The analysis of the Gospel of John revealed that the raising of Lazarus functions as a key turning point in the narrative and that Martha plays a key role within this Gospel. She appears as carrier of the evangelist's theology and announces the most complete statement of Johannine faith in the Gospel. As such she is received as a 'second Peter' not only by modern interpreters, but also by some early Christian exegetes. This chapter turns to a different tomb and a different story. For, as has already been observed, there are a number of texts that place Martha also at the tomb of Jesus. It will be the task of these next chapters to examine these texts, their origin, function and relationship to the canonical texts. Here I begin with the *Epistula Apostolorum* (*Ep. Ap.*), the earliest of the extant textual witnesses to the tradition placing Martha at the tomb of Jesus.

### 3.1 The *Epistula Apostolorum*

The *Epistula* purports to be a letter written by the eleven apostles to the Church in the whole world; a letter, moreover, which has been revealed by Christ himself. Most of the text, however, uses the form of a dialogue between the risen Saviour and his disciples occurring between his resurrection and ascension. Thus Hills suggests the *Epistula* is

less a 'letter' than it is a 'book of revelation,' a handbook for the successors of the apostles similar in function to the Gospel of Matthew (with which it has much material in common). (1990b: 36)

Alsup (1975: 128–130) calls it a new *Gattung*. Hartenstein identifies it as a 'dialogue Gospel,' though noting as a significant difference to

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1 Consistent with this view the opening of the text can be translated as “the book,” not “the letter” (Schmidt [1919] 1967: 25), a translation which is preferred also by Klauck (2003: 153) since it fits better with the notion of the contents being 'revealed' (compare also Rev 1:1, 4).
other such dialogue Gospels the extended resurrection narrative and its grounding in the crucifixion: “behandelt wird die Auferstehung des Gekreuzigten, nicht die Erscheinung des Auferstandenen” (2000: 113). Its immediate purpose is the refutation of Gnosticism, specifically a form of Gnosticism that is docetic and anti-apocalyptic. Thus the Epistula’s choice of genre, which closely matches the Gnostic dialogues between the risen Lord and various disciples, may be an attempt to combat Gnosticism with its own weapons (Hornschuh 1965: 6–7; Hills 1990b: 15; Hill 1999: 12).

That the gnostic opponents of the Epistula are part of the author’s community is suggested by the parable of the ten virgins (Hornschuh 1965: 21–29; Hills 1990b: 146–168). It appears, moreover, that the opponents are both in the majority and probably occupying the leadership positions and offices in the community (Hornschuh 1965: 96–97; Hartenstein 2000: 105). Indeed, precisely the author’s choice of pseudepigraphy would suggest this: a person holding an office might have relied on his own authority, or rather, on the authority of his office. The inclusion of ‘obedience’ among the sleeping virgins (43.16) points in the same direction (so Hartenstein 2000: 105).

The Epistula was originally written in Greek, though this text has been completely lost. It survives in two translations: an incomplete Coptic translation in a fourth- or fifth-century codex which reveals marks of translation from the Greek (description of the manuscript in Schmidt [1919] 1967: 4–6), and a complete translation into Ethiopic extant in six late (sixteenth- to eighteenth-century) manuscripts, whose text is

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2 “[The text] treats the resurrection of the crucified one, not the appearance of the resurrected one.”

3 The author of the Epistula is unknown, but is more likely to be male than female because of the text’s fiction of male authorship by the eleven apostles and the absence of any indicators suggesting either female perspective in the text or female authorship of the text.

4 Description and comparison of the MSS in Schmidt ([1919] 1967: 4–20). C. D. F. Müller (1991: 250) incorrectly lists five MSS. The confusion results from the fact that Guerrier knows five manuscripts, but, according to Wajnberg, ignores one of them (Or. 795) almost entirely. Wajnberg adds to the five MSS listed by Guerrier an important new one, Stuttgart Cod. Orient. fol. No. 49 (Schmidt [1919] 1967: 8–9). Müller has included this new MS, but overlooked Or. 795 (compare the listing of the five MSS in Müller 1991: 269). To these six MSS Hills adds a further seven or eight MSS which he claims are now available, but which he does not describe further. He suggests, however, that these indicate “two distinct groups of witnesses” (Hills 1990b: 7). There is some confusion about just how many new MSS there are: Hills lists one new MS catalogued by Ernst Hammerschmidt and six additional MSS in the Ethiopian Manuscript Microfilm