canonical name of Gabriel (Censers). All of the three main later Dormition text traditions, thus, preserve different narrative elements seen in the Deir al-Surian wall painting.

The presence of highly redacted narrative elements across multiple later manuscripts in all three Dormition text traditions strongly suggests that the iconography preserved in the remarkable Deir al-Surian wall painting, as well as in the tiny sixth-century Palestinian pottery token, preserves a scene in a Dormition source narrative. This scene portrayed Jesus as the Great Angel, the women liturgically censing Mary on her deathbed, and the men sleeping outside. It seems quite likely that the source narrative also contained other passages with narrative elements that survive only in bits and pieces across surviving manuscripts.