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Katherine Ludwig Jansen, *The Making of the Magdalen: Preaching and Popular Devotion in the Later Middle Ages*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000. xiii + 389 pp. Figures, notes, bibliography, and index. \$19.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 0-691-08987-6.

Review by Katharine J. Lualdi, University of Southern Maine.

As innumerable sources related to her cult attest, Mary Magdalen was the most popular female saint (after the Virgin Mary) of the late middle ages. People from all walks of life appealed to her for support, from repentant prostitutes to anxious mothers to ambitious kings. Even for scholars well acquainted with the inventive spirit of medieval hagiographers her stature is striking, given the fact that the oldest historical source documenting her existence, the four gospels, contains only twelve references to her.

How and why did devotion to Mary Magdalen gain such prominence by the later medieval period? And what does her cult reveal about the ways in which sanctity functioned at the time? Katherine Ludwig Jansen examines these intriguing questions through the lens of mendicant preaching. The mendicant orders of Saint Francis and Saint Dominic assume center stage in her study because, she argues, they identified closely with both the historical and legendary features of Mary Magdalen's life. They crafted and propagated their reverence for the saint in their sermons and were, consequently, the principal disseminators of her cult in the medieval West. Culling through letters, spiritual autobiographies, and the like, Jansen also strives to decipher lay responses to the friars' preaching. Throughout the book, she deftly combines textual analysis with a study of Magdalen iconography, which adds color and depth to her central argument: preachers and their audiences "made" the late medieval *persona* of Mary Magdalen in response to their own spiritual needs as well as to broader social, theological, and political issues. Overall, Jansen's book is engaging, well written, and convincingly argued and is of importance to anyone interested in late medieval religious culture and society.

Against the wide canvas of recent studies of medieval sainthood, Jansen blends three important historiographical trends in her investigation. Following the path of Peter Burke, Natalie Zemon Davis, and others, her definition of "popular" devotion encompasses both lay and clerical voices and the interaction between the two. Jansen is equally indebted to the work of scholars such as Thomas Tentler and Lester Little who have explored the social meanings and functions of late medieval religion. Echoing Caroline Bynum, Jansen also uses gender as a category of analysis in each chapter to argue that medieval men and women understood Mary Magdalen in different ways.

Jansen limits her focus to the thirteenth through the early sixteenth centuries because Mary Magdalen's cult was at its height in this period, sparked in part by the Church's concerted campaign to foster and shape lay piety through preaching. With the Protestant challenge to the cult of saints in the sixteenth century, Catholic leaders strove to purge saints' lives, including Mary Magdalen's, of their legendary components. As a result, the complexity of her "symbolic significance" in late medieval culture was lost (p. 336). Geographically, Jansen keeps her eyes trained predominantly on Italy and, to a lesser extent, southern France, which formed the cradle of late medieval Magdalen devotion. As Jansen explains, in 1279 Prince Charles of Salerno, the future count of Provence and king of Naples, discovered Mary Magdalen's relics in the church of Saint-Maximin in Provence. He and the Dominicans, whom he

designated as caretakers of Mary Magdalen's *provençal* shrine, imported devotion to her into southern Italy. Along with their Franciscan counterparts, the Dominicans also had a notable presence in central Italian urban areas, where both orders cultivated Magdalen worship.

Jansen begins with an overview of the early Christian, late antique, and early medieval sources treating Mary Magdalen, which laid the foundations for her late medieval identity (chapter one). Of these sources, Pope Gregory I's thirty-third homily had an especially profound impact on the subsequent development of her cult. Confronted with questions about Mary Magdalen's identity, which stemmed in part from the fact that in the gospels Christ's circle of followers comprised at least six women called Mary, Gregory merged three distinct women into one: the unnamed female sinner who washed Jesus' feet with her tears at the banquet of Simon the Pharisee; Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus; and the demonically possessed Mary Magdalen. Hagiographical material written between the ninth and fifteenth centuries embroidered additional details onto the tapestry of Mary Magdalen's life, thereby transforming her into a prostitute-turned-saint, evangelizer of pagan Gaul, mystic, and miracle worker.

Aside from providing vital background information, chapter one paves the way for the fundamental premise of the book. Building upon Brian Stock's seminal study of the rise of literacy in eleventh- and twelfth-century Europe and the concomitant emergence of groups of people whose activities centered around texts, Jansen argues that hagiographic sources, and the sermons which drew upon them, were molded and structured by the interests of their audience(s) and, in turn, of society-at-large.

Part I (chapters two-four) explores how mendicant preachers drew upon and reshaped the Magdalen of legend and history into a model both for themselves and their audiences. Jansen demonstrates that the mendicants' intimate relationship with Mary Magdalen was based on their desire to forge a social identity distinct from what they viewed as the wealth and decadence of the institutional, masculinized church. They did so by embracing Mary Magdalen's apostolic mission, for it closely resembled their own as preachers and administrators. The mendicants also revered the contemplative aspect of her life, however, since they themselves had little time for spiritual reflection. As a result, they succeeded in casting themselves as "new Magdalens," humble, obedient, and faithful. Jansen describes this as a process of symbolic gender reversal because medieval society associated many of these qualities with the female sex (pp. 84-85). At the same time, the mendicants urged their audiences to shape their piety after Mary Magdalen's life, especially in regards to her acts of charity and penance.

The mendicants' self-identification with Mary Magdalen was fraught with paradox, however, as Jansen demonstrates in parts II and III (chapters five-seven). On the one hand, they embraced her "feminine" qualities of humility and tearful repentance, for example. On the other, they denounced certain aspects of her personality as representative of the weakness of the female sex in general and the threat it posed to society. By drawing out her failings in their sermons and gendering them female, mendicant preachers were responding to specific philosophical and social issues: the nature of Woman, the care and control of women, and the problem of prostitution. Mendicant preachers held her up to wayward women and others as a "blessed sinner" who had escaped the perils of vanity and lust to become Christ's most faithful disciple and the first witness to his resurrection. Thus, she embodied the propensity of women to commit sin, especially of a sexual nature, yet she was simultaneously the supreme symbol of penance and its redemptive power. Jansen provides a compelling example of this dynamic at work in society: the establishment of convents for repentant prostitutes under the patronage of Mary Magdalen in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries throughout Europe (pp. 177-184).

Jansen turns to lay responses to Mary Magdalen in part IV of her study (chapters eight-eleven). In these chapters, the breadth and creativity of Jansen's research is especially impressive. Seemingly no stone is left unturned in her quest to uncover how men and women helped to fashion the late medieval Magdalen in light of their own social, spiritual, and political needs. (In regards to the latter, Jansen points exclusively to Charles of Salerno, who adopted Mary Magdalen as the Angevin dynasty's patron

saint, and to his heirs and supporters.) Her sources include art, hymns, prayers, wills, pilgrimage diaries, notarial documents, naming practices, and a miracle register. Although Jansen does not confine her examples exclusively to her stated geographical focus, as in previous chapters voices from Italy predominate. Taken together, these voices reveal that men and women used representations of the saint differently. While male preachers emphasized Mary Magdalen's lust as a threat to society in general, for instance, women tended to interpret it as a threat to individual salvation. Furthermore, the concerns of the preachers' audience, particularly women, infused Mary Magdalen with new meaning as mother and virgin.

Here, as elsewhere in her analysis, Jansen strives to interpret the multifaceted image of Mary Magdalen within the broader context of medieval culture, and the results her efforts yield are convincing. The development of Mary Magdalen's unlikely *persona* as virgin is a case in point (pp. 286-294). Jansen links it to the increasing number of uncloistered religious women, frequently matrons, in the late middle ages, many of whom feared that their loss of virginity would bar them from salvation. They embraced Mary Magdalen because, as the mendicants preached, she transformed herself through penance from a prostitute into a saint who gained a place among the heavenly choir of virgins. In this way, she came to resemble her one rival in the cult of saints, the Virgin Mary.

Part IV also helps to rectify the one significant weakness of Jansen's analysis. In her introduction, she aptly describes sermons as the "mass media" of the day (p. 6), which bridged the gap between complex theological ideas and the lives of everyday people. In theory this is true, but in reality there was potentially a substantial gap between how the sermons were written (typically in Latin), and how they were delivered in the vernacular. The extent and significance of this gap is, in fact, a point of debate among sermon scholars. Although the sources used in part IV reflect many of the same images and themes found in the friars' sermons, it is not necessarily as easy as Jansen suggests to draw a straight line between ideas expressed in a written sermon and how they were presented to an audience. Thus, Jansen's analysis would have benefited from a more explicit discussion of sermons as a literary genre and the ways in which they circulated and were used within mendicant communities.

This question leads to another, related one that Jansen's work raises. Is it possible that sermons originating from outside her geographical axis of Italy and Provence may have placed different emphases on Mary Magdalen's *persona*? As Anne Thayer discusses in her book on late medieval penitential preaching (Ashgate, forthcoming), although medieval preachers worked within the same theological lexicon, their sermons reveal important geographical variations in their messages, especially in regards to penance, with which the Magdalen was so closely associated in the late middle ages. Such a possibility warrants serious consideration because penance was not only an important motif of late medieval piety, but it also became a fundamental dividing line between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century.

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