

BAPTISMS BY BLOOD, FIRE, AND WATER  
A TYPOLOGICAL REREADING OF THE *PASSIO*  
S. *MARGARETAE*

BY MARIE SCHILLING GROGAN

*A typological reading allows us to see that Margaret's early-medieval Latin passio, the Mombritius version upon which most later vernacular versions of her popular legend ultimately drew, is a tightly structured figural meditation on the theme of baptism and the sacraments of initiation. Examination of the prayers, the liturgically allusive gestures, and the symbolic elements of the whole narrative reveals a powerful female figure who "presides" over her own ordeal and with her prayers transforms the instruments of torture into baptisms by blood, fire, and water. This narrative's deep structure may offer further insight into Margaret's appeal as a patroness of childbirth.*

In the fourteenth-century Northern-Italian manuscript London, British Library Egerton MS 877, folio 12 preserves a unique Latin prayer appended to a version of Saint Margaret's legend; the manuscript, which bears evidence of having been repeatedly kissed on this very page, is a *libellus* that was apparently brought to women in childbirth. Above an image of a woman who has just given birth, flanked by two other women, the prayer reads:

Come forth infant, Christ summons you in the name of the Son. Come forth infant, Christ guides you in the name of the Holy Spirit. Come forth infant, Christ guides you and invites you to baptism, [he] who suffered for you and from his side produced the water of baptism, and made baptism red by his blood. Elizabeth bore John, Anna bore Mary, the Virgin Mary bore Christ the saviour of the world, who will free you [name] from birth and your pains, Amen. If you are male or female, living or dead, come forth, for Christ summons you, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. The Father is alpha and omega, the Son is life, the Holy Spirit is medicine. Thanks be to God.<sup>1</sup>

The tremendous appeal of Saint Margaret, a virgin martyr, as an intercessor for women in childbirth has long puzzled readers of her legend and historians of

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<sup>1</sup> As translated by John Lowden, "Treasures Known and Unknown at the British Library, Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts, Tours," *The British Library*, accessed 15 April 2010, [www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourKnownB.asp](http://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/TourKnownB.asp).

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her widespread cult. Is it that her own miraculous “birth” from the belly of a dragon promises hope for the most difficult of deliveries?<sup>2</sup> Is it that her name, meaning Pearl, recalls the healing powers of the pearl with respect to excessive bleeding, a connection with obvious relevance for women giving birth?<sup>3</sup> Is it that her dismissal of the second demon in her story relies on ancient Judaeo-Hellenistic traditions of exorcism and protections for childbirth?<sup>4</sup> Certainly each of these theories adds some definition to a picture whose contours have faded over time. I believe the prayer in Egerton 877 points to another crucial element of the composition: Saint Margaret’s story is intimately connected with baptism — the saving sacrament that the danger of birth both makes possible and might preclude. As the prayer asserts, the child is brought forth in order to be baptized. Or, as art historian John Lowden muses about this evocative artifact, “And if the worst happened and their child was stillborn, how many women prayed in anguish, with the help of this little book, that their labour might still end safely?” “Safely,” in such a case, would mean “in heaven,” should baptism have been effected in time — the powerful hope offered by this particular prayer and, I suggest, more generally by the legend to which it was attached. While Margaret’s emergence from the dragon’s belly, the most iconographically familiar moment in her story, may indeed be read as a successful “birth,” it also represents a key moment in a baptismal narrative that structures this legend, implicitly addressing the concerns of medieval women not only for the physical safety but also for the eternal salvation of their infants.

The legend of Saint Margaret, one of the most popular saints in European medieval culture, recounts the purported martyrdom during the Maximian persecutions of a maiden from Antioch who refuses to yield the virginity she had pledged to Christ to the local pagan prefect, Olibrius. Olibrius imprisons, elaborately tortures, and finally beheads her. During the course of her ordeal, Margaret is beaten, burned, and nearly drowned; she is also swallowed by a dragon and visited by a demon who identifies himself as Beelzes, or Beelzebub. Work on the

<sup>2</sup> See Bella Millet and Jocelyn Wogan Browne, *Medieval English Prose for Women: Selections from the Katherine Group and Ancrene Wisse* (Oxford, 1990), xxii.

<sup>3</sup> See the etymological discussion of Margaret’s name that begins the *Legenda Aurea* version of her life. Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Ryan (Princeton, NJ, 1993), 368.

<sup>4</sup> Julia Dresvina, “The Significance of the Demonic Episode in the Legend of St Margaret of Antioch,” *Medium Aevum* 81 (2012): 189–209, at 202. Dresvina’s insightful reading of the legend came to print after my initial work on the baptismal elements in the *passio* was completed. I have found her conclusions to corroborate and complement my work on the legend. Her more recent book, *A Maid with a Dragon: The Cult of St. Margaret of Antioch in Medieval England* (Oxford, 2016) offers a wealth of information about the cult of the saint over eight centuries in England, continuing to emphasize the significance of the highly symbolic demonic episodes for Margaret’s story.

legend generally has fallen into one of two critical camps: feminist and historical-critical. From the perspective of the most recent feminist criticism, Margaret is a tortured female body, understood perhaps as the violated object of the male gaze, perhaps, as Jennifer Borland recently proposed, as transgressive “precisely because it vacillates between being inviolate and being penetrated, between solidity and ephemerality, between wholeness and fragmentation.”<sup>5</sup> Feminist scholarship pursues as well the related cultural question of Margaret’s role in the lives of women who called upon her as the patroness of childbirth.<sup>6</sup> Historical-critical study often pursues the patristic and liturgical sources of elements of the legend and evinces a particular fascination with its demonology, focusing on Margaret’s remarkable defeat of the dragon that had swallowed her and the subsequent disquisition of his brother demon.<sup>7</sup> Both lenses reveal much but used separately serve to illuminate only portions of the legend: the cultural work performed by that tortured body on the one hand, or the arcane theologies revealed by the presence of the dragon and demon on the other. This paper proposes that historical-critical methods, particularly a pursuit of the typological underpinnings of the early-medieval Latin *passio*, can substantiate and enrich a feminist reading to bring the disparate elements of this story into a more clearly focused whole.

Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis build the essential foundation for such a synthesis in their edition of *The Old English Lives of Saint Margaret*. Before focusing on the Old English vernacular versions, Clayton and Magennis discuss the transmission of the legend in the West and offer an astute reading of the important early Latin *passio* classified in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* (BHL) as

<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Borland, “Violence on Vellum: St Margaret’s Transgressive Body and Its Audience,” in *Representing Medieval Genders and Sexualities in Europe: Construction, Transformation and Subversion, 600–1530*, ed. Elizabeth L’Estrange and Alison More (London, 2011), 81. Similarly, Julie E. Fromer, “Spectators of Martyrdom: Corporeality and Sexuality in the *Liflade ant te Passiun of Seinte Margarete*,” in *Intersections of Sexuality and the Divine in Medieval Culture: The Word Made Flesh*, ed. Susannah Chewning (London, 2005), 89–106. For an overview of and challenge to other readings in this vein, see Katherine J. Lewis, “‘Lete Me Suffre’: Reading the Torture of St Margaret of Antioch in Late Medieval England,” in *Medieval Women: Text and Contexts in Late Medieval Britain; Essays for Felicity Riddy*, ed. Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Turnhout, 2000), 69–82.

<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Wendy R. Larson, “Who is the Master of this Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of St. Margaret,” in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 94–104.

<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Jocelyn Price, “The Virgin and the Dragon: The Demonology of Sainte Margarete,” *Leeds Studies in English* 16 (1985): 337–57, as well as the extensive treatment of the demonology of the legend in Mack’s edition (n. 13 below). More recently, Julia Dresvina (n. 4 above) takes up these issues, and Monica White, “The Rise of the Dragon in Middle Byzantine Hagiography,” *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 32 (2008): 149–67, interrogates changes over several centuries in the demonology of the legend of Marina (as Margaret is known in the Greek manuscript tradition).

no. 5303.<sup>8</sup> Although Margaret's legend was probably first composed in Greek (where she is known as Marina), the earliest manuscripts we have are from the eighth century in Latin; Greek manuscripts date from the later ninth century and on. BHL 5303, known as the Mombritius version (taking its name from the edition printed in Mombritius's *Sanctuarium*),<sup>9</sup> along with its reconstructed predecessor, the "Pre-Mombritius" version, represents, as Clayton and Magennis point out, the tradition that lies behind "nearly all vernacular adaptations" of Margaret's legend.<sup>10</sup> We may say that BHL 5303 offers a "revision" of the earliest Latin translations of the Greek legend, and I will take this influential Mombritius version (henceforth referred to here simply as the *passio*) as my subject, hoping to build on the critical insights of Clayton and Magennis with regard to this version's richly liturgical style.<sup>11</sup> My aims are literary rather than historical. I will demonstrate a deliberate pattern of typological allusions to the sacrament of baptism clearly at work in the Mombritius *passio*, noting as well the degree to which these structuring patterns seem to derive from earlier versions of the legend, both Latin and Greek, but I do not attempt to determine a specific historical or geographical context for the composition of this "revised" version. Such an investigation, which I hope my findings may provoke or facilitate, will be difficult until there is a critical edition of BHL 5303. Meanwhile, there are a handful of printed editions of manuscripts of the *passio*, including the edition of Paris, BN, lat. 5574 (P), that Clayton and Magennis provide in their study.<sup>12</sup> Among the available editions, I have opted to use the edition of BL Harley 2801 (H) that Frances Mack provided as a source text in her EETS volume *Seinte Marherete: De Meiden ant Martyr*.<sup>13</sup> This edition of a fairly early manuscript (dated to 1200 by Mack) has the

<sup>8</sup> Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis, *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret* (Cambridge, 1994). See also Maria Carmen Viggiani, Sandra Isetta, and Monique Goulet, "Passio Marinae BHL 5303c," in *Le Légendier de Turin* (Florence, 2014), 732–36 for a concise discussion of the manuscript tradition, both Latin and Greek. For the Bollandists' editions, see *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina*, 2 vols., *Subsidia hagiographica* 6 (Brussels, 1898–1901), with supplements, *Subsidia hagiographica* 12 and 70 (Brussels, 1911 and 1986).

<sup>9</sup> Bonino Mombritius, *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum*, 2nd ed. (Paris, 1910), 190–96.

<sup>10</sup> Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives*, 24.

<sup>11</sup> For discussion of the *passio*'s "indebtedness to the liturgy," see Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives*, 24–40; see also Theodore Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende des Mittelalters* (Tübingen, 1964), 170–77.

<sup>12</sup> Other print versions (besides the T and Mp editions of Viggiani et al., cited in note 8 above) include: Gordon Hall Gerould, "A New Text of the Passio S. Margaritae with Some Account of Its Latin and English Relations," *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 39 (1924): 525–56 (the Mather MS); Clayton and Magennis's *Casinensis* text from Monte Cassino, MS 52 (224–34 of their work cited in note 8 above); Elizabeth A. Francis, *Wace, la Vie de S. Margarete*, *Les Classiques Français du Moyen Age* 71 (Paris, 1932), 1–56 (based on Paris BN, MS lat. 17002).

<sup>13</sup> Frances Mack, ed., *Seinte Marherete: Pe Meiden ant Martyr*, EETS OS 193 (New York, 1934), 127–42. Quotations throughout the essay from the Latin *passio* are from Mack's

advantage of being both widely available to contemporary readers and perhaps a closer witness to the earliest Latin and Greek traditions than other printed editions. H shares much with P, for instance, but also retains some readings that suggest it is closer to the earlier strata of the legend — that is, the eighth-century Latin “translations” from the original Greek represented by another manuscript family (BHL 5303c). This branch of the textual tradition is witnessed by the following manuscripts: Turin, BN, D.V. 3 (T), and Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l’Université, École de Médecine, H 55 (Mp), which are recently available in the volume edited by Monique Goulet.<sup>14</sup> My discussion of the *passio* will therefore be based on H, but I will demonstrate at key points how variants found in H are often in keeping not only with readings in T and Mp, but also with the earliest Mombritus MS, O (Saint-Omer, BM, 202)<sup>15</sup> and the late-ninth-century Greek MS of BHG 1165, or “Usener” (Paris, BNF, gr. 1470) printed by Hermann Usener.<sup>16</sup> H is the best available edition for my close readings here, but the liturgically resonant structure of BHL 5303 is manifest to varying degrees in all editions, regardless of textual variants.<sup>17</sup>

Over the course of the *passio* as it is preserved in H, Margaret offers ten scripturally and liturgically allusive prayers directly to God; in addition to other responses and speeches, she also offers two credal acclamations and two imprecations that have prayer-like qualities.<sup>18</sup> Clayton and Magennis note the elevated register of the prayers in particular, spoken in a “public and proclamatory mode that is apparent even when Margaret is on her own,” a register that is particularly highlighted in her final prayer, where she “orchestrates the audience’s

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edition, with page and line numbers provided in the text. Translations are mine but based on the facing page translation by Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives*, 195–219.

<sup>14</sup> See n. 8 above.

<sup>15</sup> O has been digitized and is available at <http://bibliotheque-numerique.bibliotheque-agglo-stomer.fr/collection/353-recueil/?n=6>.

<sup>16</sup> Hermann K. Usener, *Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori: Festschrift zur fünften Säcularfeier der Carl-Ruprechts-Universität zu Heidelberg, überreicht von Rector und Senat der rheinischen Friederich-Wilhelms-Universität* (Bonn, 1886). I rely on Guido Tammi’s Italian translation of Usener’s text provided as a source text in his *Due versioni della leggenda di S. Margherita d’Antiochia in versi francesi del medioevo* (Piacenza, 1958).

<sup>17</sup> Mack has also collated H with eight other texts besides those I have examined (both manuscripts and printed editions); I will refer to variants of particular note from these texts as well. See Mack, *Seinte Marherete*, xxv for the list of texts she collated.

<sup>18</sup> In H, all but one of these fourteen prayer-like speech acts either begins with a signal phrase such as “orauit, dicens” (134, line 20) or concludes with a ritual coda (“Amen,” or a benedictus formula). In other manuscripts of BHL 5303, however, not all of these “prayers” are as clearly marked. Wolpers, for instance, counts nine “prayers” in the Mombritius *passio* (Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende*, 171). For those prayers I discuss in detail, I have provided line numbers from H and I refer to them numerically according to their order in H.

praise for God and leads the prayer.”<sup>19</sup> As Theodore Wolpers also observed, these prayers are cultic, rather than personal, expressions.<sup>20</sup> In general, there is a remarkable regularity in these prayers from manuscript to manuscript and even across versions of the Margaret story. It is worth noting that an important feature of the narrative is Theotimus’s assertion: “scripsi omnes orationes eius in libris carteneis cum astutia multa, et transmisi omnibus Christianis haec omnia, in ueritate conscripta” (142, lines 5–8) (I have written down all of her prayers in the pages of books with great diligence and passed these things all on in truth to all Christians). As we shall see, it is Margaret’s preserved prayers, those written texts that construct and enhance the liturgical architecture of the *passio*, which will become the locus of her cult in the West; her relics are in fact found “in the pages of books” rather than in reliquaries.

In one prayer Margaret utters the very words of the baptismal formula — “baptiza me in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti” (139, line 3), rereading her torture by submersion into a self-administered sacrament. The baptismal formula, present in all the Mombritius texts I have examined, is an addition to the legend at this point in its textual history; it is not found in T, Mp, or Usener, although Margaret’s submersion in the cauldron is clearly described as a baptism even in these earlier versions. The baptismal words (and indeed all of the prayers) disappear in some later versions of the legend.<sup>21</sup> The addition of the formula in the Mombritius *passio* suggests a “reviser” who seeks to foreground the baptismal theme that is present already in the liturgically resonant shape of the narrative.

The structure of the Mombritius *passio* generally follows the order of baptismal liturgies but does not adhere strictly to any particular rite. The sequence of events broadly mirrors Western baptismal practices and the related rituals of confirmation and Eucharist as these ceremonies evolved in the early Middle Ages.<sup>22</sup> At the same time, baptismal norms and symbols more proper to Eastern rites seem suggested at certain moments — evidence in its deep structure that the

<sup>19</sup> Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives* (n. 8 above), 31 and 40.

<sup>20</sup> Wolpers, *Die englische Heiligenlegende*, 172.

<sup>21</sup> See Karen Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs: Legends of Sainthood in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca, NY, 1997), 15. See also Evelyn Vitz, “From the Oral to the Written in Medieval and Renaissance Saints’ Lives,” in *Images of Sainthood in Medieval Europe*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Tímea Szell, and Brigitte Cazelles (Ithaca, NY, 1991), 97–114. The removal of her prayers and of the episode in which she speaks the baptismal formula over herself coincides in some versions with the insertion of information earlier in the story that she was baptized as a child. See the late-thirteenth-century *Legenda Aurea* version and in the Anglo-French Margaret, Version G, printed by Brigitte Cazelles, *The Lady as Saint: A Collection of French Hagiographic Romances of the Thirteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1991), 218–28.

<sup>22</sup> For a useful overview of the differences between the developments of baptismal theology and ritual in East Syria and the Greco-Latin West, see Aidan Kavanagh, *The Shape of Baptism: The Rite of Christian Initiation* (Collegeville, MN, 1978), 38–78.

Latin *passio* most likely had its origins in what Clayton and Magennis call “a highly developed older Greek tradition.”<sup>23</sup> At other moments, episodes that seem repetitive — for instance, the repeated signings with the cross and the three appearances of the Holy Dove — remind the contemporary reader that baptismal rites, both Eastern and Western, were marked for many centuries by a wide variety in local practices, resulting in what Sebastian Brock calls “confusion and fluidity” in the surviving texts.<sup>24</sup> In addition, the narrative is exuberantly embroidered with baptismal symbolism, language, and imagery, drawn as much from patristic reflections on the sacraments of initiation as from actual cultic practice.

This deliberate and elaborate shaping of Margaret’s *passio* requires a typological approach to reading it that has not yet been fully undertaken. Although purporting to be the account of a third-century martyrdom, Margaret’s *passio* falls into a generic category described by James Earl: a narrative lacking the historicity that Bollandist Hippolyte Delehaye attributes to the early *passions historiques* and that participates instead in the more literary and theologically informed shaping characteristic of hagiography after the fourth century.<sup>25</sup> Earl suggests that such hagiography, like Scripture, is “essentially typological, not just in the details of its content, or in its historical interest, but by its very nature as an event in sacred history.”<sup>26</sup> Likewise, Thomas Hill concurs that many hagiographic texts intend to carry forward the patterns of Christian history into the lived experience of believers — both those celebrated within the texts and those who in turn read the saints’ stories.<sup>27</sup> Both Earl and Hill discuss the patterning of saints’ lives and passions as *imitatio Christi* — certainly a structuring device at play in Margaret’s *passio*. More significantly, because Margaret’s story figures baptism, it also participates in what Jean Daniélou calls “sacramental typology.”<sup>28</sup> It is, Daniélou suggests, precisely in the creation and celebration of

<sup>23</sup> Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives*, 6.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Bryan Spinks, *Early and Medieval Rituals and Theologies of Baptism: From the New Testament to the Council of Trent* (Burlington, VT, 2006), 46. For a sense of the rich variety of baptismal practices and theologies in both the West and the East in the centuries before this *passio* was composed, see also Edward Charles Whitaker and Maxwell E. Johnson, *Documents of the Baptism Liturgy*, rev. ed. (Collegeville, MN, 2003).

<sup>25</sup> Delehaye as referenced in James Earl, “Typology and Iconographic Style in Early Medieval Hagiography,” *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 8 (1975): 15–46, at 24. See also Hippolyte Delehaye, “Les passions historiques,” 15–131, as compared to “Les passions épiques,” 171–226, in *Les passions des martyrs et les genres littéraires*, 2nd ed., *Subsidia hagiographica* 13B (Brussels, 1966).

<sup>26</sup> Earl, “Typology,” 35.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas D. Hill, “*Imago Dei*: Genre, Symbolism, and Anglo-Saxon Hagiography,” in *Holy Men and Holy Women: Old English Prose Saints’ Lives and Their Contexts*, ed. Paul E. Szarmach (Albany, NY, 1996), 35–50, at 44.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame, IN, 1956).

liturgies that the Christian community carries those Old Testament patterns forward toward the eschaton.

In this sense, we may say that a baptismal liturgy is a work of communal exegesis whose prayers, symbols, and gestures serve to teach the typological reading of Christian history. The interpretations that such a liturgy promotes are not only readings “back” into the Hebrew Scriptures, finding for instance that the waters of the Red Sea in Exodus are a type of the waters of the River Jordan in which Christ was baptized. More significantly, the typology of baptism reaches “forward” to encompass the life of each newly baptized Christian, pulling his or her story into the larger narrative of salvation history.<sup>29</sup>

To the extent, then, that the monastic revisers of this *passio* preserve or enhance the typologically rich motifs related to baptism in the narrative, they create a Saint Margaret who in her highly scriptural prayers and ritual actions embodies this completion of a hermeneutic circle. The *passio* notes that Margaret was instructed in the Christian faith as a child and loved to read about the early martyrs; in the prayers and gestures — the “liturgy” of her own martyrdom — she reveals a right reading of these Christian texts and also offers the crowds assembled around her their own opportunities to read and prayerfully interpret her witness. This narrative framework, derived from BHL 5303 and still in place in *Seinte Marherete* (the mid-thirteenth-century vernacular version of the legend that Jocelyn Price studies), preserves a model of a powerful female saint who, in the words of Price, “directs and stage manages her own martyrdom in a series of self-conscious demonstrations and imitations of Christ.”<sup>30</sup> For Price’s “directs and stage-manages” we might substitute “reads and presides over” to grasp fully the potentially subversive power of this *passio*. A typological reading of the legend recasts Margaret’s role from that of tortured victim to that of priestly presider and offers further insight into why a virgin martyr would have come to serve as the patroness of childbirth.

For the sake of clarity, I have divided my close reading of the *passio* into sections that reflect different liturgically allusive moments in the narrative. Within each section I discuss the prayers, gestures, speeches, and symbols that demonstrate the presence of baptismal motifs and themes. With the exception of the “Prologue,” which is indicated by rubrics in H, the divisions are my own. Building on this reading of the *passio*, I next consider the symbolism of the pearl that is highlighted at the point in the legend’s history when the Greek Marina is renamed as Margaret. Finally, I consider the relicization of Margaret’s text,

<sup>29</sup> For the typological interpretation of the waters of the Red Sea, see chap. 9 in *Tertullian’s Homily on Baptism*, ed. and trans. Ernest Evans (London, 1964) as well as the discussion of the theme in P. Lundberg, *La typologie baptismale dans l’ancienne église* (Uppsala, 1942), 116–45.

<sup>30</sup> Price, “Demonology” (n. 7 above), 352.



rather than her body, as her cult develops in the West, and offer suggestions for further research into the uses women made of Margaret's *passio*.

THE PROLOGUE (127, LINE 1–128, LINE 20) AND PART ONE (128, LINE 21–133, LINE 17)  
MARGARET AS CATECHUMEN AND BAPTISM BY BLOOD

The beginning of the *passio* immediately alludes to baptismal themes. The legend of Margaret is related by a narrator, Theotimus, who begins his tale by linking Margaret with two early figures of salvation through baptism — “beata Tecla et sancta Susanna” (128, line 19).<sup>31</sup> Susannah, famous for bathing while the elders watched, was invoked in baptismal prayers over female catechumens in the early Roman liturgy and throughout the Middle Ages.<sup>32</sup> When the disciple of Paul named Thecla (or Tecla) was thrown to the wild beasts, she baptized herself by jumping into a pool of water and reciting the baptismal formula.<sup>33</sup> Theotimus, a representative of the Christian community that fostered Margaret, announces his own affiliation with the baptismal formula, which will be a crucial element of the legend — “Ego enim, Theotimus nomine, baptismum accepi, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti” (128, lines 6–8) (Indeed I, Theotimus by name, have received baptism in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit). But while Theotimus's status as a Christian is clear, and it is stated that Margaret is filled with the Holy Spirit from birth, the *passio* offers no direct information about Margaret's formal initiation. She is, however, linked with Christian catechesis — we learn that she finds inspiration in hearing about martyrs, and, when the narrative proper begins, she is, significantly, in the fields, shepherding her foster mother's flocks, a scene often depicted in medieval iconography.<sup>34</sup> She is associated in this way with Christ, the Good Shepherd, especially as figured in Psalm 22, which was a crucial text for baptismal instruction in the early Church, as it was believed to epitomize all of the sacraments, but most especially those of initiation.<sup>35</sup>

The possibility is open at the beginning of the narrative that Margaret, although she has received catechesis, has yet to be baptized. She is linked in

<sup>31</sup> This is true for H although the reference is not found in P. The allusion to Tecla and Sussana is also preserved in the Latin *Casinensis* version of the legend, which was another significant witness for the transmission of the story in the West, as discussed by Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives* (n. 8 above), 13–16.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Austin Wilson, ed., *The Gelasian Sacramentary* (Oxford, 1894), 49. See also Whitaker, *Documents*, 218 and 289 and John Wickham Legg, *The Sarum Missal, Edited from Three Early Manuscripts* (Oxford, 1916), 126.

<sup>33</sup> For Susanna, see Vulg. Dan. 13; for Thecla, see “The Acts of Paul and Thecla,” chap. 34, *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*, ed. J. K. Elliott (Oxford, 1993), 370.

<sup>34</sup> Winstead, *Virgin Martyrs* (n. 21 above), 97.

<sup>35</sup> See Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 177–90.

this way to the similarly uninitiated witnesses to her martyrdom, who at the end of her legend achieve salvation by an alternate justification. Early treatises on the question of baptism do in fact speculate about the fate of those martyred before their actual initiation into the Church through the rites of baptism, confirmation, and Eucharist. As *The Apostolic Tradition*, ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome, notes: “If anyone being a catechumen should be apprehended for the Name, let him not be anxious about undergoing martyrdom. For if he suffer violence and be put to death before baptism, he shall be justified having been baptized in his own blood.”<sup>36</sup> At a variety of levels, the legend of Saint Margaret reveals concern over the question of formal initiation and the possibility that there are other ways of attaining the grace of baptism.

Margaret’s prayers in the first part of the *passio* are notable for their high degree of scriptural allusiveness, especially in reference to the psalms. These allusions serve to link her trials to those of Christ himself. From the cross, Christ quotes from the same psalms Margaret references in Prayer Two (131, lines 8–15) when she has been suspended in the air (131, line 6) (“in aera suspendi”) to be scourged. At one level the overarching typological pattern suggested by Margaret’s entire narrative is the *imitatio Christi*, the saint’s life and death cast in the mold of Christ’s.<sup>37</sup> But these first four prayers are also interspersed with ritual dialogue and symbolic actions that suggest from the outset that her story also figures the sacrament of baptism.

We see such ritual dialogue for instance between Margaret’s first two prayers, when the henchmen of Olibrius ask her to announce her status, name, and affiliation. The three questions they ask are reminiscent of the questions at the door of the church, which begin the baptismal liturgy — as recorded, for instance, in the variant of the Roman rite represented in the Sarum Missal, a practice that had evolved over time from various ceremonies of enrollment for catechumens.<sup>38</sup> As early as the *Apostolic Tradition* ascribed to Hippolytus of Rome, those aspiring to the catechumenate were to be “questioned about their state of life.”<sup>39</sup> When

<sup>36</sup> Quoted and translated in Whitaker, *Documents* (n. 24 above), 6. As Johnson notes in the updated edition of Whitaker’s important work, chap. 1, recent scholarship on the *Apostolic Tradition* suggests it is “not Hippolytan in authorship, not necessarily Roman in its contents, and not early third century in date” (4). Nevertheless the work does preserve, in a more complicated synthesis than previously imagined, an important witness to early theologies and practices of baptism.

<sup>37</sup> Earl, “Typology” (n. 25 above), 17.

<sup>38</sup> The Sarum Missal notes that at the door of the church, the priest would ask the midwife 1) whether the infant is male or female, 2) if the infant has been baptized at home, and 3) by what name he is to be called. Discussed and translated in J. D. C. Fisher, *Christian Initiation: Baptism in the Medieval West* (London, 1965; repr., Chicago, 2004), 178. The name of the person to be baptized is first required in the eighth-century *Hadrianum* sacramentary. See Spinks, *Early and Medieval* (n. 24 above), 122.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted and translated in Whitaker, *Documents*, 5.

she is questioned, Margaret identifies herself as a freewoman and a Christian (130, line 7), whose name is Margaret (130, line 10), and proclaims her belief in God the Father and his Son (130, lines 12–13). In Prayer One (129, lines 20–34) the saint specifically puns on the name she announces here: Margaret, the pearl, which, according to the scriptural verse she is echoing, must not be cast before swine — “Non proiciatur margarita mea in lutum” (129, line 26) (Do not cast my pearl into the mud).<sup>40</sup> Before Prayer Two (131, lines 8–15) Margaret also offers an affirmation of faith that seems to make specific reference to her catechetical formation: “Cognoscet Deus, qui uirginitatem meam consignauit, quia non suadebis, nec me mouere poteris a uia ueritatis quam cepi ambulare” (130, lines 27–29) (God, who has put his seal upon my virginity will know that you will not persuade me, nor will you be able to move me from the path of truth upon which I have begun to walk).

That Margaret has “begun to walk” the “path of truth” would seem to support her identification as a catechumen. Likewise, her use of the term “consignauit” may suggest the specific “sealing” with the sign of the cross, called in Greek *sphragis*, an important feature in early baptismal liturgies. She reiterates her status as one who has been “sealed” a few lines later, asserting that she will not hesitate to die for Christ “quia suo me signaculo sibi consignauit” (131, line 4) (because he has sealed me for himself with his sign). The *sphragis* certainly had specific sacramental reference in the postbaptismal confirmation rite of anointing with holy oil (which in early Christian and medieval liturgies was an integral part of the baptismal liturgy, not a separate ceremony) but here may be related to a prebaptismal anointing that was an important feature of many early ceremonies, albeit a highly variable element. In fact, recent scholarship on early baptismal practices notes that in rites of the Christian East, “the high point of the rite ... was not the water bath or any postbaptismal rite, but the prebaptismal anointing of the head (later the entire body) as the pneumatic assimilation of the neophyte to the messianic priesthood and kingship of Christ.”<sup>41</sup> In any case, this reference to Margaret’s “sealing” is an addition found in BHL 5303 (present in O, P, and H), but not appearing in T, Mp, or Usener, suggesting it is another example of the early Latin reviser’s attempt to strengthen the baptismal motif.

In Prayer Three (132, lines 8–21) Margaret prays for relief because “many dogs have encompassed me round” (“circumdederunt me canes multi”). In writing about baptism, Cyril of Jerusalem wrote of the *sphragis*, “He does not give what is holy to the dogs, but where He discerns a worthy motive, there He

<sup>40</sup> This reading is, in fact, found in all versions of BHL 5303 collated by Mack except H; the reference is of course to Mt. 7:6: “Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest perhaps they trample them under their feet, and turning upon you, they tear you.”

<sup>41</sup> M. E. Johnson, “Introductory Essay,” in Whitaker, *Documents*, xiii–xxii, at xv.

confers the wonderful seal of salvation. Before this demons tremble whereas angels acknowledge it, so that the former are put to flight while the latter honor it as something kindred.”<sup>42</sup> This passage links an allusion to Matthew 7:6 (“Give not that which is holy to dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine”) with the power of the *sphragis* both to repel demons and to attract heavenly kinship. It thereby suggests that patristic meditations on baptismal themes must surely have been part of the *lectio* of the person who crafted this narrative of a “pearl” that will banish dragons and demons before being escorted by angels to heaven.

Before Prayer Two, Margaret is stripped, hung high, and flogged. In the course of the narrative, Margaret is stripped twice, just before two of the figurative baptisms she undergoes (by blood and by fire), suggesting the nakedness historically associated with baptism.<sup>43</sup> Between Prayers Two and Three Margaret is beaten again, and once more after Prayer Three: “Carnifices uero accesserunt et mactabant corpus eius tenerum” (132, lines 22–23) (The torturers approached and afflicted her tender body). We may say that the first torture the saint endures in her passion is a threefold scourging that results in an effusion of blood, also noted three times. Each time, the blood is characterized by its flowing movement. Of particular interest is the explicit comparison of Margaret’s blood to flowing water, the sacramental substance of baptism. Of her first beating the narrator reports: “and blood flowed like water from the purest spring” (131, line 17) (“et sanguis quasi aqua de fonte purissimo decurrebat”). Margaret’s subsequent beatings result in “multa sanguinis effusione” (131, lines 19–20) (a great outpouring of blood) and “sanguinis effusionem” (132, line 24) (the outpouring of blood). Rubrics for baptism always indicate that the water be “natural and true water” or “living water.” The insistence on “living water” is found as early as the *Didache*.<sup>44</sup> This bloody torture suggests the baptism of blood “baptismus sanguinis” discussed in the *Apostolic Tradition*, a concept that also had scriptural precedent in that Christ referred to his own death as a baptism by blood.<sup>45</sup> In one sense we may say that the whole narrative recounts such a story: Margaret’s death by torture and beheading effects the salvation of a martyr who has not been formally initiated. At the same time, as becomes clear here, the individual tortures within the narrative are each suggestive of a particular theological construct for baptism, here baptism by blood.

Margaret has been tested three times since she proclaimed her faith in Christ; three times Margaret is asked to renounce Christ on pain of torture. Three

<sup>42</sup> “Catechesis 1,” in *Saint Cyril of Jerusalem: Works*, vol. 1, trans. Leo P. McCauley, SJ and Anthony A. Stephenson, The Fathers of the Church 61 (Washington, DC, 1968), 93.

<sup>43</sup> On nakedness in baptism, see Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (n. 28 above), 38.

<sup>44</sup> As discussed by Peter Cramer, *Baptism and Change in the Early Middle Ages, c. 200–c. 1150* (New York, 1993), 10.

<sup>45</sup> See Lk. 12:50 and 1 Jn. 5:6.

times she steadfastly proclaims her faith, denounces Olibrius as the son of the devil, and even exhorts others to belief. Some of the earliest baptismal instructions from the age of the martyrs depicted here mandate periods of questioning for catechetical purposes, a practice that later evolves into three public “scrutinies”: those public occasions when the catechumen answered questions about her knowledge, lifestyle, and commitment, and also ritually renounced Satan.<sup>46</sup> As recorded in the *Gelasian Sacramentary*, formulaic scrutinies would occur on three Sundays in Lent.<sup>47</sup> This three-part dialogue also recalls the three times Jesus rejects Satan when he faced temptation in the desert — the gospel pericope traditionally used for the First Sunday of Lent when catechumens were enrolled.<sup>48</sup>

PART TWO (133, LINE 18–138, LINE 2)  
BAPTISMAL EXORCISM AND TYPOLOGY

During this central and popular portion of the legend, the imprisoned Margaret will defeat two demonic tormentors — the dragon and the demon — and be visited by a holy dove speaking words of approbation reminiscent of those heard when Christ himself was baptized in the Jordan. Margaret’s encounter with the two demons has been a focal point of interest in the legend throughout its history. While some early versions of the legend may have abbreviated these episodes and others elaborated upon them, the Mombricitus version may be said to treat fully the appearances and vanquishing of the dragon and the demon.<sup>49</sup>

Theotimus, the narrator of our story, appears as eyewitness in the narrative at this point, identified as one who sustained the imprisoned Margaret with bread and water (133, line 19) and writes down her prayers (133, line 20) (“orationem eius scribebant”), presumably beginning here with Prayers Five and Six. Prayer Five (134, lines 3–12) is essentially a petition for protection that includes a lengthy meditation on God as the creator — a theme central to baptismal liturgies, especially at the points of exorcising the devil and blessing the font.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> On the development of these scrutinies, see Kavanagh, *Shape of Baptism* (n. 22 above), 58–61 and Edward Yarnold, SJ, *The Awe-Inspiring Rites of Initiation: The Origins of RCIA*, 2nd ed. (Collegeville, MN, 1994), 11–12.

<sup>47</sup> Whitaker, *Documents* (n. 24 above), 213–15.

<sup>48</sup> See K. A. H. Kellner, *Heortology: A History of the Christian Festivals from their Origin to the Present Day* (London, 1908), 103.

<sup>49</sup> *Casinensis* and another recension (from Rebdorf, Bavaria: BHL 5308) downplay these episodes, while T expands them. See Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives* (n. 8 above), 7–23.

<sup>50</sup> In the baptismal liturgy as found in the *Gelasian Sacramentary*, the rite of exorcism for females begins with the prayer, “Deus caeli, Deus terrae, Deus angelorum, Deus archangelorum, Deus prophetarum, Deus martyrum, Deus omnium bene viventium, Deus cui omnis lingua confitetur caelestium, terrestrium et infernorum, te invoco Domine, ut has famulas tuas perducere et custodire digneris ad gratiam baptismi tui” (God of heaven, God of the earth, God of angels, God of archangels, God of prophets, God of martyrs, God

Prayer Six, celebrating Margaret's escape from the dragon's stomach unharmed and uttered just after the second demon appears, is a litany of praise and thanksgiving; Margaret lists the wonders she has seen God perform during this very ordeal, including one which has not been directly represented in the narrative: "oleum sanctum uenire uidi ad me" (135, line 1) (I have seen holy oil come to me).<sup>51</sup> In T and Mp the word "ung[u]enta" appears in the prayer at this point, but not "oleum."<sup>52</sup> Once again, the specific reference to "oleum sanctum" added to this early Latin revised version of the text seems to emphasize the sacramental nature of the moment.

Margaret next offers a powerful imprecation against her enemy and acclamation of her faith (135, lines 22–27) that vanquishes the second demon — just as he had feared. This prayer-like speech offers a litany of epithets for the devil, and generally describes Margaret's allegiance to God:

Cessa de mea uirginitate, quia ego habeo adiutorem Deum. Cessa, maligne, gemisce horribilis homicida, protector mihi Christus est. Cessa fetor male, fera iniqua, auctor gehenna. Ego enim agna Christi et domestica eius. Ego ancilla Dei et sponsa Christi sum, cuius nomen permanet benedictum in secula seculorum. (135, lines 22–27)

Stop [working] against my virginity, because I have God as my helper. Stop, evil one, mourn and groan horrible murderer, Christ is my protector. Stop, stinking evil one, cruel unjust one, author of hell. I am the lamb of Christ and his servant, I myself am the handmaid of God and the bride of Christ, whose name is blessed for ever and ever.<sup>53</sup>

Specific words renouncing the devil are central to the rite of baptism: "Abrenuntio" (I do renounce), the candidate replies three times when asked if he or she

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of all that live rightly, God to whom every tongue confesses of those in heaven, on the earth, and below, I invoke you, Lord, over these your handmaids that you would deign to lead them and to guard them to the grace of your baptism). Wilson, *Gelasian* (n. 32 above), 46. The language of Prayer Five clearly evokes the same creator God who rules the heavens, the earth, and the infernal regions: "qui formasti paradysum indeficientem" (134, line 4) (who formed everlasting paradise), "et mari terminum posuisti" (134, line 5) (and established a boundary for the sea), and "diabolum ligasti" (134, lines 6–7) (bound the devil), and ends with an almost parodic description of the dragon's "leading" of this handmaid: "Et obsorbere me festinat, querens me perducere in caueam suam" (134, lines 11–12) (And it hastens to swallow me up and desires to lead me into his cave).

<sup>51</sup> This prayer differs slightly in P where a very abbreviated version occurs just after Margaret emerges from the dragon but before the appearance of the second demon; the prayer is missing in Mather. In H and O the more complete prayer is spoken after the second demon appears.

<sup>52</sup> See Viggiani et al., "Passio Marinae" (n. 8 above), 744 and, on the accompanying DVD, their facing transcriptions ("synopse ac-ac") of T, fol. 125r, and Mp, fol. 120r.

<sup>53</sup> A better reading for "gemisce horribilis homicida" as noted by Mack from Harley 5327: "genus horribile. Cessa homicida" (horrible being, cease, murderer); see *Seinte Marherete*, 135 n. 4.

renounces Satan, his works, and his pomps. Three times (in this version) Margaret abjures the devil: “Cessa.” As in the baptismal rites, the renunciations are followed by statements of belief and allegiance to Christ. After her renunciations, a bright light appears in the cell and a dove descends sitting on a cross (135, line 29) (“super crucem”), offering Margaret words of strength that vary slightly from manuscript to manuscript but generally promise that the gates of heaven await her.

Having “stopped” or formally renounced the demon, Margaret demonstrates her power over him through a prolonged interrogation (136, line 1–138, line 2) that concludes when, making the sign of the cross at him, she banishes this second demon into the earth: “Et consignavit se [eum]<sup>54</sup> in angulo carceris et dixit ei: ‘Vade de me, Satanas.’ Et suscepit eum in terra” (138, lines 1–2) (And she made the sign of the cross at him in the corner of the cell and said to him: “Go from me, Satan.” And he was received into the earth). Dresvina compellingly reads this episode with the second demon as an exorcism that bears a strong resemblance to the exorcisms performed by Solomon himself in the *Testament of Solomon*, a long-acknowledged source for the demonology of the legend.<sup>55</sup> She also links this exorcism with ancient Judaeo-Hellenistic practices that offered protections for childbirth, suggesting that the Western versions of Margaret’s legend preserve a “remnant” association between exorcism and childbirth, a factor that accounts for some of the legend’s appeal for pregnant women.<sup>56</sup> While Dresvina also notes the survival of early exorcism rites within the baptismal liturgy and points out that Margaret indeed exorcizes herself before her baptismal torture in water the next day, she does not focus on the ways in which the *passio* as a whole may have been shaped specifically to frame this exorcism in its baptismal context. I would also argue that the *amplificatio* inherent in having Margaret defeat two demons raises the question of what further symbolic resonance each devilish figure adds to the *passio*. In addition to the material from esoteric and apocryphal sources that we have long known informs these demonic episodes, early Christian exegesis that specifically connects the types of demonic figures who appear in the *passio* with baptism has not been as thoroughly explored. It is significant, I believe, that patristic commentary on the Book of Job envisages a dragon in the baptismal water itself and that in commentaries on the Pauline and Petrine epistles, baptism is figured typologically by the Harrowing of Hell, specifically through the latter’s interrogation and binding of fallen angels.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> As found in three other manuscripts collated by Mack, 138 n. 1.

<sup>55</sup> See Mack, *Sainte Marherete* (n. 8 above), xxvii; Price, “The Virgin and the Dragon” (n. 7 above); and Dresvina, “Demonic Episode” (n. 4 above).

<sup>56</sup> Dresvina, “Demonic Episode,” 202.

<sup>57</sup> Jean-Pierre Albert’s work, “La légende de sainte Marguerite: un mythe maïeutique?” *Razo, Cahiers du Centre d’Etudes Médiévales de l’Université de Nice* (Nice, 1988), 19–31, which

First, the Behemoth of Job 40:18–20 is interpreted by Cyril of Jerusalem in his catechetical lectures as a type of the devil who tests the Christian in baptism. Cyril writes:

The dragon, according to Job, was in the waters, he who received the Jordan into his maw. When, therefore, it was necessary to crush the heads of the dragon, descending into the waters, He [Jesus] bound the strong one, that we might receive the “power to tread upon serpents and scorpions.” It was no ordinary beast, but a horrible monster. ... But Life came running up, that the maw of Death might be stopped, and all we who are saved might say: “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?” Baptism draws death’s sting. For you go down into the water bearing your sins, but the invocation of grace, placing a seal upon your soul, makes you proof against the dragon’s maw.<sup>58</sup>

Didymus the Blind offers the same exegesis of this passage in Job, and Daniélou reports a Greek prayer for the blessing of baptismal water: “Thou, Thou hast sanctified the waters of the Jordon by sending from on high Thy Holy Spirit, and Thou hast crushed the heads of the dragons hiding therein.”<sup>59</sup>

The subsequent miraculous light shining in the prison and the appearance of a dove that speaks words praising Margaret align this episode with the story of Christ’s baptism in the Jordan. Although Margaret is not yet in the water, she is in prison, and in the opening words of her fifth prayer she explicitly associates the dungeon, where the dragon assails her, with the primordial abyss: “Invisible God, before whom the *abysses* and the treasures of the abyss tremble” (134, lines 3–12) (“Deus inuisibilis, quem *abissi* et thesauri [*abyssi*] contremiscunt,” my emphasis).<sup>60</sup> In the New Testament the abyss is often the dwelling place of demons and evil spirits; it is also in Judaeo-Christian cosmology connected with the primordial, abysmal waters.<sup>61</sup>

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has just been brought to my attention, does concur with my reading of the prison episode as a *descensus ad inferos*. Albert’s structuralist approach to the much later Golden Legend version of Margaret’s story traces the narrative’s cultural history as it moved, Albert argues, from its origins as an allegory, to popular acceptance as a “true story,” to its place as a myth that shapes cultic practices surrounding childbirth. Albert’s astute observations about the mythic character of the legend focus as well on the importance of its inherent pearl symbolism, a reading that likewise corroborates my discussion of this element below.

<sup>58</sup> From “Catechesis 3,” in *Saint Cyril of Jerusalem, Works* (n. 42 above), 115.

<sup>59</sup> Didymus, *De Trinitate*, PG 39, 684B and a Greek prayer, both as reported by Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (n. 28 above), 42 (quoting A. Baumstark); the definitive discussion of this theme in baptismal typology is found in Lundberg, *Typologie baptismale* (n. 29 above).

<sup>60</sup> Mombrithius’s printed edition and the other manuscripts I mention above have “abyssi et thesauri abyssi” (*var. abyssiorum T*); I have emended Mack’s text accordingly in the quotation. With regards to the Greek text, Usener’s A manuscript has “at the sight of whom the sea and the depths (*buthos*) of the sea dry up,” but the B manuscript has “the sea and the abysses” (*abussos*), and Guido Tammi actually translates it as “il mare e gli abissi.” *Due versioni* (n. 16 above), 36.

<sup>61</sup> See, for instance, Lk. 8:31, Rom. 10:7, 1 Pt. 3:19ff., and Rev. 9:11, 11:7, 17:8, 20:1–3. Cf. John H. Bernard, “The Descent into Hades and Christian Baptism: A Study of I Peter



That the prison may be associated with the abyss also suggests another baptismal motif first employed by St. Paul: he compares the descent of Christ into Hades with the Christian's descent into the baptismal waters.<sup>62</sup> This association is explored in the writings of Chrysostom and is often taken as the explanation both for the threefold baptismal immersion (Christ was in the tomb for three days) and for the preference of Holy Saturday for the baptism of catechumens (Christ harrowed hell on that day).<sup>63</sup> In fact, Margaret has already explicitly invoked the Harrowing in Prayer Five when she refers to God as one who "laid waste hell, bound the devil ... extinguished the power of the great dragon" (134, lines 6–7) ("infernum deuastasti, diabolum ligasti, qui extinxisti potestatem draconis magni").

Another early link between baptism and the Harrowing of Hell is found in 1 Peter 3:18–21 — also a famous *crux* for scriptural interpretation. The passage reads:

Because Christ also died once for our sins, the just for the unjust: that he might offer us to God, being put to death indeed in the flesh, but enlivened in the spirit, In which also coming he preached to those spirits that were in prison: Which had been some time incredulous, when they waited for the patience of God in the days of Noe, when the ark was a building: wherein a few, that is, eight souls, were saved by water. Whereunto baptism, being of the like form, now saveth you also: not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but, the examination of a good conscience towards God by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>64</sup>

Ancient traditions of the *Descensus ad inferos* concern themselves with Christ's encounter there with demonic forces. From centuries of debate about the identity of the "spirits that were in prison" in this Petrine passage, a strong tradition (which is validated in most contemporary scholarship) holds that these were the fallen angels and that Christ "announced" to them their condemnation. The second demon, when interrogated by Margaret, directly identifies himself with a figure known to inhabit Hell: "Beelzes is my name; I am later called Beelzebub" (136, lines 7–8) ("Beelzes nomen est mihi; postea Beelzebap dictus sum"). This line has many variants<sup>65</sup> but invariably links this demon to Beelzebub, a figure with

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3:19ff." *The Expositor* 8 (1916): 241–74, at 242. Christ conquers the demons of the waters in his own baptism as observed in Cyril of Jerusalem, n. 58 above.

<sup>62</sup> Rom. 6:3–5 and Col. 2:12.

<sup>63</sup> Chrysostom wrote, "The immersion and emersion are the image of the Descent into Hell and the Return thence. That is why Paul calls Baptism a burial" (*Hom. I Cor.*, 40; PG 61, 348; as translated by Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 77 n. 16). On the liturgical uses of the Harrowing of Hell at Easter, see Karl Tamburr, *The Harrowing of Hell in Medieval England* (Cambridge, 2007), 1–13.

<sup>64</sup> A useful introduction to the textual and critical history of this passage is provided by John Hall Elliott, *1 Peter, A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York, 2000).

<sup>65</sup> See Mack's collation of variants to line 7 at the foot of page 136 and Clayton and Magennis, *The Old English Lives* (n. 8 above), 222 n. 80.

wide associations in both Hebrew and Christian scriptures and in apocryphal literature. Significantly for the *passio*, which, as noted above, Mack and Dresvina have linked to the *Testament of Solomon*, Beelzebub is identified there as one of the chief fallen angels.<sup>66</sup>

To recap, in the important episode of Margaret's demonic encounters in prison, the saint's consecutive defeats of the dragon Rufo and his brother Beelzes figure the rejection of Satan and all his pomps and works that is a central element of the baptismal liturgy. At the same time, typological associations related to baptism — the waters of the abyss, the baptism of Christ, the descent into hell, and condemnation of demons — are evoked in the specific appearance of the demons as a dragon and Beelzes, a fallen angel.

PART THREE (138, LINE 3–139, LINE 11)  
PRAYING TORTURE INTO BAPTISM BY FIRE AND WATER

At this point in the *passio*, in front of “the whole of the city” (138, line 5) (“*de ciuitatibus cuncti*”) Margaret is stripped again, hung high, and burned with brands. Alluding directly to Psalm 25:2, she prays: “Burn up my loins, Lord, and my heart, so that there may not be wickedness in me” (138, lines 16–17) (“*Ure, Domine, renes meos et cor meum, ut non sit iniquitas in me*”). This prayer has some liturgical and devotional currency during the period of the presumed development and revision of the legend,<sup>67</sup> but its use at this key moment in Margaret's figural narrative may be connected to a very similar prayer from the third-century apocryphal *Acts of Judas Thomas*, thought to have been originally composed in Syriac, although texts in Greek may preserve the earliest version.<sup>68</sup> Within the *Acts*, Thomas performs the baptism of Gundaphorus and his attendants, offering an epiclesis of the Holy Spirit — that is, a prayer calling down the Holy Spirit. This prayer concludes, “Come, Holy Spirit, and cleanse their reins and their heart, and give them the added seal in the name of the Father, and the Son, and Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup> This prayer, so reminiscent of the

<sup>66</sup> “The Testament of Solomon,” in *The Apocryphal Old Testament*, ed. H. F. D. Sparks, trans. M. Whittaker (Oxford, 1984), 733–52. For the history of Beelzebub (here Beezebul), see 742–43.

<sup>67</sup> This allusion figures in a penitential prayer that concludes the *Sermo asceticus* ascribed to Ephrem (probably falsely) and circulating widely in Syriac, Greek, and Latin texts in the late-patristic period. See Patrick Sims-Williams, “Thoughts on Ephrem the Syrian in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge, 1985), 221. A similar prayer can be found in six medieval sacramentaries; see Moeller Eugenio and Ioanne Maria Clément, eds., *Corpus Oratorum*, vol. 9, CCL 160H, Item 6025.

<sup>68</sup> Spinks, *Early and Medieval* (n. 24 above), 19.

<sup>69</sup> As translated in Whitaker, *Documents* (n. 24 above), 18–19.

one Margaret speaks as she is tortured by fire is, in effect, part of a baptismal formula in this apocryphal text.

For the fire, which here burns Margaret's flesh, is also a richly symbolic element in baptismal liturgies and literature. In terms of ceremonial practice, lighted tapers are recorded in Syrian baptismal liturgies as early as the mid-fifth century, and, in the West, use of the large Paschal candle in the initiation liturgies of Holy Saturday was a well-established practice during the Middle Ages.<sup>70</sup>

But beyond its use as a symbolic element in rituals of baptism, fire evokes as well two related but distinct baptismal themes discussed by patristic and medieval writers alike: "baptism by fire" and "baptism by desire." The expression "baptism by fire" refers to the action of the Holy Spirit in conferring the grace of baptism and originates in Matthew 3:11 where John the Baptist promises that the one who is to come after him will baptize "in the Holy Ghost and fire." Origen takes up this theme at some length, treating the linked terms "Holy Ghost" and "fire" in two different ways: both as "two aspects of the same experience in the present" (as one might receive in sacramental baptism) and as temporally distinct events (baptism in this life and eschatological purification in the next).<sup>71</sup>

Although patristic debate on the precise meaning of "baptism by fire" was wide-ranging, there was never a belief that canonical baptism might be effected by the actual substance of fire. However, in addition to water baptism (*baptismus aquae*) and the martyr's baptism by blood (*baptismus sanguinis*), the third canonical mode of baptism, baptism by desire (*baptismus flaminis*), derives this Latin designation from the action of the Holy Spirit whose ancient name, "Flamen," means a blast of wind. The Holy Spirit has also long been associated with fire, not only as the two are linked in Matthew 3:11 but also in the "tongues, as it were of fire" that descended at Pentecost (Acts 2:2–3). Like *baptismus sanguinis*, *baptismus flaminis* develops as a theological conceit to explain how a person who has not had the opportunity to be baptized by water might achieve salvation — in this case by desiring it deeply enough. Patristic commentaries on the narratives of the Good Thief (Luke 23:39–43) and Cornelius (Acts 10:1–44) are particular sites for the development of this doctrine.<sup>72</sup> The concept will especially gain prominence in much later (post-Reformation) Christian theologies, but, as early as the fourth century, Ambrose attested to the possibility of a baptism by desire in his oration on the death of Emperor Valentinian II, *De obitu Valentiniani consolatio*. In this funeral oration, Ambrose conjures a comforting scenario for the sisters of the young emperor, Valentinian, who has died while still a catechumen:

<sup>70</sup> Spinks, *Early and Medieval*, 47 and 122.

<sup>71</sup> Everett Ferguson, "Baptism According to Origen," *Evangelical Quarterly* 78 (2006): 117–135, at 122.

<sup>72</sup> Marcia L. Colish, "Baptism by Desire," in *Faith, Fiction and Force in Medieval Baptismal Debates* (Washington, DC, 2014), 18–24.

Valentinian hears his pre-deceased, beatified half-brother, Gratian, explain that Christ himself has effected Valentinian's baptism by desire. Gratian tells Valentinian, "It was not just anyone, but Christ, who illuminated you with spiritual grace. He has baptized you, since human rites were not present in your case."<sup>73</sup>

In the *passio*, as the naked Margaret is tortured "with torches" (138, line 14) ("cum lampadibus"), she expresses in Prayer Seven her desire for a burning purification, and is immediately challenged once more by Olibrius to renounce her faith. Margaret replies with words that emphasize the saving action that Christ himself has effected on her behalf, once again using the sacramentally significant term "consignavit": "Non enim poterit uincere diabolus castam puellam. Consignavit enim Christus omnia me[m]bra mea in corona gloriae suae" (138, lines 21–23) (The devil will not be able to defeat a chaste girl. Indeed Christ has sealed all my members in the crown of his glory). This line in H lacks an image that is supplied at this point in many of the other manuscripts; in both T and Mp the line also explicitly references the "pearl of my soul" which will be thus encircled. For instance in T: "Consignavit omnia membra mea christus meus sua castitate / Et margarita[m] anime meae signavit in corona gloriae suae" (My Christ has sealed all my limbs with his chastity and signed the pearl of my soul in the crown of his glory).<sup>74</sup> The earliest manuscript of BHL 5303, O, likewise invokes pearl imagery here: "Consignavit omnia membra mea Christus et consignavit coronam gloriae suae et margaritam anime meae" (Christ has sealed [with the cross] all my limbs, and sealed the crown of his glory and the pearl of my soul). The retention in O of this detail from earlier versions is not an isolated variant. As Mack notes, two other London manuscripts, Harley 3863 and Additional 10050, have virtually the same reading as O, but worded in an even more telling way, "He has sealed the pearl of my soul in the crown of his glory."<sup>75</sup> The important pearl and crown references here will be discussed further below; first, we must examine the final ordeal Margaret faces as soon as she offers this testimony.

Olibrius swiftly orders that Margaret be bound hand and foot and placed in a large vessel of water to be put to death there (138, line 25) ("ibique eam mortificari"). Margaret's binding recalls the binding with sin from which baptism frees the Christian; fittingly, as soon as she is immersed in the vessel of water she begins Prayer Eight (138, line 28–139, line 4) by calling upon the Lord to break her bonds:

Lord, who reign in eternity, break apart my fetters. I will offer up to you a sacrifice of praise. May this become for me the water of sweetness and the illumination of salvation. Let it become for me the unfailing font of baptism, and put

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>74</sup> Viggiani et al., "Passio Marinae" (n. 8 above), 747.

<sup>75</sup> Mack, *Seinte Marherete* (n. 13 above), 138, note 4 on lns. 22–23: "Consignavit enim omnia membra mea christus, et cumsignavit in corona gloriae suae margaritam anime mee," H3865; "et consignavit in coronam gloriae suae et margaritam anime suae, Add. 10050."

upon me the helmet of salvation. May the holy dove, filled with the Holy Spirit, come upon me and bless this water in your name, and wash all my sins away; and strengthen (confirm) my soul and sharpen my mind, and cast from me the shadow of sins, and baptize me in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, because he is blessed for ever and ever. Amen.

Domine, qui regnas in aeternum, disrumpe uincula mea: tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis. Fiat mihi haec aqua suauitatis et illuminatio salutis. Fiat haec mihi fons baptismi indeficiens, et indue me galeam salutis. Veniat super me sancta columba tua, Sancto Spiritu plena, et benedicat aquam in nomine tuo, et mihi abluat peccata mea, et confirma animam meam, et clarifica sensum meum, et proice a me tenebras peccatorum, et baptiza me in nomine Patris, et Filii et Spiritus Sancti; quia ipse est benedictus in secula seculorum. Amen. (138, line 28–139, line 4)

Margaret begins this prayer in an audacious imperative mode, in effect commanding action from the God who “reigns in eternity” and promising, in language resonant of the prayer “Super oblata” at the Offertory of the Mass, to offer to God a “sacrifice of praise” (138, line 29) (“tibi sacrificabo hostiam laudis”).<sup>76</sup> The prayer shifts then to the present subjunctive more common to petition, twice employing the powerfully evocative word “Fiat” found in the Canon of the Mass in the Roman Rite in the prayer “Quam oblationem,” which asks that the offering on the altar “may become for us the Body and Blood of your most beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ” (“ut nobis Corpus et Sanguis fiat dilectissimi Filii tui, Domini nostri Iesu Christi”).<sup>77</sup> The prayer “Quam oblationem” serves as the epiclesis of the Roman canon — that is, the moment in an anaphora (or other sacramental prayer) in which the priest invokes the Holy Spirit, asking for the change of the sacramental substance to occur. The history of the epiclesis in the Eucharistic prayer is long and complicated, but, from very early baptismal liturgies, the calling down of the Holy Spirit is a part of the blessing of the baptismal waters that Margaret’s prayer here explicitly echoes.<sup>78</sup> Margaret asks that the dove, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” bless the water, wash away her sins, confirm her soul, and baptize her. The prayer employs the baptismal formula invoking the Trinity and references the martial imagery of the helmet of salvation, from Ephesians 6:17, echoing a patristic motif of the armor of baptism.<sup>79</sup> As noted above, the

<sup>76</sup> Wilson, *Gelasian Sacramentary* (n. 32 above), 235.

<sup>77</sup> “Fiat” also recalls God’s own creation of the world (“Fiat lux,” Gen. 1:3) and Mary’s assent to the Incarnation (“Fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum,” Lk. 1:38).

<sup>78</sup> On Eucharistic epiclesis, see John McKenna, *The Eucharistic Epiclesis: A Detailed History from the Patristic to the Modern Era* (Chicago, 2008). For the role of the epiclesis in blessing of the baptismal waters, see Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church: History, Theology, and Liturgy in the First Five Centuries* (Grand Rapids, MI, 2009), 146 and Spinks, *Early and Medieval*, 43 (on practices in fourth-century Jerusalem). Also, McKenna cites the work of Edward Schillebeeckx on this question (156).

<sup>79</sup> See Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church*, at 209–10 and 497–98 for references to this imagery in the writings of Ignatius and Aphrahat respectively.

inclusion of the baptismal formula here is an addition to the text not found in T, Mp, or Usener, suggesting a desire on the part of the early Latin reviser to emphasize the baptismal motifs.<sup>80</sup>

At the conclusion of her powerful prayer, signs and wonders commence: the earth trembles; the dove descends once again, praising Margaret, the “beloved virgin of God” (139, line 12) (“dilecta uirgo Dei”), bearing a golden crown that it places on Margaret’s head; and her bonds are broken. In some Eastern baptismal liturgies — for instance in a Coptic rite and in Syrian liturgies — crowns are given to the newly baptized after a prayer for the Paraclete.<sup>81</sup> In the West in some early rites, an actual “chrism-cloth” or veil is placed on the confirmed after the anointing and worn for several days, then removed in another ceremony. At the end of the eighth century or early in the ninth century, Alcuin writes of the baptizand’s anointing in a brief commentary on baptism, “Primo paganus,” explicitly comparing the anointing and physical “veiling” to a crowning: “Then his head is anointed with holy chrism and covered with a mystic veil, so that he understands that he carries the crown of the kingdom and the dignity of the priesthood.”<sup>82</sup> In response to her crowning and freeing, Margaret sings a song of praise, “The Lord has reigned; he has clothed himself with glory. The Lord has put on strength and girded himself with power” (139, lines 9–11) (“Dominus regnauit; decorem induit; induit Dominus fortitudinem et precinxit se uirtute”).

That Margaret’s antiphon refers to new clothing is appropriate to the post-baptismal moment when the newly baptized “put on Christ” in the act of putting on a white garment. There is no direct reference to her own reclothing in the Latin versions, although in Usener, Marina’s baptismal prayer specifically asks that she be divested of the old man who corrupts and then reclothed in the new; also, in the Greek text, a column of light appears from above after the saint emerges from the water.<sup>83</sup>

The column of light in Usener is further proof for Carl-Martin Edsman that the Greek Marina has undergone baptisms by fire and water. He references her legend

<sup>80</sup> The Turin version certainly alludes to the baptismal formula but does not explicitly add the text. In T we find: “et benedicens aquam expolia me uetere hominem et indue me nouo qui me renouit” (and blessing the water, strip the old man off me and put on me the new one who will renew me). See Viggiani et al., “Passio Marinae,” 748.

<sup>81</sup> See Spinks, *Early and Medieval* (n. 24 above), 106–7 for Coptic liturgies and Thomas Finn, *Early Christian Baptism and the Catechumenate, West and East Syria* (Collegeville, MN, 1992), 16 on Syrian liturgies.

<sup>82</sup> Owen Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe: The Carolingians, Baptism, and the Imperium Christianum* (Oxford, 2014), 124 and n. 117.

<sup>83</sup> As translated by Tammi: “Spogliami dell’uomo vecchio che si corrompe e rivestimi del nuovo” and then, “Una colona di luce apparve dal cielo,” *Due versioni* (n. 16 above), 40. Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy* (n. 18 above), 49–50, offers references to Ambrose, Cyril, Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodore of Mopsuestia on the shining brightness associated with the baptismal garment.

in *Baptême de feu*, his book-length examination of the motif of baptism by fire, especially as it is explored in the works of Origen and Ephrem the Syrian, noting that here “Marina est revêtue du vêtement de lumière du Christ, et, par là, du Christ lui-même. Et ce vêtement prend l’aspect d’une colonne de lumière ou de feu.”<sup>84</sup> But even in H, where no such column appears, we may say that Margaret, the “dilecta virgo Dei,” crowned with the golden crown, and in the Latin tradition, “the pearl,” is herself a symbol for the purity that the white garment of the newly baptized represents.

Intriguingly, Edsman also points to a quasi-scientific explanation for the creation of pearls promulgated in the works of (pseudo-)Ephrem that may have significance for this moment in the narrative and for the legend as a whole, as will be discussed below. According to Ephremic literature, the pearl results from the union within the mussel shell of “clear lunar dew” (water) and “lightning” (fire).<sup>85</sup> Edsman concludes, “la perle est créée par l’eau et le feu.”<sup>86</sup> This theory of pearl formation is attributed to Ephrem in the gospel commentaries on Matthew 13:46 (the pearl of great price) that came out of the Canterbury school of Theodore and Hadrian, suggesting that this explanation had wide dissemination.<sup>87</sup> Certainly, Margaret has undergone in rapid succession ordeals of both fire and water. In some versions of the legend, the linking of these ordeals is foregrounded just before Margaret enters the water. First, the brief Prayer Seven of the Mombritius version (138, lines 16–17) (“Ure, Domine, renes meos et cor meum ...”) is longer in T, Mp, and Usener, which add to this line verse 12 from Psalm 65, alluding to the transformation inherent in the survival of this double testing (for instance, in T: “transeo per ignum et aquam eo quod indutus me in refrigerio” [I pass through fire and water, because He has clothed me in refreshment/salvation]).<sup>88</sup> Whether or not the *passio* explicitly links the ordeals of fire and water in ways that have symbolic resonance for the emergence of the pure “Pearl,” it is clear in the narrative structure itself that an important transformation has occurred: Margaret is burned, she is bathed, she emerges spiritually strengthened.

<sup>84</sup> Carl-Martin Edsman, *Le baptême de feu* (Leipzig, 1940), 166.

<sup>85</sup> Looking back to Margaret’s Prayer Two, it is perhaps also noteworthy that in some manuscripts (although not H) she prays specifically for “dew from heaven” (“rorem de caelo” in P) or “healing dew” (“rorem sanitatis” in O) to soothe her wounds.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>87</sup> Bernhard Bischoff and Michael Lapidge, eds., *Biblical Commentaries from the Canterbury School of Theodore and Hadrian* (Cambridge, 1994), 403.

<sup>88</sup> Viggiani et al., “Passio Marinae” (n. 8 above), 747. Likewise in the *Casinensis*: Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives* (n. 8 above), 231. Albert, “La légende de sainte Marguerite” (n. 57 above), 4, suggests that the legend’s trials of fire and water (“éléments contraires”) are symbolically necessary for producing a pearl.

PART FOUR (139, LINE 12–142, LINE 17)  
COMMUNION AND THE CREATION OF CULT

In her final moments, Margaret exhibits the new spiritual authority that has come to her as one baptized and confirmed in the faith. The final three “speeches” of the *passio* (Margaret’s Prayer Nine, the Dove’s spoken response, and Margaret’s final prayer, Prayer Ten) reach a degree of spiritual intensity that might even be called ecstatic. Between the two prayers, to the reverberating noise of thunder, the dove comes from heaven with the holy cross and proclaims that Margaret has sought the holy oil and defeated the world. This is the third time the dove has been described as coming down from heaven; the threefold visitations and blessings of the dove may relate to liturgical or sacramental moments — perhaps to signing with the *sphragis*, anointing with oil, imposition of hands, etc. — or this kind of *amplificatio* through structural repetition may serve to reinforce the Trinitarian theme of baptism itself. This liturgically resonant and elaborately structured conclusion is present in Usener’s Greek, where the dove is actually identified as “the Lord in the form of the dove.”<sup>89</sup> However, the oldest Latin manuscripts (T and Mp), abridge the whole final episode drastically, cutting Margaret’s detailed petitions and the dove’s third descent confirming their fulfillment. The early-medieval reviser whose work is represented in H (and the even earlier O) was evidently working with an abridged text that more closely reflected the structure and amplitude of its Greek original but added even more liturgical language to the narrative at this point, once again strengthening the sacramental motifs.

As we have already noted, the confirmation rite is part of the baptismal liturgy for most of the late-antique and early-medieval periods; immediately following the confirmational anointing, the newly baptized joins the community of the faithful for the Eucharistic celebration. The *passio* builds in its final prayers and actions to a Eucharistic crescendo that completes the liturgical action. Prayer Nine (139, line 30–140, line 16) is structurally similar to the prayer known in Western liturgies as the “Preface.” The preface begins the Eucharistic prayer or anaphora and developed in the West as a separate prayer marked off from the words of institution by the *Sanctus*. In the Eastern liturgies the separation is less stark, but in all cases the preface begins, as does Prayer Nine, with praise and thanksgiving offered to God the Creator.

Prayer Nine begins, “God who have marked out heaven with your palm and measured earth in your fist and who established a limit for the sea” (139, line 30–40, line 1) (“Deus qui palmo caelum mensus es et terram / pugillo mensurasti, mari quoque limitem posuisti”). Margaret then prays for the forgiveness of the

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<sup>89</sup> “Il Signore sotto forma di colomba,” as translated from the Greek by Tammi, *Due versioni*, 41.



sins of anyone who performs devotional activities on her behalf. The list of ways in which she may be honored is lengthy and marked by insistent repetitions. Margaret prays in the *passio* for the following: those who read this book of her deeds or listen to her passion; those who bring a lamp to her basilica; those who remember her name at the final judgment; those who read the passion, carry it, or hear it read; those who build a basilica in her name, copy a manuscript of her passion, or by their labor cause one to be written. She prays that all of these categories of devotees will have their sins forgiven and begs, as a coda attached to her last petition, that no child will be born lame, blind, dumb, or be tested by the devil in the home of anyone who performs devotions on Margaret's behalf.

The degree to which the cult of Saint Margaret becomes related to childbirth should not distract us from observing that for most of these categories of pious behaviors the benefit Margaret requests is the forgiveness of sins. These diverse devotional activities are also unified by their very nature as memorial actions. Whether it is reading a book or building a church, the activities Margaret recommends to her followers in this prayer might all be summarized in the words of Jesus at the Last Supper that are spoken as part of the canon of the Mass: "Do this for a commemoration of me."<sup>90</sup> I am not suggesting that the full theological weight of the *anamnesis* enacted by the Eucharist is evoked here; actions done in memory of Margaret will not serve to "render present" her sacrifice each time they are performed. But these memorial actions will certainly ensure the continued memory and power of her witness. Several times during the course of the *passio* the threat that Olibrius or the devil will erase the memory of Margaret from the earth has been raised. The townspeople warn her, "The prefect is angry and hastens to ruin you and to blot out memory of you from the earth" (131, lines 23–25) ("Iste prefectus iracundus est, et te perdere festinat, et delere de terra memoriam tuam"), and the demon complains, "Indeed I sent my brother Rufo to you in the likeness of a dragon to swallow you up and to remove your memory from the earth" (135, lines 13–16) ("Ego quidem misi fratrem meum Rufonem in effigie draconis, ut absorberet te et de terra tolleret memoriam tuam"). But as her two final prayers attest, Margaret will be remembered, and specifically through memorial practices that she herself promotes and the dove endorses.

After the thanksgiving and intercessions of Prayer Nine and the promises of the dove, Prayer Ten (141, lines 2–11) returns to the theme of memorial action and petition but concludes with thanksgiving to God. In Prayer Ten, Margaret prays, "Fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, I adjure you all through the name of great God, make recollection of me, call my name and venerate me" (141, lines 2–4) ("Patres et matres, fratres et sorores, omnes uos coniuro per

<sup>90</sup> These words from the canon that prescribe the memorial action are from Lk. 22:19b.

nomen magni Dei, memoriam meam facite, nomen meum nominate, et commendate me”). Clearly, in her final prayers Margaret is gathering together a community of believers. In the moments before and after her execution, 5,000 have already been converted (and martyred); the executioner will be joining her in heaven; the crowds are drawn rhetorically within the sphere of her prayers. The thanksgiving that concludes Prayer Ten is described by Margaret herself in the *passio* as a hymn: “I utter a hymn to the Lord. I praise and glorify God, because God is blessed for ever and ever” (141, lines 9–11) (“Hymnum dico, Deum laudo, et glorifico, quia Deus benedictus est in secula seculorum”).

After echoing Christ’s own words of eschatological promise in Luke 23:43 to the “good thief” (141, lines 15–17), Margaret is at last beheaded and the conditions of her final prayers immediately begin to be fulfilled. The executioner falls dead at her right side — presumably, like the good thief, to be reunited with her in heaven. Demons who now recognize that there is only one powerful God, the God of Margaret, howl their torment (141, lines 24–26). All manner of afflicted people — the sick, the blind, the lame, the enfeebled — touch her body and are healed (141, lines 26–28). Her own salvation, as promised by the dove, is visibly attested to when angels come to carry her body towards heaven (141, line 28). In other versions of the legend, to be discussed below, it is her head or soul that is thus raised up.<sup>91</sup> As they rise up, the angels sing the *Sanctus*; the full text of the Latin prayer is provided in the *passio* (141, lines 31–34). The *Sanctus* recalls in the most solemn moments of the Eucharistic liturgy the doctrine of the communion of saints — the angels are present at the mass and the congregation sings with them this hymn of praise before the words of institution (“This is my body ... this is ... my blood”) are spoken over the bread and the wine. The words of the *Sanctus* here, like the echoes of the opening of the Preface in Prayer Nine, are another liturgical enrichment to the text added by the early-medieval reviser. The *Sanctus* is present in H, P, O, and Mombritius’s printed edition; it is not found in the abridged ending of T and Mp; it is not also in Usener’s Greek, where the angels sing only the verse from Psalm 85 that precedes the *Sanctus* in H.<sup>92</sup>

The Eucharistic moment seems to stop short, then, in Margaret’s story when no prayer that more specifically references the words of institution follows the *Sanctus*. Yet we might say that at her own invitation, when Margaret submitted to the beheading, her body was broken, just as the Eucharistic host is broken during the mass. Margaret’s prayer spoken while in the cauldron of water echoed the *super oblata*; there she offered the “hostiam laudis” (138, line 29)

<sup>91</sup> On the variants in the textual tradition, see Clayton and Magennis, *Old English Lives*, 14.

<sup>92</sup> In H the verse which precedes the *Sanctus*: “Non est similis tui in diis, Domine, et non est secundum opera tua.” Cf. Ps. 85:8 (Gallican Psalter).

(sacrifice of praise) as she was about to be martyred, and the motif of Margaret herself as “hostiam,” from which the term “host” derives, gains resonance here. As has been discussed in studies of the Middle English poem “Pearl,” the pearl there and elsewhere can also be a figure for the Eucharist.<sup>93</sup> In the elevation of Margaret by the angels at this point, we may see a suggestion of the elevation of the Eucharistic host that occurs during the consecration. Finally, Margaret is dispersed, like the “bread broken for all.” In Byzantine Christian churches, the term for the pieces of the host after the fraction rite is, in fact, *margarites*.<sup>94</sup> Just before her body is carried to heaven, the sick throng around it, and the narrator reports that they “touched her body” (141, line 27) (“tangebant corpus eius”) to receive its healing power; after her elevation we see both her relics and prayers distributed for memorial use (141, line 35–142, line 8). In his concluding testimony the narrator, Theotimus, reports, “I have written all her prayers in the pages of books with great diligence and passed on all of them, written in truth, to all Christians” (142, lines 7–8) (“Scripsi omnes orationes eius in libris cartaneis cum astutia multa, et transmisi omnibus Christianis haec omnia, in ueritate conscripta”). These final words from the narrator of the story seem to guarantee its authenticity and also serve both to enable and to model the cultic practices that Margaret had prescribed.

#### THE PEARL AND BAPTISMAL SYMBOLISM

As we have seen, many changes made to the text by an early Latin reviser seem intended to highlight the baptismal motifs that are already present in the narrative structure and symbolic register. One important alteration that occurs early in the Latin textual tradition is the changing of the saint’s name from the Greek Marina, “of the Sea,” to Margaret, “the Pearl.” In their recent edition of the Turin manuscript, the editors note that for “raisons obscures” the name shifts from Marina to Margaret in the Western tradition in the ninth or tenth century. Dresvina discusses the irony that the Western name Margaret derives from a Greek word, while the Greek name, Marina, is “a Latin epithet for margarita-pearl, or a metaphor for pearl if used independently.”<sup>95</sup> T and Mp, the earliest

<sup>93</sup> On pearl symbolism in general, see William H. Schofield, “Symbolism, Allegory, and Autobiography in the *Pearl*,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* 24 (1909): 585–675, and James W. Earl, “Saint Margaret and the Pearl Maiden,” *Modern Philology* 70 (1972): 1–8. On the use of the pearl as a Eucharistic symbol in the Middle English poem *Pearl*, see Jennifer Garrison, “Liturgy and Loss: Pearl and the Ritual Reform of the Aristocratic Subject,” *Chaucer Review* 44 (2010): 294–322 and Heather Phillips, “The Eucharistic Allusions of Pearl,” *Medieval Studies* 47 (1985): 474–86.

<sup>94</sup> Peter Day, *The Liturgical Dictionary of Eastern Christianity* (Collegeville, MN, 1993), 181.

<sup>95</sup> Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon* (n. 4 above), 22.

Latin manuscripts (BHL 5303c), in fact retain “Marina,” although a second hand has corrected the name to “Margareta” throughout Mp. BHL 5303c, as represented by T, nevertheless has six references to pearl imagery, two of which are the expression “margarita animae meae” (the pearl of my soul).<sup>96</sup> It may be significant that the specific identification of Marina’s soul as a pearl, “margarita anima mea,” in T and Mp disappears once Marina is renamed Margaret. M. B. McInerney suggested some years ago that “the name Margaret, which means pearl in Greek, may have been attached to the saint because it filled some demand of the hagiographical narrative.”<sup>97</sup> Perhaps that “demand” was the Latin reviser’s desire to further highlight the symbolic value of pearl imagery in the legend.

Indeed, when pearl imagery or the actual name Margaret/Pearl feature in the text, the symbolic associations that I have suggested above — the pearl as created by fire and water, the pearl as a symbol of purity, or the pearl as Eucharist — may be in play; the Mombritius *passio* in fact draws attention to the symbolic value of the pearl when Margaret puns on her name in Prayer One. And while the pearl is a multivalent symbol in scriptural and patristic terms, a particular strand of pearl symbolism found especially in the work of the Ephrem the Syrian may have special relevance for the Marina/Margaret legend. In works such as *Hymns on Virginity* and *Hymns on Faith* (the latter of which includes a set of strophes known as Hymns on the Pearl), Ephrem returns again and again to a complex web of baptismal associations: Christ as the sea, the diver as the baptizand, the pearl as baptism itself, the pearl as Christ, the pearl as the baptized soul.<sup>98</sup> For instance, a hymn for Epiphany attributed to Ephrem offers a clear example of direct connection made between the pearl, the sea, and baptism: “Again, the diver brings up / out of the sea the pearl. / Be baptized and bring up from the water / purity that therein is hidden / the pearl that is set as a jewel / in the crown of the Godhead.”<sup>99</sup> The Pearl symbolism taken up by Ephrem also features in the Gnostic thought that influenced his work.<sup>100</sup>

The only explicit reference to a pearl in Usener’s Greek text is in a description of the eyes of the dragon (a reference also present in the Latin versions). Although

<sup>96</sup> Viggiani et al., “Passio Marinae,” 729 nn. 1 and 2.

<sup>97</sup> Maud Burnett McInerney, “Opening the Oyster: Pearls in *Pearl*,” *Aestel* 1 (1993): 19–54, at 22.

<sup>98</sup> For “Christ the Sea” and the “Diver as baptizand,” see, for instance, “Hymns on Virginity,” Hymn 10, lines 4–6, and, for “Christ as Pearl,” lines 9–11, in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, ed. and trans. Kathleen McVey, Classics of Western Spirituality (New York, 1989), 308.

<sup>99</sup> From “Hymn Seven” of the “Hymns for the Feast of the Epiphany,” in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 13, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, trans. A. Edward Johnston (Buffalo, 1898), 275.

<sup>100</sup> See McVey, *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 11.

the Usener text includes four references to “my soul” within three of the prayers that Margaret utters before she is shut up in the prison, any explicit identification of the soul as a “pearl” is not present in this Greek text. As Clayton and Magennis discuss, the Mombritius version ultimately relies on an even older Greek tradition of which the version Usener printed represents only a subgroup; in his translation of the Usener text, Tammi lists seven other Greek versions of the legend. It is beyond the scope of this project to determine whether any of the Greek versions of the legend employs the explicit pearl imagery that seems to lead to the reidentification of the saint as herself the “pearl” in the Latin tradition. It is nevertheless possible that even without the word “pearl,” the Greek legend of Marina, “of the sea,” already points towards this pearl-related constellation of symbols.

The degree to which the works of Ephrem might have been known to the Greek composer or early Latin translators and revisers of the legend is difficult to determine, but recent work on Syriac literature and the Ephremic corpus continues to reveal wider and wider spheres of his influence in the late-antique and early-medieval world.<sup>101</sup> Dresvina’s research on the demonic episode points to the likelihood that the origins of the Marina/Margaret legend are in fact in the general area of the saint’s assumed hometown, Pisidian Antioch, or at least in the more broadly defined Judaeo-Hellenistic regions of Egypt, Syria, or Asia Minor.<sup>102</sup> Ephrem’s work — both the genuine and the inauthentic — would have been widely known both in Syriac and Greek texts in this area. Greek texts (most of which have no correspondence with Syriac originals) circulated even more broadly after the fourth century, and a small corpus of Latin texts (translations from the Greek) were available on the Continent beginning in the sixth century.<sup>103</sup> If this layer of pearl-related symbolic detail is emphasized more clearly in the Latin than in the Greek, it may offer further evidence of knowledge of Ephrem’s work in the West.

The pearl imagery that continues to be added to the legend in its Latin and vernacular versions from the ninth through the fifteenth centuries becomes more

<sup>101</sup> In *Symbols of the Church and Kingdom: A Study in Early Syriac Tradition*, rev. ed. (London, 2004), Robert Murray writes of the “exponential growth of Syriac studies in recent years” (ix) and offers as one piece of evidence the “massive” *Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian* compiled by Kees den Biessen (Grove in Umbria, 2002).

<sup>102</sup> Dresvina, “Demonic Episode” (n. 4 above), 199.

<sup>103</sup> For an overview of Ephrem’s life and his work in Syriac, see Kathleen McVey’s “Introduction” to *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, 3–48. On the availability of Greek texts, see Ephrem Lash, “The Greek Writings Attributed to Ephrem the Syrian,” in *Abba: The Tradition of Orthodoxy in the West*, ed. John Behr, Andrew Louth, and Dimitri Conomos (New York, 2007), 81–98; on the Latin texts, see in the same volume Sebastian Brock, “The Changing Faces of St. Ephrem as Read in the West,” 65–80 and Sims-Williams, “Thoughts on Ephrem the Syrian” (n. 67 above).

exclusively related to the association of pearls with virginity.<sup>104</sup> The Mombritius version also insists on the purity of this pearl, the “*dilecta virgo Dei*” (139, line 12) (beloved virgin of God), but Margaret’s preservation as the *Sponsa Christi* functions here to enhance the *passio*’s baptismal theme, recalling patristic exegeses of the Song of Songs that point to baptism as the consummation of the spiritual marriage of the virgin soul and the bridegroom, Christ.<sup>105</sup>

More broadly, we may say that any martyr’s story invites the allegorizing impulse that shapes the narrative of this “pearl,” Margaret. As Origen, citing Jesus’s own references to his impending death as a baptism in Mark 10:38 and Luke 12:50, observed: “Martyrdom is named a baptism.”<sup>106</sup> In composing the life of a virgin martyr, in the “iconographic style” described by Earl, the monastic imagination would naturally be drawn to the structuring device of the baptismal liturgy and the extensive symbolic vocabulary for baptism available in scripture and patristic literature, including that of the sea/pearl.

#### CONCLUSION

##### THE SUBVERSIVE POWER OF A TEXTUAL RELIC

In the Mombritius *passio* from which the many European vernacular legends of Margaret descend, the theme of baptism is inescapable — it is clearly a structuring device, accounting for the highly liturgical framework of prayer, gesture, and event. The potently symbolic “pearl” at the heart of this legend recasts her tortures into baptisms, effecting the transformation from death to everlasting life that the sacrament of baptism promises. As Margaret speaks her efficacious prayers, it is difficult not to see her in the role of “presider” over this liturgically informed narrative. Many devotees of the saint may have understood at some level the subversive, transformative power Saint Margaret wields, accounting for some of this legend’s tremendous popularity. It is this liturgically resonant *vita* — with its elaborate structure of self-assertive prayers culminating in Margaret’s self-baptism and Eucharistic self-sacrifice — rather than her bodily relics that emerges as the motive force and the principal object of her cult, as this is promoted in the closing moments of the *passio*.

Margaret’s intercessory prayers are offered for anyone who reads “*librum gestae meae*” (140, line 2) (the book containing my story), who hears “*meam ... passionem*” (140, line 3) (my ... passion), who “*legerit aut tulerit libellum passionis huius*” (140, line 9) (reads or carries the book of this passion), or who

<sup>104</sup> James W. Earl, “Saint Margaret and the Pearl Maiden” (n. 93 above), 1–8.

<sup>105</sup> Chap. 12 (pp. 191–207) of Daniélou’s *The Bible and the Liturgy* (n. 28 above) details the patristic exegeses of the Song of Songs that attempted to “connect different verses of the Canticle with different aspects of the liturgy of initiation” (193).

<sup>106</sup> Cited in Ferguson, *Baptism in the Early Church* (n. 78 above), 418.

“scripserit passionem meam, aut emerit eam de iusto labore” (140, lines 11–12) (makes a copy of my *passio* or furnishes/buys one with the proceeds of his honest labor, 140). Likewise, the narrative emphasizes, both in the Prologue and at the end of the *passio* Theotimus’s transcription “cum astutia multa” (142, lines 6–7) (with great diligence) of Margaret’s prayers and their immediate distribution “omnibus Christianis” (142, line 7) (to all Christians). Margaret’s intercessory prayer that so repeatedly reiterates the importance of the accounts of her passion is one of the most stable parts of the legend.<sup>107</sup>

The textual tradition is confused, on the other hand, about the status of her body, which is typically the more important locus of memorial activity in martyr cults. In some manuscripts of BHL 5303, including H, O, and Assman, Margaret’s body (“corpus”) is carried to heaven by the angels; in others, including Mather, the printed Mombritius, and Piper, her soul (“anima”) is thus elevated.<sup>108</sup> In T, Mp, and Usener, it is rather the head that is borne up. In the manuscripts where the body has just been carried away, Theotimus is next reported to be taking her body to the house of an Antiochian noblewoman, Sinclitica, where her relics will rest in a casket (“scrinium,” a Latin word with no Greek cognate) he has made of sweet-smelling stone.<sup>109</sup> In the earlier versions where only the head was borne away, the location of her tomb is less clear. Usener’s Greek version is noncommittal: at the end, we read, “I Theotimus collected the remains of the intrepid martyr and constructed an oratory (*eukterios*) worthy of her” — a bit later specifying only the place where she suffered and died (Antioch) and not the location of these “remains.”<sup>110</sup> The earliest Latin versions, T (and Mp), likewise acknowledge that there was a body but are equally vague about its whereabouts: “Ego ... Theododimus colligi corpus eius et deposui in optimo et oportuno loco” (I ... Theotimus collected her body and deposited it in a place most worthy and fitting).<sup>111</sup>

<sup>107</sup> The T and Mp versions are a notable exception; they do not include this prayer because the conclusion there has been “radically abbreviated” according to Clayton and Magennis, *Early English Lives* (n. 8 above), 12. These versions do, however, include Theotimus’s assertion that he wrote down and distributed all of Margaret’s prayers “cum multa astucia” (T) or “diligencia” (Mp).

<sup>108</sup> See Gerould’s collation for these references, “A New Text” (n. 12 above), 545.

<sup>109</sup> In private correspondence about the unusual use of the word *scrinium* here, E. Gordon Whatley observes: “the most usual meaning in antiquity was for a chest for books and papers. The later meaning of ‘reliquary’ (equivalent of *feretrum*) is first cited in the 12<sup>th</sup> c., according to Niermeyer’s dictionary; the usage here is at least 200 years earlier than the period when the Latin word supposedly acquired a specifically hagiological meaning; it seems to me the hagiographer deliberately chose a word meaning ‘casket, container’ that was mainly associated with the storage of texts.”

<sup>110</sup> Or “worthy of her suffering.” See Tammi, *Due versioni* (n. 16 above), 42; Usener, *Acta S. Marinae* (n. 16 above), 46, line 17.

<sup>111</sup> Viggiani et al., “Passio Marinae” (n. 8 above), 749.

Marina/Margaret herself never asks for her own bodily relics to have salvific or intercessory power; in Usener's Greek text, when Christ "in the form of a dove" responds to her prayers of intercession, he mentions in passing that his mercy and protection from demons will be bestowed in "places where there are relics or written records" of Marina's martyrdom, but he then proceeds to focus, as does she, on the story, the text. He explains that he has "placed a seal on the books that speak of you and by means of these it will be possible to obtain pardon for one's sin," that the head will be kept in secret by his angels, and that only the "writer" will be able to read the syllables of "this description."<sup>112</sup> The bodily "sealing" earlier associated with Margaret's sacramental initiation is here shifted to the book. In the early Latin versions, T and Mp, the emphasis still falls heavily on the legend and the memory of Marina, more than on the briefly and vaguely mentioned "reliquiae." In Mombricitus's edition her "relics" are omitted entirely from the dove's speech. H, O, and P transmit the Greek's "in places where there are relics ...," but these versions especially share in the confusion of a body now carried away, yet somehow still present.

In view of the marked emphasis at the climax of her narrative on Margaret's *written* legend, and the corresponding vagueness about her bodily relics, it is not surprising that Margaret had no major cult center or pilgrimage site in the Latin West.<sup>113</sup> Purported relics of Margaret were translated to Montefiascone, Italy, whose cathedral was dedicated to Saint Margherita in 1369. Yet, as Dresvina suggests, the relatively late establishment of this site may account for its failure to grow "large enough" to be the true locus of the saint's cult. Dresvina concludes, "Therefore the role of the main relics of the martyr was played by her written lives."<sup>114</sup>

Devotion to Margaret was indeed centered on the text of her passion, in the later Middle Ages especially — as noted at the outset of this paper with reference to Margaret's promises about what the mere presence of her "little book" offers to women in childbirth. Perhaps the story became linked in popular piety with childbirth during the stages when the text still clearly included the baptismal formula. When brought to the woman in labor, afraid for the health, life, and ultimate salvation of her child, it would offer even the illiterate the comfort of the presence and promise of the baptismal words, spoken in the text by a woman, not a priest. Even in the shorter, later versions (particularly the abbreviated vernacular renderings, which lack most of the prayer texts along with the words of the

<sup>112</sup> Tammi, *Due versioni*, 42.

<sup>113</sup> Veneration of Saint Marina in the Eastern churches has included devotion to her relics; for a recent discussion of a reliquary of St. Marina, see Wendy R. Larson, "'Do you inquire about these things?' Text, Relic and the Power of St. Marina," *Medieval Perspectives* 27 (2012): 173–81.

<sup>114</sup> Dresvina, *A Maid with a Dragon* (n. 4 above), 188.



baptismal sacrament), Saint Margaret herself clearly promises in her intercessory prayer the very benefits that baptism confers: forgiveness of all sins and salvation from death at the last judgment. Looking beyond the particular necessities of cult development — the reading of passions, building of churches, copying of texts, and such — we see that the pious busyness Margaret encourages results in the same reward: forgiveness of sins. The protection specifically offered to newborns is that they not be born deformed, lame, hunchbacked, dumb, deaf, or afflicted by the Devil — real, worldly afflictions but also states symbolically resonant of sin.<sup>115</sup> The legend of Saint Margaret does not (and could not overtly) promise eternal salvation for infants who died before they were baptized, but it offered that hope.

That hope for alternate justification may have been, at times, only dimly or subconsciously felt. I began with one tantalizing bit of evidence for such an association — the prayer in Egerton 877 — and offer another to conclude. In her article on the degree to which popular attachment to the dragon episode was in conflict with authoritative efforts to suppress this sensational element, Wendy Larson offers a medieval French prayer to illustrate “the way in which a mother might turn to the saint for assistance,” but this prayer does not in fact mention the dragon at all. Rather it implores Saint Margaret, “Make my child come out / safe and sound, so I can see him / baptized joyously.”<sup>116</sup>

Such prayers related to Margaret’s cult suggest avenues for further research into the extra-liturgical, devotional use of her legend and into issues of women’s access to a canonically regulated necessity: baptism. Meanwhile, we may say that the vision that animates this typologically informed *passio* — that of a woman who presides over and transforms through her prayers episodes of unspeakable pain into instruments of salvation for herself and for those around her — must surely account for some of the legend’s tremendous appeal to women in childbirth.

*Chestnut Hill College*

**Keywords:** childbirth, Latin-language literature, liturgy, Margaret of Antioch, prayer, typology, women saints

<sup>115</sup> Throughout the *passio*, the pagan idols are described as “deaf and dumb.”

<sup>116</sup> Larson, “Master of this Narrative” (n. 6 above), 97–98.