The Changing Shape of Liturgy
From Earliest Christianity to the End of Late Antiquity

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When we refer to the changing shape of liturgy in the same breath as the writing of liturgical history, as the other chapters in this volume highlight, it is not only liturgy itself as it was performed in all its glorious diversity in the past that changes over time but also our perception of it. Reflecting on precisely how and why we approach liturgy’s past in the way that we do is thus an important exercise, to which I contribute this overview of some of the key changes in approach to the study of liturgy in the past that have emerged in recent decades.¹ Throughout my survey and analysis I shall assume that study of the history of the structure of liturgical rites, their content, and their textual sources—the dominant approach of the past—remains fundamental to the field and will in the future continue to be a focus.² But

¹ My thanks go to Teresa Berger, Bryan Spinks, and the Yale Institute of Sacred Music for inviting me to reflect intentionally on the changes that have been taking place in our approach to liturgy in these formative centuries, many of which have influenced my own work both consciously and subconsciously. Some of the insights presented here came to me only as I was preparing the original keynote lecture; many of the questions I ask have deepened as a result of the other papers presented, their respondents and the questions posed by the audience.

² As an example of how this approach continues to define liturgical studies as a field, see the contents of Bert Groen, Steven Hawkes-Teeples, and Stefanos
that is not what interests me here. My focus in this reflection is on how changes in the study of history and new developments in the sciences are currently influencing how we approach liturgy and how this in turn is expanding the way that we view liturgy in these historical periods. Looking at liturgy from these alternative angles raises some very interesting questions. While my focus will also be on Christian worship in the first eight or nine centuries (with a strong Eastern bias, due to my own area of expertise), what is clear is that many of the developments that I outline here are trends that have been occurring simultaneously in, or that are of equal relevance to, the study of liturgy in other geographical areas and historical periods.3

For the first eight centuries, the study of Christian worship, its origins and its evolution, goes hand in hand with the study of the rise of Christianity as a religion. One of the most significant influences in the past two decades in this respect has been the field of Late Antiquity. By redefining the centuries between the classical Roman and Medieval worlds as a period not of decline but of transformation and by viewing them not through a (primarily) economic and political but a cultural and sociohistorical lens, this multidisciplinary field has given rise to an endlessly changing range of approaches and points of view.4 What constitutes Late Antiquity is itself still under definition, with a variety of time ranges theorized.5 For the study of liturgy, the most important point to

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3 This is not surprising as what we are talking about here is a widespread change in historiography in recent decades, more generally characterized under the labels of postmodernism or postcolonialism.

4 For reflection on the formation and development of the concept see the historiographical essays in both Philip Rousseau, ed., A Companion to Late Antiquity (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009), and Scott F. Johnson, ed., The Oxford Handbook of Late Antiquity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

5 So in his World of Late Antiquity, Peter Brown defined Late Antiquity as the period from 150–750 CE. In another iteration of this work, also published in 1971, the chronological termini were replaced by the names of significant individuals of roughly the same periods. See Peter Brown, The World of Late Antiquity: AD 150–750 (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971); Peter Brown,
note is that in its most generous interpretation the field essentially
deals with the period between our earliest historical sources—the
New Testament and associated writings—and, in the West, the early Medieval Period, in the East, middle Byzantium and early Islam. The sheer breadth of the perspectives that this all-encom-
passing view of these critical centuries offers has had a profound impact on the study of the rise of Christianity, with a noticeable flow-on effect into the study of its worship practices.

The most important changes this reconceptualization of history has brought about are, in my view, the following. The first is a sub-
stantial alteration in how we view the parting of the ways between Christianity and Judaism, on the one hand, and the relationship be-
tween Christianity and so-called “pagan” religions, Greco-Roman philosophy, and magic on the other. The shift from a neat linear schema to one that is organic and much more chaotic is wonder-
fully illustrated by figures 1 and 9 published by Martin Goodman in The Parting of the Ways. The broad implications of this change

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The World of Late Antiquity from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad (London:
Thames and Hudson, 1971). A more restrictive view focuses on the Roman Empire, arguing that its later phase extends from the Diocletian tetrarchy to the beginning of the Arab conquest. See, e.g., Stephen Mitchell, A History of the Later Roman Empire AD 284–641: The Transformation of the Ancient World (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). In response to ideological debates, the negotiation of the boundary between classical Antiquity, Late Antiquity, and the Middle Ages is ongoing, with the boundary at either end of Late Antiquity continuing to shift back and forth. An increasing interest in the rise of Islam and the transition into Islamic rule in the Mediterranean east is now influenc-
ing the terminus at the upper end. The Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity, for example, designates it as “the period between approximately 250 and 750 CE” (http://www.ocla.ox.ac.uk).

The fields of study circumscribed by the Oxford Centre for Late Antiquity are particularly expansive: the later Roman Empire; the Sassanian world (Per-
sia); Byzantium and the Christian East; Judaism and the Jewish world; Islam and the Islamic world; and the post-Roman West. Their web site (as cited in the previous note) is divided accordingly, with each field comprising its own researchers, graduate students, and events.

in perspective are profound: a move away from the language of Christianity to that of Christianities, for instance, and a move away from studying only those strands viewed as central (for example, the Eucharist, baptism, and these rites in orthodox/Nicene Christianity) to a growing appreciation of those on the periphery; a recognition, even, that what we thought was on the periphery may not, in fact, be so peripheral; and a constant reappraisal of when we thought certain benchmarks in the rise of Christianity—such as its emergence as a distinctly separate religion and the emergence of Nicene trinitarian Christianity as normative—took place. A second important change is that, within a view of history that focuses on the cultural and the social, the life of the ordinary person, not just elites, becomes important. This has led to an interest in the laity, their personal and communal experience of the liturgy and even their influence on it, not just in the clergy who preside over or perform it. An additional consequence is an increased emphasis on

121 and 129. In his introduction (119–20) Goodman points out the limitations of figure 9 and other two-dimensional illustrations, arguing that 3-D modeling would represent the complexity of the current perspective even more effectively.

The various shifts in the way we view the emergence of Christianity as a distinct religion are amply illustrated by the essays published in Becker and Reed, The Ways That Never Parted; and in Simon C. Mimouni and Bernard Pouderon, eds., La croisée des chemins revisitée. Quand l’Église et la Synagogue se sont-elles distinguées? Actes du colloque de Tours, 18–19 juin 2010, Patrimoines, Judaïsme antique (Paris: Cerf, 2012). With regard to the emergence of Nicene Christianity as normative, the comments of James O’Donnell, Bryn Mawr Classical Review 2014.5.53, reviewing Jason D. BeDuhn, Augustine’s Manichaean Dilemma, vols. 1–2 (2009, 2013) are illustrative: “BeDuhn emphasizes the creation of ‘Nicene’ and ‘Catholic’ Christianity in 379–381 CE and following, when Theodosius came to the throne. The emperor’s church made the surprising choice of going back to the Nicene formulation that had been all but abandoned, even by Constantine, and using it to create an approved form of Christianity that passed under what was now a brand name of ‘Catholic.’” (http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2014/2014-05-53.html). The fragility and the chaotic fate of Nicene Christianity in the fourth century is amply illustrated by Lewis Ayres, Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

viewing liturgical practices in their social, cultural, and geo- and church-political contexts. A third change has been a shift in how we approach our textual sources. Works that were once viewed as popular as opposed to serious literature, such as homilies, hymns, and saints’ lives, are now studied in their own right, with their status substantially revalued. For liturgy, this has meant a growing acknowledgment of the central and dynamic role of the sermon in the Liturgy of the Word, its association with pre- and post-baptismal instruction and ritual, and its role in the context of the hagiographies that were read out during the liturgies enacted on the festivals of saints and martyrs. Surprising as it may seem, study of the origins and evolution of the homily and of preaching per se in the first eight hundred years has only been taken seriously since the 1990s. A fourth change is a new appreciation of buildings built for the purposes of public worship (churches, synagogues, temples) as community hubs, that is, as complexes that have rooms for activities and liturgies (in the ancient sense) other than worship—for instance, for the storage of the church treasury, for the collection of linens and clothing for distribution to the poor, for communal meals. That is, that the worship space of a church or


10 Although it should be noted that the division between the Liturgy of the Mass or Eucharistic Liturgy and the Liturgy of the Word reflects a distinctively modern Roman Catholic and Protestant point of view. Orthodox churches view the rites observed at a regular liturgical synaxis more holistically.


synagogue is only one part of a larger complex and that liturgy is embedded within and in relationship with those other activities. Perhaps even more self-evidently, like the relationship between preacher and audience, between the sermon and other parts of the liturgy, or between laity and clergy, this relationship, too, is not static but dynamic.\(^{14}\) A fifth change is a move away from a Western bias that had been underwritten by historiographies concerned with the rise of Europe, with a resultant increasing interest in cultures and communities that worshipped in languages other than Greek or Latin.\(^{15}\) Also relevant is an increased self-consciousness


\(^{14}\) That is, buildings are altered in response to changes in use or ritual over time. Concerning changes at the synagogue at Ostia, for instance, see Douglas R. Boin, *Ostia in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 119–22 and 167–68. In the churches of Antioch, in a number of cases baptisteries were not original but added later. At the church in the lower city, Seleucia Pieria, the chancel was extended and doors added or sealed up as additional rooms were added to the complex, while in the case of the Church of St. Babylas, the use of external rooms changed, while interior and exterior tombs were added over time. See Mayer and Allen, *Churches of Syrian Antioch*, 32–40 and 59–61.

\(^{15}\) We see this most clearly in the maturing of interest in the Syriac- and Coptic-speaking communities of Late Antiquity, and now also the growing
about historical methods and the biases of sources, resulting in a
greater honesty about what is missing and what we can and cannot
know on the basis of the evidence that we do have. Together, these
changing perspectives go hand in hand with the impact of the de-
velopment of new technologies for the study of material evidence
(such as church buildings and the visual arts) on how we approach
and view liturgy, a factor to which we shall turn toward the end of
this chapter. As a curious aside and before we move on to explore
these issues further with a range of illustrations from recent and
current research, one final point is worthy of note. While Late An-
tique studies has had a profound influence on how we currently
view liturgical practices and their evolution during these early cen-
turies, not one of the recent handbooks on or companions to Late
Antiquity devotes a chapter to the topic. The closest we come is a
chapter on sacred space and visual art in *The Oxford Handbook of
Late Antiquity*. On the other hand, in *The Oxford Handbook of Early
Christian Studies*, the now much-changed field of patristics (study
of the church fathers) demonstrates this more socially and cul-
turally contextualized view of liturgy, with seven chapters under
the rubric “Ritual, Piety, and Practice,” and with the inclusion of
chapters on homiletics, martyr passions and hagiography, and po-
etry and hymnography under the rubric “Expressions of Christian
Culture.”

Having set the background, what I shall do in the discussion
that follows is to offer examples of recent work, both published

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18 Ibid., chapters 27 to 33. Hymnography is divided into three chapters (Christian Latin poetry, the Greek world, and Syriac).
and in progress, in order to raise questions about their implications for how we view liturgy in both past and present.\textsuperscript{19} I have already mentioned a turn in research to the laity and their experience. A radical and challenging work that emerges from this perspective, within the setting of the blurry, chaotic religious worldview that is the new norm is Ramsay MacMullen’s book \textit{The Second Church}.\textsuperscript{20} The fundamental question that he asks is this: in the period before 400 CE, how central to the common person’s devotional life was clergy-led worship inside a church? The conclusion he arrives at is: scarcely at all. It was only a small part of their understanding of worship and religious life. He points to church attendance inside cities of only 1 to 8 percent of the Christian population.\textsuperscript{21} By far, the majority of Christians were conducting their worship outside the city walls at the tombs of the martyrs and saints.\textsuperscript{22} In pointing to the coexistence of two churches—the established church (dominant in our textual sources) and the Christianity of the many (visible in the archeological and epigraphic record), the two churches in tension with each other in matters of worship\textsuperscript{23}—he raises important questions concerning whether in viewing the liturgy of the past

\textsuperscript{19} In many cases the literature relevant to the topics under discussion is considerable. For the sake of conserving space, I offer only representative examples here. It is also important to acknowledge the anglophone bias in the examples cited. This reflects in large part the conferences I attended while preparing this paper, which proved a useful source for testing ideas. Although the trends described here are to some extent led by anglophone scholarship, there is much literature that could be cited that appears in many other languages.

\textsuperscript{20} Cited at n9.

\textsuperscript{21} MacMullen, \textit{Second Church}, 101.

\textsuperscript{22} Summed up at MacMullen, \textit{Second Church}, 104–14.

\textsuperscript{23} See, esp., MacMullen, \textit{Second Church}, 95: “Various details . . . show bishops and the masses pulling in opposite directions. They had different ideas about the language of gesture and voice that one should use toward the divine, its style or propriety; different ideas about the reality of relations with the dear departed; and their own sense of what were the best answers for ordinary people faced with the needs of this secular life, not those of the life to come. . . . They didn’t disagree with their bishop’s teachings, but those teachings were not the whole of their religion.”
our definition of liturgy, of religion, and of the actors involved has been and remains too restrictive and elite.24

Two current research projects highlight the importance of this challenge. In a paper delivered in 2013, Andrew McGowan, illustrating the gendered aspect of liturgy, drew out the evidence for the origins and evolution of the ritual of footwashing.25 Quite apart from the details themselves, what was intriguing in this paper is where he located and how he described the transformation of this common, hospitable act performed by women into one that is liturgical. Throughout his paper, he talked about a “ritual act with practical benefit,” something that became a “distinct sacramental performance,” shifting in the fourth century “into a different kind of mode, sacramental, if not liturgical,” and, in the end, as “piety performed in other places” (homes, prisons, cemeteries) as well as “worship.” He also talked of how what was seen as worship in the second century is different from what was seen as worship in the fourth. In this language we see, I would suggest, the tension between a desire to engage with the full religious world of the

24 MacMullen, Second Church, 95: “Our understanding of worship itself is . . . a problem for us still, an encumbrance to our reading of the past”; and (98) “to the extent that the modern model of religion derives from and reveals to us the Christianity of these great teachers and their classrooms everywhere, it must appear to be the possession of a very few. . . . History is a democrat. It is or it should be respectful of all human beings alike, not only those that dominate in the report through their position and their art.” This raises interesting questions concerning the North American evangelical search to recover early liturgical tradition, as discussed in the chapter by Melanie Ross. Whether one’s worship places emphasis on a sermon associated with the reading of Scripture and prayer or on ritual language and action perceived to originate in the first centuries of Christianity, it is now possible to conceive that both are worshipping equally in the tradition of the early church.

Christianity of the first four centuries, while still working from within a language and view of liturgy tied to the established church. We must ask whether that language would change and some of those distinctions disappear, if this ritual were viewed from the less easily defined perspective of MacMullen’s “second church,” taking into evenhanded account the Christianity of the many.

In a paper delivered only a short time later, Blake Leyerle, who has been working for some years on a book tentatively titled Travelling Space: Theorizing Early Christian Pilgrimage, offers among her examples one that raises some interesting questions about the boundary, if any, between common human behavior that takes place in a space associated with liturgy and gestures that are themselves liturgical.26 The point that she makes regarding pilgrim graffiti scratched in stone or written in charcoal is that in general the leaving of graffiti by pilgrims was a performative gesture.27 In some special cases, she remarks, this practice was even formalized by the custodians of the shrines who themselves inscribed scriptural verses and phrases at points throughout the buildings or caves to prescribe movement throughout the space and designate stations at which pilgrims could enact their devotion. These are performative acts that occur along a spectrum, so that what might not be labeled liturgical at one end shades into something distinctly liturgical at the other. The same could be said of impermanent gestures performed by pilgrims as part of the Christianity of the many—the leaving of perishable offerings,28 the pouring and

28 So Severus of Antioch, hom. 27 (ed. Maurice Brière and René Graffin, Patrologia Orientalis 36, fasc. 4 [1974], 570–73), delivered June 18, 513, tells us that when Leontius’s relics were processed the wagon was covered by the pious with items of clothing, bread, necklaces, and rings.
removal of oil from a casket, the removal of dirt from the base of a stylite’s pillar, or performing a gesture associated with the history of the site, such as reclining on a bench at the site of the wedding of Cana. Do we require words uttered at the same time as the gesture—whether spontaneous or formulaic—such as a prayer, to transform the action into something liturgical? Or, since the Piacenza pilgrim goes on to say that he filled one of two water jars at the site with wine, lifted it on his shoulder, offered it at the altar, and washed in the spring (or, possibly, font) for a blessing, is it the intent of the performer that confers liturgical status? And, if an act is spontaneous, does it make it any less an act of worship?

Another point that this last example raises is the benefit of the dialogue between textual and material evidence for the historical period in question and between these two and contemporary evidence. At the 2013 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in Baltimore, at which Leyerle delivered an earlier version

29 For examples of reliquaries and the various mechanisms for pouring oil into and collecting it from them, see the illustrations and discussion in Marie Christine Comte, *Les reliquaires du proche-orient et de Chypre à la période protobyzantine (IVe–VIIIe siècles): formes, emplacements, fonctions et cultes*, Bibliothèque de l’antiquité tardive 20 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2012), 46–51 and 111–12.


31 *Antonini Placentini Itinerarium* 4 (ed. P. Geyer, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina 175 [Turnhout: Brepols, 1965], 130): Deinde milia tria uenimus in Cana, ubi ad nuptias fuit Dominus, et accumsimus in ipso accubitu, ubi ego indignus nominem parentum meorum scripsi (“Next we travelled three miles to Cana, where the Lord attended the wedding, and we reclined on the actual couch, where I, unworthy that I am, wrote the names of my parents.” Translation mine.

32 Ibid.: ex quibus hydriis duae ibi sunt et implevi unam ex eas uino et in collo plenam leuani et obtuli ad altare et in ipsa fonte pro benedictione lauauimus.
of her paper, Lee Jefferson reported on the state of excavations at Khirbet Qana in lower Galilee, where he and his colleagues have discovered a complex of four caves dating from the fifth century CE that had become filled with soil soon after the Crusader period. Situated in the vicinity of a Jewish village and part of a hillside complex that appears to contain a church and monastery, the subterranean pilgrimage site has rough graffiti scratched on its walls and in one chamber with plastered walls a sarcophagus lid on its side, displaying three crosses. In his paper, Jefferson reported on the presence in the same chamber in close proximity to this putative altar of a number of stone water vessels. The association of the site with the miracle at the wedding at Cana is relatively compelling. This find broadens out our questions. If the presence of a church and monastery is subsequently confirmed, we see in the same context and side-by-side three settings for worship (monastic, established church, that of the Christianity of the many). At this period, this phenomenon was not uncommon across the Mediterranean world. What was the relationship between all three? How distinct were they? And what were the relative ratios of participation? How did the Jewish community and its rituals impact those of the Christians? Who had jurisdiction over the various parts of the complex? That is, who regulated and prescribed the various modes of worship that took place in each of the three settings? And, when the Christianity of the many is involved, is the established church, regardless of its view of acceptable behavior and its efforts to regulate it, even relevant? I pose this last question

in light of the thought-provoking response by the art historian Gary Vikan to the panel in which Jefferson and Leyerle gave their papers. Describing his research into the devotion attached to Elvis Presley for his book, *From the Holy Land to Graceland*, Vikan noted how reverence at the holy site (Graceland) is policed not by security guards but the laity, who have their own rigid ideas of what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior.\(^{34}\) He also pointed out how in the course of his researches across time and space, it became clear that one of the defining features of such ritual behavior is the sense of *communitas* experienced, even though individual pilgrims approach the same site or event or saint differently. Again, we see here how in taking the religion of the many into account, worship becomes something that is considerably more expansive than traditional definitions and approaches allow.

Another set of questions was raised early in 2014 when I was asked to respond to a panel on the theme “Sacred Objects, Mundane Origin” at the Annual Meeting of the American Society for Church History. A paper by Maria Dasios concerned an episode in a seventh-century hagiography, the Life of St. Theodore of Sykeon.\(^{35}\) Theodore’s condemnation of a silver chalice and paten purchased by a deacon for use in his monastery because of its secular origin (in this case silver allegedly reclaimed from a prostitute’s chamber pot) highlighted for me something that I had been pondering in my own work on the churches of this same period in Syrian Antioch.\(^{36}\) That is, whether acquisition was via purchase by the church in question or via donation, some liturgical vessels, particularly in earlier centuries, most likely started out as objects produced for the private household. Liturgical spoons, for instance, like patens, are of precisely the same type as those in domestic


use. Strainers could be used equally in either setting. Is it context, then, that is, the simple act of transference from the private to the liturgical setting, that changes their status from secular to liturgical? Was any kind of ritual involved? On the other hand, many of the items in liturgical silver hoards have specifically Christian symbolism and votive inscriptions. This suggests that they were commissioned intentionally by donors for a local church. Did these explicitly Christian symbols or inscriptions automatically confer on the vessels liturgical status? And what about the private devotional act engaged in commissioning and donating them? On the other hand, the anxiety that Dasios identifies in the Life of Theodore concerning the slippage of such objects from secular to sacred and back is also intriguing. To what extent is the lavish use of metals in liturgical objects (including the cladding on altars and on the columns of ciboria) irrelevant to the liturgical status of objects, given that we find critiques of this same practice in private households in the discourse against wealth? I think here of couches, chairs, beds and not just chamber pots. Given that even small churches held in their treasury a far greater quantity of liturgical vessels than they could possibly use or require for liturgical celebrations, should we look instead to the monetary value of the metal from which li-

37 For comparative examples of liturgical and domestic silver plates see Marlia Mundell Mango, Silver From Early Byzantium: The Kaper Karaon and Related Treasures (Baltimore: The Walters Art Gallery, 1986), figs 34.8, 95.1, 106.1 at 164, 269, 278. For spoons see ibid., entries 19–22 at 121–27.
38 Ibid., figs 24.1–3, 26.2–4 at 131, 134.
39 See ibid., entries 1–56 at 68–226.
41 For a late fourth-century example of such invective, in which the use of silver chamber pots, chairs, and footstools is excoriated, see John Chrysostom, In Col. hom. 7 (Patrologia Graeca 62, 349–50).
42 The silver hoard associated with the Church of St. Sergius, Kaper Karaon, a village in the limestone massif in the hinterland of Antioch, Syria, contains fifty-five items (crosses, patens, chalices, ewers, spoons, lampstands, fans, strainer) and a piece of silver revetment weighing a total 82 lbs (37.2 kgs). See Marlia Mundell Mango, “The Monetary Value of Silver Revetments and Objects Belonging to Churches, A.D. 300–700,” in Ecclesiastical Silver Plate
turgical objects were made, viewing them simply as an expression of the wealth of donors and a transference into the liturgical sphere of the patronage ethos? And what about the case of liturgical fans, which were used in the liturgy but had, at least initially, a purely pragmatic rather than symbolic ritual purpose? (Here we are encouraged to think about the influence on worship of climate.) Again, is it the context in which they are used that makes them liturgical? In the end, is Dasios right, and does everything hinge on multiple, sometimes competing, discourses of perception?

To move to a not unrelated issue, just as MacMullen points out that the majority of our written sources for this period reflect the established church, so one of the consequences of the multidisciplinary approach brought to bear in the study of Late Antiquity is to view those texts and what they have to say about liturgical practice through a hermeneutic of suspicion. This engenders a


44 As suggested by Constitutiones apostolicae 8.12.3 (Syria, c. 380; ed. Marcel Metzger, Les constitutions apostoliques, 3, Sources Chrétiennes 336 [Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2008], 178): δύο δὲ διάκονοι εξ ἑκατέρων τῶν μερῶν τῶν θυσιαστηρίου κατεχέτωσαν εξ ὑμένων λεπτῶν ῥιπίδιον ἢ πτερὸν ταῶνος ἢ ὀθόνης, καὶ ἠρέμα ἀποσοβείτωσαν τὰ μκρὰ τῶν ἱπταμένων ζωῶν, ὅπως ἂν μὴ ἐγχρίμπτωται εἰς τὰ κύπελλα. (“Let two of the deacons, on each side of the altar, hold a fan, made up of thin membranes, or of peacock feathers, or of fine cloth, and let them discreetly drive away the small flying insects, so that they don’t dart into the cups.”)
deep distrust of what Christian literary texts across a wide range of genres have to say at face value—and here we include all of those traditionally used in the study of liturgy—on the basis that their underlying concern is distinguishing one particular version of Christianity from other religions or other forms of Christianity.\textsuperscript{45} There is a reason why the shaping of Christian identity (in which performative ritual plays a part) is a topic that is currently exciting much attention.\textsuperscript{46} In hindsight, this insight might seem self-evident, but there is rapidly increasing exposure of the profound extent to which the picture of distinctiveness promoted by these texts, particularly of discontinuity between Christian ritual and that of the social and cultural world within which it developed, has covertly shaped how we view liturgy. These issues are illustrated by a number of recent studies that revolve around amulets, the ritual use of scriptural incipits, exorcism, and baptism. Where terms like magic and superstition were once used pejoratively and seen as distinct from religion, they are now viewed as interconnected, the boundaries between them becoming to our view increasingly blurry. Once again, this area of research allows us greater access to the worship life of the second church, that is, insight into the cognitive and experiential world of the Christianity of the many.

In his article on Christian exorcism and spells, Theo de Bruyn seeks to assess the veracity of the claims of second- to third-century Christian apologists that by virtue of the simplicity of

\textsuperscript{45} Two examples of the complete reappraisal of the function and meaning of texts brought about by this hermeneutic are: Aude Busine, “From Stones to Myth: Temple Destruction and Civic Identity in the Late Antique Roman East,” \textit{Journal of Late Antiquity} 6, no. 2 (2013): 325–46; and Douglas Boin, “Hellenistic ‘Judaism’ and the Social Origins of the ‘Pagan-Christian’ Debate,” \textit{Journal of Early Christian Studies} 22, no. 2 (2014): 167–96. In the first the author deconstructs narratives of temple destruction, which are shown to be later reconstructions of memory for contemporary purposes; in the second, the author deconstructs the dominant pagan-Christian dichotomy, showing that it is a construct of internal Christian identity formation.

their language (that is, appeals to the name of Jesus or short phrases from Scripture) their exorcisms are more effective. By contrast, these authors argue, the incantations performed by other practitioners are elaborate and incomprehensible. In the process of reaching his conclusion—that the apologists are only partially correct and both the preservation of traditional elements and Christian innovation are widely variable—he makes the point that the rite of initiation has dominated the study of Christian exorcistic practice to the detriment of our understanding of ad hoc exorcism. He also points to amulets from the fifth to seventh centuries that contain in some cases extended liturgical invocations or petitionary prayer. In one case, this involves an excerpt from the Lord’s Prayer. This particular category of amulets and spells is one that de Bruyn has been working on for some time, and it raises the issues of how ordinary Christians perceived the ritual power of formulaic phrases (for instance litanies, prayers, the chanting of psalm verses) within the established worship setting, and whether they perceived that power as intrinsic and transferrable to another context. That is, did words performed within the worship of the established church have the same or a different set of associations when performed within the context of the Christianity of the


many? Nils Korsvoll answers these questions to some extent by applying cognitive ritual theory. This allows him to argue for a cognitive blending on the part of the user and ritual practitioner, which would not have been accepted by the “official” church. Between them de Bruyn, Korsvoll, and Joseph Sanzo—whose doctoral research on the use of scriptural incipits in Egyptian amulets is now published—elicit a number of additional factors of significance. All three point to the way in which these texts overturn an assumed relationship between ritual power and strict adherence to established ritual patterns. The ritual practitioners who create the spell show flexibility in what formulaic elements they use and how much or little of a text they inscribe in relation to the space available. This includes variability in the citation of scripture itself, with an appeal to the scholarship of others on the flexible scribal habit—that is, the flexibility exhibited by scribes of this period between word-for-word and free forms of transmission. What does this have to say to the relative inflexibility that we assume from the fourth century onward in regard to the established church’s liturgical practice? Jitse Dijkstra equally importantly, in his most recent publication on this material, points out how scholars have habitually ignored the drawings, including crosses and orant (praying) figures, that occasionally accompany spells. In arguing that these “illustrations” are in fact integral to the spells as well as linked schematically and performatively to temple graffiti, he not only challenges us to draw together the performative aspect of spells

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and pilgrim behavior but also raises intriguing questions about the link in the Christianity of the many (and perhaps also the liturgy of the established church) between images, their performance, ritual action, and ritual words. Sanzo and Korsvoll also raise the importance of viewing such practices and practitioners within their local context, in this case, Egypt. Adducing the work of David Frankfurter and David Brakke, influential scholars of monasticism and Egypt in Late Antiquity, they point to the rise of the monk in this region as a local ritual specialist. This parallels similar theorizing of the rise of the holy man or virtuoso ascetic as local Christian ritual specialist at this same period in Syria. This, in turn, raises the question of liturgical authority and again introduces the monastic setting as another element that needs to be considered when we think of liturgy. Finally, the importance of Dayna Kalleres’ work is that it ties all of this back into the ritual of the established church (in this case the prebaptismal rite of exorcism), reminding us not only of the importance of the tension in this respect between the practices and perceptions of the established church and the Christianity of the many, and the fact that the two need to be viewed in concert, but also that in the view of human beings prior to the Reformation ritual words had power and were performative.

While all of this research has been going on and continues apace, research into the liturgical life of the established church during these centuries has also been reshaping the liturgical landscape. Here, we again see the influence of the sociocultural emphasis and

54 Korsvoll, “Engaging with the Divine,” 84–87; Sanzo, Scriptural Incipits, 171–75.


multidisciplinary approaches brought to bear in the study of Late Antiquity. Earlier in this chapter, I mentioned the growing appreciation of preaching and the homily as an important liturgical act and element. The work on the preacher’s audience pioneered by Mary Cunningham and Pauline Allen⁵⁷ that led to a volume on the medieval preacher’s audience⁵⁸ is now reaching fruition in a third volume dedicated to Latin patristic preaching.⁵⁹ Study of the impact of liturgy on society and vice versa is exemplified in two recent works, one concerning seventh- to eighth-century Rome,⁶⁰ the other seventh-century Byzantium.⁶¹ In the first, John Romano argues that in these critical centuries, public worship at Rome acted as a social glue, as a mechanism for inclusion and exclusion. In this respect, this important study reminds us that the worship of the established church was not only something that took place at a certain time and within a certain space but also was, in a much larger sense, socially performative. Here it ties in with other recent work that focuses explicitly on the demarcation and construction of space as part of religious boundary formation, appealing to theories from social and cultural geography.⁶² That work in turn should be viewed side by side with studies that focus on architecture itself and its setting as active agents in the ritual process.⁶³ To

⁶⁰ John F. Romano, Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014).
⁶¹ Phil Booth, Crisis of Empire: Doctrine and Dissent at the End of Late Antiquity (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2013).
⁶³ Bonna D. Westcoat and Robert G. Ousterhout, eds., Architecture of the Sacred: Space, Ritual and Experience from Classical Greece to Byzantium (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), especially chaps. 7–12: Joan Branham,
return to the second book just mentioned, however, Phil Booth, like Romano, looks at a period in which a specific geographic region, this time the Eastern Roman Empire, underwent a profound transformation. Here he looks to the rise of the Eucharist as “the central aggregating icon of the Christian faith” amid what he describes as the “renegotiation of competing ascetical and liturgical narratives.” Again we see here liturgy and liturgical concerns permeating at least certain levels of society well beyond the interior space of the church building. In yet another recent book, which admittedly extends into a much later period, we see the nexus between liturgy and power brought out in relation to liturgical objects not yet mentioned in this chapter, clerical robes.

The term “embodied” points to the study of two aspects of liturgy that are only just starting to emerge, the cognitive and experiential. Missing from dry texts and archeological remains is not only the full experience of what it was like to touch, feel, taste, smell, see, and hear the worship experience but also how ritual gestures and even the clothing one wears during worship affect the mind of the performer. In a provocative paper delivered at the 2014 meeting of the North American Patristics Society, Adam Serfass appealed to both Daniel Schwartz’s recent study of the communal, cognitive, and ritual components of initiation and to enclothed cognition theory to tease out the reality of the baptismal robe and its subconscious impact. Enclothed cognition theory, building on


64 Booth, Crisis of Empire, 1.
theories of embodied cognition, describes the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer’s psychological processes. In the course of a ritual program of prayer, good works, and daily exorcism, going barefoot, for instance, eliminates all footwear-related distinction of rank, but does it also make the brain of the catechizand more receptive? Similarly, how do the robes that priests wear affect the audience subconsciously, and do they make their wearer more ethical? The same questions, applying embodied cognition, can be asked of the literal effect of bowing one’s head and kneeling down during penitence or of the various positions engaged in prayer. Cognitive theories point to the fact that in all of these cases, and most probably across the full range of ritual clothing, gestures, and utterances in liturgy, the physical experience will have been as significant as the symbolic meaning, the two going hand in hand. A few other examples of recent scholarship that try to bring us closer to the experience of worship in the early Christian past are Carol Harrison’s emphasis on listening as part of Christian practice—particularly in relation to sermons and prayer—on the basis that nearly everything written down in the ancient world and well into Late Antiquity was performed aloud. Giselle de Nie turns to a quite different set of theoretical models from psychiatry, psychoneuroimmunology, and anthropology in her attempt to recover the affective experience of miracles in the Latin-speaking West, in particular the transforming power of images, both verbal and visual.


68 These questions were posed by Serfass, “Enclothed Cognition.”


Her work has potential for trying to understand at a level deeper than sight the visual aspects of worship. This is quite different from the approach of Robin Jensen, for instance, who in her recent publications on baptism pulls together a wide range of evidence in order to help us understand the conscious mind of the participant when exposed in ritual to the visual.\(^7\) Her work is in some ways a milestone in the study of early Christian art in the way in which it contextualizes this art.

An impact on how we both study and understand past worship which I have not mentioned thus far, and that requires reflection as we draw to a close, is that of recently developed, in particular computer-assisted, technologies. 3D computer imaging, employing software developed within the discipline of architecture, offers an obvious advantage in allowing us to reconstruct the space in which worship took place, particularly when the evidence is partial and fragmentary. This has considerable potential in terms of providing us with a more embodied sense of the lived experience of worship in these distant centuries than our imagination can supply. At present, 3D reconstruction of liturgical space, on the other hand, is constrained by the view of liturgy applied by the modeler, and it should be pointed out that the available models are at present highly variable in terms of their utility. So, for instance, the project Byzantium 1200 for the most part provides only exterior-view reconstructions of church buildings in middle Byzantine Constantinople, without 360-degree view capability.\(^7\) A rare exception is two interior views of the baptistery of Hagia Sophia.\(^7\) Of perhaps


\(^7\) See “Hagia Eirene,” http://www.byzantium1200.com/eirene.html; “Holy Apostles,” http://www.byzantium1200.com/apostles.html; and “Saints Sergios and Bacchos,” http://www.byzantium1200.com/sergio.html. The results, it must also be pointed out, are also dependent on the reading of the sources, both textual and material, used.

greater use are the static reconstructions of fora and statues, public space through which liturgical processions passed. On the other hand, associated YouTube videos of landmarks within the city, with their mobile perspective, now supplement and enhance the static views of the city’s buildings. Similarly, the reconstruction of the interior of the church in the lower city at Seleucia Pieria, the port of Syrian Antioch, produced as part of the multiverse ancient Antioch exhibit coordinated and curated by Christine Kondoleon in 2000, is indicative of an older view of liturgical space, as it ignores the plethora of rooms, including baptistery, that formed part of the complex. In its infancy is application of these same technologies and visualscape theory to line-of-sight research. The articles to which I refer here do not deal with Christian architecture per se but offer an example of future possibilities. Ethan Gruber and John Dobbins, for instance, produced a 3D model of a villa with dining floor mosaics and water features from late antique Antioch

76 See, e.g., “Column of Leo,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=othETzXU0IA; and “Porta Aurea—Golden Gate (Sunrise Version),” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q0fflXZvaNk. In the latter the interests of the creator (military, rather than social-historical) are evident.
to which they applied algorithms for the movement of sunlight. This allowed them to show that at certain hours of the day sunlight hit certain mosaic panes in the floor, which correlated with the hours for dinner parties and dining. One can see the potential for studying the play of light on visual art and furnishings within churches in terms of the worshiper’s experience. One study that has been conducted along these lines is that of Ioannis Liritzis and Helen Vassiliou, who examined twelve Greek Byzantine churches dating from the fifth to eighteenth century.\footnote{Ioannis Liritzis and Helen Vassiliou, “Does Sunrise Day Correlate with Eastern Orientation of Byzantine Churches on Significant Solar Dates and Saint’s Days? A Preliminary Study,” Byzantinische Zeitschrift 99 (2006): 523–34.} While their results were not consistent, they were able to show that the alignment of most ensured that sunrise hit the church around the equinoxes, and in some cases near the date of the summer solstice or on the feast day of a particular saint. Again, this adds another dimension to our understanding of the worship experience. So, too, does the new capacity to enjoy virtual tours of early Christian spaces. The web site offering the capacity to tour from one’s desk the Catacombs of Priscilla in Rome is the fruit of recent collaboration between the Pontificia Commissione Archaeologia Sacra and Google Maps.\footnote{“Catacombe di Priscilla,” https://plus.google.com/+CatacombediPriscillaRoma/about. To access the tour, move down the web page to the image labelled “See inside” and click on the arrow. Navigation into and through various galleries and corridors is achieved via clicking on sections of the image (or arrows that appear); the scene can be rotated by up to 360° using the compass to the bottom right of the image. Images on the walls of the catacomb can be enlarged (retaining resolution) using current trackpad gestures.} What it offers is a limited but valuable opportunity to explore, at the very least, the visual experience of moving through the catacombs and to do this repeatedly, getting a better feel for what it must have been like to worship in the chambers of that underground venue.\footnote{Missing is the damp feel of the underground galleries and these are lit by powerful modern lighting that illuminates and casts shadows on the wall decorations in a manner quite different from that of the torches or lamps that would have been used by worshippers of the first Christian centuries. Absent,
What has been offered in this chapter is a whirlwind tour of a multitude of changes in historiography, art and architecture, archaeology, and related disciplines that are rapidly changing how we view liturgy in the first eight centuries that followed the emergence of Christianity. So whirlwind has it been, in fact, that we have not even entered into the topic of gender studies\textsuperscript{82} or the nascent influence of disability studies,\textsuperscript{83} both of which deserve consideration in their own right. What remains is to take a step back to regain our breath and to reflect in these closing paragraphs on some significant ways in which our understanding of the landscape of liturgy in those centuries has already changed or is in the process of changing in response to the developments discussed. First, the social and cultural turn in late antique studies encourages us to view worship as embedded in society. Similarly, it encourages us to view developments that occur as not linear or static but local or regional and untidy. More important, it challenges us to acknowledge that what we call “the liturgy” refers to the worship life of the established church and is only one of a number of equally valid worship options. The other settings, in our current reimagining of liturgy’s past, are the Christianity of the many—this includes the cult of the martyrs, saints and angels, pilgrimage, and ritual practices relating to the demonic and the divine—and one that we have barely touched on here, the ascetic and monastic setting. That is, what we have in the past viewed as rites that are original, central, and normative—the liturgies of the Word and the Eucharist, or baptism—developed in parallel and in interaction too, is any sense of smell or experience of how sound moves through the restricted and less restricted spaces.

\textsuperscript{82}See Teresa Berger’s essay in this volume and her book, \textit{Gender Differences and the Making of Liturgical History: Lifting a Veil on Liturgy’s Past} (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).

\textsuperscript{83}Although the application of disability studies to biblical studies is a growing trend, its relevance to how we view liturgy in this period is only just starting to be explored. It has considerable relevance for liturgical rites of the established church that require mobility, such as baptism by immersion and processions, and the worship of the Christianity of the many, such as pilgrimage and incubation at healing shrines, to name but a few.
with a range of other forms of worship. In fact, for the first four
centuries and, in some regions, possibly even later, the established
church was a minority, and the bulk of worship took place outside
of that context. And so, too, we should expand our scope beyond
the confines of the church building. Here we are reminded of
Goodman’s modeling of the development of Christianity. If we
were to swap out the labels for ones specific to worship, our cur-
rent view of the development of liturgy would be markedly sim-
ilar. The blurring of boundaries between the secular and sacred,
between Christianities, and between these latter and Judaisms and
other religious options as a result of this changed point of view
now leaves us floundering somewhat as we struggle to come up
with models and definitions that are holistic and inclusive. On the
other hand, what we look for when we now think of liturgy in this
period has, as a result of these conceptual changes, expanded con-
siderably. We now look for not only what is prescribed in worship
but also the spontaneous—on the part of all of its performers. That
we now look at all of its performers, not just those in the estab-
lished church or who preside, is in fact another change that has
taken place. We also look at flexibility in ritual expressed in a wide
variety of ways and at an expanded range of ritual gestures, acts,
and utterances. We now look to recover the sensory, cognitive and
experiential in addition to the more traditional approaches to the
visual that drive the study of Christian architecture and art—and
by cognitive, I mean that we now engage in attempting to recover
the performer’s subconscious and automatic as well as conscious
attitude or response. It is in this area of study, one suspects, in

84 See the figures cited in n7, which model the old, traditional linear view
of Christianity’s development against a variety of newer multidimensional
chaotic and interactive models. Fig. 9 (Goodman, “Modelling,” 129) includes
within this picture: Platonism, magic, Second Temple Judaisms, post-70 Juda-
isms, Christianities, Ebionites, judaizing Christians, “proto-orthodox” Chris-
tianity, “heresies,” “gnostics, etc.,” Marcionites, Jewish Christians, judaizing
gnostics, Talmidei Hakhamim, “Sadducees,” and “Essenes,” in repeated con-
tact with “varieties of paganism,” all laid over a background labelled “culture
of Graeco-Roman world.”
addition perhaps to the field of disability studies, that we will see some of the most interesting developments.

If I were to attempt to sum up the change in mindset that has in recent decades occurred in scholarship concerning the first eight centuries of Christianity, it would be the importance now placed on multidisciplinarity, multiple kinds of evidence, and on context. If I were to sum up the influence of this change in mindset on how we now view Christian worship in the past, it would be encapsulated in the phrase “think outside the box.” If the twentieth century was focused on looking inside the box at the worship of the established church, the twenty-first century is in the process of ripping open the box’s sides, flattening it out, and watching the contents spill out and mingle with everything outside it. Concerning the different imagined past that results, liturgical historians at the end of this century will no doubt have their own interesting things to say.

85 Maxwell Johnson’s chapter in this volume introduces a cautionary note. If contextualization is important for the ancient evidence, it is also important for its contemporary interpreter. As we engage in our task as liturgical historians, we are challenged continually to ask ourselves why we are asking the questions that we ask or reading the evidence in a particular way.
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