GROUP IDENTITY AND RELIGIOUS INDIVIDUALITY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

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Private Chapels and the Reserved Eucharist

Around 521, the non-Chalcedonian bishop Severus of Antioch received a letter. Its author was one Caesaria, possibly the niece of the emperor Anastasius, and it contained an appeal. Caesaria wanted the Eucharist: the churches of her native Constantinople now offered daily Eucharistic services and a fair few even served the non-Chalcedonian faithful such as herself. But communal neighborhood masses were not what Caesaria craved: she was looking for the special, holy bread consecrated by the famous bishop-in-exile, made doubly holy by his individual touch. Severus scolded Caesaria for her request: dispatching the Eucharist across diocesan lines had long been prohibited by church law and her implied hierarchy of holiness troubled him. But in the end, he packed up a box of the reserved Eucharistic bread and shipped it off to Caesaria’s house in the capital.

About the same time, an aristocrat, possibly even the dux, of the Libyan town of Apollonia, was building himself a fine townhouse. It was in many re-

spects a typical house of the region, built of coarse blocks of local stone, arranged around a courtyard and boasting two reception halls. It also included a small chapel, complete with apse, flanking pastophoria and chancel screens that guarded a large relicary box. It measured just nine meters long, and was, in effect, a miniature copy of the city’s cathedral, shrunken down and packaged for a household.

This volume challenges us to take seriously acts like those of Caesaria and the anonymous Apollonian aristocrat. It asks us to think about late antique religious life beyond what might be termed the institutional imperative—the assumption that institutions, particularly Christian institutions, form the only important engine of historical change, and thus historical inquiry. Late antique Christian ritual history has long been preoccupied with institutions and their teleological histories—with the development of the liturgy of the Mass, the origins of the stational liturgy and the development of monastic rites. The material remains of Christian ritual has followed similar orientations, attempting to pair church architecture and liturgical furnishings with these presumed liturgical evolutions, tracking the spread of episcopally defined building forms, and more recently, documenting the slow takeover of familial and individual burial rituals by a communally-defined cult of the saints.

Caesaria’s self-communion outside the weekly Mass, and the Apollonian aristocrat’s extrabasilican chapel can both be seen as religious activities that elide or at least push the boundaries of institutionally defined ritual acts. In a recent book on late antique domestic religion, I suggested that acts like


these were the tip of an iceberg of Christian ritual activity, whose principal agents were pious individuals and whose context was the home. These individual, home-based rituals and ritual architectures transcended the pre and post-Nicene divide which traditionally relegated all house-based ritual to a pre-Nicene before, followed by the triumph of episcopally defined “public” worship after the Peace of the Church. They also transcended an easy pagan or Christian categorization: although clearly “Christian” in their ritual content and architectural elaboration, the assumption of ritual independence on the part of homeowners, the general disinterest in episcopally defined liturgical privileges, and the highly individualized, original character of most private church projects echoed a Greco-Roman religious habitus. The book, in short, envisioned a ritual world in which institutions, particularly episcopally-defined institutions, did not matter as much as we thought they had, and that what we casually termed “Christianization” was marked by the unorchestrated, often eccentric projects of pious individuals that frequently clashed with still-nascent ideas of episcopal authority.

Perhaps the deepest flaw in this book was to assume, with Mary Douglas, an ineluctable divide between institutions and individuals, and in an effort to correct the “institutional imperative,” to shrug aside the former and raise up the latter. It was perhaps possible to make this argument and assume this partiality about the fourth and fifth centuries—the period that was the focus of the book. When we arrive in the sixth century, however, institutions become harder to avoid and their overlap with the ritual lives of individuals becomes harder to ignore.

As a partial corrective, this essay thus examines a small corpus of sixth-century domestic chapels, built into aristocratic homes in Asia Minor and North Africa, and a collection of sixth-century Greek and Syriac texts from the same regions that describe the various uses of the reserved Eucharist.

Together, they reveal an important facet of the late antique ritual habitus—namely the mimicry and appropriation of Christian communal ceremony into small spaces and holy objects. For while Caesarea’s self-communion and the Apollinian chapel can be regarded as individual ritual acts, they depend upon and, indeed, insistently reference the very institutions they elide and even subvert. At the same time, these acts of mimicry involved acts of miniaturization in which publicly defined ritual or ritual buildings were shrunk or fragmented so as to be possessed and controlled by a small group—the neighborhood, the family, the individual. As such, they had the effect of fragmenting the episcopally defined community, creating points of ritual activity apart from the communal group. The essay concludes by contemplating the meaning of such private ritual appropriations in a broader, sixth-century ritual context.

Sixth-Century Domestic Chapels

The most conspicuous quality of the physical evidence for personal Christian ritual is its paucity—or at best, its ambiguity. The hundreds of phylacteries, pilgrim tokens, medals and other small personal objects that line the shelves of museums around the world may very well have been used for personal ritual, but in most cases they exist as disjecta membra without archaeological contexts that might point to their function. Conversely, only a handful of sixth-century domestic private churches have been uncovered, or rather, only a handful of sites have produced convincing physical evidence of domestic rituals in the form of an altar or other ritual furnishings. Spaces that served Christian rituals but lacked permanent furnishing would obviously be underrepresented in the archaeological record. On the other hand, it is worth noting that house construction—both new houses and major additions—became

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7. The term “chapel” will be deliberately used throughout. I eschewed the word in my above-described book, arguing that its medieval usage assumed a dependency (either physical or pastoral) on a larger-order church that was not necessarily true in a fourth or fifth-century environment. Here, however, it is precisely the dependency of these structures on an institutionally controlled architectural language of sacred power that I wish to highlight.
increasingly rare in the sixth century, and thus the corpus of sixth-century houses is itself small. Of that small corpus, however, a significant number of houses exhibit some indications of domestic ritual.

The best-preserved example is the above-mentioned Palace of the Dux in the city of Apollonia, dated to the second half of the sixth century. Tentatively identified as the residence of the dux, or governor, of the Pentapolis, the house had two major wings—a residential wing and a service wing separated by a narrow alley (f.igs. 3-1 and 3-2). The residential wing was entered through a vestibule that in turn led to an apsed hall or aula, seemingly used to receive visitors. Guests permitted past this reception complex would have been ushered into a peristyle, at one end of which was another apsed reception or dining room. The chapel was located on the far side of the peristyle from the entrance and was oriented to the east.

Seemingly planned and built in conjunction with the rest of the house, the chapel was laid out as a basilica in miniature, with a truncated "nave" that also served as sanctuary and three aisles separated by piers. At its eastern end was an inscribed apse flanked by two lateral chambers, and at its western end, a large narthex. In the "nave" before the apse a network of channel screens protected a large reliquary box (nearly 1 meter in width), its top set with metal crosses and containing a hole for the pouring of libations or the extraction of holy oil. The chapel was entered via the peristyle portico through one of two doors along its long, north side. The easternmost of these doors, clearly the main one, was painted with indecipherable inscriptions, permitted views of the reliquary, and was surmounted by an open arch, allowing light to penetrate the chapel. The western door was constructed with a simple lintel. A third door, off-center in the chapel's west wall, communicated with a large room beyond.

The city of Ephesus with its rich, late Roman remains has produced two or three examples of domestic chapels, although of more uncertain chronology. One was inside the so-called Theater House, a grand domus set on a terraced overlooking the city, built probably in the second century B.C. and modified in the fifth and sixth centuries (fig. 3-3). Like the Palace of the Dux, the called Hanghaus or Terrace House 1, one of the structure's lateral apartments (Wohnungen z) included a small fountain complex composed of two rooms (G and H). During the fifth or sixth centuries, when the terrace house had become subdivided into combination storage and poor living quarters, the fountain house was modified: the ceiling in both rooms was raised and vaulted, the floor in Room H was laid with opus secile, the fountain basin in Room G was rebuilt, and slightly enlarged and flanked by two columns bearing crosses, while two capitals were found out of situ, both bearing crosses. In the rooms above this so-called chapel and possibly connected to it via a stair, an inscription reading Καιν/κινος/ικας/ινος ημερόν or "God, help your servant Jordanius," was found on a column. The reinvestment in the fountain space with its new vaulting and ceiling is notable, as are the Christian-inscribed architectural members, but it is hard to tell if the fountain house was simply adapted with Christian symbols (a commonplace on water facilities in Ephesus) or if the rooms accommodated some ritual function. For bibliography, see Claudia Lang-Ausinger, Hanghaus 1 in Ephesos: Der Bauschatz (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1996), 140–47; Renate Pilling, "Die christlichen Denkmäler von Ephesos," Mitteilungen zur Christlichen Archäologie 2 (1996): 43.

10. Josef Keil, "XVI. Vorläufiger Bericht über den Ausgrabungen in Ephesos Jahrhundert des Öster
house seems to have been entered from the south via a vast apsed *aula*, itself seemingly late antique in date and supplied with hypocaust heating and a fine mosaic floor. A long corridor permitted access to the main peristyle, which measured 10.5 meters square and was framed on north and south by square exedrae screened by ionic columns. A large room along the east side probably served as a *triclinium*. Numerous rooms around the peristyle and between the peristyle and the entrance *aula* are not described in any of the reports, but many are clearly the result of later construction phases.

The chapel is located in the northeastern corner of the house and was accessed through a double-arched door in its west wall. A small, single-aisled, single apse affair measuring just seven by five meters and oriented east-west,
the chapel was covered by a barrel vault and must have been quite dark (fig. 3-4). A chancel barrier found in situ screened the eastern half of the church from the western "nave." Two wall niches or cupboards were located to the east of the chancel barrier, presumably to store books or ritual implements, while the base of an altar was found about halfway between the chancel barrier and the chord of the apse. No reliquary was found beneath the altar base. The apse itself preserves a two-tiered synthonon.

The largest late-Roman house in the city was the so-called Governor's Palace—like the Dux house at Apollonia, tentatively associated with a state administrator (fig. 3-5). Only the reception areas of the house were excavat-

ed, while residential spaces were either nonexistent or remain to be discovered. The house was entered through a monumental double-apsed entrance hall, from which one would have been ushered either into a bath complex to the north or a grand, domed tetracronch to the south, which probably served as reception hall or dining complex. The chapel could be accessed either from the domed hall itself, via the hall’s south wall, through an apsed vestibule and entering the church from the west, or through a smaller door leading from one of the chambers flanking the great apse, through the chapel’s north wall. Like its sister in the Theater House, the chapel was a small, single-aisle affair, with the remains of a chancel barrier preserved about 1 meter in front of a small apse. The apse held a single curved bench, and a marble cornice running around the apse wall held a single, raised cross. No altar or other liturgical furnishings were reported. Also like the Theater House, the chapel appears to have been a later addition to the house. However, the absolute date of both the late Roman “palace” and the later chapel are imprecise. The excavators proposed a general fifth-century date for the complex, while more recent publications have placed it in the sixth century. The date of the chapel is unknown.

A final, very different, example comes from the city of Alexandria in a house of somewhat lower socioeconomic status. From the area of Kom el-Dikka, the multistoried House D on street R.4 probably accommodated both a home business, manufacturing and selling glass and ceramics, plus a residence on both the ground floor and above. Its odd plan is a product of the site’s earlier history (fig. 3-6). As an alley flanked by buildings, the house was organized around a long, narrow courtyard. The presence of frescoed rooms along this courtyard and a finely carved balustrade point to the presence of a family or families of means, while at the back, a glass workshop suggests that industry shared space with habitation.

On the courtyard’s south wall was a remarkable, if somewhat battered,

14 Thanks to Ruth Opal for information on this site and its relative chronology.

painting of the Virgin and Child. Dated to the early to mid-sixth century, the fresco depicted an enthroned Virgin holding the Christ child flanked by at least one angel and a smaller figure, perhaps a donor (fig. 3-7). The quality of the paintings was high, and the excavators have suggested a professional artist or workshop was responsible. No altar or other furnishings were found, but flanking the fresco were two iron brackets, identified by the excavators as stands for lamps, while on the opposite side of the courtyard were two iron eyelets. As these exactly paralleled the edges of the fresco opposite, they seemed to have been related to it in some way, possibly serving to separate this portion of the courtyard for ritual purposes attached to the frescoed image.
While obviously distinct in terms of plan and domestic topography, these examples share certain basic features. With the exception of the Alexandria frescoed courtyard, each of the chapels condenses a public, basilican plan into the small space dictates of the home. In an area less than nine meters in length and five in width, each includes a single-aisle or in the Dux chapel, three-aisle plan, and an eastern apse preceded by a marked-off sanctuary. The liturgical accouterments of these chapels are similarly versions of the furnishings found in public basilicas. In the Dux chapel, an elaborate system of chancel screens and railings was designed to protect an unusually large reliquary, which probably stood in the "choir." A large narthex was likewise carefully included in the plan, even though the chapel’s main entrance was set in the north wall. Even more surprising are the tiny synthronoi sandwiched in the apses of both the Theater House and Governor’s Palace chapels. The former example actually boasted two miniature tiers of benches. The Alexandria fresco is likewise oddly scaled, but in the opposite direction: at some 1.5m preserved width, it may have been originally as much as three meters. The fresco is thus over-large for its narrow courtyard (itself only about three meters wide), and thus was thought by the excavators to be a copy of the apse decoration of a public church.  

Why were such efforts made to reproduce public church architecture and decoration? In these particular cases, it seems that that the formal norms of public, ecclesiastical architecture, rather than the simple construction of an altar or presence of a reliquary, were imperative for the definition of "church" as such, even if that church was nested within in the domestic sphere. That is, for these spaces to function ritually, they needed to "look" like churches.

The clear debt these chapels owe to public Christian architectural and liturgical forms can be more precisely traced, for in each case it seems that the chapel or liturgical space was modeled on an architectural type from the chapel’s respective city. In Apollonia, the so-called Central Church and probably the city’s cathedral was located only some 75 meters from the Palace of the Dux and dated to the early sixth century (perhaps a generation prior to the construction of the Dux chapel). With an elaborate narthex, two side chambers and an apse enclosed behind a straight eastern wall, its plan was echoed in the Dux chapel, which seems a scaled-down copy of this church’s eastern end.  

The two Ephesian chapels, with single-aisled naves and prominent synthronoi, might also be understood as imitative of a local, Ephesian church-building tradition, particularly the famous Cathedral of the Virgin (fig. 3-8). Among the earliest, if not the first church in the city, the cathedral was built into an earlier stoa near the Temple of Hadrian. Recent reexcavations have suggested that its

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first phase saw simply the broadening and roofing of the single aisle formed by the stoa colonnades, and the construction of a large, free-standing synthonon and altar (fig. 3-9). The overlarge synthonon was also repeated in the newer, more elaborate Justinianic church of St. John. Finally, the excavators of the Alexandria church have recognized in the fresco’s iconography, color scheme, and other elements imitations of the churches at Bawit, although the most likely object of imitation was one of the now-destroyed churches of Alexandria.

But while these chapels borrow from a local language of public architecture, they clearly never accommodated the great liturgies referenced through their furnishings. Neither the chancel screens designed to keep crowds at a distance from the sacred, nor clergy benches to seat a bevy of clerics would have


been strictly necessary in a private chapel. Indeed, many of these furnishings, such as the *synthronon*, have been miniaturized past actual functionality, or in the case of the Alexandria fresco, enlarged past the scale of their surrounding space. Clearly, it was not important that such furnishing be functional or proportional, but only that they be present. At work in the chapels of Apollonia, Alexandria, and Ephesus is not simply the new and pervasive influence of public church forms, but the ability of those forms to "stand for," or signify, the liturgies they housed and thus the holiness they embodied.

We cannot know exactly what rituals were carried out in these chapels. The large reliquary at Apollonia points clearly to the veneration of relics; the altar and cupboards in the Theater House suggest that a Eucharistic mass was possible in this small space; while the lighting of lamps and prayer may have been the only rites carried out before the over-large image of the Virgin at Kom el-Dikka. I would also argue that the deliberate emulation and miniaturization of public church architecture and furnishings was also a ritual act, and that the physical structures were themselves intended as perpetual rituals. By copying and shrinking the architecture and liturgical furnishings of public church architecture, these chapels were built, in part, to function purely as signifiers, standing in for public rituals. Indeed, as Susan Stewart has suggested, overt changes in scale—miniaturizing and maximizing—actually heighten signification by drawing attention to the miniature or gigantic as object. Thus, just as a doll house draws attention to the physical objects of everyday life, so, too the mini-*synthronoi* and shrunken basilican plans or the over-large Virgin fresco would point even more powerfully to the church building and its liturgies as signified, even as simultaneously these miniature objects reified and made physical the liturgy by drawing attention to themselves as impossibly small or large spaces and objects. In this way, the homeowners who sponsored these domestic ritual projects reified the public church liturgy through its physical furnishing and decoration, and transplanted it, minus its communal element, into the home.


13. The Reserved Eucharist

There is a parallel set of evidence for this tendency to appropriate the ritual of public churches for individual or small-group use, but it is of a very different kind, namely a series of sixth-century Greek and Syriac miracle stories featuring the reserved Eucharistic bread and its consumption in the home.

Since the third century, the laity had taken portions of the bread home with them for consumption during the week. Novation provides a vivid description of these practices as he berates one parishioner who inadvertently carried the bread with him to the gladiatorial games, passing on his way through a red-light district and thus "carrying into the midst of the foul bodies of prostitutes the sacred Body of the Lord." According to Jerome and other sources, the practice of reservation seems to have been particularly common in third to early fifth-century Rome. In the Greek east, however, we catch only sporadic signs of it until the sixth century and later, when a whole host of texts use the reserved Eucharist as the *mise-en-scène* for miracle tales. These stories appear in John Moschus, John Rufus and the Syriac *synodica*, as well as the letters of Severus, the non-Chalcedonian bishop of Antioch. Some of these tales formed part of the propaganda war between Chalcedonians and non-Chalcedonians, but the motif is common on both sides of the doctrinal fence. The reserved Eucharist doubtless played an important community-marking role in the tangled doctrinal controversies of the age, as Volker Menze has recently argued. In spite of controversy, however, the reserved Eucharist seems


to have gained a wider renown, both in actual practice and certainly as an imagined object of miraculous, divine power.

The reserved Eucharist is frequently described as having the power to heal and protect. Caesaria, whom we encountered at the beginning of this essay attempting to procure a "mail-order" Eucharist from Severus of Antioch, spoke of her bodily illnesses which she hoped Severus's Eucharist would cure. John Rufus's *Plerophoria* described a Constantinopolitan lawyer who used reserved bread dispatched by Peter the Iberian to cure his sick wife. By the late seventh century, Jacob of Edessa was asked about the rampant amuletic use of the Eucharist—parishioners were wearing it round their neck, building it into the walls of their homes, even sleeping with it. The bishop-monk doesn't flinch, only objecting when these practices were performed by impious persons or catechumens.

Similarly, the reserved Eucharist was frequently found defending itself against corruption or misuse. John Moschos's *Pratum Spirituale*, a set of tales from a Chalcedonian perspective, included the story of a man who inadvertently left his Eucharist in a cupboard when he went off on a year-long business trip to Constantinople. Worried lest the bread become corrupted, a servant thought to burn it but when he opened the cupboard, the bread had miraculously sprouted leaves. Another tale involved a couple of mixed doctrinal affiliation. When the wife snuck off to take communion at the home of Chalcedonian coreligionists, the husband followed and attempted to prevent her from swallowing a morsel of reserved bread. They tussled and the bread fell to the ground where it was snatched up in a sheet of flame. The Eucharist, in other words, behaved like a relic—it channeled the power of God and, through him, was capable of preserving itself.

The ultimate implications of the Eucharist-as-relic did not go unremarked upon in these stories. As a holy object, the reserved Eucharist was detached from the liturgy of the Mass that consecrated it, and the human community of the faithful who constituted that Mass. Thus, a series of stories in the *Pratum

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36. For the quotation of Gregory, Severus *op. 3.1, The Select Letters of Severus*, ed. Brooks, 3.4 references other requests, Basel, op. 92; this letter has been shown to be a misattributed letter of Severus of Antioch; Sever J. Voicu, "Cesaria, Basilio (Ep. 92–94) a Severo," *Augustinianum* 35 (1995): 607–701.
laymen or women who could effectively choose the host from a competitive market. The Eucharist as object, in other words, was intensely possessable and thus detachable from its broader ritual community.  

Nonetheless, the Eucharist as imagined in these stories is not communityless. The reserved Eucharist owed its origins to at least a notional community of the faithful, whether Chalcedonian or non-Chalcedonian, represented by their bishop. Furthermore, the mise-en-scène of the Plerophoria, the Prætum S. P. et Syrac. synodice was often the bedroom, the garden, the sickroom—the tight spaces of the home. Indeed, the family or small group were often the protagonists of so many of these stories and, indeed, the subject of increasing episcopal and imperial control in this period.  

These subgroups within the broader urban or village community used the reserved Eucharist to craft ritual lives of their own, centered on moments of need and the exigencies of daily life.

Miniaturization and Fragmentation in Object and Word

Despite their shared chronology and general geography, the world imagined in these texts cannot be readily or simply transplanted onto the extant remains of house and chapel. Chapels appear rarely in imagined topography of the miracle stories, and the chapels themselves are relatively mute on the rituals they accommodated. Did these chapels serve as monumental containers for the preservation and consumption of the reserved Eucharist? We cannot know: their miniaturized, hard-to-use furnishings admit so many possible uses—small-scale Eucharistic masses, worship of relics, storage and consumption of the reserved Eucharist, or simply prayer—that it would be dangerous to assume they witnessed the rituals of self-communion described in the texts.

Rather than assuming a primary-level functional relationship between the two forms of evidence, we might more usefully interrogate them on a more conceptual interface, namely a shared dependence upon, but separateness from, the episcopal or public church. That is, rather than assuming that texts might help us to repopulate chapel rituals, it might be more useful to consider what both words and things reveal about their shared sixth-century ritual world, particularly the ritual tensions and synergies between individuals and institutions.

In both the miniature chapel and the reserved Eucharist, an implied full ritual—the ritual of the Mass—was distilled into things, and in consequence, those rites were reified into possessable objects. In the process, the broader ritual community—real or implied—could be short-circuited, replaced by, or represented by the physical object, liturgical furnishings, or Eucharistic bread, which stood for the whole. On the other hand, it was that synecdochic quality which lent these objects their power: the fragment owed its meaning and ritual power to the notional community—the bishop, the communal Mass or communal church building—for which it stood. Thus the community of the faithful was never wholly banished, nor was family or individual severed from it, but the broad community's literal constitution, in the form of real Masses with real participants, could be, at least notionally, omitted. Families and individuals could invoke the community through their possessable objects of Eucharist or miniature church and, in doing so, replace the community itself.

Reification, Miniaturization and Fragmentation in Sixth-Century Context

The tendencies we have been describing—to distill ritual and community into possessable spaces and objects—are not particular to Christianity: the massive Hindu temple cart reproduces the architecture and participants of the even greater temple complexes; the tiny models of public temples used in Hindu, Greek, and Egyptian personal rituals; or the miniaturized cult statues used in Roman domestic lararia, are all examples of allied phenomena.  

Within Christian history, such reification was implicit already at the Last Supper, when bread and wine stood in for a human sacrifice—not simply as replace-

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ment but as a replacement which was itself a physical object. The question thus arises as to whether these sixth-century acts of reification and miniaturization are historically different in any meaningful way, or whether they should take their place in a more usefully undifferentiated history of such processes. 49

It is tempting to place the tendencies toward reification and communal fragmentation, observed in both chapel and Eucharistic miracle story, in the context of the great fragmentations of the age, namely the Chalcedonian controversies that so ripped Christian communities in the East into conflicted subunits. 40 As Volker Menze has described, the physical performance of the liturgy and particularly the Eucharist itself was a means of clearly articulating the difference between these two communities, whose doctrinal differences were often hard for ordinary people to grasp. 41 He has thus read the prominence of the Eucharist in the Plerophoria and Severus's letters as part of a broader effort on the part of non-Chalcedonians to draw clear, physically tangible lines around their communities. It is also, I suppose, possible to read the chapels in this way: Alexandria and Ephesus had both Chalcedonian and non-Chalcedonian communities, and while Apollonia is never mentioned as a hotbed in the controversy, it is certainly possible there were divergent doctrinal groups that might have wished to construct their own ritual spaces. 42

However, while both chapels and texts may have been used in doctrinal wrangling, it seems unlikely that either the buildings or the stories are solely and simply a product of these debates. While it is doubtless true that the reserved Eucharist in the Plerophoria is deployed to demonstrate God's favor for the non-Chalcedonian cause, it draws upon a clearly common practice to make physical that favor. John Moschus, a pro-Chalcedonian less obviously engaged in doctrinal debate, employs very similar miracles, suggesting that while the practice of reservation might be a potent vehicle for the marking of doctrinal boundary, it served that function precisely because it had become so commonplace on both sides of the doctrinal fence. The chapels are even harder to read as doctrinally motivated, not least because two of them appear in residences possibly associated with state officials—unlikely candidates for anti-Chalcedonian separatism. Rather, it seems more prudent to view these tendencies toward ritually-based fragmentation as social habitus, a habitus whose constant and multifaceted performance—in architecture, in ritual—made it ever more readily pressed into service as a doctrinal marker.

It is useful, in this regard, to trace how this habitus came into being. While the reification and miniaturizing of ritual have been inherent in Christianity from its beginnings, the particular modes we find in the sixth century were not. The very signifiers miniaturized—the public church building and liturgy of the Mass—have an important historicity. From the fourth to the early years of the fifth century, most cities in the empire still lacked a defined church building; the notion of a canonical Christian architecture was slow to develop and at the time our chapels were being built was, in most regions, less than a century old. The physical language of Christian ritual that the chapels appropriate and miniaturize was thus relatively new. Likewise, the development of the Eucharistic Mass, and the Eucharistic bread as the most important product of that ritual, now appear to have taken far longer to formalize than previously thought. Eucharistic meals, “blessings” made at table and other extra-episcopal Eucharistic celebrations continued through the fourth century. 53 In the churches of the East it seems that daily Eucharistic Masses were slow to develop, with the Eucharist being offered only on Sundays until well into the fifth century and much later in Constantinople. 44

The development of homogeneous, quotable physical and ritual Christian vocabularies in the later fifth and sixth centuries was a product of the church’s increasing institutional muscle. While bishops of the fourth century were often drawn from the middle classes, with church treasuries that were mostly as


41. Menze, “Priest, Liturgy and the Sacrament of the Eucharist in Sixth Century Syria,” and Menze, Justinian and the Making of the Syrian Orthodox Church, chap. 4.


43. McGowan, Aeticus Eucharistia.

unimpressive as their family trees, the same could not be said of their far more powerful sixth-century successors. Sixth-century bishops were also making inroads into the family, offering their services as marriage counselors and educators, and in the processes shaping the episcopal office as a kind of supervisory paterfamilias.\(^{45}\) The sixth-century bishop's increasingly prominent liturgical roles—in great basilicas or processing through city streets—now stood at the front of a whole web of relationships that reached into the very bedroom.

The sixth-century families who built chapels or made use of the reserved Eucharistic bread seemed to take for granted the power of bishops to define holy space and holy objects, and responded to that power by distilling episcopal liturgy into objects. In so doing, however, they gathered around those objects the small communities of family and self. Like someone peering over a miniature book, they drew in close around small spaces and objects, and in doing so, solidified the ritual lives of small group or of the self. That is, the "triumph of the church" as institution may have brought about subtle but fundamental changes in the relationship between communal versus familial and individual worship. These changes were not describable so much as a hostile takeover, but rather as the slow monopolization of a sacred vocabulary, a vocabulary that was particularly prone to miniaturization, reification and thus, somewhat ironically, possession by the very lay households it would seem to exclude. In other words, the growth of the institutional church—its liturgies and buildings—simultaneously expanded ritual communities and provided the very materials for their fragmentation.

We might mention another instance of personal miniaturization of collective ritual that was also a product of the expanded church institution and that also appeared for the first time in our period, namely the production of pilgrim eulogiae, or blessings, stamped with images of famous holy places. These small objects—tokens, ampullae, or medallions, sometimes containing sacred material from the sites themselves—began to appear in the fifth century but their real heyday was the sixth through the mid-seventeenth centuries, after which they fade from view.\(^{46}\) They were in the first instance a product of the popularization of pilgrimage in this period, prior to which the notion of travel to holy places had been largely a purview of the particularly pious or wealthy.\(^{47}\) Such objects have been principally studied as a link in the chain that connected the worship of relics to the worship of images: they functioned not simply as memorabilia from a visit, but, according to the textual sources, agents of healing miracles in which a holy substance—that is, the dust from the shrine, or oil dipped in the saint's relics—acted in combination with a visual image to provoke a miraculous epiphany, the saint appearing before the petitioner, wherever they were, and granting their prayers.\(^{48}\) The visual-ritual technologies by which image and object provoked epiphanic response has been likened to that of magic, in which the physical acts of inscription and sealing, in combination with prayer and incense, force divine agents to respond to petitioners' demands.\(^{49}\) Other processes were at work, however, in those pieces that bore an image of a holy place or ritual. These were predominantly tin or lead ampullae bearing images of the aedicular shrine in the church of the Holy Sepulchre. They were eulogiae or ampullae stamped with what might be reproductions of famous church apse images—such the Ascension from the church of the Ascension on the Mount of Olives; and clay tokens depicting Simeon Stylites the Younger on his column with monks bearing censers and venerating the column's base.\(^{50}\) As has been widely noted, these images intensified the intercessory power of the "blessing" by invoking spaces that were themselves relics.\(^{51}\) That is, the miniaturized representation of the aedicular shrine, apse


image, or stylique's column were not simply meant to remind the viewer of visits to those styles—indeed, some of the Holy Land images seem to have been produced at the shrine of Simeon Stylites and thus not for visitors to the Palestinian holy sites at all. Rather, the miniaturized representations of sacred spaces carried with them the holy power of those places, making those spaces portable, possessable even by those who had never visited the place itself. Furthermore, the images of Simeon the Younger both reproduced rituals carried out at the Holy Mountain outside Antioch—namely the censing of the saint's holy body and the veneration of the column itself—but also alluded to the use of incense in private rituals undertaken away from the saint's shrine, probably even using the token itself. While reproduction and miniaturization resulted in a portable, possessable holy object, at the same time these miniaturized reproductions referenced and thus reemphasized the originality and sanctity of the communal places and rituals they hosted. Thus, these blessings display many of the same technologies at work in contemporary private chapels and eucharistic rituals, namely the miniaturization of communal sacred space and ritual, their reification into possessable objects, and thus the simultaneous dependency on the communal sacred and the possibility of independence from it.

Afterward: Caesura

There is a strong temptation to tie these sixth-century instances of miniaturization and communal fragmentation to the much bigger processes that characterize the longue durée of Byzantine ritual history. The middle Byzantine city of the ninth and tenth centuries had become a constellation of small spaces, of contracted demographics, of jewel-like katholikoi rather than great basilicas. By the ninth and tenth centuries, the public church liturgies were almost wholly a production of the clergy, with the laity no longer participating in the processions and most activity taking place behind the now-opaque screen of a tall iconostasis. Even as public church liturgies were becoming ever more the preserve of the clergy, private chapels and liturgies were multiplying. While we are badly informed about the domestic architecture of the period, many of the palaces of the period probably had their own chapels, and the cave-mansions of Cappadocia were typically outfitted with them. Indeed, many of these cave-mansions may have had associated tomb complexes, complete with miniaturized feasting rooms and miniaturized chapels: shrunken past the point of actual functionality in many cases, these tiny spaces served as perpetual stand-ins for more occasional funerary meals and masses. Urban centers, like those documented at Pergamon and Amorium, seemed to witness a multiplication of shrines and small churches in homes, shops, and on street corners. In the public churches private chapels also began to multiply, often outfitted with the same liturgical furnishings as the main church but used by wealthy families for funerary masses, by church clergy for special public masses, for the keeping of relics, and for a myriad other purposes. In homes, almost wholly a production of the clergy, with the laity no longer participating in the processions and most activity taking place behind the now-opaque screen of a tall iconostasis. Even as public church liturgies were becoming ever more the preserve of the clergy, private chapels and liturgies were multiplying. While we are badly informed about the domestic architecture of the period, many of the palaces of the period probably had their own chapels, and the cave-mansions of Cappadocia were typically outfitted with them. Indeed, many of these cave-mansions may have had associated tomb complexes, complete with miniaturized feasting rooms and miniaturized chapels: shrunken past the point of actual functionality in many cases, these tiny spaces served as perpetual stand-ins for more occasional funerary meals and masses. Urban centers, like those documented at Pergamon and Amorium, seemed to witness a multiplication of shrines and small churches in homes, shops, and on street corners. In the public churches private chapels also began to multiply, often outfitted with the same liturgical furnishings as the main church but used by wealthy families for funerary masses, by church clergy for special public masses, for the keeping of relics, and for a myriad other purposes. In homes,
the burgeoning worship of images—on panels, on jewelry and other personal objects—produced intimate cells of devotion clustered around holy images. The middle Byzantine city, in short, was a world of small ritual spaces in which rituals and spaces of the small group had come into their own.

And yet, the sixth century’s specific modes of miniaturization and fragmentation left few traces on the other side of iconoclasm’s divide. By the middle Byzantine period, the consumption of the Eucharist by the laity had declined dramatically, and Eucharistic reservation was increasingly practiced only for the sick. Private chapels that duplicated public church architecture had certainly continued and spread, but appeared above all at the perimeters of public churches where their functions were not restricted to family or individual worship. The small size of all Byzantine church spaces was probably due to a series of factors—demographic decline, reduction in economies of scale, the cessation of large-scale public processions as part of the Eucharist rite, and a tendency to produce particularized spaces for devotion to individual saints. The best comparanda for the technologies and modes of individual miniaturization of collective ritual monuments are the Cappadocian chapels and tomb complexes: only further work can document whether these genres are purely local or reflective of more general Byzantine habits.

If there is a strand of continuity between this world and the sixth-century


64. On communion: Talt, Beyond East and West, chap. 5; on reservation: Nussbaum, Die Aufbereitung der Eucharistie, 728–82.


phenomena it is on a more general level. The increasing popularity of individual and small-group rituals, their reference to and dependence on those of the public church, and the mimicy of public church architecture—observed not only in private chapels but in icons, reliquaries, and other church furnishings—may be the deeper strands connecting a particular sixth-century moment to the longer, more ambivalent trajectory of Byzantine ritual history. If this is the case, then the sixth century may indeed be a watershed, if not for the advent of particular modes of religious individualization, then perhaps for the shift in ritual habits marked by the simultaneous collusion and fragmentation between individuals and institutions.

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