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MATERNITY AND FAITH IN THE COPENHAGEN  
BOHUN WOMEN SAINTS' LIVES

(Royal Library, Ms Thott 517 4°)

BY

MARINA VIDAS

Ms Thott 517 4° is a small illuminated fourteenth-century English manuscript (176 × 130 mm.), which principally contains three texts each dealing with the life of a female saint: the Passing of the Virgin Mary, ff. 1r–10v, the Life and Passion of Saint Margaret, ff. 10v–22v and the Apostolic and Eremitic Life of Mary Magdalene, ff. 22v–38r.<sup>1</sup> Its primary decoration consists of three superb six-line historiated initials placed at the beginning of each of the works representing the saint

<sup>1</sup> This article is offered as a sequel to the one I earlier published in this journal, Marina Vidas: Representation and Reception: Women in the Copenhagen Bohun Hours (Royal Library, Ms Thott 547 4°). *Fund og Forskning i Det Kongelige Biblioteks Samlinger*, 50, 2011, p. 77–126, and presents some of the research which is currently in preparation to appear in my forthcoming book about the Copenhagen Bohun Manuscripts. I am deeply grateful to Kathryn A. Smith and Keith Busby for their comments and to Jonathan J.G. Alexander for his encouragement. I would also like to express my gratitude to Ivan Boserup and Anders Toftgaard for their assistance with the Latin and Anglo Norman French transcriptions and English translations that appear in this publication. For financial support for my project I acknowledge the generous grants by the Danish National Endowment for the Humanities, the Novo Nordisk Foundation and the Carlsberg Foundation. I am also greatly indebted to the Royal Library, Copenhagen, where I worked on my forthcoming book, and, especially, the generosity of Erland Kolding Nielsen and John T. Lauridsen. I would also like to thank Lucy Freeman Sandler who shortly after a chance meeting in 2007 at the British Library, London, where I was doing research on the two Copenhagen Bohun manuscripts, kindly sent me her then unpublished contribution to Nigel Morgan's festschrift about Ms Thott 517 4°. I have profited from reading it and on those occasions where I have drawn on information in her essay and of which I was previously unaware I have footnoted her now published article, Lucy Freeman Sandler: Mary de Bohun's 'Livret de saintes' in Copenhagen. Julian M. Luxford and M.A. Michael (eds.): *Tributes to Nigel Morgan: Contexts of Medieval Art: Images, Objects & Ideas*, Turnhout 2010, p. 65–76.

whose life is narrated in the text.<sup>2</sup> The manuscript is further embellished with attractive four-sided and partial rectilinear borders, finely painted, three- and one-line decorative initials as well as abstract and vegetal line endings. Although it shares many common features with Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup> (Copenhagen, Royal Library), a devotional manuscript made for a daughter of Humphrey de Bohun, the seventh Earl of Hereford, sixth Earl of Essex and second Earl of Northampton (1342–1373), there are also differences between the two manuscripts.<sup>3</sup> While Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup> has an elaborate pictorial program, Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is more sparsely decorated. Unlike Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, it does not contain any *bas-de-pages*, *haut-de-pages*, marginalia or heraldry, nor does it include a portrait of its intended reader.

The Copenhagen book containing the three legends was illuminated in a very distinctive style associated with two artists working in the employment of the Bohun family.<sup>4</sup> In the opinion of two eminent contemporary scholars of the Bohun family manuscripts, Lynda Dennison and Lucy Freeman Sandler, Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> was executed after the death of Humphrey de Bohun. Dennison judges it to have been made c. 1380–1384 while Sandler dates it 1380–1394.<sup>5</sup> Although a number of authors posited that both Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup> and Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> were brought to Scandinavia by Mary de Bohun's daughter, Philippa, Queen of Denmark, Norway and Sweden (1394–1430), the research I did in 2006 on these manuscripts revealed no evidence of the manuscripts being in Denmark before they entered the collection of the Danish nobleman, Count Otto Thott (1703–1785) in the eighteenth century. An important clue to the manuscripts' provenance,

<sup>2</sup> A digital facsimile of the manuscript can be accessed at <[www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/75/dan/](http://www.kb.dk/permalink/2006/manus/75/dan/)>

<sup>3</sup> C. Bruun: *De illuminerede Haandskrifter fra Middelalderen i Det store kongelige Bibliotek. Aarsberetninger og Meddelelser fra Det store kongelige Bibliotek*, 1870–1902, p. 192–196 was the first to conclude that the two Copenhagen manuscripts were executed in the same manner and produced in the same atelier. For some of the notable differences between the two manuscripts, see Lynda Dennison: *The Stylistic Sources, Dating and Development of the Bohun Workshop*, Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1988, 165–175.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of the style of these artists, see Lucy Freeman Sandler: *Gothic Manuscripts 1285–1385*, 2, 1986, p. 155–163; Amanda Simpson: *The Connections between English and Bohemian Painting during the Second Half of the Fourteenth Century*, New York 1984; Dennison 1988; and Lucy Freeman Sandler, *The Lichenthal Psalter and the Manuscript Patronage of the Bohun Family*, London 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See Dennison 1988, p. 173–174; and Sandler 2004, p. 164, respectively.

I then believed, was their bindings.<sup>6</sup> This hunch proved to be right. Mirjam M. Foot who studied the bindings of the Copenhagen Bohun manuscripts has recently shown that before Count Thott they were owned by the Hague magistrate Samuel van Huls (1655–1734) and therefore had not been in Scandinavia since the fifteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

This latest research, however, does not entirely rule out that Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup> and Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> may have been owned by Philippa's mother, Mary de Bohun. I will argue in this publication that there are a number of reasons that suggest that the manuscript was intended for a female reader, probably one of the close female relatives of Humphrey de Bohun, the last direct male descendent of the house of Bohun, Earls of Hereford, Essex, and Northampton – his wife, Joan (1347–1419), or one of his two daughters, Eleanor (1367–1399), who married Thomas of Woodstock, Edward III's youngest son, in 1376 or Mary (1370–1394), who in 1381 wed the king's grandson, Henry of Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV.

In this article I first present and analyze each of the texts in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>. Then the principal illuminations in the manuscript – the three six-line historiated initials and the three-line initials – are described and examined. Next, I discuss similarities between the illuminations as well as common themes in the three texts. I argue that for the intended audience of the manuscript all three saints must have held some significance. I also suggest that Saint Margaret, who is represented twice in the manuscript, to whom petitionary prayers were addressed, and whose life was probably translated into Anglo-Norman French from Latin for Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, was singled out for special emphasis. Finally, the identity of the intended reader of the manuscript is explored.

<sup>6</sup> I communicated the aforementioned observations in 2007 to Prof. Sandler and she has kindly acknowledged my comments about the bindings in Lucy Freeman Sandler: *One Hundred and Fifty Years of the Study of the Illuminated Book in England The Bohun Manuscripts from the Nineteenth Century to the Present*. Colum Hourihane (ed.): *Art and Thought in the Later Medieval Period: Essays in Honor of Willibald Sauerländer*, University Park 2011, p. 252.

<sup>7</sup> Mirjam M. Foot: *An Eighteenth-Century Dutch Patron of Bookbinding*. *Quaerendo*, 41, 2011, p. 204.

### A. *The Texts*

The texts in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, written by one scribe are primarily three Anglo–Norman French works composed by different authors, recounting episodes from the life and afterlife of three of the most popular female saints in England at that time—Mary, Christ’s mother, Margaret, the virgin martyr, and the Magdalene, the repentant harlot. One of the lives, that of Saint Margaret, is followed by an antiphon, a versicle, and a prayer, naming her.

Dennison and, more recently, Sandler have both convincingly argued that Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> was made as an independent volume and is not a fragment, as some earlier studies have postulated.<sup>8</sup> Medieval books of small size, containing hagiographic biography, concerning a single saint or, occasionally, two or three saints, were most often written in Latin and produced between 950–1200 for abbeys.<sup>9</sup> Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is a different kind of little book (*libellus*) of saints’ lives, one designed for one or more members of a household. English illuminated manuscripts of this format containing a few select lives and for this kind of readership are not all together common.<sup>10</sup>

The works selected for the Copenhagen manuscript are of the type found in large hagiographic collections. Two of the texts, the *Transitus mariae* and the life of Mary Magdalene, are represented in an unillustrated manuscript (London, British Library, MS Additional 6524) containing fifty legends in Anglo–Norman French copied in England around the end of the thirteenth century or in the early fourteenth century.<sup>11</sup> The third text, the Anglo–Norman translation of the life of Saint Margaret, is preserved only in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>. It is, therefore, possible that

<sup>8</sup> Dennison 1988, p. 173–174; Sandler 2004, p.126; and Sandler 2010, 65.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion of these manuscripts, see Francis Wormald: *Some Illustrated Manuscripts of the Lives of Saints*. *Bulletin of the John Rylands Library*, 35, 1952, p. 248–266.

<sup>10</sup> An example of a book of small size, written in the vernacular and made for a specific group of readers is the so-called Katherine Group, a collection of five thirteenth-century Middle English texts, including three lives of female saints. See Jocelyn Wogan-Browne: *Saints’ Lives and Women’s Literary Culture, 1150–1300: Virginité and its Authorizations*, Oxford and New York 2001, p. 6.

<sup>11</sup> For the English origins and date of MS Additional 6524, see Jacques Lemaire: *Édition de quelques vies de saints d’après le texte des manuscrits Bruxelles, B.R., 10236, Paris, B.N. nouv. acq. franç. 10128, Paris, Bibl. Sainte Geneviève, 588, Londres, B.M. Add. 6524*, Mémoire présenté pour l’obtention du grade de licencié en Philologie Romane, Université libre de Bruxelles, 1968–1969, p. 26.

the first two lives could have been copied from a larger manuscript compendium of hagiographic material, while the life of Saint Margaret was a new translation from the Latin.

*I. Transitus mariae (The Passing of Mary), ff. 1r–10v*

The first text in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, an account of the death and assumption of the Virgin, is a vernacular translation of one of the two Latin recessions of the *Transitus mariae* (the Passing of Mary), erroneously ascribed in the Middle Ages to Melito of Sardis (d. c. 200).<sup>12</sup> The text has been judged to have been composed several centuries after Melito's death, at the earliest, at the end of the sixth century.<sup>13</sup> Numerous medieval copies of the Pseudo-Melito text exist in Latin as well as the vernacular.<sup>14</sup> The translation of the *Transitus* in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is faithful to the style and content of its Latin source.

The focus of the *Transitus mariae* is on how the Virgin Mary departed this life. It encompasses themes which are common to the earliest narratives: her meeting with the apostles, Christ's reception of his mother's soul, the hostility of the Jews towards Mary, and the transfer of the Virgin's body and soul to Paradise.<sup>15</sup> In the *Transitus mariae* Mary is distinguished from all other women by her virgin maternity. This distinction justifies her corporeal assumption: the body which had given birth without corruption should not suffer destruction in death.<sup>16</sup> Mary is also set apart from the rest of humanity and, implicitly, connected to her son by the ascent of her body and soul to heaven a short time after

<sup>12</sup> There are two versions of the *Transitus* of Pseudo Melito, designated *Transitus B1* and *Transitus B2*. The text in the Copenhagen manuscript is an Anglo-Norman translation of the former. For the *Transitus B1* text, see C. Tischendorf: *Apocalypses apocryphae Mosis, Esdrae, Pauli, Johannis, item Mariae dormitio, additis Evangeliorum et Actuum apocryphorum supplementis / maximam partem nunc primum edidit*, Leipzig 1866, p. 124–136; and Mary Clayton: *The Cult of the Virgin Mary in Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge and New York 1998.

<sup>13</sup> See Simon Claude Mimouni: *Dormition et Assomption de Marie: histoire des traditions anciennes*, Paris 1995, p. 272.

<sup>14</sup> The *Transitus* text in French found in Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is present in a number of other manuscripts, including an Anglo-Norman translation made earlier than the one in the Copenhagen manuscript. See Paul Meyer: *Légendes hagiographiques en français, Histoire littéraire de la France*, 33, Paris 1906, p. 443, note 6.

<sup>15</sup> Stephen J. Shoemaker: *Ancient Traditions of the Virgin Mary's Dormition and Assumption*, Oxford and New York 2002, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> See Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 9v.

death. But the text also portrays Mary's human maternity, her affection for her son and the emotional pain she suffered because he was taken from her. Christ's compassionate humanity is also noted. His concern for and devotion to his mother leads him to leave her in the care of Saint John and give her the assistance for which she asks, fulfilling her wish not to see the prince of darkness.

*II. A. The Life and Passion of Saint Margaret, ff. 10v–22v*

The Copenhagen Anglo–Norman life of Saint Margaret is based on the tenth–century Latin version called Mombritius after its earliest editor, Boninus Mombritius (1424–1500).<sup>17</sup> This version of Margaret's legend was popular in medieval Europe and can be found in a great number of texts. It was already known in pre–conquest England and was translated into Old English.<sup>18</sup> After the conquest it was translated into Anglo–Norman French as well as Middle English and was the source of inspiration for a number of writers. The Anglo–Norman translation in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is not based on any of the known vernacular translations and, therefore, might have been undertaken for the Bohuns from the Latin.<sup>19</sup>

The legend of Saint Margaret in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> is somewhat freely translated from its Latin source. Some changes were made to the order of presentation (e.g., f. 17r, f. 17v) and details are placed in a more contemporary context by the translator. For example, in the Mombritius recension the passage in which Olibrius promises Margaret that she would be above all his household, “tibi erit super omni familia mea,” is translated in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 13r, as she would be second only to him in his palace and lady of his household (“apres moi la souereine de mou[n] paleis et dame serroiez sour toute ma menee.”)

The translator shortened many of the oral communications in the Latin text, namely the prayers, monologues and dialogues. Thus some of the layers of meaning and symbolism in the Mombritius text are eliminated. Examples of these types of abbreviations are: the curtailing of Margaret's prayers (while in prison, f. 16r and f. 16v, during her ordeal

<sup>17</sup> See Boninus Mombritius: *Sanctuarium seu Vitae Sanctorum*, 2, Hildesheim 1978, p. 190–196.

<sup>18</sup> See Mary Clayton and Hugh Magennis: *The Old English Lives of St. Margaret*, Cambridge 1994, p. 7–9 and Chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> See Meyer 1906, p. 443.



in the vessel, f. 19v, and after the appearance of the dove of the Holy Spirit, f. 21r), as well as of her speeches (especially her vehement exchange with the demon is significantly abbreviated, ff.17r–17v). It is puzzling that a part of the Mombritius text which seems especially relevant for a lay audience, namely the confirmation of Margaret's powers of intercession by the Holy Spirit, is truncated in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 21r.

Other portions of the Latin source are expanded on. For example, in Margaret's first prayer, f. 12r, she compares herself to a lamb, bird, fish, and deer, while in the Mombritius text she compares herself to a sparrow and fish. The incorporation of the extended animal imagery suggests that the translator was aware of versions of Margaret's legend other than the Mombritius.<sup>20</sup> Generally speaking the Anglo-Norman French translation heightens the emotional content of events related in the Latin original and provides more details about the events unfolding in the narrative. For example, in relationship to the Latin original the translator of the Copenhagen text expands on the details of Margaret's torture after her ordeal with the demon, ff. 19r–19v.

One of the most significant changes to the dramatic structure of the story in the Copenhagen manuscript is the diminished role of Margaret's father, Theodosius. The Latin Mombritius text, as well as other medieval compositions dealing with the saint's life, pit pagan father against Christian daughter, emphasizing Theodosius's great displeasure at his daughter's embrace of her nurse's religion, to the point that he comes to despise Margaret: "Odiosa erat patri: dilecta domino Iesu Christo" (Mombritius, 190, 35: She was hated by her father: she was loved by the Lord Jesus Christ). In contrast to the Mombritius text (Mombritius, 192, 21–23 and 193, 53–54), in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 16r, Margaret, while imprisoned, does not mention that she is her father's only child and that he has abandoned her, nor are her father and mother named by the demon as his followers. While Margaret's mother in the Mombritius text acts as a foil to the heroine's Christian and affectionate nurse (Mombritius, 190, 33), the Ms Thott text tells the reader very little about Margaret's relationship to her parents, f. 11r: "En un temps son pier[e] & sa mere demurent & ele remist orpheine" (after some time her mother and father died and she was an orphan).

<sup>20</sup> For earlier sources for this imagery, see Clayton and Magennis 1994, p. 32.

Affective imagery already present in the Mombritius recension of Margaret's legend is expanded on in the Copenhagen text. The translator increased the number of references to Margaret's heart, ff. 11r, 13r, 14r, as well as to her love of Christ. The Thott text uses language that shows the saint's personal emotional attachment to the Lord, for example, the manner in which Margaret's love for Christ is described, f. 11r: "en seon noun de fist seint marger[ete] baptizer & einz seon queor vers ih[e]su crist grant amour conseen en taunt ke lautre amour aver ne savoit" (in His name Margaret was baptized and in her heart she conceived so much love for Jesus Christ that she could know no other love) and the characterization of Jesus as her "ami" (lover, friend or suitor), ff. 13v, 16r and 19v. Unlike the Mombritius recension, in the Thott text the language of romantic love is used to describe Olibrius's feelings for Margaret. While in the Mombritius version (Mombritius, 191, 15–16), Olibrius thinks about what devices he can use to deflower Margaret: "quali machinatione eius uirginitatem perderet," in the Thott translation, f. 13r, he thinks of a way to enchain Margaret's heart (penser une maniere p[ar] quel il purreit enchiner le queor margarete). Olibrius's romantic feelings for Margaret are also noted elsewhere in Ms Thott 517 4°. While Margaret is being tortured, the people witnessing her torments cry out with pity and tell her, f. 14v, "assentir a Olibrius q[u]i tant desir[ ]tamour" (give in to Olibrius who greatly desires your love). In contrast, in the Mombritius recension this type of language is not used; the crowd warns the girl that the prefect is angry and counsels her to save herself by believing in his gods: "præfectus iste iracundus est et perdere te festinat et delere de terra memoriam tuam: Crede illi et uiues (Mombritius, 191, 44–45). The characterization of Olibrius's relationship to Margaret is more explicitly emotional than in the Mombritius text and juxtaposed to the saint's romantic but chaste dependence on Christ. Thus, there is a greater sense in Ms Thott 517 4° that Margaret's piety is affective than in the Latin source.

If we compare Saint Margaret's prayer on behalf of those who worship her in Ms Thott 517 4°, f. 20r, to its Latin source, we find that the Copenhagen text is somewhat longer and more specific than the Mombritius version (Mombritius, 195, 2–13). In the Copenhagen manuscript, Margaret entreats the Lord to specifically protect women in labor and their children: "e a femmes q[ui] sont en travaillant denfa[n]t et que lirront ou orrount cestestoire, ne suffrez q[ue] les ne lour engendrure soient failes de corps ne de membre" (and to wom-

en who are in labor in childbirth and who read or hear this story, that they will not suffer nor will their progeny be ill in body or in limb). The Mombritius Latin version of Margaret's prayer makes no mention of women in childbirth. However, petitions on behalf of expectant mothers and women in labor are present in a number of English and Anglo-Norman accounts which predate the Copenhagen life.<sup>21</sup> Another detail present in the Copenhagen manuscript, but absent from the Mombritius recension, is the reference to the contemporary practice of purchasing (from scribes) an amuletic text, which could be folded or rolled, and carried on the body: "& ki estoire escriversa ou escrit a chatera & entour seon corps portera" (and whoever writes the story or purchases a text and wears it around the body).<sup>22</sup> The modifications to the Mombritius text in the Copenhagen translation thus result from knowledge of other versions of Saint Margaret's life and practices of women associated with the saint's cult, specifically with the veneration of the saint by expectant mothers.

There are documented examples of women in their childbearing years who owned books and images which could be used to venerate Saint Margaret. Amongst the English women who owned these types of objects were Eleanor de Bohun, who in 1382 received from her brother-in-law a picture of the saint, and Eleanor's granddaughter Anne Stafford, Countess of March (c. 1403–1432), who requested a life of Saint Margaret from John Lydgate, probably in the 1420s.<sup>23</sup> French works include a prose life of Saint Margaret together with a miniature depicting the saint in a manuscript (*Hours of Jeanne II of Navarre*, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, nal 3145, ff. 133–134v, c. 1336–40), made for Jeanne II de Navarre (1311–1349), who by 1336 had given birth to four of her eight children and a small book of the

<sup>21</sup> The first mention of protection of mothers was in a twelfth-century legend in the vernacular by the Anglo-Norman poet Wace. See Elizabeth A. Francis (ed.): *Wace: La vie de sainte Marguerite*, Paris 1932, p. 48–49.

<sup>22</sup> The Mombritius Latin text (Mombritius, 195, 10–11) reads: "qui ... scripserit passionem meam: uel qui de suo labore comparauerit codicem passionis meae" (whoever ... writes my passion or from his labor acquires a manuscript of my passion).

<sup>23</sup> For the gift to Eleanor de Bohun who at the time was a teenager, see Sydney Armitage-Smith (ed.): *John of Gaunt's Register*, 1, London 1911, p. 232. For Lady March's life of Saint Margaret, see Henry Noble MacCracken (ed.): *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate*, 1, London 1961–1962, p. 176.

life of Saint Margaret commissioned for the French queen, Isabeau de Bavière (1371–1435), shortly before the birth of her ninth child.<sup>24</sup>

In sum while in the Mombritius Latin text the prayers of the saint provide the bulk of the legend, in the Copenhagen vernacular translation less space is devoted to Margaret's words. There is more of a focus on events and the actions of the protagonists in the Thott translation which includes more concrete and colorful imagery than is found in the Latin version of the text. The prayer Saint Margaret utters in the Mombritius Latin text is expanded in the Copenhagen translation and specifically refers to the protection of women in labor and their children. Thus it can be concluded that not only was the text of the life of Saint Margaret, in all likelihood, translated for the intended owner of Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, but also that it was adapted for its audience. The importance Saint Margaret must have held for the intended owner can also be attested to by the ensuing texts and illumination.

#### *II.B. Antiphon, Versicle and Prayer, f. 22v*

The three Latin texts that follow the vernacular life of Margaret are of a type found in commemorations of the saints and have common elements with *memoriae* in three Bohun devotional manuscripts.<sup>25</sup> The first, introduced by the decorated letter "E," is an antiphon, a text of simple character which is intended to be sung and which contains the fundamental thought of the lines which follows it. It states: "Erat a[utem] margareta annor[um] quindecim cum ab impio olibrio tradebatur i[n] carcerem (Moreover Margaret was fifteen years of age when she was sent to prison by the impious Olibrius). Next comes the versicle in which the reader calls upon blessed Margaret to pray for us so that we may prove worthy of the promises of Christ (Ora p[ro] nobis, beata margareta. Ut digni efficiamur p[ro] missionib[us] xpi.). The last Latin text on this folio is a prayer in which Margaret is invoked as an example for the supplicant: "God who on this day causeth the bless-

<sup>24</sup> The inclusion of a life of Saint Margaret in the *Hours of Jeanne II of Navarre* has been pointed out by Sandler 1986, p. 163. The French text, although a much abbreviated account of the saint's legend, includes an appeal on behalf of pregnant women. For Queen Isabeau's book, see Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse: *Manuscripts and their Makers: Commercial Book Producers in Medieval Paris, 1200–1500*, 2, Turnhout 2000, p. 129.

<sup>25</sup> This observation was made by Sandler 1986, p. 163.

ed virgin Margaret to reach heaven through the martyr's palm, grant to us, we beseech you, that by following her examples we may deserve to come to thee" (Deus qui beatam uirginem margareta[m] hodierna die ad celos p[er] martirii palmam uenire fecisti, concede nob[is] q[ue] s[umus] eius exempla sequentes ad te p[er]uenire mer[e]amur).

Prayer is stressed not only in the text of the versicle in which Margaret is asked "Ora pro nobis" but also by the portrait of the orant golden-haired saint emerging from the dragon which had swallowed her in the interior of the initial "D," f. 22v, marking the opening of the prayer, "Deus qui beatam virginem margaretam" (fig. 3). This depiction of her, furthermore, relates back to the text of the legend in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, ff. 16 v–17r, which describes the saint emerging without blemish to her body from the dragon's burst-open belly and thanking God for saving her. Since the image of the saint being delivered alive and whole from the belly of the beast was painted in a period in which the connection between Saint Margaret and childbirth was explicit, it might have been understood by the viewer as representing a woman's hope for a similar fate for her child.<sup>26</sup>

### *III. The Apostolic and Eremitic Life of Mary Magdalene, ff. 22v–38r*

The events recounted in the section devoted to the Mary Magdalene chronicle her life after Christ's ascension. The legend is made up of two distinct parts, originally completely separate Latin compositions.<sup>27</sup> The first, "the Pilgrim episode," describes the voyage of Mary and her companions to Marseille, their arrival in the city, the saint's missionary activities in southern France where she converted many pagans to Christianity, and her involvement with the pagan rulers of Marseille. The last-mentioned episode contains a long and detailed account of the Marseille miracle which narrates how the saint helped the barren lady conceive, assisted with the child's birth, was responsible for a lactation miracle and offered continuous protection to the mother and

<sup>26</sup> Wendy R. Larson: Who is the Master of this Narrative? Maternal Patronage of the Cult of Saint Margaret. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (eds.): *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, Ithaca 2003, p. 97.

<sup>27</sup> See John Rees Smith (ed.): *The Lives of St Mary Magdalene and St. Martha (MS Esc. H-I-13)*. Exeter 1989. From a combined Latin text version of the two parts a French translation was made. For a discussion of the gradual process of combination of the two parts which led to the French translation, see Smith, 1989, p. xx–xxiii.

child after they have been abandoned.<sup>28</sup> The second part of the legend is concerned with the many years of the Magdalene's life spent in the wilderness and which were devoted to heavenly contemplation as well as to her death and burial.<sup>29</sup>

Generally speaking, Mary Magdalene's life may have been chosen for inclusion in Ms Thott 517 4° because the saint's penitence, self-sacrifice, and life of prayer, made her an ideal role model for the faithful who themselves confronted temptation. However, the saint also had particular importance for the Bohun family. A relic of the Magdalene, much in demand by women in labor, was said to have been given by Empress Matilda (1102–1167) to the priory of Saint Mary Magdalene at Farleigh, a dependent house of the priory of Lewes, founded by Maud de Bohun (b. c. 1084) and her son, Humphrey III.<sup>30</sup> When Eleanor de Bohun came of age in 1380, the advowson of Farleigh priory, of which the Bohuns were important benefactors throughout the medieval period, passed to her and her husband.<sup>31</sup> In 1386, however, Thomas of Woodstock granted Henry of Bolingbroke the advowson of the priory.<sup>32</sup>

A young female member of the Bohun family appears to have held the saint in particular reverence. In the Bodleian Library's Psalter–Hours (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct.D.4.4.), f. 181v, Mary Magdalene is given a place of significance in a full-page miniature, in which she presents the young Bohun lady to the Virgin and Child, and in the pictorial table of saints, f. 238r, in which the Magdalene is depicted first among the holy women of the third tier. Mary Magdalene is further commemorated in two of the *memoriae*, f. 198v and f. 218v, as well as depicted in the initials. She also figures in a number of other Bohun manuscripts. The Magdalene is represented in the pictorial table of saints in the Pommersfelden manuscript (Pommersfelden, Kunstsammlungen Graf von Schoenborn, MS 348), f. 10r, she is commemorated in the *memoriae* of the Copenhagen Hours, f. 13v, of the Exeter manuscript (Ox-

<sup>28</sup> For the Latin text (BHL 5457) corresponding to part 1 of Thott 517 4°, ff. 22v–31v, see Smith 1989, p. xxiii; and Sandler 2010, p. 66, note 8.

<sup>29</sup> For the Latin source for part 2 of Thott 517 4°, ff. 31v–38r, see Smith 1989, p. xxi–xxiii; and Sandler 2010, p. 66 note 8.

<sup>30</sup> Thomas Wright (ed.): *Three Chapters of Letters Relating to the Suppression of Monasteries*, London 1843, p. 59 and R.B. Pugh, Elizabeth Crittall (eds.): *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Wiltshire*, 3, London 1956, p. 263.

<sup>31</sup> W.H.B. Bird (ed.): *Calendar of the Close Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office, Richard II, 1*, London 1914, p. 394.

<sup>32</sup> London, National Archives, Piece reference DL 27/312.

ford, Exeter College, MS 47), f. 123r, and of the Egerton Psalter–Hours (London, British Library, MS Egerton 3277), ff. 119v and 164r, as well as portrayed in initials of her commemorations in the two last-mentioned manuscripts.

For the most part, then, the texts in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> are, or are based on, orthodox and widely disseminated accounts of these holy women’s legends which had been in circulation for centuries and were originally read by clerics. But it is likely that there are reasons other than these that the particular versions of the saints’ legends in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> were chosen to be copied and bound together. The narratives of the three legends have common threads. The first and most important is the holy women’s relationship to Christ. Two of them, the Virgin and Mary Magdalene, were present at many of the central events of Jesus’s life. In the legend of the Magdalene some of these key episodes are noted: the washing of the Creator’s feet with her tears, and their drying with her hair (f. 34v), the Lord’s appearance to her before all others and her mission to inform the apostles that Christ has risen (f. 37v). As stated in the text of the legend of the Magdalene, f. 32r, Jesus himself provided both his mother and Mary Magdalene with companions, Saint Maximin and Saint John, respectively.

Margaret too was close to the Lord but her relationship is represented in a different manner. Although not explicitly stated in the text, Margaret imitates Christ. She acts on the behalf of humanity and willingly suffers so that others will be saved. Margaret’s defeat of the dragon and the demon evoke Christ’s victory over Satan. Her triumph over death, her emergence from the belly of the dragon, is not dissimilar from the resurrected Christ’s emergence from his tomb. Margaret, as well as the other two holy women whose legends are described in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, play an active role in the conversion of non-Christians. In the Copenhagen *Lives* pagans embrace the Christian faith after witnessing miracles at the Virgin’s funerals, seeing Margaret’s ordeals and after hearing the Magdalene preach.

Both the *Transitus* and the legend of Mary Magdalene are involved with events following Christ’s ascension, especially those occurring just before and shortly after the holy women’s deaths as well as their burials. The text of the *Transitus* concentrates almost entirely on the end of the Virgin’s life, her meeting with the apostles, her death and assumption, while the legend of Mary Magdalene deals with a longer period of time, her apostolic and hermitical life in France, and only towards



the end of the text with her death and burial. Margaret's *vita* traces her entire life, focusing on the events leading to her martyrdom. She is exceptional in the trilogy in that she did not live while Christ was on this earth.

*B. The Major Illuminations in the Copenhagen Bohun Lives*

Ms Thott 517 4° contains three six-line historiated initials depicting episodes described in the texts they introduce. In the first illumination, placed at the opening of the Passing of Mary, f. 1r, the Assumption of the Virgin into heaven is represented (fig. 1). This event is described on folios 9r–10r of the manuscript. Some of the elements depicted in the scene inside the initial “Q” are described in the text, e.g., Mary rising from her tomb in the presence of the apostles, angels and the Lord. The absence of Saint Michael, who plays an important role in the Pseudo–Melito text, was not uncommon in pictorial renditions of this event. The visualization of the scene of the Assumption is, for the most part, based on pictorial tradition.<sup>33</sup> For example, in two earlier English manuscripts, the *Tiptoft Missal* (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M.107, c. 1320), f. 253v and a religious miscellany (Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Douce 79), f. 3r, we find some of the same compositional components as in Ms Thott 517 4°, such as the depiction of the Virgin with joined hands in a mandorla held by angels and the Lord. Other details present in Ms Thott 517 4° can also be found in earlier representations of the Virgin's Assumption. For example, the censuring angels, which are not mentioned in the text of the *Transitus*, were depicted in scenes of the Assumption on portals of cathedrals. Some elements are of a symbolic nature. The Virgin who at the time of her death would have been middle-aged, is represented in the historiated initial as an adolescent; her youthful beauty symbolizes her faultlessness and her long loose hair is a sign of her maidenhood. Her attire too adds to her attractive physical appearance. In the miniature she is clothed in a tight-fitting rose color gown and not in “the robe of her burial” which she is described as wearing in the text, f. 6r.

The second historiated initial “S,” f. 10v, marks the beginning of the Life and Passion of Saint Margaret. It illustrates a number of episodes

<sup>33</sup> For the pictorial tradition of the Assumption, see Penny Schine Gold: *The Lady and the Virgin: Image, Attitude, and Experience in Twelfth-Century France*, Chicago 1985, p. 54–55 and 59–60.



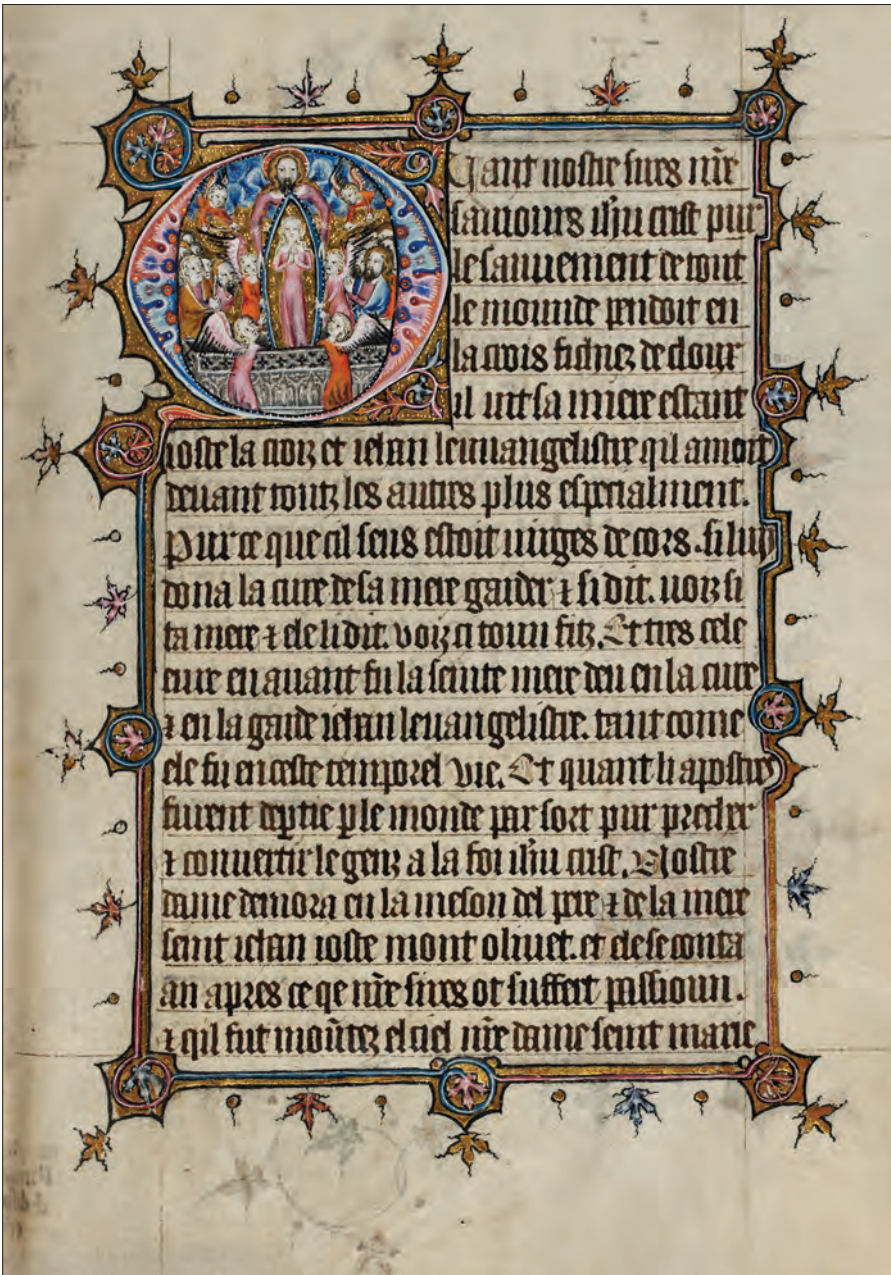


Fig. 1: Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 1r illuminated with the Assumption of the Virgin. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

described in the legend which took place in the prison where Margaret was held captive (e.g., the saint's nurse bringing bread and water to her foster daughter, narrated on f. 16v) and other events which occur later in the *vita*, namely Margaret emerging unharmed from the dragon's belly, f. 17r, the saint attacking the demon ff. 17r–17v, and the descent of the crown from heaven, f. 19v (fig. 2). Margaret is represented not only as an adolescent, which according to the antiphon on f. 22v was the age when she was imprisoned, but also, as is stated throughout her legend and in the prayer, as a maiden. She is slim, narrow-waisted and small bosomed and has uncovered loose hair. While the text on f. 17r states that the saint made the sign of the holy cross, causing the dragon's belly to burst open, thus allowing Margaret to emerge without blemish to her body, in the miniature she spears the beast. Such a depiction of Margaret's liberation was not unusual in the pictorial arts.<sup>34</sup> In fact in a number of other Bohun manuscripts she is shown emerging from the belly of the dragon and transfixing the beast with a cross-spear, namely in the *memoriae* following Lauds in the Egerton Psalter–Hours, f. 120r, as well as in the pictorial tables of saints in the Bodleian Psalter–Hours, f. 238r and the fragmentary manuscript in Pommersfelden, f. 10r. Another component of the narrative, which draws on pictorial tradition, is that Margaret is shown about to be crowned, not by the dove of the Holy Spirit holding a crown in its beak, as described on f. 19v, but rather by an angel descending from heaven.<sup>35</sup>

A few details in the miniature illustrate aspects of the description of the dragon narrated in the legend. For example, the text, f. 16v, states that the dragon's hair and beard gleamed just like gold and in the miniature the creature is golden brown. However, the creature is depicted as having white teeth and not teeth the color of iron as stated on f. 16v, nor does it have a long tongue, nor is fire exuded from its nostrils. On the whole the representation of the beast is based on visual precedents.

The representation of the erect and black demon takes into account the description on f. 17r, which states that the devil appeared in the form of a man blacker than an Ethiopian: “en forme de lomme plus

<sup>34</sup> For an earlier English representation of Margaret transfixing the dragon with a cross-spear, see, for example, the *Alphonso Psalter* (London, British Library, MS Additional 24686), f. 2v.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the prefatory image of Margaret receiving the crown from an angel in an English Psalter of the second half of the thirteenth century (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, M. 679), f. 15v.



Fig. 2: Ms Thott 517 4°, f. 10v illuminated with St. Margaret Delivered from the Dragon. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).



noir cum en ethopien.” However, he is also portrayed as bestial: he is horned, has two paws and two cloven feet. According to the text Margaret grabbed the demon by the hair, threw him to the ground and trampled him underfoot. In the Copenhagen manuscript Margaret attacks the demon in another fashion: she thrusts an object into his mouth.<sup>36</sup>

In the third historiated initial, f. 22v, Mary Magdalene, is represented with comely features and uncovered, long, loose, wavy, brown and golden hair, supported by four angels above the entrance to a cave (fig. 4). She is barefoot, dressed as a hermit and clutches a gold ointment jar to her chest. Mary’s slender body, except for her feet and lower arms, is completely covered by hair, her own and that of the beast’s whose hide she wears. To the left of the cave stands a bearded man in a grey hooded cloak. With his left hand he shields his eyes and with his right he holds a stick.

The miniature depicts the scene described on f. 33v in the second half of the legend in which a priest witnesses Mary Magdalene, in the arms of angels, hovering above the place in which she dwelt. Some of the aspects of the representation of the Miracle at Baume in Ms Thott 517 4° are based on a pictorial tradition. The text does not mention an ointment jar nor does it describe the Magdalene’s disheveled tresses or primitive attire. The ointment jar was the attribute by which she was commonly identified in the visual arts. Mary’s clothing and hair are symbolic of her penitence, humility and removal from society.

In sum, the compositions of all three major illuminations, while largely based on pictorial tradition, were also influenced by contents of the texts they accompany. Certain aspects of the texts were highlighted by the illuminations and an attempt was made to show common facets in the three legends. The scenes in all three historiated initials portray the heavenly favors bestowed on each of the holy women and the revelation of their celestial rewards to chosen witnesses, the apostles, Margaret’s nurse, and a priest, respectively. Because the scenes are placed at the opening of narratives recounting their lives, the juxtaposition of text and images could be understood as implying that the heavenly rewards bestowed on each of them is the consequence of the lives they

<sup>36</sup> For images of Margaret fighting the demon with a scourge or stick, see Lois Drewer: Margaret of Antioch the Demon-Slayer, East and West: The Iconography of the Predella of the Boston Mystic Marriage of St. Catherine. *Gesta*, 32, 1993, p. 11. For an English example of Saint Margaret with a scourge, see the thirteenth-century *Huth Psalter* (London, British Library, MS Additional 38116), f. 13r.



Fig. 3: Ms Thott 517 4°, f. 22v illuminated with St. Margaret Delivered from the Dragon and Mary Magdalene Borne Up by Angels. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

led. One of the legends, that of Saint Margaret, is followed by a prayer, in which the virgin saint is presented as an exemplum for the faithful. The manner in which the three holy women are depicted in the historiated initials, on earth but in contact with heaven, may also be read as an allusion to these saints' roles as intercessors for prayers.

Furthermore, the Virgin, Saint Margaret and Mary Magdalene were named in the Litanies of devotional manuscripts associated with the Bohun family while Saint Margaret and the Magdalene were invoked in some of the *memoriae*.<sup>37</sup> Because the holy women were important for their powers of intercession, and because of the manner in which they were depicted in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the images in the manuscript were used for prayer and meditation.

### C. *The Patron and the Intended Reader*

The manuscript has no arms or portraits. It was certainly made by the Bohun atelier but at whose command and for whom? We know that books concerned with the lives, miracles and passions of saints were kept at Pleshey Castle which until at least the death of the last male of the family, Humphrey de Bohun, the seventh earl, had been the family's chief residence. In 1376, two years after Eleanor de Bohun's marriage, her husband, Thomas of Woodstock, was awarded the castle and its contents. In 1397 Thomas was arrested and an inventory of his property was taken which records a library of eighty-four books and additionally forty-two books for chapel.<sup>38</sup> Listed in the inventory are a book in French of the Miracles of Our Lady, a large book containing different Saints' passions, a French Life of Saint Thomas of Canterbury, a book in French called the Crown of Tribulation and the lives of the

<sup>37</sup> For Mary Magdalene and Saint Margaret in the sequence of virgins in the Litanies of manuscripts belonging to the Bohun family, see Dennison 1988, p. 310–311 and Sandler 2004, 31. The intercessory powers of Mary Magdalene are invoked in the *memoriae* of the Office of the Virgin in Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 13v and in the Bodleian Library's Psalter–Hours, f. 218v. For *memoriae* to Saint Margaret, see the British Library's Psalter–Hours, f. 120r, Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, f. 14r, and the Bodleian Library's Psalter–Hours, f. 218v.

<sup>38</sup> For the books listed in the inventory, see J. Dillon and W. H. St. John Hope: "Inventory of the Goods and Chattels Belonging to Thomas, Duke of Gloucester, and Seized in His Castle at Pleshy, Co. Essex, 21 Richard II (1397); with Their Values, as Shown in the Escheator's Accounts. *Archaeological Journal*, 54, 1897, p. 298–303.





Fig. 4: Thott 517 4°, f. 22v. Detail. Historiated Initial "A:" Mary Magdalene Borne Up by Angels. (Photo: The Royal Library, Copenhagen).

saints, and a book of Barlaam and Josaphat.<sup>39</sup> How many of these books were added by Thomas of Woodstock and how many stemmed from his wife's family's collection is not known. We do know that amongst the sixteen books which Eleanor de Bohun personally owned there was a manuscript of *De Vitis Patrum* which she willed to her daughter, Isabelle, and a copy of the *Legenda Aurea* in French which she bequeathed to her daughter, Anne.<sup>40</sup>

Dennison has leaned toward the view that Thomas of Woodstock and Eleanor de Bohun were the chief patrons of the Bohun atelier and that after the death of the seventh earl it was Thomas who built up

<sup>39</sup> Dillon and St. John Hope 1897, p. 300–303.

<sup>40</sup> For the sixteen books associated with Eleanor, see M. M. Bigelow: The Bohun Wills, II. *American Historical Review*, 1, 1896, p. 641–643 and Sandler 1986, p. 164.

the library at Pleshey Castle.<sup>41</sup> Sandler has argued that after 1373 the Bohun atelier was engaged by Joan de Bohun on a number of projects, including the execution of manuscripts for Mary de Bohun and Henry of Bolingbroke.<sup>42</sup> The dowager countess's interest in manuscripts and literary works is documented but not as extensively as that of her son-in-law, Thomas.<sup>43</sup>

We now turn to Ms Thott 517 4° itself for any indications about its patronage and intended audience. The choice of material included in the Copenhagen *Lives* suggests that the patron may have wanted a manuscript which could have been read out loud to or studied in the household. Both the legend of the Magdalene and the legend of Saint Margaret have engaging narratives which must have appealed to audiences of both genders. The life of Mary Magdalene describes the perilous journey undertaken by a pregnant noblewoman who gives birth at sea, is taken for dead and is abandoned on an island with her still

<sup>41</sup> Lynda Dennison: British Library, Egerton MS 3277: A Fourteenth-Century Psalter-Hours and the Question of Bohun Family Ownership. Richard Eales and Shaun Tyas (eds.): *Proceedings of the 1997 Symposium: Family and Dynasty in Late Medieval England*, Donington, p. 141–142. For specific manuscripts and literary works connected to Thomas of Woodstock see A.I. Doyle: *English Books In and Out of Court from Edward III to Henry VII*. V.J. Scattergood and J.W. Sherborne (eds.): *English Court Culture in the later Middle Ages*, London 1983, p. 168; Jenny Stratford: *La Somme le Roi* (Reims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 570), the Manuscripts of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and the Scribe, John Upton. Marie-Clotilde Hubert, Emmanuel Poulle, and Marc H. Smith (eds.): *Le statut du scribe au Moyen Âge. Actes du XII<sup>e</sup> colloque scientifique du Comité international de paléographie latine (Cluny, 17–20 juillet 1998)*, Paris 2000, p. 267–282; Fiona Somerset (ed.): *Four Wycliffite Dialogues: Dialogue between Jon and Richard, Dialogue between a Friar and a Secular, Dialogue between Reson and Gabbyng, Dialogue between a Clerk and a Knight*, Oxford 2009, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> Sandler 2004, p. 145–146 and Sandler 2010, 73. I discuss Joan de Bohun as patron of the Bohun atelier more fully in my forthcoming book.

<sup>43</sup> For specific manuscripts owned or bought by Joan see Thomas Rymer: *Foedera, conventiones, literae et cujuscunque generis acta publica, inter reges Angliæ, et alios quosvis imperatores, reges, pontifices, principes, vel communitates, ab ineunte sæculo duodecimo, viz, ab anno 1101, ad nostra usque tempora, habita aut tractata, ex autographis, infra secretiores archivorum regionum thesaurarias, per multa sæcula reconditis, fideliter exscripta*, 9, London 1729, p. 291, and Susan H. Cavanaugh: *A Study of Books Privately Owned in England: 1300–1450*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1980, p. 346. For manuscripts which she might have owned see Eric George Millar: *The Luttrell Psalter: Two Plates in Colour and One Hundred and Eighty–Three in Monochrome from the Additional Manuscript 42130 in the British Museum*, London 1932, p. 5 and A.I. Doyle: *The Vernon Manuscript: A Facsimile of Bodleian Library, Oxford, Ms. Eng. Poet. A*, Cambridge 1987, p. 15. For Joan's patronage of Thomas Hoccleve, see H.C. Schulz: *Thomas Hoccleve, Scribe. Speculum*, 12, 1937, p. 80.



living infant. The life of Saint Margaret portrays a love-struck tyrant set on possessing the object of his affections. When he realizes that he cannot have her, he slowly and cruelly takes her life. Both the legend of the Magdalene and the legend of Saint Margaret include lessons about faith and conduct, appropriate for both men and women. However, there are reasons to believe that this collection of three saints' lives was primarily intended for a female audience. Female saints tended to be perceived as relevant models for women.<sup>44</sup> By extension a collection of three holy women's lives would be seen as particularly suitable material for the contemplation and instruction of a female audience.

The analysis presented here suggests that the Copenhagen *Lives* have a special focus on saints associated with motherhood and childbirth. As we have seen both Saint Margaret and Mary Magdalene are specifically associated with the protection of mothers and children. The image of the Saint Margaret being delivered whole from the belly of the beast, as we have discussed, came to represent the mother's hope for a similar fate for her child.<sup>45</sup> Because of the attachment of the Marseille miracle to Mary Magdalene's *vita* since the twelfth century and widely known from its inclusion in the *Golden Legend*, the childless Magdalene came to be largely regarded as a saint who specialized in issues related to motherhood. In versions of the legend which include the Marseille miracle, like the one in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, the Magdalene helps the barren lady conceive, and during her labor the saint acts as a midwife.<sup>46</sup> She was also responsible for a lactation miracle allowing the newborn to nurse at his dead mother's breast and offered continuous protection to the mother and child after they had been abandoned.<sup>47</sup> The Marseille miracle inspired childless women and mothers to turn to the saint for help.<sup>48</sup> This particular version of the Magdalene's life, with its long and detailed account of the miracle of Marseille, may have been thought particularly appropriate for a female reader. It should be remembered that the church canonized few mothers and that women, therefore,

<sup>44</sup> For the relevance of female saints' lives for women, see Jocelyn Wogan-Browne: *Saints' Lives and the Female Reader*. *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 27, 1991, p. 314.

<sup>45</sup> Larson 2003, p. 97.

<sup>46</sup> Katherine Ludwig Jansen: *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton 2001, p. 295.

<sup>47</sup> Jansen 2001, p. 295.

<sup>48</sup> Jansen 2001, p. 296.

might have looked to holy virgins and women who were no longer sexually active for help with issues relating to motherhood.<sup>49</sup>

While Saint Margaret and Mary Magdalene did not have children themselves, the Virgin Mary, the third holy woman whose life is included in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup>, experienced motherhood. There was a long standing belief that the Virgin came to the assistance of women in childbirth. Queen Philippa of England (1314–1369), to whom the Bohuns were related by marriage, had been brought a secondary relic of the Virgin to her confinement in 1354 when she gave birth to her son, Thomas of Woodstock.<sup>50</sup> Also in the Copenhagen Bohun Hours, a manuscript closely related to the *Lives*, the Virgin is shown assisting a mother with the birth of her child, f. 1r.

It would seem from the analysis of the texts and images presented here that the likely intended audience for the illuminated *Lives* was a female who was about to enter or already was in her child-bearing years.<sup>51</sup> However, it cannot be ruled out that the *Lives* were executed for Joan de Bohun after she became a widow in 1373. The *Transitus mariae* and the legend of Mary Magdalene deal with issues, like faith, conduct and death, which might have had relevance for a widow. Additionally, the *Transitus* text, with its focus on the Virgin Mary, might have had a particular interest for the dowager countess, who, after her husband's death, became an important patron of Walden Abbey, which was dedicated to the honor of Saint Mary and Saint James the Apostle.<sup>52</sup> Another indication of Joan's interest in the life of the Virgin is her commission of a devotional poem, *The Complaint of the Virgin*. This poem is similar to the *Transitus mariae* in that the subject of both works is the lamenting mother of Christ. It is, therefore, not impossible that the texts in Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> would have held some interest for Joan de Bohun and that the Copenhagen manuscript was intended for

<sup>49</sup> For a discussion on the church and the canonization of mothers, see Anneke Mulder-Bakker (ed.): *Sanctity and Motherhood: Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, New York 1995, p. 4.

<sup>50</sup> Also, the Virgin's girdle was brought to Henry III's queen, Eleanor, to be used in preparation for the birth of her child in 1242 and to Queen Philippa in 1338 when she gave birth to Lionel of Antwerp. See Nicholas Vincent: *The Holy Blood: King Henry III and the Westminster Blood Relic*, Cambridge 2001, p. 169–170.

<sup>51</sup> Eleanor proved her age (14) by June 1380 while Mary proved hers in December 1384. See Bird 1914, 1, p. 390, 394 and Bird 1920, 2, p. 512–516, respectively.

<sup>52</sup> William Page (ed.): *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Essex*, 2, London 1907, p. 110–113.

her. However it is also conceivable that the *Lives* were not meant for the exclusive contemplation of one person. Both Joan and one of her daughters could have been the intended audience of the *Lives*. In the first few years after Mary de Bohun's marriage the young lady lived with her mother. This is evident from a record of an annuity of 100 marks granted to the dowager countess on 31 January, 1382 for her daughter's maintenance until she was fourteen.<sup>53</sup> It is thus not impossible that Mary de Bohun could have heard and/or read the legends with the dowager countess while in her mother's care.

One final point may be added. Because Ms Thott 517 4<sup>o</sup> and Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, the two Bohun manuscripts in Copenhagen, survived together we need to entertain the possibility that they stem from the collection of one particular member of the Bohun family. We know on the basis of manuscript evidence that Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, which I believe were executed later than the *Lives*, was made for a young female member of the Bohun family, in all likelihood for either Mary or Eleanor.<sup>54</sup> The absence of the *fleurs-de-lis* of France, a very significant component of the arms of Eleanor's husband, Thomas of Woodstock, on the first folio of Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup>, tips the balance somewhat in favor of identifying the intended reader of the manuscript as Mary de Bohun.<sup>55</sup> It seems, therefore, possible that Ms Thott 547 4<sup>o</sup> was in Mary's collection and that the *Lives* may be of the same provenance. The dowager countess, who was likely to have been the patron of the *Lives*, may have given her daughter the manuscript, for example when Mary left her mother's household to live with Henry of Bolingbroke, or on another fitting occasion, perhaps during one of her pregnancies.

<sup>53</sup> Armitage-Smith 1911, 2, p. 309.

<sup>54</sup> I discuss the dates of the two Copenhagen manuscripts in my forthcoming book.

<sup>55</sup> Vidas 2011, 127.

## SUMMARY

Marina Vidas: *Maternity and Faith in the Copenhagen Bohun Women Saints' Lives* (Royal Library, Ms Thott 517 4°)

*Ms Thott 517 4°* is a small illuminated fourteenth century English manuscript that principally contains three Anglo-Norman French texts composed by different authors, each narrating episodes from the life and afterlife of one of the three most popular female saints in England at that time - Mary, Christ's mother, Margaret, the virgin martyr, and Mary Magdalene, the repentant harlot. One of the lives, that of Saint Margaret, is followed by an antiphon, a versicle, and a prayer. The manuscript was illuminated in a very distinctive style associated with two artists working for the Bohun family, probably some time after the death of Humphrey de Bohun (1342-1373), the seventh Earl of Hereford, sixth Earl of Essex and second Earl of Northampton. This article discusses the reasons why this manuscript may have been intended for a female audience, perhaps for one or more of the close female relatives of Humphrey de Bohun - his wife, Joan (1347-1419), his daughter, Eleanor (1367-1399), who married Thomas of Woodstock, Edward III's youngest son, in 1376 or his daughter, Mary (1370-1394), who in 1381 wed the king's grandson, Henry of Bolingbroke, the future Henry IV.

I argue that *Ms Thott 517 4°* contains texts and images that would be appropriate for the contemplation and instruction of a female audience. I show that the texts that were selected for inclusion in the manuscript narrate the lives of two holy women who were close to and important for Christ and who were present at many of the central events of his life, as well as a virgin who was martyred because of her faith. I also show that the major illuminations in the manuscript depict the heavenly favours bestowed on each of the holy women as a consequence of the lives they led. Thus a female audience could draw strength from the holy women's examples. Additionally, in the article I demonstrate that the three holy women whose lives were included in *Ms Thott 517 4°* were all believed to come to the assistance of women in labour.

It is argued that the likely intended audience for *Ms Thott 517 4°* was a female who, more specifically, was about to enter or already was in her childbearing years. However, it is also suggested in this article that the *Lives* were not necessarily meant for the exclusive contemplation of one person. The *Transitus mariae* and the legend of Mary Magdalene deal with issues, such as faith, conduct and death, which might have had relevance for a widow. Furthermore, the *Transitus* text, with its focus on the lamenting mother of Christ, could have had a particular interest for the dowager countess, who is known to have commissioned the devotional poem, the *Complaint of the Virgin*. It is, therefore, suggested in this article that both Joan de Bohun and one of her daughters could have been the intended audience of the *Lives*.