

Character Construction within the Constraints of Scripture: Magdalen and Theotokos in *Christos Paschon* and the Easter *kontakion* of Romanos¹

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Character construction is not usually considered for non-fictional characters, and surprisingly seldom in drama as distinct from mediated narrative. An analysis, based on the method of De Temmerman and van Emde Boas (who characterises and how), of the treatment of the Gospel accounts of the first Easter Sunday in the third (Resurrection) play of the Christos Paschon and in Romanos's Resurrection reveals the dominance of female characters in both texts: the women of Galilee and Mary Magdalen in both and additionally the Theotokos in the Paschon. In Romanos they are contrasted with the timorous and unbelieving male disciples; in the Paschon with the venal conspiracy of Pilate, priests and guard. In neither text is characterisation constrained by scripture or by a fixed transtextual tradition. Gospel harmony is achieved by very different means and the characters are constructed differently in the two texts. Mimesis (Paschon) as well as diegesis (Romanos) provides access to the inner worlds of the characters, and it is clear that character construction should be considered however fictional or non-fictional a text may be.

When we think of characterisation, and indeed when theorists deal with it,² it is normally in terms of building an invented character from scratch in a fictional story-world. Margolin talks about “any entity, individual or collective, human or human-like, introduced in a work of narrative fiction;”³ Jannidis defines it as “a text- or media-based figure in a story-world, usually human or human-like.”⁴

1 This essay is for Professors Vladimír Vavřínek, who advanced the careers of countless young Byzantinists by publishing their first article, and Růžena Dostálová, who with an important article of 1981 pioneered the literary study of my primary text.

2 I have found most useful the introductory surveys of Margolin and Jannidis, the specific consideration of drama by Pfister and Culpeper and the de Jong-inspired work in classics of van Ende Boas and De Temmerman. As always, I am indebted to the advice and guidance of Markéta Kulhánková.

3 U. MARGOLIN, Character, in: D. Herman (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, Cambridge 2007, 66–79 at 66.

4 F. JANNIDIS, Character, in: *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, 1, <https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/41.html> (retrieved 25 January 2025).

Wilpert and Smith talk about characters as “fictive persons”⁵ and Elder says “the texts that construct characters are fictional.”⁶ It takes little thought to realise that this is inadequate: how about the extraordinarily compelling Thomas Cromwell in the novels of Hilary Mantel? We have to make space for characters who are not fictional but may be treated as such: Todorov said that “non-fictional texts are literature if they are treated in a fictional kind of way.”⁷ And of course in Byzantium issues of *plasma* mean that avowed fiction is the exception rather than the rule, one extreme on a sliding scale.⁸ Ethopoiia demands imaginative elaboration, just as generals’ speeches in historiography were necessary but not believed as word-for-word accurate.⁹ And often there is a scriptural base, often a very few words or lines which authors build to a complete work.¹⁰ This scriptural base is a kind of constraint, though Margolin makes it clear that

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- 5 G. VON WILPERT, *Figur*, in: G. von Wilpert (ed.), *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, Stuttgart 1989, 298. M. SMITH, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, Oxford 1995, 17.
- 6 J. ELDER – F. JANNIDIS – R. SCHNEIDER, Introduction, in: J. Elder – F. Jannidis – R. Schneider (eds.), *Characters in Fictional Worlds: Understanding Imaginary Beings in Literature, Film, and Other Media*, Berlin – New York 2010, 11.
- 7 T. TODOROV, The Notion of Literature, *New Literary History* 5, 1973, 7–8.
- 8 On concepts of fiction in Byzantium, see most recently S. PAPAIOANNOU, Theory of Literature, in: S. Papaioannou (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature*, Oxford 2021, 76–109, at 93–100.
- 9 *Hermogenes, Progymnasmata, 9 on Ethopoiia*, H. Rabe (ed.), *Hermogenis opera*, Leipzig 1913, 20, tr. G. A. KENNEDY, *Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric*, (Writings from the Greco-Roman World, 10), Atlanta, GA 2003, 84: “in ethopoiia we imagine words from a real person,” and see K. DE TEMMERMAN, 10 *Figur-Antike/Character-Antiquity*, in: E. von Contzen–S. Tilg (eds.), *Handbuch Historische Narratologie*, Berlin – Heidelberg 2019, 105–115, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-476-04714-4_10 (retrieved 26 January 2025). On speeches in history, J. L. MOLES, Truth and Untruth in Herodotos and Thucydides, in: C. Gill – T. P. Wiseman (eds.), *Lies and Fiction in the Ancient World*, Austin, TX 1993, 88–121 at 104–106 on licence in reporting speeches, and T. P. WISEMAN, Lying Historians: Seven Types of Mendacity, *ibid.*, 122–146 at 144–145, on speeches as elaboration of narrative, the detail necessary for *enargeia* and verisimilitude. S. EFTHYMIADIS, A Historian and his Tragic Hero: A Literary Reading of Theophylact Simokatta’s Ecumenical History, in: R. Macrides (ed.), *History as Literature in Byzantium: Papers from the Fortieth Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Birmingham. April 2007* (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, 15) Farnham, Surrey 2010, 169–185 at 173 calls speeches “this critical weapon that grants narrative advantages to any historian who follows the classicizing tradition.” For one of these narrative advantages see A. KALDELLIS, Procopius’ Persian War: A Thematic and Literary Analysis, *ibid.*, 253–273 who at 260–262 discusses the “artful simulations” of speeches as a way for the historian to criticise a ruling emperor.
- 10 A. CAMERON, *Christianity and the Rhetoric of Empire: The Development of Christian Discourse* (Sather Classical Lectures, 35), Berkeley, CA 1991, ch. 3 “Stories People Want,” 113 says that “the canonical gospels left many loose ends and required expansion from an early date”. A great deal of recent work on Romanos for example has been concerned with his “tying up Scripture’s loose ends and filling nagging gaps,” see G. FRANK, Dialogue and Deliberation: The Sensory Self in the Hymns of Romanos the Melodist, in: D. Brakke – M. L. Satlow – S. Weitzman (eds.), *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, Bloomington – Indianapolis, IN 2005, 163–179 at 163.

there are other kinds of constraint: what is possible in a given story-world or the character's individual role in the story.¹¹ And each text has its own nexus of constraint – or opportunity.

The main text I want to look at here, the *Christos Paschon*,¹² would look very strange to Margolin or Jannidis. Firstly, to its first receivers it was far from fictional, though treated as if it were by its author. Secondly, it was profoundly transtextual (its characters are time-bound but reappear in an enormous body of text, in liturgy and in wall-painting, icons, metalwork, manuscripts; some were regarded having real-life intervention in times closer to the receivers' own,¹³ and some had a continuing personal spiritual relationship with the receivers).¹⁴ And, thirdly, unusually in Byzantium, and not often considered by narratologists,¹⁵ it is drama not narrative, largely mimesis not diegesis, and shares with ancient tragedy certain constraints: all actions have to be performed on the public space of the stage, all thoughts must be spoken aloud, there are no intermediate points between on-stage and off-stage, and above all, no privileged access to the interior world of any character, a feature which van Emde Boas regards as fundamental to tragedy.¹⁶ It is also constrained by the conventions of tragedy in terms of performance, time and place and also by the sacred geography of Jerusalem.¹⁷ Linguistically it is constrained by the fact that 45% of the whole is Euripidean cento and the rest is Euripidean

11 MARGOLIN, *Character*, op. cit., 73.

12 *Christus Patiens. Tragoedia quae inscribi solet CHRISTOS PASCHON Gregorio Nazianzeno falso attributa*, J. G. Brambs (ed.), Leipzig 1885. *La passion du Christ: tragédie. Grégoire de Nazianze. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index*, A. Tuilier (ed.), (SC, 149), Paris 1969.

13 See for example postmortem miracles of saints, and the real-life intervention of the Panagia as documented in J. BAUN, *Apocalyptic Panagia: Some Byways of Marian Revelation in Byzantium*, in: L. Brubaker – M. B. Cunningham (eds.), *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images*, (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies, 11), Farnham, Surrey 2011, 199–218.

14 See for example P. MAGDALINO, *Constantinople: Theatre of Piety and Holiness*, in: M. Mitrea (ed.), *Mapping the Sacred in Byzantium*, Cambridge (forthcoming), at n. 78 on “narratives of interactive relationships between holy figures and ordinary believers.”

15 B. RICHARDSON, *Drama and narrative*, in: Herman (ed.), *Cambridge Companion to Narrative*, op. cit., 142–155 explains that “while cinema was quickly brought into the fold of narrative theory, drama has lagged behind.” Followers of Genette exclude drama while Barthians would include it, as would Richardson, 142: “Quite simply, if you are going to discuss plot and character, you must take drama and its theorists into account.” M. PFISTER, *The Theory and Analysis of Drama*, J. Halliday (tr.), Cambridge 1988, includes in his bibliography Austin, Barthes, Fish, Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, Propp, and a very few other non-drama works.

16 E. VAN EMDE BOAS, *Euripides*, in: K. De Temmerman – E. van Emde Boas (eds.), *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature*, (Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative, 4), Leiden 2018, 355–374 at 368.

17 M. MULLETT, *Space, Emotion and Performance in the Christos Paschon*, in: Mitrea (ed.), *Mapping the Sacred*, op. cit. (forthcoming).

pastiche.¹⁸ And its biblical constraint is considerable: the biblical narratives of the resurrection have been a known problem for millennia with a variety of supernatural announcers of the Resurrection, requiring superheroic mobility with multiple journeys back into town, agonistic footraces and deceleration or acceleration to ensure individual private experience.¹⁹ One modern attempt at harmony by J. Gene White includes twenty-two different sequential episodes (fig. 1). But the exceptionalism does not mean that we cannot ask the usual narratological questions of it: who characterises and how.²⁰ After all, one of the editors of the *Studies in Ancient Greek Narrative* volume on character says that “all techniques found in ‘pure’ narrative are also to be found in drama.”²¹ And according to Jonathan Culpeper it is surprising that there has been little study of characterisation in drama because “in drama characters are particularly salient.”²² And there may be additional benefits from its “factive” form: it may be that “the minds of imaginary figures can be known in ways that those of real persons cannot”²³ but the benefit also ensues from those real life figures *treated as fictional*. And the rich transtextuality brings not only depth and texture but also (as with ancient myth in tragedy) choice.²⁴ So for the length of this paper, a character is a constructed story-world participant, a creature of the word and the Word; characterisation, character-construction, is the process through which traits are ascribed to characters, and receivers form an impression of them.

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- 18 M. MULLETT, *Spoiling the Hellenes: intertextuality, appropriation, embedment. The case of the Christos Paschon*, in: I. Jevtic – I. Nilsson (eds.), *Spoliation as Translation: Medieval Worlds in the Eastern Mediterranean, (Convivium, Supplementum 2021/2)*, Brno 2021, 99–115. Eadem, *Painting and polyphony: The Christos Paschon as commentary*, in: B. van den Berg – D. Manolova – P. Marciniak (eds.), *Byzantine Commentaries on Ancient Greek Texts, 12th–15th Centuries*, Cambridge 2022, 214–239.
- 19 Gospel harmony: J. GENE WHITE, *A twenty-two-point harmony of the four gospels*, <https://theologue.files.wordpress.com/2014/05/harmony-resurrectionofchrist-jgenewhite.pdf> (retrieved 26 January 2025). Late antique attempts at harmony include Eusebius of Caesarea, *Pros Marion*, PG 22: 937–985 and Hesychios of Jerusalem, *Synagoge aporion kai ekluseon*, 50–57, PG, 93, 1434–1444. Both concentrate on individual problems rather than reconstruct the events of the Resurrection.
- 20 DE TEMMERMAN – VAN EMDE BOAS, *Character and Characterization*, op. cit., in: De Temmerman – van Emde Boas (eds.), *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature*, op. cit., 3 and their checklist at 23. In their preface, ix, they say that their contributors “have been asked to examine by whom, when and, mainly, how characters are constructed.” Who characterises also appears in PFISTER, *Theory and Analysis of Drama*, op. cit., 185, under figural explicit self-commentary and figural explicit commentary by others, and under authorial characterisation.
- 21 VAN EMDE BOAS, *Aeschylus*, in: De Temmerman – van Emde Boas (eds.), *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature*, op. cit., 317–336 at 336.
- 22 J. CULPEPER, *Language and Characterisation: People in Plays and Other Texts*, Harlow, Essex 2001, 2.
- 23 D. COHN, *The Distinction of Fiction*, Baltimore 1999, 118.
- 24 J.-P. VERNANT – P. VIDAL-NAQUET, *Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece*, J. Lloyd (tr.), Princeton 1990. J. BUXTON, *Myths and Tragedies in their Ancient Greek Contexts*, Oxford 2013.

So, after these issues of definition, I want first to introduce the text and compare it with another treatment of the same theme, the Easter *kontakion* of Romanos.²⁵ I shall then turn to the characterisation of the myrrhophores, of Mary Magdalen and the Theotokos with a last look at the relationship between Theotokos and Magdalen in the play.

The *Christos Paschon*

The *Christos Paschon* is the only surviving Byzantine tragedy, or rather trilogy of tragedies,²⁶ I Passion, II Burial, III Resurrection. It is often viewed as a Virgin's lament²⁷ (a third of it is composed of eleven laments and several reported or included laments) or as a cento, since 1,175 of its 2,632 lines are composed from four Euripidean tragedies: *Medeia*, *Hippolytos*, *Bakchai* and *Rhesos*. Its date is still disputed but I believe it is twelfth century.²⁸ Here I focus on the third, Resurrection, play, lines 1906–2531. The plot, from early on Easter Sunday outside John's house until the end of the day at the house of Mary, is set out in fig. 2. The four sections (after the dawn prelude, 1906–2030) do not map closely and chronologically on to biblical episodes but are contrasting treatments of the resurrection material: the dramatisation of three episodes, the lowlife subplot, the rapid list of unharmonised episodes, followed by the appearance to the eleven and the call to action at the end.

Of White's twenty-two points (fig. 1), the *Christos Paschon* can be regarded as having eighteen, three in the introduction, nine in the first section, one forming the basis of the subplot, seven in the recapitulation section and one more the basis of the epilogue. Of the seven possible tomb experiences *Christos Paschon* has four, though the visit of Peter and John is off-stage. Four points are omitted: the mention of the first day of the week (White 1: though

25 No. 29, Resurrection VI, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica: Cantica Genuina*, P. Maas – C. A. Trypanis (eds.), Oxford 1963, 223–233. No. 40, Resurrection I, *Romanos le Melode, Hymnes*, I–V, J. Grosdidier de Matons (ed.), Paris 1965–1981, IV, 355–421. See the reading by D. KRUEGER, Liturgical Emotion: Joy and Complexity in a Hymn of Romanos the Melodist for Easter, in: M. Mullett – S. Ashbrook Harvey (eds.), *Managing Emotion in Byzantium: Passions, Affects and Imaginings*, (Studies in Byzantine Cultural History), Abingdon 2023, 347–374.

26 As suggested by Tuilier (ed.), *La passion du Christ*, op. cit., 20.

27 M. ALEXIOU, The Lament of the Virgin in Byzantine Literature and Modern Greek Folksong, *BMGS* 1, 1975, 111–140 at 122–124.

28 All twenty-five manuscripts ascribe the poem to Gregory of Nazianzos, but since H. HUNGER, Die byzantinische Literatur der Komnenenzeit, *Anzeiger der philologisch-historischen Klasse der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* 105/3, 1968, 63–65 the text has been redated to the twelfth century, though Gregory had his adherents through the 1970s and 1980s. Arguments from lexicography, metre and iconography as well as context support the later date. See in particular W. HÖRANDNER, Lexikalische Beobachtungen zum *Christos Paschon*, in: E. Trapp – J. Diethart – G. Fatouros – A. Steiner – W. Hörandner (eds.), *Studien zur byzantinischen Lexikographie*, Vienna 1988, 183–202. A rigorous overhaul of date and authorship is overdue.

the third day is mentioned instead), the earthquake (White 4), the encounter of the risen Christ with the collective of women (White 16) and a second visit to the tomb by Peter in which he encounters Jesus (White 20). The deputisation of Mary (lines 1933–1948), the dialogue between Pilate, priests and guard (lines 2205–2377, White 17), and the speech of Christ at the house of Mary (lines 2504–2531, White 22) are added or expanded, and the part played by the Theotokos, together with her relationship with the Magdalen, is significantly developed, as the role of the men is minimised. There is little or no cross-reference to other biblical or liturgical material but there is a whole other level with the centonic texture of the play. These choices may be viewed in terms of Romanos' *kontakion* composed 600 years earlier but still performed in the Easter Vigil in the middle Byzantine period.²⁹

The Easter *kontakion* of Romanos

This metrical homily, the only one of Romanos' six Resurrection *kontakia* to deal with the terrestrial events of the first Easter Sunday, deals with the events of that day from the setting out of the women to before the appearance at Emmaus. The six sections after the prooimion (see fig. 2) correspond to four episodes in the New Testament drama: a woman seeing an empty tomb, men seeing an empty tomb, a woman seeing someone familiar and yet strange, and women encountering a supernatural being; to these are added two sections of report: woman to women and women to men. The episodes are similarly structured from journey through experience to report and reaction. They show rich typology, biblical precedent and sequel, and also a liturgical level: the Sanctus, the hymn to the tomb, the importance of hymns underlined in the prayer, and they carry us from supernatural light to the joyful natural spring. The intertextuality combines Old Testament typology with references to the foreshadowing events of the gospels and *Acts*. The hymn is given in all manuscripts except the missing portion of D (Athos Lavra Γ 28) and is still sung in its entirety today.

In terms of the twenty-two episodes (see fig. 1) it contains twelve; of the possible seven tomb experiences it offers four. It does not mention the first day of the week, the earthquake, any doubt as to who will move the stone, or the Pilate subplot. It adds the deputisation of Mary Magdalen (stanza 2), dialogue between Mary and the male disciples (stanzas 5–6), the return of Mary to the women (stanzas 13–16), the reply of the women to the angel (stanza 21) and dialogue with the male disciples (stanzas 22–23). It simplifies, reducing the account to one angel, seen once, with one vision of Christ. Its order differs

29 On performance see G. FRANK, Romanos and the Night Vigil in the Sixth Century, in: D. Krueger (ed.), *Byzantine Christianity*, (A People's History of Christianity, 3), Minneapolis 2006, 59–78. T. ARENTZEN, Voices Interwoven: Refrains and Vocal Participation in the Kontakia, *JÖB* 66, 2016, 1–10. Derek Krueger's argument in "Liturgical Joy," op. cit., 352 for Middle Byzantine performance rests on its presence not just in the eleventh-century Patmos *kontakarion* but in all manuscript witnesses.

from White's in that the collective of women only reaches the tomb after the experiences of Mary Magdalen, Peter and John. It ends before White's last three episodes (see fig. 1).

In constructing his hymn Romanos faced a similar task and similar difficulties to the author of the *Christos Paschon*. He did not have to handle dramatic form or combine Euripidean cento but like the poet of the *Paschon* he did have to arrive at a credible account of the events of the first Easter Sunday. This makes the hymn a good comparator to the play: as well as the similar problems it is more dramatic³⁰ and fuller than any of the homilies or hagiographies dealing with the same events, so closer to our play. But it has a primary narrator, and a completely different metrical system, and is liturgical, unlike the *Paschon*, so can also serve to draw out differences in characterisation caused by form. It should finally be remembered that the pieces are not totally independent: the author of the *Paschon*, we may assume, heard and joined in the refrain of the *kontakion* of Romanos once every year.

Two versions: similarities and differences

The two pieces have many similarities. Both by virtue of their (different) form require idealised women not to be silent and both in keeping with their models explore male/female reactions to the news of the Resurrection: both offer rich treatment of the female characters. Both explore the development of faith over the events of the third day: the women veer from clear expectation of the Resurrection to disappointment when the body is not there to shock at the supernatural apparitions they encounter and to an easy confidence when events have taken their course. Both simplify the 22 potential events (to 18 or 12) to arrive at a psychologically and dramatically satisfying sequence (fig. 1). And both adopt the stratagem of sending Mary Magdalen ahead in the first instance as a scout; this helps with the considerable differences between John and the synoptic gospels but also allows the focus to zoom in and out on the Magdalen, the two Marys and the group of women as a whole.

But there are differences: for one the *Paschon's* version is twice as long as Romanos', with the brilliant Pilate sub-plot (lines 2194–2377) which does not figure in Romanos and will not be discussed here. The Theotokos does not appear in Romanos but is central to the *Paschon*. Romanos simplifies and selects, spending time and stanzas over dialogue where the *Paschon* attempts completeness. Romanos has three journeys back into town (Magdalen to male disciples, Magdalen to the women, Magdalen and women to the male disciples), the *Paschon* (I think) one; Romanos has two apparitions, the *Paschon* three. Romanos is free-standing (though embedded in the vigil liturgy) while the *Paschon* relates to the two other plays on Crucifixion and Burial. In terms

30 U. H. ERIKSEN, *Drama in the Kontakia of Romanos the Melodist: a Narratological Analysis of Four Kontakia*, (PhD thesis, Aarhus University 2013).

of structure the *Paschon* falls into four parts while *Romanos* has six episodes; *Romanos* ends with the joyful announcement of resurrection and spring and the (less joyful) heterodiegetic narrator's prayer while the *Paschon* must proceed to the appearance to the Ten before the final prayers to Pantanax and Parthenos.

It should now be obvious that both treatments are very much focused on women. In *Romanos* the women are a strong collective, though the Magdalen has the central spotlight, and they deal confidently with the apostles' assumption of entitlement, and the angel's assumption of their stupidity.³¹ They are characterised early as *μυροφόροι κόραι* and *θεοφόροι* and on their return in 15.1 as *ὁ χορὸς τῶν εὐσέβων νεανίδων* and 17.1 as *ὁ σύλλογος τῶν θεοφόρων θηλείων*.³² In the *Paschon* Resurrection play, the gospel roles given to Mary Magdalen and the myrrhophores are expanded and redistributed to the Virgin (who is the main character of the whole trilogy), the Magdalen, and the chorus, with brief references to Mary the mother of Mark and two other Marys.³³ This female world of courage, hope and celebration with its characters played by three actors is contrasted with the male world of the comic sub-plot in which the guard, the priests and the governor, also played by (the same) three actors, conspire in a cover-up.³⁴ While they try out their story on a sceptical Pilate, the Magdalen is bringing the good news of the Resurrection to the male disciples, castigated for their inadequacy by the Theotokos.³⁵ The only other male character, apart from supernatural apparitions, is a single messenger who is cut down to size by the Theotokos: she receives him imperiously, tries to keep him on-message and ruins his announcement by guessing what he is going to say.³⁶ Unlike in *Romanos* Peter and John are kept offstage, do not speak and we do not see the Magdalen's interchange with the male disciples.³⁷

31 Stanza 23 for the disciples, stanza 21 for the angel, *Romanos le Melode*, Grosdidier de Matons (ed.), op. cit., 418, 414.

32 *μυροφόροι*: 1.3. *θεοφόροι*: 2.1, *Romanos le Melode*, Grosdidier de Matons (ed.), op. cit., 382. 15.1, idem, 404. 17.1, idem, 408.

33 The house of Mary is the women's destination at 2480 and Mary herself appears at 2487 and 2492. That Mary is clarified at 1615 as Mary the mother of Mark. The two other Marys are mentioned at 2468 as part of the Magdalen's information dump, *La passion du Christ*, Tuilier (ed.), op. cit., 330, 258, 328.

34 Lines 2194–2377.

35 1936–37: *μύσται γὰρ οὐ πάρεισι τοῦ διδασκάλου, / φεύγοντες ὀρμὴν ἄλογον μαιφόνων*.

36 See the long exchange at 2174–2193. Line 2180 is her terse directions, 2186 her guess that he has come to tell her that her son has left Hades. A barrage of questions at 2191–2193 elicits the detailed account of his spying which becomes the subplot.

37 Peter and John are observed by the chorus 2415–2420. The Magdalen's account to them precedes her return at 2434, *La passion du Christ*, Tuilier (ed.), op. cit., 324, 326. In *Romanos*, the Magdalen reports at 3.8 and they run to the tomb at stanzas 4.1–6.3, *Romanos le Melode*, Grosdidier de Matons (ed.), op. cit., 386–390.

Character construction

I now analyse in turn the female characters of both texts: the women of Galilee (in both), Mary Magdalen (in both) and the Theotokos (in the *Paschon*). I proceed by setting each character in the Byzantine tradition, then summarising her/their parts in each text, following this summary with an analysis based on that of de Temmerman and van Emde Boas, especially their checklist (see note 18 above), to look at direct characterisation, naming, address, speech, action, emotions, synkrisis and, in the case of the *Paschon*, the impact of the cento. This involves some quantitative analysis, though this is merely indicative (the biggest part in a play may not be the most important one). I then note who is responsible for characterising the character. This section is in each case headed ‘who characterises and how’ and the items in the checklist are set in bold.

1. *The Women of Galilee*

The women who accompanied Jesus to Jerusalem play supporting roles in many resurrection accounts and iconographies. Various are named: Mary mother of James and Joses (Mk 15:40, Lk 24:10), Salome (Mk 16:1), Joanna (Lk 8:3, 24:10), Susanna (Lk 8:3), Mary Cleopas (Jo 19:85). As myrrhophores, usually two as in Matt 28:1 (Magdalen and ‘the other Mary’), sometimes three as in Mk 16:1 (Magdalen, Mary mother of James and Salome), they provide, unnamed, the standard Byzantine representation of the Resurrection until the appearance of the Anastasis in the eighth century.³⁸ After that the myrrhophores appear on many different media, at the empty tomb in communication with the angel, pulled in two directions, to advance or to flee.³⁹ Often they appear in funerary contexts, for example the imperial tombs of the twelfth century.⁴⁰ The other scene in which they appear shows them falling at the feet of Christ.⁴¹ They are

38 J. MYSLIVEC – G. JÁSZAI, Frauen am Grab, in: E. Kirschbaum SJ – G. Bandmann – W. Braunfels – J. Kollwitz – W. Mrasek – A. A. Schmid – H. Schnell (eds.), *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, Rome – Vienna 2004, II, 54–62.

39 See for example the twelfth-century silver-gilt reliquary, Musée du Louvre, département des objets d’art inv. nr MR 348 and MR 346, and the careful analysis of S. TEETOR, “For trembling and astonishment had gripped them”: Emotional and Bodily Movements in a Byzantine Depiction of the Women at the Empty Tomb, in: G. Fingarova – F. Gargova – M. Mullett (eds.), *Illuminations: Studies Presented to Lioba Theis*, Vienna 2022, 127–137. Her fig. 1 shows the reliquary plaque.

40 R. OUSTERHOUT, Women at Tombs: Narrative, Theatricality, and the Contemplative Mode, in: A. Eastmond – L. James (eds.), *Wonderful Things: Byzantium through its Art*, (Papers of the 40th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, 20–22 March 2009), (Society for the Promotion of Byzantine Studies, 16), Farnham, Surrey 2013, 229–246.

41 For the iconography of the *Chairete*, showing two women falling at the feet of Christ see P. KONIS, The Post-Resurrection Appearances of Christ. The Case of the Chairete or “All Hail,” *Rosetta* 1, 2006, 31–40. http://www.rosetta.bham.ac.uk/issue_01/Konis.htm (retrieved 22 January 2025).

praised by church fathers for their presence when needed and the male disciples were in hiding.⁴²

In Romanos they frame the hymn: in 1–3.3 they set out together but decide to be sensible and send Mary ahead: what she says we'll follow. After the Magdalen's experiences with empty tomb, interactions with the male disciples (3.7–6) and the *Chairete* (9–12) she returns to her ὁμοτρόποις and reports to them; they go together to the tomb, sing hymns and engage with the Young Man (19–21) and then “mixing fear and joy, happiness and grief” (22.1) go together to the men, to encourage them. They are sharp-witted, pointing out to the Young Man that he wouldn't be lounging around on the stone if Christ were still there, and they patiently respond to the men's incredulous mockery (23.3–4). Theirs are the last words (apart from the prayer of the heterodiegetic narrator in 24). We see through their actions their trust in the Magdalen, their wit, their emotions, as a united rejoicing collective female witness of the Resurrection.

Who characterises and how?

In Romanos they are not **named**, in keeping with the portrayal as a united group of women, *μυροφόροι γυναῖκες* (the Magdalen at 13), *θηλεῖται* (angel at 20) they address each other (1.4) as φίλοι or (2), γυναῖκες. They are **directly characterised** as being φρονιμοί (21.2), as θεοφόροι (2.1), συνεταί (3.1) and as a collective of virtues in 15.1 and 17.1. But they speak μετὰ δειλίας at 18.5. They have eight **speeches**, accounting for 30% of the whole hymn and indeed have the last word (apart from the poet in 24). In **action** we see them hastening (1.2) having good ideas (2.2), deputing Mary (3.2), believing immediately at 15.4, determining to go to share the experience (16.4), singing a hymn to the tomb (17.4–13), seeing the apparition (18.4) and urging each other to flee (18.11). They recover smartly and sass the angel, return to the men and rebut their snarky ‘got that from an angel, did you?’ Their **emotions** are explosive: largely fear but they mix fear and joy, happiness with sadness in 22 (like the Louvre reliquary). They embody the liturgical joy of the Resurrection in their joyful return (22.4–14). The best **synkrisis**, is not of them, but theirs of the angel: for what general is seated in the presence of his emperor? (21.8–9). If we ask who characterises, a great deal hangs on the primary narrator, though the women reveal much indirectly in speech, action and especially emotion.

In the *Paschon* they form the chorus. They have tried to keep the Theotokos safe in the first play but taken no active part in the second, and in the third they play a minor and unspectacular role as incompetent foils, sleepy, stupid, scared, to the two main women. They self-identify as women of Galilee (1960), they are sleepy at the beginning (1963) and fail to accompany Theotokos and Magdalen to the tomb (2006–2008), and once there they are very much afraid of the Young Man at the tomb and wish to withdraw (2140). They announce

42 E.g. *John Chrysostom, In Matt.Hom.* 88, PG 58, 777–778. Idem, *In Jo.Hom.* 85, PG 59, 462.

the arrival (2415) of Peter and John (off) and (2173) the Fifth Messenger. They narrate the journey and the entrance into the house of Mary (2480–2496) until the final appearance of Christ.

Who characterises and how?

In the *Paschon*, **direct characterisation** comes with Mary Magdalen at 1992–2001 saying that they cannot chase sleep from their eyes. The women **name** themselves at 1960 as ἄλλαι τε πολλαὶ Γαλιλαίας θρεμμιάτων and the Magdalen identifies them at 2117 as ἄλλαι τε πᾶσαι Γαλιλαίας θρεμμιάτων. They are **addressed** by the Magdalen at 1995 as γυναῖκες and by the Theotokos at 2410 as φίλαι. The exchanges at 1995–2008 between them and the Magdalen when she tries to wake them up are less amicable than the Theotokos's words at 2013–2019: she clearly thinks they should be on the road already. She is possibly over-exacting and the Theotokos right: she later sees them running, τρέχουσι, to the tomb – the Theotokos had **compared** them to the speed of a dove in 2014. They have five **speeches**, beginning with 1931 their declaration that they will persevere with the Theotokos to the end, but then lapse into sleepiness at 1957–1963 promising to follow later. At 2138 they have a long speech expressing their almost hysterical reactions to the Young Man at the tomb, ending with their normal⁴³ function of hailing the Fifth Messenger. Their few words at 2415–2420 simply notice the appearance of Peter and John off and their last words at 2480–2513 comment on the arrival at the house of Mary up to the appearance of Christ. **Emotion** words are plentiful, out of proportion to their 79 lines, particularly in the long speech (or ode?) expressing *thambos* and *ekstasis*.⁴⁴ The **Euripidean cento** contributes to the atmosphere of their sleepiness at the beginning, using the sleepy chorus of *Rh*546–555. The Second Messenger's account of Agave leading the bacchantes, darting forward like doves at *Ba*1086 is combined, 2014–18, with *Ba*693, the First Messenger on Agave waking up the bacchantes, reinforcing the women's somnolence. Lines 2137–2142 recall *Rh*291, the messenger's shock at the arrival of the Thracian army, to express the profound shock at the tomb. If we ask **who characterises**, the answer is all the women: the Magdalen pejoratively, the Theotokos more supportively, the chorus themselves owing to their panic and fear at the tomb.

2. Mary Magdalen

In the Gospels she appears as a follower of Jesus in Galilee having had seven devils cast out of her (Lk 8:2). She is present at the cross but from afar (Matt 27:56, Mk 15:40) and sits at the sepulchre (Matt 27:61, Mk 15:47). At the end of the Sabbath, she keeps her eye on the sepulchre (Mk 16:1, Lk 24:1, Jo 20:1), preparing to bring spices to the tomb. Christ appears first to her (Mk 16:9) and

43 One of their normal tragic functions as chorus, that is.

44 2138–2172. On emotions and emotion words see M. MULLETT, *Tragic Emotions? The Christos Paschon*, in: D. Cairns – M. Hinterberger – A. Pizzone – M. Zaccarini (eds.), *Emotions through Time* (Emotions in Antiquity, 1), Tübingen 2022, 281–302.

stands outside the tomb weeping, seeing two angels at head and foot (Jo 20:12) and is greeted by Christ, ‘Mary’ to which she replies ‘Rabboni’. In text she has a very different story in east and west: in the west from Gregory the Great her story is united with those of Mary of Bethany and the sinner who anointed Christ;⁴⁵ in Byzantium she remains a separate figure, appearing in the *Synaxarion* of Constantinople and the *Imperial Menologion* simply with the biblical references plus her service to the Theotokos in Ephesos.⁴⁶ Her cult was minimal until Leo VI brought her relics from Ephesos to join Lazaros’ from Cyprus in his new church of St Lazaros. Theophanes Continuatus, Skylitzes and Kedrenos confuse her with Mary of Bethany, and the *Patria* says her relics came from there, though neither view was orthodox.⁴⁷ In John Geometres she is with Mary Kleopas at the foot of the cross, sits a little away from the tomb, flees when the guard arrives, buys perfumes for the body, before taking her place on Sunday.⁴⁸ In the fourteenth century Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos wrote a Life in which she is present at every event from the raising of Lazaros to the Ascension, even quarrelling with the centurion at the cross.⁴⁹ In art, she appears very seldom until the thirteenth century;⁵⁰ Cecily Hennessy has described her as marginalised in Byzantium.⁵¹

In Romanos however she retains the central role she held in St John’s Gospel. She commands the central part of the hymn, stanzas 3.7 to 12, beginning her apostolic mission by telling the apostles so that Peter and John can run to the tomb in 5, consoling them and maintaining morale in 6, speaking for the women not herself, enjoying (7–12) an extended *Chairete* meeting with Christ. In the opening stanzas and the second half she interacts with the women with their complete trust, joining with them in their joyful hymn at the tomb (17.4–13) and ecstatic speech to the male disciples (22.4–13). She is passionate, courageous, quick thinking, steadfastly believing, articulate, generous and empathetic.

45 For Mary Magdalen in the west see S. HASKINS, *Mary Magdalen: Myth and Metaphor*, Hammersmith 1993. K. LUDWIG-JANSEN, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*, Princeton, NJ 2000. V. SAXER, *Le culte de Marie Madeleine en occident : des origines à la fin du moyen âge*, Auxerre – Paris 1959.

46 For the east see V. A. FOSKOLOU, Mary Magdalene between East and West: Cult and Image, Relics and Politics in the Late Thirteenth-Century Eastern Mediterranean, *DOP* 65/66, 2011/2012, 271–296 and C. HENNESSY, Mary Magdalene and the Prostitute Saints: East and West, Marginalized and Demarginalized, in: D. Ariantzi (ed.), *Marginalization and Subculture Groups: Prostitutes, Actors, and Tavern-keepers in Byzantium*, Leiden (forthcoming).

47 *Theophanes Continuatus*, (CSHB), I. Bekker (ed.), Bonn 1828, 364–365. *John Skylitzes, Synopsis historion*, (CFHB, 5), H. Thurn (ed.), Berlin 1973, 180–181. *George Kedrenos, Synopsis historion*, (CSHB), I. Bekker (ed.), Bonn 1839, II, 260. *Patria of Constantinople*, T. Preger (ed.), *Scriptores originum Constantinopolitanum*, Leipzig 1989, 288.

48 *John Geometres, Life of the Virgin*, M. Constan – C. Simelidis (ed., tr.), (Dumbarton Oaks Medieval Library, 77), Cambridge, MA 2023, 91, 254–258.

49 *Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos, Logos eis ten hagian isapostolon Myrophoron Marian ten Magdalenen*, BHG 1162, PG 147, 539–576 at 560–568.

50 FOSKOLOU, Mary Magdalene between East and West, op. cit., 275–279.

51 HENNESSY, Mary Magdalene and the Prostitute Saints, op. cit., (forthcoming).

Who characterises and how?

In Romanos she is **named** thirteen times, evoked as an authority by the women in 23.13, **hailed** simply ‘Mary’ by Christ at the *Chairete* as in John, but later (11.8) Ὡ σέμνή. She has six **speeches**, taking up 25% of the whole hymn. She **acts** decisively, bravely, compassionately. Rich **emotion** vocabulary stresses her *pothos* and *agape* above all, though at 9.1 she is beaten down by mourning and exhausted by *pothos*, 11.1 she is carried away by warm *pothos* and burning *agape* to try to touch the risen Lord. At 14.1 she recalls her *lype* turning to *euphrosyne*. **Synkrisis** makes of her ‘a powerful trumpet’, a dove with the olive branch in her mouth, Moses descending from the mountain. If we ask **who characterises**, the answer is varied. The **primary narrator** (at 3.4, 9.1 and 10.1) records her emotions, the **women** at 2.10 express confidence in her, and in 16 evaluate her logos as ἀληθός; both they and **Christ** address her as σέμνή, and he shows appreciation of the power and articulacy of her voice at 12.5 as she prepares to announce the Resurrection to the disciples. And in her two reports, to the men in 3 and the women in 13 **she** reflects on her experience as well as simply reporting it.

In *Paschon* III she represents a new character in the trilogy with no advantage of primacy⁵² except the Gospel of John (according to the Gospel accounts she should have appeared both at the Crucifixion and the Burial)⁵³ and Romanos. So we need to get to know her immediately and the innovation of the dawn prelude gives us that opportunity. She emerges from the chorus, volunteers (at lines 1941–1942) rather than being deputised and her first word is ἐγὼ. Indirectly we must see her as brave (the Theotokos at 1934 asks who dares?), though she is not unaffected by the apparitions, and was daunted by the empty tomb. She is ambitious and knows exactly what she wants: to be the first to see the living Christ. She volunteers to go to tell the disciples, and after several aborted attempts finally goes. She arrives back having missed the comic subplot to hear the Theotokos telling the chorus about her earlier exploits.⁵⁴ She then (2437–2474) offers the information dump of other resurrection events which we assume she has learnt during her time in town with the male disciples.⁵⁵ Seen

52 Primacy is defined in the glossary of De Temmerman – van Emde Boas (eds.), *Characterization in Ancient Greek Literature*, op. cit., xv as follows: “the effect that information about a character which is presented first (i.e. soon after the character’s introduction in the story) will strongly determine the narratees’ view of that character unless considerable contrasting information is presented.”

53 Matt 27:56 and Mk 15:40 at the cross, Matt 27:61 and Mk 15:47 at the tomb.

54 The Theotokos, 2421–2433, tells how she ran to the tomb before the others, but accompanied by the Theotokos. They saw the empty tomb and thought the body had been removed but soon learned the truth and the Magdalen set out to tell the disciples, so that Peter and John set out to see the tomb for themselves (as they do, off, 2415–2418).

55 The Magdalen confirms the Theotokos’ account, then says she went twice to the tomb, once with the Theotokos, then with Peter and John. She saw two angels dressed in white, at head and foot of the tomb, then she recognised Christ’s voice and his unexpected appearance, at which she fell to the ground and embraced his feet. She reports Christ’s information that

often as the least satisfactory part of the play, and impossibly unnaturalistic not to say contradictory,⁵⁶ but a last desperate attempt to get in as many Resurrection events as possible, the speech serves to give her the authority of omniscience; she has the overview of the Resurrection as well as the first sighting. She then (2475–2476) gets the women moving again to their next commitment, the appearance to the Ten at the house of Mary. The Magdalen sets the pace in this play, dawdling a little for the right time to leave in the half-light, attempting to follow instructions, rounding up her sisters.

Who characterises and how?

The Magdalen is **named** first at 1999 (93 lines in) by the Theotokos as ‘Maria’ and at 2418 the chorus names her: Μαγδάλ’ εἶπε Μαρία and calls her πιστουμένη. She is **addressed** by the Theotokos as φίλη at 2050. Her fifteen **speeches** demonstrate her loyalty, faith, determination and initiative; she avows her own eagerness, προθυμία at 1974 and her ποθοῦσα καρδιά at 2122. She owns to her own weakness and knows her mind – and the desire (δ’ ὦν ἐρᾶς 1982) of the Theotokos. Her **actions** drive the play along. She expresses some **emotion**, the failure of hope at the empty tomb (2036), describing herself as τρέμουσα καὶ φόβῳ κρατουμένη at the tomb (2134) and at 2448 καταπλαγεῖσα χαρᾶ καὶ φόβῳ. She calls the disciples φίλοι (2466) and the Theotokos φίλα (1992, 2004), but love does not drive her like Romanos’ Magdalen. The **cento** allows her to voice Dolon in *Rhesos*, volunteering and asking for a reward (1941–1945; *Rh*154–157; 1972, 1978–1979; *Rh*181, 175), but she also voices Jason, claiming to be working in the interests of Medeia/Theotokos (1976; *Med*460), as well as Odysseus and Diomedes, pressing on (2004–2006, *Rh*582), and various messengers (e.g. 2443–2450, *Rh*291–297, the messenger who announces the arrival of the saviour Rhesos): she is of course the first and most important messenger of the day. She is Athena, assuring the Trojans of her good faith (1979, *Rh*667). Her shock at the tomb is voiced in the words of Hippolytos discovering the body of Phaidra (2122–2123, *Hipp*912–913). She largely characterises herself, both directly and indirectly.

3. The Theotokos

From a biblical point of view the Theotokos should not be in this play at all, unless she can be the ‘other Mary’ of Matt 28:1. But already in the sixth century on the Sancta Sanctorum box, and the Rabbula Gospels (and in Severus

he would return to heaven to be with his father but before then would see the disciples in Galilee. She had reported this to the disciples, and they did not want to believe her words, but came themselves. She reminds the Theotokos of her own experience at the tomb with the chorus and the two other Marys. Finally, she reports the appearance to two other disciples who had left for the country – the appearance at Emmaus.

56 For example, the two angels of Jo 20,11–13 are recalled in diegesis at 2445 as immediately before the *Chairete*. We have already seen in mimesis at 2055–2075 both Theotokos and Magdalen encountering first one white-clad angel then Christ.

though not in Romanos), one of the myrrhophores is dressed as the Virgin is in other scenes, and is customarily identified as her.⁵⁷ Procopius lists churches in Constantinople dedicated to her,⁵⁸ there are multiple icons already in the early period,⁵⁹ and increasingly, especially in the ninth century in homilies, her story is expanded.⁶⁰ Middle Byzantine developments in the Lives of the Virgin bring her even more into focus.⁶¹ Epiphanius' ninth-century account has her absent almost entirely from both Passion and Resurrection (though she gets a special appearance from Christ at John's house to make her the first person to see him after the resurrection).⁶² The tenth-century Lives place her at the centre of the action: in John Geometres (= psMaximos) she argues with Annas and Caiphas during the trial, arranges the deposition, requisitions the tomb, remains alone at the tomb so that she sees the Resurrection, and Christ appears to her many times at the house of John.⁶³ Our text steps back from this hyperactivity, but she has already in the first two plays established an unforgettable authority. In I she stands indefatigably receiving successive messages of bad news and forces her way to the foot of the cross to converse with her Son. In II she insists, against the wishes of Joseph, Nikodemos and John, on her participation in Deposition and Burial and herself carries out the two other ritual acts of *Threnos* and *Teleutaios Aspasmos*.

So the principle of primacy would encourage us to see her in charge at the beginning of III and indeed she speaks 154 lines to the Magdalen's 130 and the chorus' 79. She opens the play in a divine prologue (1906–1929) before the entrance of the chorus but takes time to reassert herself and decide (1989) to accompany the Magdalen. She has her own conversation with the first angel (2060–2083), and while the Magdalen is away informing the disciples resumes

57 Sancta Sanctorum Reliquary box, Vatican cat. 61883.2.1–2. Florence, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, cod. Pluteus 1, 56, fol. 13a and for discussion HENNESSY, *Mary Magdalene and the Prostitute Saints*, op. cit. (forthcoming).

58 Procopius, *De aed.*, (Loeb Classical Library, 343), H. B. Dewing – G. Downey (eds.), I–VII, Cambridge, MA – London 1971, VII, 1.3.1–10, p. 38–40.

59 See C. BARBER, *Early Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, in: M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Mother of God: Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, Milan 2000, 253–278 and catalogue items 1–9.

60 See M. B. CUNNINGHAM, *The Virgin Mary in Byzantium, c. 400–1000: Hymns, Homilies and Hagiography*, Cambridge 2021, ch. 3, 94–136. P. Allen – M. B. Cunningham (eds.), *Preacher and Audience: Studies in Early Byzantine Homiletics*, Leiden – Boston – Cologne 1998. N. TSIRONI, *The Lament of the Virgin Mary from Romanos the Melode to George of Nicomedia: An Aspect of the Development of the Marian Cult*, (PhD thesis, King's College, London 1998).

61 CUNNINGHAM, *Virgin Mary in Byzantium*, op. cit., ch. 5, Narratives about the Panagia, 179–210 at 191–205. Part IV in T. Arentzen – M. B. Cunningham (eds.), *The Reception of the Virgin Mary in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images*, Cambridge 2019, 309–340.

62 Epiphanius of Kallistratos, *Life of the Virgin*, BHG1049, 21, PG 120, 185–216 at 210C.

63 John Geometres, Constatas – Simelidis (ed., tr.), op. cit., 76, 86–88, 89, 90, 92, 93 and 204, 242–248, 253, 262–266, 270.

her role as receiver of messengers,⁶⁴ asserting herself as we have seen. She handles the arrival of the chorus by making sure they are up-to-date but after the Magdalen returns, we do not hear her again. After her prominent but isolated role over the three days she is absorbed with the other women into a new community of Christians with a new mission.

Who characterises and how?

Direct characterisation is particularly difficult in the case of the Theotokos who is onstage throughout.⁶⁵ The Magdalen describes her as being fond of the two other Marys, and indeed she regularly calls the disciples φίλοι or φίλαι.⁶⁶ She is never named Theotokos or Parthenos, but addressed frequently, for example by the Fifth Messenger as Δέσποινα μήτηρ παιδός (2174) and Δέσποινα πάγκαρτε (2181). She has fifteen **speeches**, opening the play, delivering her last lament, conversing with Christ at the *Chairete*.⁶⁷ In term of **action** she is fairly passive, hesitating to go along with the Magdalen, waiting to receive the chorus, the Fifth Messenger and the Magdalen on her return, falling in with the walk to the house of Mary. She does not claim many **emotions**, being famous for *apatheia*,⁶⁸ though she ascribes passions to other people: the *thumos* (1938), *phthonos* (2409), *orge* (1937), *thrasutes* (2035) of her enemies, and she admits θαμβουμένη πέφρικα to see the stone moved (2052). The Magdalen recalls her as θάμβει καταπλαγεῖσα at the tomb (2467). At 2108–2115 she sings a song of joy which compares well with the language of joy which crescendos towards the end of the *kontakion*.⁶⁹ She voices the vivid **synkrisis** of the white horses of Rhesos and the angel in the tomb (2058, *Rh*618). The **cento** allows her to voice the Trojan leaders of *Rhesos*: Odysseus (1908, *Rh*587), Aeneas (1910, *Rh*125), Hector (1917, *Rh*141), as well as Menelaus in *Troades* (2076, *Tro*860). She is Artemis telling Hippolytos that he will get his revenge (1920–1921, *Hipp*1416–1418) and Agave in both Messengers' speeches in *Bacchae*, waking up the bacchantes and getting them going (2012–2018, 2038–2042, *Ba*693, 733,

64 The pattern of chorus recognition, preliminary dialogue, messenger speech, acknowledgement and reaction (lament in the first three) from the Theotokos is repeated in all five, but her reception changes, from the condemnation of Judas in the first messenger scene (I 124–357 betrayal), through anxiety and denial (I cannot bear it) in the second (I 361–477 condemnation), and the dread of the third (I 637–688 crucifixion), to the defiance of the fourth (II 1860–1902 guard on the tomb) and her confidence and high-handedness in the fifth (III 2173–2392 the guard's witness to the resurrection).

65 In the second play she is apostrophised at 1163–1171, discussed at 1227 and quoted at 1227–1230, 1235–1238 and we assume that either she is off stage or in some way unable to hear what is said.

66 Fond of the Marys: 2468. φίλοι: 2435. φίλαι: 2410.

67 1906–1929, 2019–2030, 2098–2103, *La passion du Christ*, Tuilier (ed.), op. cit., 284, 292, 298–300.

68 *John Geometres*, Constan – Simelidis (ed., tr.), op. cit., 89 and 248 says that she gave herself to emotion only in suitable proportion, not exceeding the boundaries of appropriate behavior.

69 In the women's hymn to the tomb at 17.4–13, *Romanos le Melode*, Grosdidier de Matons (ed.), op. cit., 408 and their report to the men at 22.4–13, idem 416.

1086–1088). She is the messenger describing the saviour Rhesos at the head of his army (2029, *Rh355*, 357). She is characterised by her presence, reduced though it is in this play, and by the cento above all.

Magdalen or Theotokos?

If a major theme of the play is the contrast between the brave, loyal women and the skulking or deceitful men, another is surely the relationship between the two Marys. The Magdalen insists that she is acting on behalf of the Theotokos (1987), οὔσα γάρ μοι δεσπότης, but addresses her as κόρη, Ἦ φίλα κόρα, ἀδελφή, which suggest a much more equal relationship. Only at 2434 when she returns from the disciples does she address her as κόρη δέσποινα, χάρμα τοῦ γένους. The Theotokos addresses her once (1989), as Maria, at the point she has decided to go along with her to the tomb, once (2050) as φίλη. The chorus name her fully at 2418. If the first section, the dawn prelude, suggests friction between the ambitions of each woman and the potential for competition, as the play wears on we see mutual support and compromise: when the Magdalen falters on seeing the empty tomb the Theotokos tells her to have courage; when the Theotokos shows some vulnerability, the Magdalen reassures her that she will see Christ before the others, in fact just before he appears.

A comparison of the *Chairete* episode in both texts shows up more clearly this process in the *Christos Paschon*. In Romanos the *Chairete* is an extended section (6 stanzas as against 5 for the women at the tomb, 4 for the Magdalen reporting to the women, 3 for the deputising of Mary by the women and the experience of Peter and John at the tomb) after Peter and John have left. Mary cries to Jesus “where have they taken you?” (7.5–13) and begs him to revive himself as he did Lazaros and the widow’s son (8). In 9 Christ addresses her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you searching for in the tomb?” and the Magdalen replies with Jo 14–15 ‘they have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid him.’ She directly challenges the other “for if I am not wrong you are the gardener.” She then proclaims him as her teacher and her Lord, who (in the refrain) offers resurrection to the fallen. In 10 Christ, knowing that she has recognised his voice says, “Mary.” And she recognises him and 10.5–13 says so. In 11 she wishes to hold him, and he responds with Jo 20:17 and the *noli me tangere*. In 12 he tells her to trumpet the news to the disciples. And immediately at the beginning of 13 she returns to the women. In the *Paschon* the episode (lines 2085–2115) lasts a mere 30 lines with a speech by the Magdalen at 2085–2096, Christ’s single-word greeting, χάρητε, at 2097, a response from the Theotokos 2098–2103, Christ’s injunction to tell the disciples to meet him in Galilee (2104–2107) and the Theotokos’ (2108–2114) rejoicing at the encounter. Most of the Magdalen’s speech is about her intention to obey the apparition and go to tell the disciples but is interrupted by at 2094 seeing something; she makes the identification “our Lord in unaccustomed guise” though at 2095 she doubts herself and remains unsure. Christ’s greeting

at 2097 echoes Matt 28:9 and the Theotokos responds with certainty, to which Christ tells them not to fear and to tell the disciples (again) to meet him in Galilee. The Virgin rejoices and the Magdalen spots the arrival of the women. So in this compressed version (no gardener, just dawning recognition and speedy response) Theotokos and Magdalen share the honours for the *Chairete*: the Magdalen is the first to see the risen Christ (and identifies him much more quickly than in Romanos) but the Theotokos responds to him (at 2098). Both in the *Paschon* eventually take their place in the group membership of women apostles to the apostles, yielding individuality to a collective identity at the end. But both are characterised more fully than any man in the trilogy and the competition between them reflects transtextual reality when first one Mary then the other is highlighted by cult, or representation in art or text. In both Romanos and *Paschon* III however the Magdalen has a prominence unusual in Byzantine culture as a whole.

Conclusion

We have seen that the two authors, dealing with the same biblical material (though a different body of tradition), made different choices and constructed their women characters differently. In Romanos the women of Galilee are confident and sassy, in the *Paschon* sleepy and fearful. In Romanos the Magdalen is articulate and loving, in the *Paschon* ambitious and enterprising. The Theotokos does not appear in Romanos, and in the *Paschon* her dominance in the first two plays of the trilogy is diluted as she is shown in agonistic counterpoise to the Magdalen, a distinctive feature of the play. In both the women are far from silent and in both they are contrasted with cowardly or venal men.

What all this reveals is

1. that the transtextuality is not a fixed tradition, a single straight development from A to Z; Mesarites in the early thirteenth century evokes the myrrhophores and identifies them as Mary Magdalen and Mary Kleopas with no sense of a hyperactive Theotokos.⁷⁰ Like myth to Attic dramatists the sheer complexity of the biblical accounts and their development in apocryphal gospel, hymn and

70 Nicholas Mesarites, *The Church of the Holy Apostles*, G. Downey (ed.), *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, n.s. 47, 6, Philadelphia 1957, 28.8, 861–918 at 909. M. Angold (tr.), *Nicholas Mesarites, His Life and Works (in Translation)*, (Translated Texts for Byzantinists, 4), Liverpool 2017, 75–133 at 112.

homily and hagiography to say nothing of the liturgical surrounding of troparia and staurotheotokia⁷¹ and images on walls,⁷² offers not so much constraints as endless opportunities to character-building authors.

2. If we compare the solutions in drama as against narrative (though the *Paschon* is more than just a tragedy⁷³ and a kontakion is not entirely a narrative⁷⁴) there is certainly no loss of interiority in the characterisation of Magdalen or Theotokos in drama.

3. Given our analysis of how characters are constructed, and, whatever “fictional” may mean in Byzantium, we should agree, against some theorists, that characters “constructed” are not necessarily “fictional.”

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71 On the *staurotheotokia*, encountered more than twenty times a week through the entire liturgical year in monasteries, and in parishes on feast-days, see FR. MAXIMOS CONSTAS, Poetry and Painting in the Middle Byzantine Period: a Bilateral Icon from Kastoria and the stavrotheotokia of Joseph the Hymnographer, in: S. E. J. Gerstel (ed.), *Viewing Greece: Cultural and Political Agency in the Medieval and Early Modern Mediterranean*, (Studies in the Visual Culture of the Middle Ages, 11), Turnhout 2016, 13–32. A philological study is an urgent desideratum.

72 As the passion cycle developed in the Middle Byzantine period with Deposition, Threnos/Entombment between Crucifixion and Anastasis, see K. WEITZMANN, The Origin of the Threnos, in: M. Meiss (ed.), *De artibus opuscula XL. Essays in honor of Erwin Panofsky*, I–II, New York 1961, I, 476–490. J. SPATHARAKIS, The Influence of the Lithos in the Development of the Iconography of the Threnos, in: D. Mouriki – S. Čurčić – G. Galavaris – H. L. Kessler – G. Vikan – C. Moss – K. Kiefer (eds.), *Byzantine East, Latin West: Art-Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*, Princeton 1995, 435–446. N. ŠEVČENKO, The Service of the Virgin’s Lament Revisited, in: Brubaker – Cunningham (eds.), *The Cult of the Mother of God*, op. cit., 247–262, the women at the empty tomb and *Chairete* were maintained, MYSLIVEC – JÁSZAI, *Frauen am Grab*, op. cit.

73 It has also been regarded as Virgin’s lament by ALEXIOU, The Lament of the Virgin, op. cit., 122–124 and eadem, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, Cambridge 1974, 62–78, esp. 64–65 and as a cento by W. PUCHNER, *Greek Theatre between Antiquity and Independence: A History of Reinvention from the Third Century BC to 1830*, Cambridge 2017, 77.

74 Though it does have a primary narrator.

Figure 1 Resurrection Harmony in Romanos and the *Christos Paschon*

	J. Gene White	Gospels	Romanos	<i>Paschon</i> III
1	First day of week	Matt 28:1; Mk 16:1-2; Lk 24:1; Jo 20:1	X	X but 3rd day
2	Time of day	Jo 20:1; Lk 24:1; Mk 16:12; Matt 28:1	1.1-2	III, 1906
3	Group of women walk to the tomb Named	Matt 28:1; Mk 16:2; Lk 24:1; Jo 20:1	1, 2 X	III, 2010-2030Th and MM: III, 2468
4	Before they arrive there is an earthquake, an angel rolls back the stone and sits on it. Guards are knocked out	Matt 28:2-4	X	X
5	The women discuss who will move the stone	Mk 16:3	X	III, 2042
6	The women at the tomb: the stone is rolled away and the angel gone; guards woken up and fled	Mk 16:4; Lk 24:2; Jo 20:1	3.4-6	III, 2031
7	The women enter the tomb and see the body is missing	Lk 24:3	3.4-6	III, 2046
8	MM leaves other women at tomb to tell Peter and John that the body is gone	Jo 20:2	3.7-13	III, 2047 intention
9	MM, J, P to tomb. J outruns P, stays outside, P enters: body missing; grave- clothes there	Jo 20:3-9	4, 5, 6	III, 2415-2420 III, 2428-2430
10	Male disciples return to town; women stay behind	Jo 20:10	7.2	III, 2048-MM and Th stay
11	Weepy MM to tomb entrance; looks inside; 2 angels dressed in white; 'why weeping?' 'Taken away my Lord'	Jo 20:11-13	7, 8 (no angels)	III, 2055- 2093 (but one angel)
12	MM walks away. Sees man in garden, recognizes him: 'Mary', 'Rabboni'	Jo 20:14-17 Matt 28:9	9,10,11,12	III, 2094-2097MM 'chairete' 2104-2115 Th
13	2 angels appear to remaining women; they are frightened and fall down, told not to fear	Matt 28:5-7; Lk 24:48	X	III, 2444
14	Women enter the tomb and see Young Man	Matt 28:6; Mk 16:7-8	17, 18, 19, 20, 21	III, 2117-2131
15	Angels tell women to tell disciples Jesus is resurrected; exit in fear and great joy to tell men	Matt 28:7-8; Mk 16: 7-8	X 22	III, 2132-2133 III, 2134-2172
16	Women leave tomb and find Jesus talking to MM. Fall down at feet. Tell men.	Matt 28:9-10	X	X
17	Guards to priests and Pilate	Matt 28:11-15	X	III, 2174-2392
18	Women do not say anything because afraid; named women do	Mk 16-18 Mk 16:10; Lk 24:9-10 Jo 20:18	X	III, 2140-2170
19	Women are not believed	Mk 16:11; Lk 24:11	22, 23	III 2461 (MM)
20	Peter returns and encounters Christ	Lk 24:34; 1Cor 15:50	X	X
21	Kleopas + 1 at Emmaus	Mk 16:2-13; L24:13-32	X	III, 2471-2475
22	Appearance to the 11 (or 10)	Lk 24:36-45	X	III, 2480-2531

Figure 2 Plot and Structure in Romanos and the *Christos Paschon*

Romanos, <i>Resurrection I</i>	<i>Christos Paschon</i> , 1906-2602
<p><i>Prooimia</i></p> <p>P 1 Victory of Christ, you said <i>chairete</i> to the myrrhophores, and gave peace to the apostles</p> <p>P 2 Women found the tomb uninhabited, and asked if he had been stolen, he who healed the woman with the issue of blood, or is he risen, he who promised resurrection?</p>	<p>1906-2030: DAWN <i>prelude</i>: Women wake up, plan visit to tomb; decide a scout is needed and Mary Magdalen volunteers; discussion with the Theotokos, who sends her at 1985-6, then 1989-91 decides to come too; she urges chorus to wake up; Theotokos addresses to Christ the final lament of the trilogy, 2019-2030</p>
<p>1 Women make their way to tomb with gift of scented oil like the Magi, urge Christ to rise again</p> <p>2 Doubt: has he left the tomb? They depute MM to go and look</p> <p>3 MM sent; sees stone rolled away and guards gone; returns to address the disciples</p>	<p>2031-2572: <i>Three experiences of the Resurrection</i></p> <p>2031-2075: Th and MM see empty tomb; angel speaks to Th while MM starts for Jerusalem</p> <p>2076-2115: Th calls on Christ, the <i>Chairete</i>, addresses Christ, who says 'do not fear'</p> <p>2116-2171: MM meets and takes chorus back to the tomb where they see the young man in white.</p> <p>2172: Chorus sees arrival of messenger</p>
<p>4 Peter and John race one another to the tomb to find no Christ there</p> <p>5 They seek an explanation for their failure</p> <p>6 MM: women are entitled to first sight of the risen Lord because they were first at the Fall</p>	<p>2174-2414: <i>Messenger's story and Pilate subplot; meanwhile MM goes to the disciples</i></p> <p>2174-2193: Th and Messenger converse</p> <p>2194-2295: Guard tells the story of tomb to priests</p> <p>2296-2377: Pilate attempts to investigate</p> <p>2378-2410: Messenger reports and Th comments</p> <p>2415: Chorus sees arrival of Peter and John</p>
<p>7 MM lingers, weeps, addresses Christ, refers to Baptism...</p> <p>8 ...Raising of Lazarus and of Jairus' daughter; Holy Holy, Holy</p> <p>9 Christ responds: Woman, why weep? MM: they have taken away my Lord...</p> <p>10 Christ: Mary! MM: it is my Lord</p> <p>11 Christ: Noli me tangere</p> <p>12 Christ: Announce the Resurrection to disciples</p> <p>-----</p> <p>13 MM tells the women...</p> <p>14 ...she is glorified like Moses and sent with news like Noah's dove</p> <p>15 Women: not surprised except dead so long</p> <p>16 Women: let us go to the tomb to be able to corroborate MM's story</p>	<p>2415-2479: <i>Recapitulation to the chorus</i></p> <p>2421-2433: Th: MM's offer to scout; her decision to go too; the empty tomb; MM sets out for the disciples; Peter and John, who saw what MM had told them. Th and MM had returned to the tomb.</p> <p>2434-2470: MM: she was first at the tomb and reported to the Th who went with her; she ran to the tomb with Th, then 2 disciples; she wept and saw 2 angels; saw Christ looking different and has conversation with him; she is told to tell the disciples; she tells them and they come; to Th: you saw everything, and your son</p> <p>2471-2479: MM: gives news of the Emmaus disciples, and urges the women to set off for Jerusalem to join them and the other apostles: it is DUSK</p>
<p>17 Women leave city, address hymn to tomb</p> <p>18 Women see person on stone; ask what he is...</p> <p>19 ...He tells them not to fear (only guards)...</p> <p>20 ...not to fear; he is servant of Christ-- who is risen!</p> <p>21 Women to angel: must be risen if you are here!</p> <p>-----</p> <p>22 With fear and joy, happiness and grief, the women report to the disciples: why so depressed? Here is light and spring! Dance!</p> <p>23 Disciples shocked; did an angel tell you? Women: yes, actually! And Christ to MM, so let us rejoice</p>	<p>2480-2531: <i>Christ appears to the Ten (XII says 11)</i></p> <p>2480-2499: Chorus recounts the arrival of the women at the house of Mary and their admission by Mary to hear the Emmaus narrative from Cleophas</p> <p>2500: Christ suddenly appears and 2505 says 'Peace be with you',</p> <p>2506-2531 tells the assembled friends to believe in the Resurrection, and that he is sending them out into the world with his Spirit.</p>
<p>24 Prayer of poet to Christ</p>	<p>2532-2571: Prayer to the Pantanax</p> <p>2572-2602: Prayer to the Theotokos</p>