

## The Women at the Tomb: The Credibility of their Story

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### 1. Introduction

There is an argument about the role of the women in the resurrection narratives with which I expect you are all familiar. As you know, the women in the Gospel narratives are the first people to find the tomb of Jesus empty. Moreover, they are the only witnesses to the empty tomb who had seen Jesus buried and therefore could vouch for the fact that the empty tomb really was the tomb in which Jesus' body had been laid two days before. According to two of the Gospels, the women were also the first to meet the risen Lord. The argument you will have heard is that, since women's testimony in the ancient world, including especially Jewish Palestine, was widely regarded as unreliable and untrustworthy, this role of the women in the Easter events is unlikely to have been invented.<sup>1</sup> As 'an apologetic legend' (Bultmann's phrase<sup>2</sup>) a story thus featuring women would be poor apologetic. This view is also commonly used to explain the absence of the women from Paul's account of the Easter events, the earliest we have, in 1 Corinthians 15.<sup>3</sup> Hence my sub-title: The credibility of their [the women's] story. This is deliberately ambiguous, since it could mean the credibility of their story for people at the time or the credibility of their story to us. Rather paradoxically but entirely logically, the argument I have cited finds in precisely the story's lack of credibility then a reason for its credibility now. Since it does not seem well designed to carry conviction at the time, it is likely to be historical, i.e. believable by people with an historically critical mindset today. It seems to me important to add one qualification to that expression of the argument. As often put, it suggests that the women's story would not be judged especially reliable by people in the first century, when what, of course, is meant is: by *men* in the first century. It is not at all obvious that the role of the women would handicap these stories for female tellers or hearers, a consideration that is relevant, not only because at least as many women as men were attracted to early Christianity, but also because the first tellers of these tales may well have been the four women whose names appear in them.

This rather traditional argument about the women in the resurrection narratives has been given a further twist in recent, feminist approaches, in which it is argued that, not only does patriarchal prejudice against women account for their absence from Paul's account in 1 Corinthians 15, but even the Gospel narratives have reduced and played down the role of the women in the origins of Easter faith.<sup>4</sup> Again, the effect is to make the historical role of the women all the more credible. If even the evangelists who record these stories were not entirely comfortable with them and sought to reduce their implications, then it is all the more striking that they record them at all. The role of the women must have already been so well established in the tradition that no Gospel writer could simply suppress it. Often an aspect of this feminist argument is the claim that issues of power and authority are involved. Easter witness conferred authority in the church, and the downplaying of the women's witness reflects the suppression of the authority women exercised in the earliest Christian communities but had lost in the contexts in which the Gospels were written. The issue therefore moves from one merely about the reliability of women's stories to one

more explicitly about hierarchy and power. In its strongest form it belongs to a feminist reconstruction of Christian origins which, in my view, has rightly highlighted the neglected evidence of women's leadership roles in earliest Christianity, but has also sometimes pushed its thesis to a speculative extreme. But we should certainly agree that denigration of women's credibility, if and where it existed, was an aspect of a patriarchal social structure in which men were publicly dominant and could decide to rule women's testimony out of court. It is also worth bearing in mind the contention that this may not have been the case in the early Christian communities in which these stories of women were first told and transmitted.

The argument that the women's story is credible now precisely because it wouldn't have been then (at least to men) has not, of course, convinced everyone. A strong tradition, especially in German scholarship<sup>5</sup>, sees the story of the empty tomb as a late legend. Here the guiding principle is the priority of Paul, since both the fact of the empty tomb and the women go unmentioned in Paul's summary of the kerygma in 1 Corinthians 15. Considerations of time tonight mean that I shall confine this lecture to the Gospel narratives, but I do want to make one point about the relationship between these narratives and Paul's catalogue of resurrection appearances in 1 Corinthians. The catalogue occurs in an example of the genre of kerygmatic summary, i.e. a brief outline of the Gospel story, such as we find also in the sermons in Acts. The argument of Pauline priority to the detriment of the women in the Gospels depends on the argument that the narratives of empty tomb and resurrection appearances that we have in the Gospels developed out of the kerygma: first the summary, then the narratives formed to illustrate the kerygma in preaching. But there is at least one massive problem here: Paul's list of appearances in 1 Corinthians and the resurrection narratives in the Gospels are remarkably - and puzzlingly - ill-matched.<sup>6</sup> It is not only that the two stories about the women - their discovery of the empty tomb and Jesus' appearance to them - find no place in Paul's summary (and the same could be said of the appearance to the disciples on the way to Emmaus), but also that there are no stories in the Gospels corresponding to three of the five appearances Paul lists (leaving aside the appearance to himself): the appearances to Peter, to more than 500 people at once, and to James. Even the other two Paul lists - appearances to the twelve and to all the apostles - are not easy to correlate with the appearances to the apostolic group narrated in the Gospels. If the stories originated from the kerygma, why do we not have a story of the appearance to Peter (merely mentioned by Luke) or of the appearance to James (we have such a story only in the Gospel of the Hebrews) or of the appearance to the 500, which seems quite unlike anything at all in the Gospels? To my mind, this rather extraordinary lack of correspondence between the kerygmatic summary Paul quotes and the resurrection narratives in the Gospels confirms the fact that we are dealing with two fundamentally independent forms in which the Easter events were transmitted probably from the very beginning of the church.

## **2. The formation of the Gospel resurrection narratives**

In this section, as a preliminary to looking closely at the role of the women in the narratives, I shall very briefly indicate the way I think the evangelists have composed their narratives on the basis of oral traditions.<sup>7</sup>

(1) I think that what the evangelists knew in the oral tradition were a number of discrete narrative units, with no stable connexions between them. **Chart 1** lists for you the units I think we can postulate and where they have been used in the Gospels (I include apocryphal Gospels because of their comparative value in exercises of this kind). That the evangelists knew resurrection traditions as discrete narrative units I think can be concluded from the fact that in no case are two of these narrative units linked in the same way by more than one evangelist. Each evangelist has selected and combined units of tradition in his own way to compose his own distinctive narrative sequence.

(2) On the other hand, there is a broadly common structure to the overall narrative design of the Gospel resurrection narratives. You can see this in **Chart 2**. With the exception of Mark, which in its original form ended with the discovery of the empty tomb, the canonical Gospels all have a threefold structure,<sup>8</sup> beginning with a twofold witness to the empty tomb (either by female and male disciples, or by the guards and the women disciples), and ending with an appearance in which the apostolic group receives from the risen Christ their commission to witness in the world. Between the empty tomb and the appearance to the apostolic group just one appearance is narrated (to the women in Matthew and John, to the two travellers to Emmaus in Luke). This appearance story has in all cases an essential narrative function - not its only, but an essential function - of making the transition from the tomb to the disciples gathered when the risen Christ appears to them. This transitional function takes different forms in each Gospel, but in each case the middle element of the three is given a transitional function. The fact that this threefold structure occurs in Matthew, Luke and John, independently (I take it) of each other, presumably means that it was deployed in oral preaching. What the evangelists achieve in writing is the integration of the three elements into a sequential narrative whole. We should also note the important fact that this threefold structure entails a certain economy of narration, which the evangelists seem deliberately to have chosen. In other words, they likely knew other oral traditions of resurrection appearances, but chose in each case just one for the transitional position, which had to be a story that could be told in such a way as to effect the transition. In Matthew's and Luke's case, they chose just one story for the concluding element of the apostolic commissioning, a different one in each case. John exceptionally extends the concluding element.

(3) What then accounts for the differences between the Gospel resurrection narratives, so often considered problematic? I suggest the following five factors:

- (a) Each evangelist *selected narrative units* from the tradition, both for narratological reasons, because he wished to create an integrated sequence of such units, and also as guided by his own theological interests and aims.
- (b) The evangelists are dependent on *varying oral forms* of the same narrative unit. Thus, for example, in the case of the story of women visiting the empty tomb, while Matthew is dependent on Mark, Luke and John in my view are each dependent on the oral form of this story that each knew.<sup>9</sup>
- (c) Each evangelist had to connect the narrative units they selected and to integrate them into an overall narrative sequence. Beyond the broad threefold structure that Matthew, Luke and John all share, as we have noticed, each had to integrate the units into a whole in their own way. Significant differences between the Gospels result. (E.g. Luke and John both narrate the women's visit to the empty tomb and the men's visit to the tomb, but combine them differently, thereby producing a rather different overall narrative.)

(d) Other narratological (i.e. storytelling) reasons should not be neglected. The evangelists are skilled storytellers who exercised the freedom necessary to storytellers if they are to communicate a story in an appealing and effective way. Comparisons between the Gospels often focus on theological reasons for their differences to the detriment of narratological reasons.

(e) Finally, the specific theological concerns of each evangelist of course guide their retellings of the story. We shall notice some of these in due course.

### 3. The credibility of women

According to Luke 24:10-11, when the women returning from the tomb report to the apostles the message of the angels to the effect that Jesus has risen from the dead, 'these words seemed to them to be nonsense, and they did not believe them' (24:11). The Longer Ending of Mark says the same of Mary Magdalene's report that she has seen the risen Christ (16:11). The Epistle of the Apostles, in a free retelling of the stories, has Jesus send two of the women in turn to tell the eleven disciples that he has risen from the dead. Each time they fail to believe. "What have we to do with you, O woman? He that is dead and buried, can he then live?" they scornfully respond (EpApp 10). Do these accounts imply simply that the content of the message the women bring is incredible, or does the *gender* of the messengers compound the incredibility of their message. Are the men disinclined to take such reports seriously because they are brought to them by women? The texts in themselves hardly allow a conclusive answer to this, though the words of the men in the Epistle of the Apostles - "What have we to do with you, O woman?" - seem a fairly strong hint that gender is not irrelevant here.

But the picture is not uniform. Matthew's narrative, while not reporting the reception the women's message got, presumes that it was believed, since this explains the fact that the male disciples do in fact obey Jesus' instruction to go to Galilee (28:16). We must also notice that the accounts make use of the same motif of unbelief when the messengers are male: this is true in the case of the two travellers in the Longer Ending of Mark (though not in Luke) and in the case of disciples reporting to Thomas in John. The issue of belief is a major theme of the resurrection narratives and not confined to the role of the women in them.

But if gender is not the only aspect of this issue and therefore not to be exaggerated, the question remains whether gender is not nevertheless *an* aspect. Is the presumed cultural context of these narratives such that reports by *women* would be especially liable to disbelief? Most often this question has been answered with reference to the fact that, at least as a general rule,<sup>10</sup> women were not eligible to be witnesses in Jewish courts.<sup>11</sup> Since our stories are not set in law courts, this piece of halakhah may be less relevant than the reason the Jewish historian Josephus alleges for it: 'because of the levity and impetuosity of their sex' (Ant. 2.219).<sup>12</sup> This, of course, is a version of the common ancient prejudice that women are less rational than men, more easily swayed by emotion, more readily influenced, all too prone to jump to conclusions without thoughtful consideration.<sup>13</sup> While this did not result in a consistent male policy of disbelieving women, it is hard to believe it would not affect judgments of credibility especially when what the women were reporting would take some believing anyhow.<sup>14</sup>

But in the case of the women's reports about the resurrection, the most relevant comparative evidence is actually more specific. There is a good deal of evidence that in the Greco-Roman world in general women were thought by educated men to be gullible in religious matters and especially prone to superstitious fantasy.<sup>15</sup> Strabo, for example, points out that

in dealing with a crowd of women ... a philosopher cannot influence them by reason or exhort them to reverence, piety and faith; nay, there is need of religious fear also, and this cannot be aroused without myths and marvels (*Geog.* 1.2.8).

We are fortunate to have an example of this prejudice directed specifically against Mary Magdalene as an alleged witness to the resurrection by the second-century intellectual despiser of Christianity, Celsus:

[A]fter death he rose again and showed the marks of his punishment and how his hands had been pierced. But who saw this? A hysterical female, as you say, and perhaps some other one<sup>16</sup> of those who were deluded by the same sorcery... (*apud* Origen, *C. Cels.* 2.55).<sup>17</sup>

Even allowing for Celsus' polemical intent in focusing on a female witness of the resurrection, it is notable that the appearance to Mary Magdalene was sufficiently prominent in what Celsus knew of the Christian claim about the resurrection of Jesus for him to be able to take it up in this way. There can hardly be any doubt that the gender of this 'hysterical' or 'crazed'<sup>18</sup> woman is important to Celsus' sneering polemic.

But what of the Jewish cultural-religious context in which the stories of the women at the tomb must first have been told? For this we can turn to some evidence that, so far as I know, has not been previously noticed.<sup>19</sup> It comes from Pseudo-Philo's *Biblical Antiquities*, a retelling of the early biblical history, a Palestinian work of the second half of the first century CE, still surprisingly neglected as evidence of Palestinian Judaism in the New Testament period. Pseudo-Philo's work gives remarkable prominence and significant roles in the history of Israel to women. On two occasions he (I cautiously use masculine pronouns for the author, but this is a case where a female author cannot be excluded<sup>20</sup>) portrays biblical women receiving and communicating revelation from God which is not believed by those for whom it is intended. In one case (**LAB 9:10**: you have this text on the handouts), the woman is Moses' sister Miriam, whom the Bible calls a prophet and to whom, as a young girl before the birth of her brother, Pseudo-Philo attributes a prophetic dream. It is one of his many elaborations on the biblical story. In the dream an angel tells her to go and tell her parents what he tells her about the child that is to be born to them. When she does so, 'her parents did not believe her.' The parallel to the story of the women at the tomb is impressive. What is striking about Pseudo-Philo's account is that Miriam's parents are the righteous couple Amram and Jochebed. Amram has been portrayed as a man of great faith, approved by God. There seems no reason in the plot for their failure to believe their daughter's prophetic dream. It looks as though Pseudo-Philo sees their unbelief as the expected reaction, even by such admirable characters as Amram and Jochebed, to a claim by a woman to have received divine revelation. Yet there is no doubt that Pseudo-Philo portrays the revelation given to Miriam as authentic and readers are certainly entitled to think that Amram and Jochebed should have believed it.

The second instance of this motif in Pseudo-Philo's work comes in his retelling of the biblical story of the birth of Samson (this is **LAB 42:1- 5**: you have a summary on the

sheet, with the crucial verse in full). As in the biblical story in Judges, Samson's mother is told about the coming birth by an angel and she reports what the angel said to her husband Manoah. Manoah's reaction - he 'did not believe his wife' - is not in the biblical text. It reveals again Pseudo-Philo's expectation that this is how a woman's claim to have received divine revelation is likely to be received. In Pseudo-Philo, as in the Bible, Manoah then prays, but Pseudo-Philo rewrites his prayer: 'am I not worthy to hear the signs and wonders that God has done among us or to see the face of his messenger?' What Manoah finds hard to believe is that the revelation should have been made to his wife rather than to him, the man. The way the story continues is a clear rebuke to this patriarchal prejudice: God does deem Manoah worthy to hear God's voice, but it is to Eluma, his wife, that the angel returns and it is she whom the angel sends to summon her husband. Pseudo-Philo is surely using the story to counter a prevalent belief that it is men with whom God communicates directly and revelation comes to women only through the mediation of men. He highlights a biblical case in which a revelation rather pointedly comes to a woman and only to her husband through her.

In the much later Jewish exegesis of the same story preserved in Numbers Rabbah we find an interpretation which is similar but not precisely the same as Pseudo-Philo's (this is the third of the texts on the handouts). Here Manoah is explicit about his reasons for not believing his wife: women's words are not to be relied on: 'she may have changed something while speaking, or omitted or added something.' This is the usual prejudice against women's rational capacities. It may also be operative, though unstated, in Pseudo-Philo. It may explain why women are not thought suitable recipients and communicators of revelation. But the value of the two examples from Pseudo-Philo is that they point to the importance of the issue of receiving revelation, which is exactly what is at stake in the resurrection narratives. That women should have been given the message of the resurrection runs up against an assumption of male priority in God's dealings with his people, an assumption Pseudo-Philo seems eager to counter throughout his work.<sup>21</sup>

In this light we can see that, if there is a problem in their Jewish context about the role of the women in the resurrection narratives, it may be not so much their supposed unreliability as witnesses or their susceptibility to delusion in religious matters, but something even dearer to patriarchal religious assumptions: the priority of men in God's dealings with the world. In these stories women are given priority by God as recipients of revelation and thereby the role of mediators of that revelation to men. Is this not part of the eschatological reversal of status, in which God makes the last first and the first last, so that no one might boast before God?<sup>22</sup> In this light too we can well understand why Peter, in Luke's narrative, does not believe the women but nevertheless hurries at once to the tomb to see for himself, just as Manoah does not believe his wife's claimed revelation but very much wants to receive the same revelation himself.

It seems not accidental that, among the canonical evangelists, it is Luke who parallels the motif we have observed in Pseudo-Philo.<sup>23</sup> Female recipients of revelation should not come as a surprise to readers of Luke's Gospel: all three women in his strongly women-centred birth and infancy narratives are such. In Luke's resurrection narrative the reaction of the apostles to the women's report functions very much like the similar motif in Pseudo-Philo: it counters the male prejudice about revelation to women. There is no doubt that the apostles ought to have believed the women.<sup>24</sup>

When the travellers to Emmaus report what the women had said, the incognito Jesus retorts: 'O how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared!' (24:25). Yet (to take up the feminist critique) does not Luke's resurrection narrative in fact minimize the role of the women?: they are the first to be told that Jesus is risen, but they are not the first to see him. Does not their mediation of revelation to the men turn out to be of no permanent significance, since it is soon replaced by the risen Lord's appearances to the men and his commissioning of the men to be his witnesses in the world?<sup>25</sup> We must now turn to this broader question which can be put to all the Gospels: is the role of the women not minimized by the way the evangelists incorporate it into their larger narrative of resurrection appearances? With this question in view I shall examine the narratives of Matthew, Luke and John. There are special issues in the way the women appear in Mark because of the debate about the way he ends his Gospel, and so, for lack of time, I'm omitting Mark from this discussion now. (Mark appears in the longer version that will be published.)

#### 4. The women in Matthew

We need to recall that threefold narrative structure that is common to Matthew, Luke and John. In this structure the first and third units are stable: the empty tomb and an appearance story featuring apostolic commissioning, while the second varies. In the first unit the role of the women is evidently essential. For Matthew and Luke, the women have a unique qualification as witnesses to the empty tomb: they were also present at the cross when Jesus died and at the tomb when his body was laid in it. They know both that Jesus was dead when laid in the tomb and that the tomb in which he was buried was the same tomb they found empty on Easter Sunday morning. The women's witness to the empty tomb and the angelic message was uniquely theirs. No other visitor to the tomb, not even a male disciple, could reproduce it. Hence the Gospel stories of the empty tomb *perpetuate the women's witness*: all readers of them are confronted with *their* distinctive witness. And, while the empty tomb is of a different order from the appearances of the risen Christ himself, the place that all the Gospels give it attributes considerable significance to it.

The second unit in the threefold structure, I suggested, is always transitional in the literary sense that it connects the empty tomb with the apostolic group to whom the risen Lord appears in order to commission them. In Matthew, the women, meeting Jesus on their way from the tomb, are instructed by him to tell the male disciples to go to Galilee, where they will see him. Implicit in the narrative is the assumption that the women's message is delivered to the eleven, believed and obeyed. This is how the eleven come to the mountain in Galilee where Jesus appears to them. The question we must consider is whether this transitional placing of the appearance to the women limits its significance to a mere preliminary to the appearance to the eleven men. I will make three comments.

First, the parallel provided by Pseudo-Philo's story of Eluma and Manoah is instructive. There the male assumption that revelation should come to men and be transmitted by them to women is overturned by a reverse process in which the woman is given the revelation to share with the man. The man himself does then meet the angel of the Lord, but only when the woman to whom the angel has appeared calls him. This ensures that, when he himself meets the angel, he cannot discount the woman's role and lapse into his normal assumption of male privilege. Similarly, in

Matthew, both the two women and the eleven men see the Lord, but the experience of the women is not only chronologically prior but also indispensable for the men's experience. Only because the men believe and obey the revelation brought them by the women can they themselves see the Lord. The women's priority is really a kind of positive discrimination which, by reversing the normally expected priority of one gender over the other, has the effect of ruling gender privilege out of the new order the resurrection appearances constitute.

Secondly, the two women in Matthew, like Mary Magdalene in John, model the proper response of the disciple to the risen Lord. They acknowledge who he is by worshipping him, as the eleven then also do (Matt 28:9, 17). This is not an incidental detail, but in Matthew's rather spare narratives of the two appearances a prominent feature: it climaxes the Matthean theme of the worship of Jesus which began with the magi in chapter 2.<sup>26</sup> But thirdly, what is implied by Jesus' command to the women to go and tell the disciples (28:10)? Is this a command whose significance is exhausted when they have delivered the message to the eleven, leaving the women, and for that matter all other male disciples, out of the commission to make disciples of all nations with which Jesus charges the eleven (28:18-20)? Matthew surely does depict a special role for the eleven, but I do not think that leaves the women's resurrection witness merely a transitional, completed and superseded role.<sup>27</sup> We have already noticed that the women's witness to the empty tomb undoubtedly continues, and the same must be said of their witness to the living Jesus himself. The command to 'go and tell,' given on both occasions, surely over-reaches its immediate narrative applicability. It is inconceivable that the women would have stopped telling all who were subsequently willing to hear them. Thus their witness is not replaced by that of the eleven, but has its own continuing validity.

## 5. The women in Luke

As far as Luke's account of the empty tomb goes, we have already noticed that, by means of his statement that the apostles did not believe the women, he makes explicit the rebuke to assumptions of male priority that the revelation given first to the women entails. But the second unit of the threefold structure in Luke is the appearance to the two travellers. It performs the necessary transitional function in that Cleopas and his companion retell the story of the empty tomb and, having recognized the Lord, then travel back to Jerusalem to rejoin the group of disciples to whom the Lord then appears and whom he then commissions. Luke most probably chose this story as his transitional one because it enabled him to develop the theme of the interpretation of prophetic scriptures that is his own distinctive contribution to the themes of the resurrection narratives. But he thereby deprives the women of the privilege of being first to meet the risen Lord.

On that subject, I want first to dismiss a point that is frequently made but which I consider a scholarly red herring. This is the view that competition for authority in the early church took the form of rival claims to the first resurrection appearance.<sup>28</sup> The feminist version of this view is that Mary Magdalene really was the first to see the risen Christ, but the claim to authority entailed by this led to rival claims for Peter and perhaps James, bolstering the male authority that came to dominate the early church. But all the evidence of the Gospels seems to me decisively against the view competition for authority is reflected in rival claims to the first appearance. If it were the case, why does the strongly Petrine Gospel of Matthew attribute the first

resurrection appearance to the women and make no mention of the appearance to Peter individually, of which we learn from Luke and Paul? If Luke were concerned to displace the women from their privileged position for this reason, why does he leave it entirely unclear whether the first resurrection appearance was to Peter or to the travellers to Emmaus?<sup>29</sup> I see no evidence that chronological priority in the resurrection appearances was thought, in itself, to confer special authority in the church.<sup>30</sup>

What then is the effect of Luke's omission of the appearance to the women? His telling and retelling of the story of the women at the tomb already sufficiently counters the assumption of male priority. This enables Luke (unlike Matthew) to include the women, without having to single them out for special mention, in the third element of the threefold structure of his narrative, i.e. the group of disciples whom Jesus commissions as witnesses. That the women are present in this scene often goes unnoticed because too little attention is paid to Luke's generally inclusive picture of the large group of Jesus' disciples,<sup>31</sup> which is different from Mark's and Matthew's greater concentration on the twelve. It is Luke who has Jesus send out the seventy as well as the twelve, with no indication, incidentally, that the seventy were all men. Both in Galilee and when he enters Jerusalem, Luke's Jesus is accompanied by a very large number of disciples (6:17; 19:37). When Luke, alone of the evangelists, in the context of the Galilean ministry refers to the women who accompanied Jesus during his Galilean ministry and names some of them (8:2-3), the effect of adding these to a mention of the twelve (8:1) is to single out the twelve and the women as two notable groups within the larger body that Luke calls Jesus' disciples.<sup>32</sup> This is confirmed by Luke 24:6, in the story of the empty tomb, where the angels tell the women to remember how Jesus told *them*, while he was still in Galilee, that he would die and rise again. The reference must be to the passion predictions spoken to 'his disciples' (9:18, 43). The women must be included in that term.

Luke's resurrection narratives refer to the disciples in such a way as to make it clear that not only the eleven, but a larger group are in view, and also that the women belong to this larger group. When the women return from the tomb they report 'to the eleven and all the rest' (24:9).<sup>33</sup> The travellers to Emmaus, not members of the eleven, are called literally 'two from them' (24:13: *duvo ejx aujtw'n*), i.e. 'two of their company,' and the travellers themselves refer to the women with an exactly parallel expression: literally 'some women from us' (24:22: *gunai'kev" tine" ejx hJmw'n*<sup>34</sup>), i.e. 'some women of our company.' So when the travellers return to Jerusalem and find 'the eleven and those with them gathered together' (24:33), readers should surely assume that the women are included.<sup>35</sup> In this inclusive picture the women do not need their own commissioning; they belong fully to the whole group of disciples Jesus commissions.

## 6. The women in John

John largely displaces the women from their role of witness to the empty tomb in favour of Peter and, especially, the beloved disciple. On the first of Mary Magdalene's two visits to the tomb, she sees, in the darkness, only that the stone has been removed and concludes that the body has been stolen.<sup>36</sup> It is Peter and the beloved disciple who first look inside. At this point, John's special concern to portray the beloved disciple as the perceptive witness<sup>37</sup> has displaced the role of the women, but, in a Gospel notable for its positive and vivid portraits of women as model

disciples, we can be sure that this is not a matter of gender bias. We must also notice that, unlike Matthew who explicitly excludes the women from the commissioning appearance to the apostolic group and Luke who includes them, John leaves it unclear whether women are present with the disciples on Easter Sunday evening (John 20:19-23). This means that the role of women in John's resurrection narratives is concentrated on the transitional episode: the appearance to Mary Magdalene. But this story - surely, with Luke's walk to Emmaus, one of the two most memorable of the resurrection appearance narratives - amply compensates for John's neglect of the women in the first and third elements of the threefold structure.

For all three of the evangelists who employ the threefold structure, the second unit serves in part to model the proper response of believers to the risen Lord. In Mary Magdalene's case this is seen in her recognition of the Master who calls her by her own name and in her learning that she need not cling to the physical presence of Jesus for fear of losing him again.<sup>38</sup> The effect of the brief narrative owes much to the one-to-one intimacy of the encounter, distinctive among the canonical appearance stories. It coheres with what has been called the 'individualism' of this Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Mary Magdalene is represented as one of the sheep of the good shepherd's flock depicted in the parable of chapter 10. He calls each by name and they recognize his voice, as they will not recognize a stranger (10:3-5, 14, 27). Appearing to Mary, Jesus begins to fulfil his promise that he will show himself, not to the world, but to the disciples only,<sup>40</sup> and, moreover, individually to each one who loves and obeys Jesus: 'The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love that one and show myself to that individual' (John 14:21: *ejmfanivsw aujtw/' ejmavtovn*).<sup>41</sup>

With regard to the relationship between this appearance story and the one that follows, there are two important points to be made. First, the group is probably not limited to the eleven and, moreover, one of the twelve, Thomas, is not present at the commissioning. This shows that John intends the commissioning of the disciples to be representative, not exclusive. Secondly, as in Matthew, it is clear that Mary's own commission to 'go and tell' (20:17) is not exhausted in the delivering of her message to the disciples.<sup>42</sup> But this is conveyed differently, and more emphatically, than in Matthew. In Mary's report to the disciples, what stands out are the words in first-person direct speech: 'I have seen the Lord' (20:18). This is exactly what the other disciples later say to Thomas: 'We have seen the Lord' (20:25). In Paul, this is the defining content and terminology of the apostolic witness: 'Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?' (1 Cor 9:1). John does not use the term 'apostle',<sup>43</sup> but the words of witness given first by Mary belong to the theme of seeing and believing that runs through John's resurrection narratives. John does not depreciate the seeing that is the privilege of the disciples to whom Jesus appeared. Others must believe without seeing (20:29), but in doing so are dependent on the witness of those who did see. In that sense, Mary's witness is in no sense superseded by or subordinated to that of disciples. Her confession, 'I have seen the Lord,' stands in John's Gospel because for every reader of that Gospel it goes on testifying to the reality of the risen Lord just as compellingly as the witness of the other disciples and Thomas does.

I conclude that there is no evidence to suggest that the role of the women in the resurrection stories has been depreciated or limited in the Gospel narratives of Matthew, Luke and John. Where male prejudice against their credibility is explicitly evoked (Luke 24:11), this is so that it may be decisively overturned. Where readers may bring such prejudice to the texts, even though the texts give no pretext for doing

so, again the effect of the narratives will be to refute and reverse assumptions of male priority and female unreliability. This is entirely coherent with the supposition that outsiders would find this aspect of the Christian narrative problematic, but it suggests that within the Christian communities themselves the role of the women as witnesses was highly respected. There seems to be no evidence that it became less so over time. It is one of a variety of striking aspects of early Christianity that belong to the counter-cultural nature of the Christian communities as societies in which God's eschatological overturning of social privilege was taken very seriously. This point will be supported in my last section as we look at the place of these Gospel women themselves in the early Christian movement.

## **7. The women as authoritative witnesses in the early church**

In general, I would resist the tendency of many recent scholars to see the roles which women played in the early Christian communities reflected in the roles they play in the Gospel narratives. This is a form of allegorization which reads the Gospels as texts about the early church disguised as stories about Jesus.<sup>44</sup> It neglects the extent to which the Gospels make historical distinctions between the 'then' of Jesus' ministry and the 'now' of their readers.<sup>45</sup> Any argument from the Gospels to the role women played in the Christian communities must proceed with extreme caution. But, in the case of the resurrection narratives, I think we can discern, not the roles of Christian women in general, but the role of the specific women who witnessed the empty tomb and the risen Lord. These women, I think we can say, acted as apostolic eyewitness guarantors of the traditions about Jesus, especially his resurrection but no doubt also in other respects. As we have seen, the fact that their witness acquires textual form in the Gospels implies that it can never have been regarded as superseded or unimportant. For as long as these women were alive, their witness, "We have seen the Lord," carried the authority of those the Lord himself had commissioned to witness to his resurrection. We should beware of the long-standing tendency in New Testament scholarship to envisage the oral traditions about Jesus as handed down anonymously in the early communities as though the disciples of Jesus, those who must first have told these stories and handed on these sayings, had all disappeared as soon as the early church got going. On the contrary, they were well-known figures and there were a large number of them. They surely continued to be active traditioners whose recognized eyewitness authority could act as a touchstone to guarantee the traditions as others relayed them and to protect the traditions from inauthentic developments. We should also remember that ancient historiography and historiographical theory set great store by the role of eyewitnesses. When the Gospels appear, as they sometimes do, to be naming individual eyewitnesses, indicating the presence in the stories of persons well-known by reputation if not in person to their readers, we should expect them to be relatively close to the firsthand testimony of these figures.

We can test this hypothesis in the peculiarly interesting case of the women at the tomb. The way that all the Synoptic Gospels repeatedly make them the subjects of verbs of seeing (Matt 27:55; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49, 55) shows that the Gospels are appealing to their role as eyewitnesses. They are not an anonymous group: all the Gospels name some of them, while also stating or implying that there were others (Matt 27:55; 28:1,<sup>46</sup> 6; Mark 15:41, 47; 16:6; Luke 24:10; John 20:2). The names are not the same in each Gospel, though Mary Magdalene appears in all, and Mary the mother of James and Joses appears in all three Synoptics. Comparison of the the

various lists of the named women is quite instructive (see **chart 3**). We must resist the rather common temptation to deduce from these lists that a woman named in one Gospel's list is the same person as a woman designated differently in another Gospel.<sup>47</sup> It is useful to remember that Mary was an extraordinarily popular name: about a quarter of all Palestinian Jewish women were called Mary. Any particular Mary had therefore to be distinguished in some way from others: so, among the Gospel women, we have one woman identified by reference to her sons (Mary the mother of James the little and Joses, a form of reference which is abbreviated in some of the texts), one by reference to her husband (Mary of Clopas), one by her home town (Mary of Magdala), and the mother of Jesus (whose personal name John does not use at all). These designations function precisely to distinguish the women and we entirely miss the point if we try to identify with one another the women they are designed to distinguish. The fact that the Synoptic evangelists make clear that the women they name are no more than a few of the women there were makes the divergences between their lists quite intelligible. Each had his own reasons for naming the specific women he does.

We may conclude then that, in all, there are five named women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, Salome, Joanna, and Mary of Clopas), together with two anonymous but specified women: the mother of the sons of Zebedee and the mother of Jesus.<sup>48</sup> What is of great interest in the divergences between the lists is the care they display in the naming of the women as witnesses.<sup>49</sup> Mark names three women at the cross and the same three women as those who go to the tomb, but only two of the three are said to observe the burial of Jesus. The explanation must be that in the known testimony of these three women, the two Marys were known to be witnesses of the burial but Salome was not. The same care is perhaps even more impressive in Matthew. For Matthew Salome was evidently not a well-known witness and he omits her from the lists. At the cross he substitutes the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who has appeared earlier in his narrative (Matt 20:20) and is unique to his Gospel. He does not, however, add her to the two Marys at the burial or the empty tomb, surely because she was not known as an eyewitness to these events. Matthew could so easily have used her to make up the number at the tomb but instead he is scrupulously content with the only two women well-known to him as witnesses. Luke, who names the women only at the end of his account of their visit to the tomb,<sup>50</sup> lists, besides the indispensable Mary Magdalene, Joanna, who is peculiar to his Gospel and already introduced at Luke 8:3, and the other Mary. His reference to Joanna surely indicates the distinctive source of his distinctive empty tomb story.<sup>51</sup> Like Matthew he omits Mark's Salome, but he does not simply reproduce the list of women followers of Jesus he had employed earlier in chapter 8 of his Gospel. Mary Magdalene and Joanna he knew to be witnesses of the empty tomb, but Susanna, the third name in his earlier list, he evidently did not.<sup>52</sup>

If, as I have suggested and allowing for the evangelists' freedom as storytellers, the stories of the women are substantially as the women themselves told them, then we must regard the differences between the stories as irreducible. We cannot go behind them to a supposedly original version. Nor can we dispense with the angels and reconstruct a less mythologically laden event.<sup>53</sup> These are the stories as doubtless different women told them. They are different performances of the oral traditions, and their differences are such as would have been expected and unproblematic in performances of oral tradition, no greater and no more problematic than those between the three narratives of Paul's conversion that all occur in Acts. Did Paul's

companions on the road to Damascus hear the voice that spoke to him or not (Acts 9:7; 22:9)? Did the women see one angel or two? We do not need to answer such questions in order to find their story credible.

### Chart 1: Narrative units in the oral tradition

|  | Mark             | Matt | Luke | John           | GPet | EpApp | LEMk | Others                       |
|--|------------------|------|------|----------------|------|-------|------|------------------------------|
| Guards at the tomb   |                  | √    |      |                | √    |       |      | GNaz?                        |
| Women find tomb empty  | √                | √    | √    | √              | √    | √     |      |                              |
| Men find tomb empty  |                  |      | √    | √              |      |       |      |                              |
| Appearance to women  | (√) <sup>1</sup> | √    |      | √              |      | √     | √    |                              |
| Appearance to travellers                                     |                  |      | √    |                |      |       | √    |                              |
| Appearance to James  |                  |      |      |                |      |       |      | GHeb, 1ApJas                 |
| *Appearance to disciples<br>Easter evening                   |                  |      | √    | √ <sup>2</sup> |      | √     | √    |                              |
| *Appearance to disciples<br>mountain in Galilee              |                  | √    |      |                |      |       |      |                              |
| *Appearance to disciples<br>fishing in Galilee               |                  |      |      | √              | √    |       |      |                              |
| *Appearance to disciples<br>on Mount of Olives? <sup>3</sup> |                  |      |      |                |      |       |      | Acts, ApPet,<br>GnosticGosps |
| *Ascension   |                  |      | √    |                |      | √     | √    | Acts, ApPet,<br>ApocrJas     |

Large √ = Cases where I judge the text is not dependent on an extant literary source, and so where direct dependence on oral tradition is likely. The Epistle of the Apostles and the Longer Ending of Mark seem to be retellings of the traditions which are dependent on the canonical Gospels but without immediate literary use of the texts of the canonical Gospels. (In the column 'Others' no judgment on this issue is made.)

\* = Narratives to which apostolic commissioning is usually attached.

<sup>1</sup>I think it likely that Mark derived the commission to the women to tell the disciples (16:7) from a story of Jesus' appearance to the women which he has not related.

<sup>2</sup>John has two such episodes, on Easter evening and a week later.

<sup>3</sup>It is hard to tell whether this existed as a narrative unit distinct from the Ascension.

## Chart 2: The narrative structure common to the Gospel resurrection sequences

|                          | Empty tomb<br>(double witness)  | An appearance               | An appearance with<br>apostolic commissioning                         |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Matthew                  | Opening: guards<br>Empty: women | Women (2)                   | 11 in Galilee (mountain)  |
| Luke                     | Empty: women<br>Empty: men      | Travellers (2)              | 11+ on Easter evening   |
| John                     | Empty: women<br>Empty: men      | Woman (1)                   | 10+ on Easter evening<br>(11+ a week later)<br>7 in Galilee (fishing) |
| Gospel of<br>Peter       | Exit: guards<br>Empty: women    |                             | 3 in Galilee (fishing)<br>(commissioning?)                            |
| Epistle of<br>Apostles   | Empty: women                    | Women (3)                   | 11 (immediately)  |
| Mark with<br>Long Ending | Empty: women                    | Woman (1)<br>Travellers (2) | 11 on Easter evening  |

### Women not believed: some Jewish texts

**Pseudo-Philo, LAB 9:10:** The spirit of God came upon Miriam one night, and she saw a dream and reported it to her parents in the morning, saying, "I had a vision this night, and behold a man was standing in a linen garment and he said to me, 'Go and say to your parents, "Behold the child who will be born of you will be cast forth into the water; likewise through him the water will be dried up. And I will work signs through him and save my people, and he will exercise leadership always.'"" When Miriam reported her dream, her parents did not believe her.

**Pseudo-Philo, LAB 42:1- 5:** [*Manoah and his wife Eluma quarrel over which of them is to blame for their childlessness. Eluma prays that this will be revealed to them. God sends an angel to tell her that she is the sterile one, but God will give her a son, Samson, who will be a Nazirite and deliver Israel from the Philistines. She tells Manoah what the angel had said.*] Manoah did not believe his wife, and being confused and sad he himself also went to the upper chamber and prayed and said, "Behold, am I not worthy to hear the signs and wonders that God has done among us or to see the face of his messenger?" (tr. H. Jacobson)

**Leviticus Rabbah 10:5:** [*Comment on Manoah's prayer and the angel's response in Judg 13:12-13: "Now when your words come true, what is to be the boy's rule of life; what is he to do?" The angel of the LORD said to Manoah, "Let the woman give heed to all that I said to her."*] And Manoah said: Now let thy word come. Manoah said to him: "Until now, what I have heard was from a woman, and women are not qualified to give directions nor are their words to be relied upon, *But now let thy word come*; I wish to hear from your own mouth, because I do not rely upon her words; she may have changed something while speaking, or omitted or added something.... *And the*

*angel of the Lord said unto Manoah: Of all that I said unto the woman. This he said in order to show honour to the woman and to endear her to him. (tr. J. J. Slotki)*

**Chart 3: The women named**

|   | <i>Cross</i>   | <i>Burial</i>                               | <i>Empty tomb</i>                                     |
|---|--|---|---|
| Mark  | Mary Magdalene<br>Mary mother of<br>James the little and Joses<br>Salome               | Mary Magdalene<br>Mary (mother) of<br>Joses | Mary Magdalene<br>Mary (mother) of<br>James<br>Salome |
| Matthew                                       | Mary Magdalene<br>Mary (mother) of<br>James and Joseph<br>Mother of sons of<br>Zebedee | Mary Magdalene<br>the other Mary            | Mary Magdalene<br>the other Mary                      |
| Luke  |  |   | Mary Magdalene<br>Joanna<br>Mary (mother) of<br>James |
| John  | Jesus' mother<br>His mother's sister<br>Mary (wife) of Clopas<br>Mary Magdalene        |   | Mary Magdalene  |
| Gospel of Peter                               |  |   | Mary Magdalene  |
| Epistle of the<br>Apostles<br>(Ethiopic text) |  |   | Sarah<br>Martha<br>Mary Magdalene                     |

## Chart 4: The two narrative units about the women

### A. The women find the tomb empty

|                                      | Mark | Matt | Luke | John    | GPet | EpApp |
|--------------------------------------|------|------|------|---------|------|-------|
| very early on first day <sup>√</sup> | √    | √    | √    | √Lord's |      |       |
| women go to tomb                     | √3   | √2   | √3+  | √1(+)   | √1+  | √3    |
| bring spices                         | √    |      | √    |         | (?)  | √     |
| find stone rolled away <sup>√</sup>  |      | √    | √    | √       | √    |       |
| angel rolls stone away               | √    |      |      | [√]     |      |       |
| *woman weeping                       |      |      |      |         | √    |       |
| women see angel/s                    | √1   | (√1) | √2   | √2      | √1   |       |
| angel/s tell of resurrection         | √    | √    | √    |         | √    |       |
| *angel tells to tell disciples       | √    | √    |      |         |      |       |
| women tell no one                    |      | √    |      |         |      |       |
| *women tell disciples                | (√)  | √    | √    |         |      |       |
| *disciples do not believe            |      |      | √    |         |      |       |

### B. Jesus appears to the women/woman

|                                | Mark | Matt | Luke | John | GPet   | EpApp  | LEMk |
|--------------------------------|------|------|------|------|--------|--------|------|
| Jesus appears to women         |      | √2   |      | √1   |        | √3     | √1   |
| *women weeping                 |      |      |      | √    |        | √      |      |
| non-recognition to recognition |      |      |      | √    |        |        |      |
| holding him mentioned          |      | √    |      | √    |        |        |      |
| they worship                   |      | √    |      |      |        |        |      |
| *he tells to tell disciples    |      | √    |      | √    |        | √twice |      |
| brothers                       |      | √    |      | √    |        | √your  |      |
| *women tell disciples          |      |      |      |      | √twice | √      |      |
| *disciples do not believe      |      |      |      |      |        | √twice | √    |

(\* = motifs listed in both A and B)

<sup>1</sup>E.g. G. O'Collins, *The Easter Jesus* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973) 42-43; P. Perkins, *Resurrection: New Testament Witness and Contemporary Reflection*

(London: Chapman, 1984) 94; W. J. Lunny, *The Sociology of the Resurrection* (London: SCM Press, 1989) 112; S. T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (London: SPCK, 1993) 182; S. Coakley, 'Is the Resurrection a "Historical" Event: Some Muddles and Mysteries,' in P. Avis ed., *The Resurrection of Jesus Christ* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1993) 100; B. Hebblethwaite, 'The Resurrection and the Incarnation,' in Avis ed., *The Resurrection*, 158; W. L. Craig, 'John Dominic Crossan on the Resurrection of Jesus,' in S. T. Davis, D. Kendall and G.O'Collins ed., *The Resurrection* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 259; A. J. M. Wedderburn, *Beyond Resurrection* (London: SCM Press, 1999) 57-60. Serious attempts to refute this argument are surprisingly rare. J. M. G. Barclay, 'The Resurrection in Contemporary New Testament Scholarship,' in G. D'Costa ed., *Resurrection Reconsidered* (Oxford: Oneworld, 1996) 23, comments: 'The prominence of the women is ... not as strong an argument [for the historicity of the empty tomb] as it seems, since it could arise simply from literary necessity: if Mark was working from a source which had only women as witnesses of the burial of Jesus, only they could be responsible for discovering the tomb empty.' But one would have to ask: why should any source used by Mark have been at all interested in witnesses to the burial of Jesus, unless this were treated as preliminary to the discovery of the tomb empty? Moreover, the variation between Mark's lists of women at the burial (15:47) and at the empty tomb (16:1) must be taken into account (see below). For an even less adequate response to the argument, see G. Lüdemann, *The Resurrection of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1994) 116-117.

<sup>2</sup>R. Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (tr. J. Marsh; Oxford: Blackwell, 2nd edition 1968) 290; similarly M. Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (tr. B. L. Woolf; London: Nicholson and Watson, 1934) 190. Lüdemann, *The Resurrection*, 118, concurs in this description of Mark 16:1-8.

<sup>3</sup>E.g. B. Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Carlisle: Paternoster, 300.

<sup>4</sup>E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *Discipleship of Equals* (London: SCM Press, 1993) 78; T. K. Seim, *The Double Message: Patterns of Gender in Luke-Acts* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1994) 147-163; Setzer, 'Excellent Women: Female Witness to the Resurrection,' *JBL* 116 (1997) 259-272; J. Lieu, 'The Women's Resurrection Testimony,' in S. Barton and G. Stanton ed., *Resurrection* (L. Houlden FS; London: SPCK, 1994) 34-44; A. Fehribach, *The Women in the Life of the Bridegroom: A Feminist Historical-Literary Analysis of the Female Characters in the Fourth Gospel* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1998) 163-164; Wedderburn, *Beyond Resurrection*, 58.

<sup>5</sup>For the origin of this approach in the form-critical work of Dibelius and its influence, see J. E. Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories of the Gospel Tradition* (Calwer Theologische Monographien 5; Stuttgart: Calwer, 1975) 23-24.

<sup>6</sup>See Alsup, *The Post-Resurrection Appearance Stories*, 55-61.

<sup>7</sup>I find attempts to trace the development of these traditions, prior to their incorporation in the Gospels, largely unconvincing.

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<sup>8</sup>This is also recognized, rather less precisely, by G. Theissen and A. Merz, *The Historical Jesus* (tr. J. Bowden; London: SCM Press, 1998) 495.

<sup>9</sup>The degree of verbal resemblance between Luke 24:1-9 and Mark 16:1-8 is remarkably small and quite insufficient to show literary dependence. Just because we know that Luke knew and used Mark, it does not follow that he modeled his version of this particular narrative on Mark. The enterprise, which many scholars have undertaken, of understanding Luke's alleged redaction of Mark in this passage rests on a premise that is highly questionable. The discussion of this issue by R. J. Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses to Ministers of the Word: Tradition and Composition in Luke 24* (AnBib 82; Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1978) 1-8, simply begs the question.

<sup>10</sup>The Mishna allows women to testify in certain cases: see R. G. Maccini, *Her Testimony is True: Women as Witnesses according to John* (JSNTSS 125; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996)68; T. Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1996) 163-166. Maccini, *Her Testimony*, 66-70, 95-96, 228, too easily assumes that the Mishna informs us as to the law in operation in the late Second Temple period, as does R. J. Karris, 'Women and Discipleship in Luke,' *CBQ* 56 (1994) 18-19. Ilan claims: 'The rabbis ... disqualified women as witnesses but the judicial system in Palestine of that period [the Greco-Roman period] did not operate to any extent according to the Pharisees and in fact often needed testimony from women' (228). 'Often' is vague enough to be plausible, as well as compatible with Josephus' general statement, but we should note that Josephus is a good witness, not for Pharisaic halakhah, but for the actual practice of Jewish courts.

<sup>11</sup>E.g. M. Hengel, 'Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen,' in O. Betz, M. Hengel and P. Schmidt ed., *Abraham Unser Vater* (O Michel FS; Leiden: Brill, 1963) 246; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 306; Seim, *The Double Message*, 156.

<sup>12</sup>He adds that slaves are also disqualified as witnesses: 'because of the baseness of their soul, since whether from cupidity or fear it is like[ly] that they will not attest the truth.'

<sup>13</sup>Cf., e.g., Philo, *Quaest. Gen.* 4.15.

<sup>14</sup>Maccini, *Her Testimony*, 77-82, 96, 228-229, tends to discount gender as a factor in disbelief of women whenever it is not explicit in the texts. This is too stringent a principle, since it overlooks the prevalence of gender prejudice that can be assumed without needing to be explicitly mentioned.

<sup>15</sup>Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.511-591; Plutarch, *De Pyth.* 25 (*Mor.* 407C); Fronto *apud* Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 8-9; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 34.28; Celsus *apud* Origen, *C. Cels.* 3.55; 2 Tim 3:6-7. Cf. also R. MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 1984) 39, 137 n.33; R. Shepard Kraemer, *Her Share of the Blessing: Women's Religions among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World* (New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 3, 211 n.1; M. Y. MacDonald, *Early Christian Women and Pagan Opinion: The Power of the Hysterical Woman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) 109, 123-124.

<sup>16</sup>This term is masculine (ti" a[llo").

<sup>17</sup>Translation from H. Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2nd edition 1965) 109. Celsus attributes this passage to a Jew whom Origen considers an invented figure. For the view that Celsus himself, unlike his Jew, did not make anything of the gender of the first witness to the resurrection, see G. Stanton, 'Early Objections to the Resurrection of Jesus,' in Barton and Stanton ed., *Resurrection*, 81.

<sup>18</sup>On the word pavroistro" see MacDonald, *Early Christian Women*, 2-3 and n. 7.

<sup>19</sup>C. S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999) 699, has a reference to LAB 9:10, but does not consider its implications.

<sup>20</sup>This is also the verdict of P. W. van der Horst, 'Portraits of Biblical Women in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*,' in van der Horst, *Essays on the Jewish World of Early Christianity* (NTOA 14; Freiburg: Universitätsverlag/Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1990)122.

<sup>21</sup>Other instances in Pseudo-Philo of revelation to and through women are Melcha's prophecy about Abraham (LAB 4:11) and Deborah's prophetic and teaching ministry (30; 32:14-15). C. A. Brown, *No Longer Be Silent: First Century Jewish Portraits of Biblical Women* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992) 218, thinks Pseudo-Philo also portrays Jephthah's daughter and Hannah as recipients of divine revelation.

<sup>22</sup>B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (SNTSMS 59; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 165, asks this question of Mark's narrative of the women at the tomb.

<sup>23</sup>A later occurrence of the motif is in the Gnostic Gospel of Mary 17:16-22, where Peter cannot believe that Jesus would have given revelation privately to a woman (Mary Magdalene) rather than to the male disciples.

<sup>24</sup>It is remarkable that some feminist critics take the motif of the male disciples disbelieving the women, in Luke and the Epistle of Apostles, as a denigration of the women's witness by these authors: Setzer, 'Excellent Women,' 265-266. It is perfectly clear in both cases that the women's report is true and authorized by God and that the male disciples are at fault in not believing it. In relation to Luke, Seim, *The Double Message*, 156-163, sees this clearly but in a quite contradictory way fails to follow it through. Against E. Schüssler Fiorenza's reading of Luke 24:11 as Luke's disqualification of the women as witnesses, see S. Barton, 'The Hermeneutics of the Gospel Resurrection Narratives,' in Barton and Stanton ed., *Resurrection*, 45-48, concluding: 'There are grounds for thinking ... that an adequate understanding of the resurrection is not best served by the method Fiorenza has adopted, and that feminist interests themselves may not be best served by this approach either.... The weakness of her approach is that the interests her interpretation is trying to serve lead to a very partial and tendentious reading of the tradition. It is as if the search for largely hidden androcentric forces assumed to lie beneath the surface of Luke's narrative take the place of attending in an open and sympathetic way to what lies on the surface'

(47-48). But this feminist interpretation of Luke 24:11 seems to build on pre-feminist scholarship. For example, R. H. Fuller, *The Formation of the Resurrection Narratives* (London: SPCK, 1972) 100-101, claims that the apostles' non-belief 'is intended to preserve the independence of the apostolic witness: apostles cannot come to faith as a result of the testimony of third parties. They must see and believe for themselves in order that they can provide first-hand witness.' But there is no reason at all why they should not believe the women and then also see for themselves, as they do in Matthew.

<sup>25</sup>Cf. Seim, *The Double Message*, 159: 'the tradition guaranteed by the women runs out into the sand.'

<sup>26</sup>It is therefore not correct to say that, in Matthew's resurrection narratives, 'The identity of the risen one is not a concern' (E. M. Wainwright, *Shall We Look for Another? A Feminist Rereading of the Matthean Jesus* [Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1998] 115).

<sup>27</sup>*Contra* Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 174.

<sup>28</sup>G. W. Trompf, 'The First Resurrection Appearance and the Ending of Mark's Gospel,' *NTS* 18 (1971-72) 313, 325-327; E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her* (London: SCM Press, 1983) 51, 332; F. Bovon, 'Le Privilège Pascal de Marie-Madeleine,' *NTS* 30 (1984) 51-52; Seim, *The Double Message*, 159; S. Schneiders, 'John 20.11-18: The Encounter of the Easter Jesus with Mary Magdalene - A Transformative Feminist Reading,' in F. F. Segovia ed., *"What is John?": Readers and Readings of the Fourth Gospel* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996) 160-161. The argument of G. O'Collins and D. Kendall, 'Mary Magdalene as Major Witness to Jesus' Resurrection,' *TS* 48 (1987) 631-646, is in part aimed against the view that Mary Magdalene's witness was seen as competitive with other resurrection appearance traditions.

<sup>29</sup>Many commentators, probably influenced by 1 Cor 15:5, seem to think it obvious that the appearance to Peter was the first. Fuller, *The Formation*, 112, even thinks Luke inserted the reference to Peter 'because he does not agree with the impression created by his source that the Emmaus appearance was the primary one.' If so, he made a poor job of correcting that impression. Why should not the appearance to Peter have occurred while the two travellers were on their way back from Emmaus to Jerusalem?

<sup>30</sup>The altercations between Peter and Mary Magdalene in GThom 114 and GMary 17:7-18:21 make no reference to the issue of priority in resurrection appearances, nor do the references to Mary Magdalene in Gnostic writings, catalogued by Bovon, 'Le Privilège,' 53-56 (and see chapter below). These references are interesting in the regard for this disciple and her symbolic value for Gnostic groups, but they do not demonstrate that this was linked to controversy about whether the resurrection appearance to her preceded that to Peter.

<sup>31</sup>For the literature on this topic, see Karris, 'Women,' 10-12. I leave aside here the debated issue of whether the women are present at the last supper as Luke depicts it.

<sup>32</sup>I differ from C. Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others* (tr. P. Burns; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 50-61, who thinks that both the twelve and the women are distinguished from those Luke calls 'his/the disciples,' and that the twelve and the women are closer to Jesus than the disciples.

<sup>33</sup>In verse 10, the recipients of the women's message become 'the apostles' (in Luke's terminology, the eleven), perhaps in order to heighten the effect of their refusal to believe the women (v 11). Not only as men but also as apostles, they assume that such a revelation should have been given to them, not to the women.

<sup>34</sup>The omission of *ejx hJmw'n* may be tendentious: the scribe wished to distance the women from the group of male disciples.

<sup>35</sup>Scholars who recognize this include Dillon, *From Eye-Witnesses*, 8-9, 53-55; 291; Perkins, *Resurrection*, 167; Karris, 'Women,' 17; J. B. Green, *The Gospel of Luke* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997) 850. J. Plevnik, "'The Eleven and Those with Them" According to Luke,' *CBQ* 40 (1978) 205-211, discusses the two phrases in 24:9 and 24:33 (he does not comment on 24:13, 22), and argues that Luke is preparing for the election of a replacement of Judas in Acts 1:15-26 and therefore making clear that there were others besides the eleven who fulfilled the condition of apostleship (Acts 1:21-22: 'the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up'). But, despite Luke's emphasis on the special role of the twelve in the early church, his interest in 'those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses' (Luke 1:2) is not limited to the twelve, as his references to the women (in Luke 8:2-3; Acts 1:14, as well as in the passion and resurrection narratives) show. The women fulfil the qualifications for apostleship, as Luke uses that term, confining it to the twelve, except that they are female. Moreover, I do not think we should read Luke 24 (or any part of the Gospel) only retrospectively with the narrative of Acts in view. The beginning of Acts re-focuses Luke's understanding of the resurrection appearances with his particular concerns as he embarks on the narrative of the early church in view; it does not follow that Luke 24 must have precisely the same focus and concerns.

<sup>36</sup>This is hardly an 'apostolic role' of witness to the empty tomb, *pace* M. Scott, *Sophia and the Johannine Jesus* (JSNTSS 71; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992) 225, 228.

<sup>37</sup>See R. Bauckham,

<sup>38</sup>20.17 is, of course, an interpretative crux which has been extensively discussed and debated. We cannot enter that discussion here.

<sup>39</sup>C. F. D Moule, 'The individualism of the Fourth Gospel,' in Moule, *Essays in New Testament Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 91-109.

<sup>40</sup>Setzer, 'Excellent Women,' 268, claims that John does not consider Mary Magdalene a disciple because 21:14 counts only three appearances 'to the disciples.' It is surely obvious that only appearances to a group of disciples (plural) are being counted.

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<sup>41</sup>It is unfortunate that the NRSV, in order to avoid gendered pronouns, turns the singulars of verses 21, 23-24, into plurals, obscuring the striking and deliberate individualism of these verses.

<sup>42</sup>*Contra* Lieu, 'The Women's,' 39.

<sup>43</sup>ajpovstolo" occurs only in John 13:16, where the use is non-technical.

<sup>44</sup>I agree with Karris, 'Women,' 4; see also R. Bauckham ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1998).

<sup>45</sup>E. E. Lemcio, *The Past of Jesus in the Gospels* (SNTSMS 68; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

<sup>46</sup>W. Carter, "'To see the tomb": Matthew's Women at the Tomb,' ExpT 107 (1996) 201-205, argues that Matt 28:1 indicates that the women are not mere witnesses, but 'those who understand and trust Jesus' teaching enough to wait expectantly for his resurrection' (205). We might take this to mean that the women are *perceptive* witnesses, who understand the significance of what they witness, as the beloved disciple does in the Fourth Gospel. But I am not convinced the evidence really supports this interpretation of Matt 28:1. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches*, 171, following F. Neiryneck, understands Matt 28:1 as a kind of title for the story that follows and not as describing the women's motive in going to the tomb: 'The Evangelist is suggesting that, seen from the point of view of God's providential plan., the women come "to witness" the empty tomb and go forth to witness about it, whatever their original intentions might have been.'

<sup>47</sup>Probably the most extensive recent examples of this practice is J. Wenham, *Easter Enigma* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984) chapter 3.

<sup>48</sup>Jesus' mother's sister (John 19:25) is probably not a fourth woman in John's group, but a description of Mary of Clopas: see chapter

<sup>49</sup>It is odd to find feminist critics acquiescing in the general neglect of the women other than Mary Magdalene by making the divergences between the Gospels grounds simply for dismissing these women from consideration without further attention: Setzer, 'Excellent Women,' 260-261; cf. Lieu, 'The Women's,' 42.

<sup>50</sup>This may be so that the naming of Mary Magdalene and Joanna can function as an *inclusio* with 8:2-3, reminding readers that the women have accompanied Jesus and his story from early in the Galilean ministry until the resurrection.

<sup>51</sup>Similarly Luke's naming of Cleopas (Luke 24:18) may well indicate the eyewitness source of the Emmaus story.

<sup>52</sup>It is tempting to conjecture that each evangelist's story or stories involving the women derives from a different woman, thus: Salome - Mark, Mary the mother of James - Matthew, Joanna - Luke, Mary Magdalene - John. But this is too speculative.

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<sup>53</sup>The claim that John 20:1-2 preserves the earliest form of the story of the visit of the women to the tomb (e.g. Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 304-305) is untenable, because analysis of the narrative units show that John has adapted a single traditional unit in 20:1-2, 11-13, inserting another such unit (20:3-10) within it.