

Cambridge University Press

0521433827 - The Old English Lives of St. Margaret - Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis

Excerpt

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Introduction

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The legend of St Margaret of Antioch

Although Margaret of Antioch, virgin and martyr, came to be one of the most widely celebrated of saints in the medieval period, nothing certain is known about the origin and development of her legend.¹ In the eastern church the name of the saint appears not as Margaret but as Marina. Some early Latin accounts preserve the Greek name Marina, but from the ninth century onwards this was being systematically changed in the West to Margarita or Margareta. According to the legend itself, the martyrdom of Marina/Margaret took place at Antioch (in Pisidia), but there are no records of her in accounts of persecution at Antioch, nor is there evidence for an early cult. Her martyrdom is traditionally associated with the persecution under Diocletian and Maximian (AD 305–13), though the mainstream versions of the story show no interest in placing it in a specific historical context.² The lack of any evidence for early devotion to Marina/Margaret, or even for her existence, coupled with the sensationalism of aspects of the story itself, led eventually to the Vatican's suppression of the cult of St Margaret in 1969.

As shown below, literary evidence for the veneration of St Marina/Margaret dates from only the end of the eighth century and later. From this

¹ See ASS, Iul. V, 30E–31B; Tammi, *Due versioni*, pp. 9–20; Sauger, 'Marina (Margherita)', cols. 1150–2.

² The Rebdorf version, however, printed in ASS, begins, 'Annorum ab Incarnatione Domini salvatoris fere ducentorum nonaginta circulus volvebatur, quando Dioclitianus, Dalmatae scribae filius, dominatu crudelissimo Romani imperii retinebat habenas . . .' (ASS, Iul. V, 34D). Tammi notes the opinion of C. Baronius (*Martyrologium*, 4th ed. (Rome, 1630), p. 352), that the martyrdom should be associated with the persecution of Julian the Apostate (361–3), but Tammi himself, like most scholars, favours the earlier setting (*Due versioni*, pp. 16–17).

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period on, however, the saint features increasingly in martyrologies and legends. Margaret becomes especially popular in the West from the twelfth century,³ from which time she comes to be regarded as the patron saint of childbirth, a notion which, unsurprisingly, does not appear in our early medieval texts. Margaret's position in later medieval popular piety is indicated by her being included as one of the 'Fourteen Holy Helpers'. She is also one of the saints whose voices Joan of Arc is supposed to have heard. From the earliest period unease was felt about the more extravagant features of the legend,⁴ but these, particularly the saint's struggle in her prison cell with a dragon-demon, also contributed to the popularity of the legend: the presence of the dragon-demon is a definitive feature of iconographic representations of St Margaret.⁵

The following is a brief outline of the legend of Marina/Margaret, as it appears in the earliest and most influential of the Greek and Latin versions. Marina/Margaret was the daughter of the chief pagan priest at Antioch, whose name was Aedesius (in the Greek tradition),⁶ or Theodosius (in most Latin versions and their derivatives).⁷ She was filled with the Holy Spirit from an early age and was brought up by a fostermother in a city fifteen stades from Antioch. After the death of her mother she was loved all the more by her fostermother, but she was hated by her pagan father. At the age of fifteen Marina/Margaret was looking after the sheep of her fostermother one day when the prefect Olibrius rode by on his mission of persecuting Christians. He saw the girl and immediately desired her. He wished to have her as his wife if she were free-born or as his concubine if a

³ See Mack, *Sainte Marberete*, pp. x–xii.

⁴ The tenth-century Greek hagiographer Metaphrastes, as transmitted in the Renaissance Latin version of Surius, was highly sceptical of the sensational and supernatural details of the story, regarding them as malicious interpolations (Surius, *Vitae Sanctorum* III, 248). Among western writers, Jacobus a Voragine was notably scornful of the episode of Margaret being swallowed by a dragon: 'istud autem, quod dicitur de draconis devoratione et crepatione, apocryphum et frivolum reputatur' (*Legenda Aurea*, ed. Graesse, p. 402). As noted below (pp. 54–5), the *Old English Martyrology* version is among those which show reticence in its treatment of the legend, omitting all mention of the episode with the dragon. The Rebdorf writer 'has striven to correct' (*corrigere studui*) the passion of St Margaret (ASS, Iul. V, 34B) and presents a restrained account.

⁵ See Celletti, 'Marina (Margherita): Iconografia'.

⁶ Also in the Rebdorf version: see ASS, Iul. V, 34F.

⁷ The Turin version, discussed below (pp. 9–13), has 'Themistius'.

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slave. On discovering that she was a Christian, angrily he had her thrown into prison while he determined how to destroy her chastity.

The following day Marina/Margaret was put on trial before Olibrius. She refused to repudiate her faith and was scourged with canes. Her torture moved the bystanders to pity but she still refused to give in, fearlessly denouncing her persecutor. After further torture she remained as resolute as ever, and so was consigned to prison for a second night.

It was at this point that the saint had her celebrated struggles with demons. She prayed that she might see the enemy who contended against her. Immediately a demon appeared in the form of a terrifying dragon and swallowed her up. She made the sign of the cross, however, which caused the dragon to burst apart, allowing her to escape unharmed. Then she saw another demon, in the form of a black man. Unperturbed, and fortified by the miraculous appearance of the cross of Christ and of a heavenly dove, she engaged in a long interrogation of this demon, finally dismissing him into the earth.

The next day Marina/Margaret was again brought before Olibrius and again refused to give in to him. She was tortured with burning torches and by being bound and immersed in a large vessel of water. But as she prayed in this vessel an earthquake took place and a heavenly dove appeared, and the saint, her fetters loosed, emerged triumphantly from the water. A multitude of people was converted to Christianity through this miracle and they were martyred for their faith.

It was then time for the saint's own execution. Before her death her executioner (whose name is given as Malchus in a number of versions of the legend) allowed her time to pray. She prayed that those who venerate her memory in particular ways might be freed from their sins and that no physically impaired child be born in their house. Immediately after this prayer the heavenly dove again appeared and made a speech solemnly granting the saint's request.

After a final prayer Marina/Margaret was ready for her execution. At first the executioner refused to kill her but she insisted that he must, and she was beheaded. The executioner fell at her side. After the saint's death many ill and physically impaired people were healed by touching her body. Her head (or, in variant accounts, her body, or soul) was borne heavenwards by chanting angels, while devils were tormented by her glorification.

This narrative appears in the influential Greek *passio* designated by the

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Bollandists *Passio a Theotimo*,⁸ which purports to be the composition of an eyewitness to the saint's martyrdom, a Christian writer called Theotimus. The *Passio a Theotimo* is the oldest of the considerable number of extant Greek versions of the legend.⁹ It exists in three distinct recensions,¹⁰ the first of which, *BHG* no. 1165, is also of key significance to the study of western versions of the legend. Manuscript evidence for this Greek version is from the later ninth century and after. A text of *BHG* no. 1165 was printed by Hermann Usener in 1886 from a manuscript of the end of the ninth century.¹¹

It has been suggested that *BHG* no. 1165 dates from the first half of the ninth century and this version has been associated particularly with the name of Methodius.¹² Even if this ascription is correct, it is clear that a highly developed older Greek tradition of the *Passio a Theotimo* lies behind the existing Greek texts and that the 'Methodius' version itself represents a subdivision of this tradition. It is from this older Greek tradition that the major Latin versions of the legend, discussed below, derive. Although the Greek text edited by Usener does not reflect exactly the direct source of any of the Latin versions (the earliest of which survives in a copy of the late eighth century), this text can be shown, by means of comparative study, to be similar to the older Greek tradition in many ways, and so it provides considerable assistance in tracing the literary development of the legend.

The date of the composition of the original *Passio a Theotimo* remains unknown. Whatever the specific origin of the legend, however, the story of St Margaret clearly follows the classic form of the passion of the virgin martyr. It is composed of familiar narrative elements, portraying threats to the saint's chastity, heroic defiance before a hostile judge and assured perseverance in the face of torture, and it ends, typically, with the saint's execution by a single clean sword-blow. In its interlude of verbal contest with demons the legend particularly resembles the passion of St Juliana.

⁸ *BHG* II, 84–5.

⁹ As well as the three recensions of the *Passio a Theotimo*, Tammi lists seven other Greek versions (*Due versioni*, pp. 31–44).

¹⁰ *BHG* nos. 1165–7c.

¹¹ Paris, BN, gr. 1470; ed. Usener, 'Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori', pp. 15–46. There is an Italian translation of Usener's text in Tammi, *Due versioni*, pp. 33–42.

¹² See Usener, 'Acta S. Marinae et S. Christophori', pp. 4–5; Tammi, *Due versioni*, p. 32.

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The Latin versions of the legend

The transmission of the legend of St Margaret in the West can be traced back at least as far as the late eighth century, the date of the earliest extant Latin manuscript containing a version of her *passio*. Among the Latin versions there exist several which derive from the Greek *Passio a Theotimo* discussed in the previous chapter. The Latin versions deriving from this Greek source are classified in the *Bibliotheca Hagiographica Latina* as subdivisions of 'Version 1' of the *passio*.¹ The most widespread and influential member of this group is that listed as *BHL* no. 5303, 'Version 1 (a)'. As well as existing in a large number of manuscripts of widely differing date and provenance, *BHL* no. 5303 is also the source of a substantial number of vernacular adaptations and paraphrases, including at least one of those composed in Old English (the CCC version). Variation between the texts identified as belonging to Version 1 is such as to suggest that *BHL* no. 5303 does not represent the original form of the translation from the Greek, but has been somewhat revised and adapted from an existing Latin version (evidence for this appears in other Latin texts and in vernacular derivatives); it also seems likely that not all variants classified under Version 1 go back to the same translation of the Greek.

BHL NO. 5303: THE MOMBRIUS VERSION

The earliest known manuscripts of *BHL* no. 5303 date from the ninth century. They are Karlsruhe, Badische Landesbibliothek, Augiensis perg. 32 (Aug), which was written by the scribe Reginbert of Reichenau before

¹ *BHL* II, 787; Suppl., p. 210.

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846;² Saint-Omer, Bibl. mun., 202 (O);³ a second Saint-Omer manuscript, Bibl. mun., 257, a fragmentary copy, containing less than half of the text;⁴ Reims, Bibl. mun., 1395 (K. 784), a manuscript which also has a copy of a different version of the legend under the name Marina;⁵ and Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, 649, an incomplete text.⁶ Two tenth-century manuscripts are also of special note: Paris, BN, lat. 5574 (P), a manuscript of Anglo-Saxon origin;⁷ and Paris, BN, lat. 17002 (N),⁸ in which the closing part of the narrative is much abbreviated. There is a copy of this *passio* in London, BL, Cotton Nero E. i, which has been assumed to be from the eleventh century,⁹ but the Margaret text in this manuscript is a later addition.¹⁰ There are printed editions of *BHL* no. 5303 in Mombricitius's *Sanctuarium* (M) and in the works of a number of nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars, Assmann (As), Piper (Pip), Gerould, Francis and Mack.¹¹ Mack compares a number of later manu-

² 55v–59v. See Holder, *Die Reichenauer Handschriften*, I, 118 and 648–9.

³ 13r–20r. The date and location are given by Cross, 'St Marina', based on discussion with Bernhard Bischoff. See also Bollandists, 'Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum bibliothecae publicae Audomaropolitanae', p. 244. On this manuscript, which contains some Old English words in eleventh-century hands, see below, p. 192.

⁴ 12v–14v, 165r–166v. See Bollandists, 'Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum bibliothecae publicae Audomaropolitanae', p. 246. Cross, 'St Marina', speaks of a different phraseology in this version, but the differences are no greater than between other copies of *BHL* no. 5303.

⁵ See Loriquet, *Catalogue Général* XXXIX.2, 541. The Margaret text is heavily abbreviated, especially in speeches. On the Marina version, see below, pp. 9–10, n. 17.

⁶ 228v–229v. See Academia Caesarea Vindobonensis, *Tabulae codicum manu scriptorum* I, 112.

⁷ 18r–32r. See Avril and Stirnemann, *Manuscripts enluminés*, p. 11; Bollandists, *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum* II, 482–3. On this manuscript, see below, pp. 95–6 and 191–2.

⁸ 7r–11r. See Bollandists, *Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum* III, 364–76. This text is printed by Francis, in her edition *Wace: la vie de sainte Marguerite* (parallel with French text).

⁹ Mack, *Sainte Marherete*, p. xxv.

¹⁰ On this manuscript, see P. H. Zettel, 'Ælfric's Hagiographic Sources and the Latin Legendary Preserved in BL MS Cotton Nero E. i + CCC MS 9 and Other Manuscripts' (unpubl. DPhil dissertation, Oxford Univ., 1979) and 'Saints' Lives in Old English: Latin Manuscripts and Vernacular Accounts: Ælfric', *Peritia* 1 (1982), 17–37.

¹¹ *Sanctuarium*, ed. Mombricitius II, 190–6; *Angelsächsische Homilien und Heiligenleben*, ed. Assmann, pp. 208–20 (an edition of the eleventh-century manuscript, London, BL, Harley 5372, fols. 1–34); *Nachträge zur älteren deutschen Litteratur*, ed. Piper, pp. 334–46

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scripts of *BHL* no. 5303, and other later manuscripts are listed by Joly.¹² Version 1 (a) is often referred to as the 'Mombritius version' and it will be convenient to use this title in the present study. This version is discussed further in ch. 3.

THE TURIN VERSION

Among manuscripts catalogued as containing copies of *BHL* no. 5303 is a number which in fact preserves texts of a different Latin version, as yet unedited. J. E. Cross¹³ has demonstrated the separateness from the Mombritius version of the version found in the following manuscripts: Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale, D. V. 3, 'saec. VIII ex., written in north-east France, probably at Corbie or some neighbouring centre' (T);¹⁴ Montpellier, Bibliothèque de l'Université (École de Médecine) H 55, 'saec. IX in., probably Metz' (this manuscript contains two witnesses, one (Mp) almost complete but deficient at the beginning, omitting some 200 words found in the other manuscripts listed here, the other (H) a fragment of only one leaf);¹⁵ Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, 95, 'in the school of Archdeacon Pacificus, died 844 A.D.' (Vr);¹⁶ Reims, Bibl. mun., 1395 (K. 784), 'saec. IX med., Reims' (Rm);¹⁷ Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbiblio-

(an edition of the fourteenth-century manuscript, Muri-Gries 4, 45v–77r); Gerould, 'A New Text of the *Passio S. Margaritae*', pp. 527–36 (an edition of a fourteenth-century manuscript in the possession of F. J. Mather); *Wace: la vie de sainte Marguerite*, ed. Francis (BN 17002: see above, n. 8); *Sainte Marberete*, ed. Mack, pp. 127–42 (an edition of BL, Harley 2801, 63r–65r, dated c. 1200).

¹² Joly, *La vie de sainte Marguerite*, p. 14, with quotations, pp. 131–41.

¹³ Cross, 'St Marina'; on early Latin texts of the *passio*, see also Siegmund, *Die Überlieferung*, p. 240.

¹⁴ 220r–229r. The dating and location are by Lowe, *Codices Latini Antiquiores* IV, no. 446.

¹⁵ 118r–122v; 222rv. On this manuscript, see Moretus, 'Catalogus codicum hagiographicorum latinorum bibliothecae scholae medicinae in universitate Montepessulanensi', pp. 251–4. The date and location are given by Cross, 'St Marina', based on discussion with Bernhard Bischoff.

¹⁶ 162v–173v. The ascription is by Cross, 'St Marina'. See also G. Turrini, *Indice dei codici Capitolari di Verona* (Verona, 1965), p. 18. The script is discussed by T. Venturini, *Ricerche paleografiche intorno all'arcidiacono Pacifico di Verona* (Verona, 1929), pp. 111–13.

¹⁷ 79v–89r. See Lorient, *Catalogue Général* XXXIX.2, 541. This manuscript was noted above as also containing a copy of *BHL* no. 5303 (see p. 8). The Marina text is distinguished by the presence of a major lacuna, omitting much of the speech of

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theke, 377, 'saec. XI' (W).¹⁸ Because of the place of preservation of its oldest manuscript this newly-identified version may be referred to as the 'Turin version'.

There is no evidence for knowledge of this Turin version in Anglo-Saxon England, but it is relevant to discuss it briefly in the context of the wider picture of the reception and transmission of Margaret material in the early medieval West. Cross plausibly suggests that this version represents an independent Latin translation of a Greek original similar to that lying behind the Mombritius version.¹⁹ The similarity of the opening of the Turin version to that of *BHL* no. 5303 had deceived library cataloguers into assuming that they were dealing with a variant of the same text. The Turin version begins, 'Post resurrectionem inlustrem domini nostri Iesu Christi et saluatoris et gloriosam ascensionem eius in caelis ad patrem, postquam acceperunt beati apostoli singuli coronas suas et adsumpti sunt de hoc saeculo, et alia magna multitudo sanctorum certaret per uirtutem crucis et uincere malignum et coronari . . .'²⁰

The Turin version, which preserves the Greek name Marina for the saint (though revisers have carefully corrected this to Margarita in Vr and Mp), closely follows the course of the narrative as reflected in the Mombritius version, and there is sometimes striking agreement even in the choice of

confession by the black demon (corresponding to *BHL* no. 5303, chs. 16–17). In the other copies of the Turin version, this speech is more expansive than in the Mombritius version.

¹⁸ 255r–260v. See Academia Caesarea Vindobonensis, *Tabulae codicum manu scriptorum* I, 58; Levison, 'Conspectus codicum hagiographicorum', pp. 697–8.

¹⁹ Cross, 'St Marina'.

²⁰ Vr, 162v: quotations from this version are here, as throughout (unless it is specified otherwise), taken from Vr. Vr is of a later date than T but presents a less corrupt text: 'After the illustrious Resurrection of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and his glorious Ascension to the Father in heaven, after the blessed apostles each received their crowns and were taken up out of this world, and many another great multitude of saints battled through the power of the cross both to defeat the wicked one and to be crowned. . . .'

Cf. *BHL* no. 5303, as printed by Mombritius (with omissions supplied here from As): 'Post resurrectionem Domini nostri Iesu Christi et gloriosae tempus ascensionis eius in caelum ad Patrem omnipotentem, in illius nomine multi martyres passi sunt, et apostoli coronati sunt, et innumerabiles sancti facti sunt in nomine Domini nostri Iesu Christi, et [uicerunt] hunc mundum [et] tyrannos et carnifices superauerunt' (M, p. 190, lines 16–19). On the beginning of P, see below, p. 220, nn. 1–3.

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words.²¹ Such close verbal correspondence is unusual, however, and even when the content of the two versions is very similar, as in the opening lines, quoted above, the Turin version for the most part maintains a distinctive phraseology.

The course of the narrative in the Turin version indeed might be described as running parallel to, rather than exactly coinciding with, that of the Mombritius version. Speeches and prayers show considerable differences in content and internal organization, and there are some speeches and prayers in the Turin version which do not appear in the Mombritius version at all: the exchange between the saint and the heavenly dove, for example, prior to her inquisition of the black demon in the prison cell, is rhapsodically developed at greater length in the Turin version.²² Generally, the Turin version cultivates an ecstatic and heightened tone, particularly in the prayers of St Marina and in the heavenly responses to these prayers: in one speech, the details of which are not reflected in the Mombritius version, the dove exclaims, 'Haue Margarita quae draconem adlisisti. Haue Margarita quae molas eius contriuisisti. Haue Margarita unguenta suauitatis per orationes referens. Parata est tibi corona gloriae; apertus est tibi paradysus. Tu eris cum patribus requiescens; tu quem occidisti per fidem adligabis usque in finem.'²³

There are many local details in the Turin version unparalleled in Mombritius.²⁴ Among the parts of the Turin version which show the most

²¹ For example, after the opening, just quoted, Vr continues, 'adhuc enim obtinebat insania hominum' (162v), closely paralleling M, 'Adhuc tamen obtinebat insania hominum' (p. 190, lines 19–20), but immediately thereafter the two versions begin to diverge greatly.

²² Vr. 169r.

²³ Vr, 169r: 'Hail, Margaret, who have smashed the dragon. Hail, Margaret, who have ground him down. Hail, Margaret, restoring through prayers the ointments of sweetness. A crown of glory is prepared for you; paradise is open for you. You will be in repose with the patriarchs; you will bind for ever him whom you have killed through your faith.'

²⁴ An interesting example of this is the comparison, in the Turin version, of Marina to the Old Testament figure Rachel, as she tends her fostermother's sheep: 'Et ipsa cum pascentibus puellis inmitabatur nouam Rachel antequam matrem Ioseph' (Vr, 163v). This reflects the Greek, ἐξωμοιοῦτο τῇ μητρὶ τοῦ μακαρίου Ἰωσήφ (Us, 133r, line 9). The comparison is found in the Latin 'Paris' and 'Rebdorf' versions discussed below (for 'Paris', see Orywall, *Die alt- und mittelfranzösische Prosafassungen der Margaretenlegende*, p. 182,