Apse Decoration in the Light of Eucharistic Liturgy

Theophanies in the Medieval Churches of Lebanon



Rafca Youssef Nasr

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By

Rafca Youssef Nasr



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Introduction

The territory of present-day Lebanon, along with the broader Syro-Palestinian region, experienced cultural, religious and artistic wealth and prosperity from the 4th century to the 7th.[1] During this period it rivalled the major centres of the Byzantine Empire, notably Constantinople, Rome and Ravenna. This was, of course, due to the esteemed status of the Holy Land as the home of Christ and the cradle of Christianity.

From the 7th century until the arrival of the Franks in the late 11th century and the early 12th, artistic activity, especially the wall decoration of religious buildings, seems to have diminished in the Syro-Palestinian region.[2] There are no known religious buildings in Lebanon with painted decoration from this era. The pictorial art of the Christians of this period may have favoured the production of icons or miniatures, that is, works that were easily transportable,[3] perhaps due, among other factors, to changes in taste, lack of economic means, evolving traditions and cultural or religious interactions, particularly with Muslim civilisations. It should be noted that our understanding of Lebanese Christian arts between the Byzantine and Frankish periods is significantly limited, primarily due to a lack of extensive studies.

In the 12th and 13th centuries, during the Crusades, members of the Frankish nobility took control of regions in present-day Lebanon as part of the south-eastern Latin states of the Levant. The County of Tripoli, established in 1109, occupied the northern half, while the southern half became the northern frontier of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, founded in 1099. The crusaders implemented a feudal system that pervaded every aspect of society, from politics and economics to administration, military affairs and religion. This system demarcated the Frankish states, encompassing lordships and baronies throughout the entire Syro-Palestinian coastal region. Within this feudal structure, the legal status of local Christians (including Melkites, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Maronites and Abyssinians) closely mirrored that of the Muslim population. Unlike Latins, both local Muslim and Christian peasants were subjected to various taxes.[4] In fact, only Latins enjoyed full political

1 Morrisson 2015.

2 The monastery of Mar Musa el-Habashi, near An-Nabek in Syria, conserves a few small fragments dating to the 11th century (Heijer 2007, 133–185; Immerzeel 2007b, 127–131; Cruikshank Dodd 2001; Cruikshank Dodd 1992; Cruikshank Dodd 1982, 167–189).

3 This issue is raised in Hélou 2011a, 103, and Zibawi 1995.

4 According to Ibn Jubayr's travel account, Muslims under Latin rule were very well-organised despite Frankish taxation: 'We departed from Tibnin – may God destroy it – at dawn on

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and legal rights, and the main societal division was not between the nobility and the common people, but rather between the Franks and the locals.[5] Despite these disparities, the Lebanese Christian communities experienced a remarkable period of artistic flourishing, evident in the relative abundance of painted churches, which testify to the vitality of the whole region, especially in religious life and the freedom of religious expression during that era. In this regard, the Maronite patriarch and historian Estephan Douaihy (1670–1704) noted that, during the period of Latin rule, Christianity spread to the Levant and was openly embraced by local communities and added that the Maronites, in particular, adopted the practice of ringing copper bells for prayer and the Divine Liturgy. Moreover, he highlighted the vibrant landscape of religious devotion, in which affluent individuals played an active role. They assumed the responsibility of building monasteries and churches, dedicating themselves to the service of God and engaging in benevolent acts.[6]

Indeed, the painted monuments of Lebanon form an important group of archaeological remains that have withstood the ravages of time and human vandalism. Currently, we can count more than 30 ecclesiastical buildings that preserve some of their paintings or have scattered, tiny traces of colour or mortar on their walls (Map 1).[7] These painted structures, which are the imprint

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Monday, passing through numerous villages and organized communities. Their inhabitants were all Muslims living alongside the Franks in a state of comfort – may God protect us from temptation. That is because the Muslims hand over to them of their crops at the time of harvest. They also pay a *jizya* tax on each head: 1 dinar and 5 qirats. The Franks do not interfere with them otherwise. The Muslims also pay a light tax on the produce of trees. They own their houses, and all their affairs are left to them to administer. All the cities along the coast of Syria that are in the hands of the Franks are administered in this way: the rural areas, including villages and small towns, all belong to Muslims. Temptation has satiated the hearts of many of them, for they see that their Muslim brothers in the rural areas and provinces under Muslim control live in a contrary situation to theirs in terms of comfort and good care. This is one of the calamities that befell the Muslims, namely that Muslims would complain about the injustice of their own kind who rule over them, and those under Frankish rule praise the conduct of their adversary and enemy, and feel comfortable under their justice' (Lindsay and Mourad 2021, 18–19).

5 Hoteit 2003, 93–100; Mayer 1978, 175–192.

6 'Christianity spread in the countries of the East, and they began to proclaim it openly. Our community started ringing the copper bells for prayer and the Divine Liturgy. Those in whose hands God's grace has overflowed built monasteries and churches, and people intended to serve God and do good. The priest Basil al-Bsharrani (of Bsharri) had three daughters: Maryam, Thecla and Salome: the daughter Maryam built the temple of Mar Saba (St Sabas) in the village of Bsharri on Mount Lebanon, Salome, the temple of Mar Daniel (St Daniel) in Hadath, and as for Thecla, she built the temple of Mar Girgis (St George) in Bkerkasha and two churches in Bshenneen from the land of Koura' (Duwayhī 1976, 104–105).

7 Map 1 includes only the sites mentioned in the present study.

of a transcultural context *par excellence*, were spread throughout the territory under Frankish domination. The greatest number of painted ensembles are preserved predominantly in rural areas. The remote placement of these monuments in the countryside or perched in valleys and on mountainsides, away from bustling towns and main roads, has played a crucial role in the exceptional preservation of a significant part of the painted decorations found within them. It is certain that Tripoli, capital of the county of that name, had churches decorated with paintings, but none of them has survived, because of the destruction of the city during its seizure by the Mamluk Sultan Qalawun on 27 April 1289.[8] Part of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, Beirut also benefitted from contacts with other crusader centres during the 12th and 13th centuries.[9] Some written testimonies[10] and archaeological remains bear witness to the existence of wall paintings in this city.[11] However, Saydet el-Rih (Our Lady of the Wind) in Enfeh,[12] which was a vassal lordship of Tripoli, Mar Elias (St Elijah) in Blat, Saydet Qassuba (Our Lady of Qassuba) in Jbeil (Byblos), Mar Marina (St Marina) grotto in Qalamun and Mar Elias Btina (St Elijah Btina) in Beirut[13]

8 Moukarzel 2007, 77, n. 15; Jidejian 2007, 105–111; Bacci 2006, 210; Salamé-Sarkis 1980, 6; Abū al-Fidā' 1872, 162.

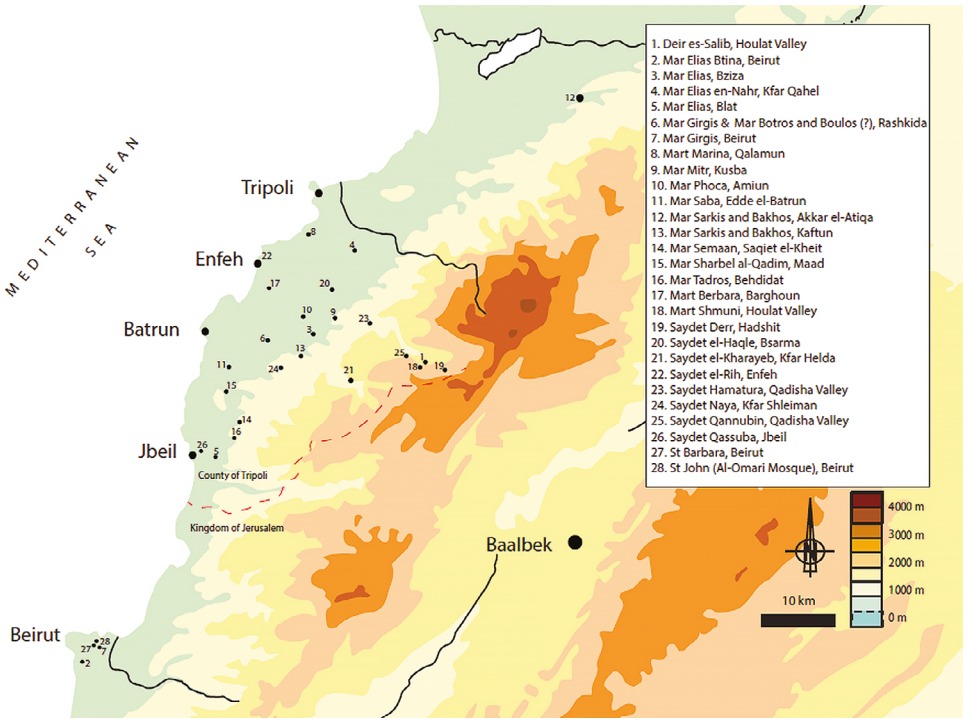
9 Hélou 2014, 78–79.

10 While in Beirut in 1211, Wilbrand of Oldenburg praised the beauty of the residence of John of Ibelin, Lord of Beirut. He said that the palace had an impressive interior, decorated with marble, mosaics and paintings by Syrian, Saracen and Greek artists (Immerzeel 2009, 120; Folda 1995, 136–137; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 16). The Beirut historian Saleh ben Yehya, who lived at the beginning of the 15th century, said that in his grandfather's time the paintings that covered the walls of the Al-Omari mosque (the ancient church of St John) were coated with lime before they were destroyed (Ibn Yaḥyā 1969, 58; see also Hours 1995, 1–64). Henry Maundrell, passing through Beirut in 1697, spoke of a richly decorated church, which may be the church of Mar Girgis (St George), and, after him, Vasili Grigorovich-Barsky also described its paintings in 1723 (Maundrell 1963, 54; Grigorovich-Barsky 2005, 120–122).

11 A section of wall paintings discovered in 1941 on the north wall of a chapel in Beirut, probably dedicated to St Barbara (Pringle 1993, 1: 118, n. 49), is currently on display at the National Museum of Beirut (Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 82–90; Hélou 2020, 243–244; Immerzeel 2009, 121, 157, 167; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 [2009], 371–372; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 374–376; Pringle 1993, 1: 118, n. 49; Hunt 1991, 84–85; Lauffray 1946, 7–16, fig. 2). Archaeological excavations carried out in 1994 and 1995 under the church of Mar Girgis (St George) in Beirut revealed some medieval pillars which still have badly damaged fragments of paintings (Hélou 2014, 84–86). Other paintings were uncovered in 2010 at the church of Mar Elias Btina (Saint Elijah Btina) to the south of the capital (Chmielewski and Waliszewski 2014, 403–414; Nasr 2024, 51–84).

12 Nasr 2022b, 287–298; Nasr 2022a, 235–266; Panayot-Haroun 2016, 190–200; Panayot-Haroun 2015, 396–415; Panayot-Haroun *et al.* 2016.

13 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 381.



MAP 1 Sites in Lebanon with ecclesiastical buildings that currently or previously featured medieval paintings

remain as extant examples of churches with painted decoration along the coast and in its immediate hinterlands.

The paintings preserved in churches in present-day Lebanon are generally concentrated in the apse and nearby walls. Sometimes this is the only part of the church featuring painted decoration. Reserved for the celebration of the Eucharist, the Holy of Holies is the most sacred area of the church space, and its painted decoration could assist its liturgical function. In fact, the iconography in this location often develops themes explicitly linked to the essential function of the place, such as Old Testament sacrifices, the Communion of the Apostles and celebrating bishops and deacons carrying boxes of hosts or waving censers, among others.[14] Nonetheless, apart from my research,[15] the medieval paintings of Lebanon, which have been the object of several studies

14 Jolivet-Lévy 2009; Gerstel 1999; Spieser 1991; Walter 1982.

15 See the Bibliography herein for citations of my relevant published works.

analysing them on different levels (historical, iconographic, stylistic, cultural), have never been approached from a liturgical perspective.

The earliest academic interest in the paintings of the medieval churches of Lebanon dates back to the second half of the 19th century with two French archaeologists, Ernest Renan and Emmanuel-Guillaume Rey. In his *Mission de Phénicie* (1864), Renan noted that these paintings 'seem to be Byzantine and represent common themes of the period'.[16] For his part, Rey limited himself merely to indicating the presence of wall paintings in his 1883 study, *Les colonies franques de Syrie aux XIIe et XIIIe siècles*.[17] A few decades later, papers appeared on the subject by such researchers as Henri Lammens (1913) and Camille Enlart (1923), who reported the existence of paintings without highlighting their historical or cultural importance.[18] Charles Diehl (1927) linked the local style of the paintings in Mar Tadros (St Theodore) in Behdidat to the churches of Cappadocia, as he considered them to be of 'Byzantine inspiration'.[19] While these authors acknowledged and referenced the existence and importance of the medieval paintings of Lebanon, their treatment of the subject was brief and superficial. Moreover, their descriptions often lacked the necessary precision and accuracy. However, in his article on the paintings of the Mar Marina (St Marina) grotto in Qalamun, published in 1926, Charles-Léonce Brossé presented a meticulous description of the various scenes preserved at the time. His research is accompanied by photographic and graphic surveys, which have become of valuable scientific importance due to the disappearance of most of the paintings during the Lebanese Civil War (1975–1990).[20]

After these few sketches from the first decades of the 20th century, the paintings of the 'cedar country' fell back into oblivion in the following years. It was not until the 1960s that authors revisited the subject. In 1962 Maurice Tallon's article on the church of Saydet Derr (Our Lady of Abundant Milk) in Hadshit appeared, accompanied by an almost exhaustive inventory of churches with paintings.[21] Similarly, Joseph Nasrallah published an article in 1969 on the importance of the painted medieval heritage of the Syrian-Lebanese region.[22] Although their analyses focus on generalities, they point to the cultural and historical importance of these paintings. In the meantime, Jules

16 Renan 1864, 240.
17 Rey 1883.
18 Lammens 1913; Enlart 1923, 1–22.
19 Diehl 1927, 328–330.
20 Brossé 1926, 30–45.
21 Tallon 1962, 277–294.
22 Nasrallah 1969, 67–92.

Leroy, in his work on Syriac illuminated manuscripts (1964), mentioned the existence of wall paintings in Lebanon and Syria, while remaining sceptical about their importance in terms of 'the history of religious painting in the Near East'.[23]

It is only since the end of the 20th century that archaeologists and art historians, both local and Western, began to take a more serious interest in the study of these paintings. Father Youhanna Sader published his book on the paintings of Lebanon in 1997.[24] While it is true that his attributions and dates were rather random, we can say that this work revived scientific interest in the subject. Two years later, two archaeologists, Lévon Nordiguian and Jean-Claude Voisin, published a book on the medieval castles and churches of Lebanon.[25] The descriptions and analysis in this work are accompanied by beautiful illustrations and plans, which give the book the appearance of an album. Nordiguian, the author of the part devoted to paintings, identified their style as Byzantine, while refraining from providing precise dates. This book, first published in 1999, was republished in 2009 in a version including five other churches whose paintings, among which some were newly discovered, had been either cleaned or restored.[26] Alongside this book, Nordiguian wrote four articles on the paintings of Saydet Hamatura (Our Lady of Hamatura),[27] Saydet Naya (Our Lady of Naya) in Kfar Shleiman,[28] Saydet el-Kharayeb (Our Lady of the Ruins) in Kfar Helda[29] and Mar Elias (St Elijah) in Bziza.[30] His studies are noteworthy for their meticulous approach in describing and identifying figures and scenes, while delicately avoiding controversial stylistic and dating issues. Father Abdo Badwi authored two articles, in 2000 and 2001, focussing on architecture and wall paintings found on Mount Lebanon. In his writings he claimed that these paintings have a Syriac origin and occasionally exhibit elements reminiscent of Byzantine, Cypriot, Romanesque and Cappadocian art, without elaborating on supporting arguments for his hypothesis. Badwi furthermore highlighted a correlation between miniatures and wall paintings.[31]

Erica Cruikshank Dodd published a colossal book providing a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Lebanese ecclesiastical architecture and

23 Leroy 1964, 83.
24 Sader 1997.
25 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009).
26 *Ibid.*
27 Nordiguian 1998, 67–89.
28 Nordiguian 1995, 95–116.
29 Nordiguian 2003, 187–192.
30 Nordiguian 2015–2016b, 397–405.
31 Badwi 2001, 71–87; Badwi 2000, 61–68.

paintings.[32] Although issued in 2004, the book is the product of research that began in the early 1970s. The photos used were taken some 30 years earlier and thus date back to before the Lebanese Civil War. Some are unique, because the images they show are now destroyed. Having worked on the paintings of the Syrian-Lebanese region, the author compared the styles of the paintings of Lebanon not only with those of Syria, but also with examples in Palestine, Cyprus, Cappadocia and the Balkans. She suggested that the paintings in the Lebanese region exhibit various traditions, including Romanesque, crusader, Syriac, Byzantine and even Islamic elements. However, the researcher's comparisons often lack justification, likely due to the inability to revisit the sites and the limited clarity provided by photography from the 1970s and earlier. This is especially true considering that the majority of the murals had not yet undergone the extensive conservation and restoration work they have subsequently received. The author compared, as an example, works of a rather local style, such as those at Saydet el-Haqle (Our Lady of the Fields) in Bsarma and Mart Shmuni (St Solomonia) in the Houlat Valley, which date back to the 13th century, to the art of 11th-century Cappadocia;[33] as a result, she proposed dating these paintings to the 11th century. However, the stylistic characteristics of these works hardly allow us to make such a comparison.[34] On the north-eastern pillar of the church of Mar Phoca (St Phocas) in Amiun, the author identified the poorly preserved figure of the angel in the Baptism scene 'as a curious animal-like creature'[35] and attributed it to an earlier layer of paint, suggesting the Virgin and Child, something that she certainly could not have seen due to the excessive deterioration of both painted layers. In the chapel of Mart Shmuni the author could not identify the scene of the Angel at the Tomb with the figures of the myrrhbearers,[36] which usually adjoins the Anastasis. Moreover, certain interpretations of historical references lack precision. For example, when addressing the image of the Dormition in Edde el-Batrun, Cruikshank Dodd based her studies on the historical reference provided by Douaihy, who dated the paintings to 1261.[37] However, it is obvious, especially after the conservation works of 2012–2013, that the style of this image belongs to late Comnenian art, that is to say, the art of the late 12th century.[38] The year

32 Cruikshank Dodd 2004.
33 *Ibid.*, 89–91.
34 Immerzeel 2009, 100 (Saydet el-Haqle), 119–120 (Mart Shmuni); Hélou 2008, 41 (Saydet el-Haqle), 62–65 (Mart Shmuni).
35 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 162.
36 *Ibid.*, 263–264.
37 *Ibid.*, 283.
38 Hélou 2003, 397–434.

cited by Douaihy certainly corresponds to a single composition featuring the Virgin and Child, which belongs to a second phase of painting. In the church of Mar Sharbel al-Qadim (St Sharbel the Elder) in Maad, a testimony mentioned by Douaihy includes the name of a Latin individual who contributed to the redesigning of the church's ceiling.[39] However, a misreading of the Arabic text led Cruikshank Dodd to believe that the person in question financed the decoration of the church.[40] Nevertheless, her work, despite being affected by the limitations posed by the deteriorated state of preservation, outdated photography and the technological constraints of the time, deserves recognition for its contribution to introducing Lebanon's medieval art to the global stage. It serves as a valuable reference for Anglophone scholars interested in exploring the country's paintings.

Nada Hélou has published a series of articles addressing the paintings of Lebanon in which she has tried to analyse the different aspects of mural decoration by raising questions of iconography and style.[41] She has noted that all of the medieval paintings in Lebanon date to the crusaders' domination of the Holy Land, but ruled out the participation of crusader artists, emphasising instead the involvement of local artists and patrons. She has grouped Lebanon's paintings into two main categories: those showing a strong Byzantine style; and those that are somewhat Byzantine, but painted with Eastern features. There seem to have been several painting workshops active in Lebanon at that time with a clearly different style from Byzantine art, which Hélou dubbed 'maniera syriaca'. For her, painting in Lebanon is a branch of Byzantine art and even forms an integral part of the Byzantine tradition. She insists on links with the local Syriac tradition which have repeatedly been relegated to the background; depending on the period, these have either been highlighted or, on the contrary, more or less ignored. Hélou has also written two small books intended for a broader audience, which have helped to raise awareness about the importance of this historical and cultural heritage.[42]

Mat Immerzeel has also addressed the subject of the region's medieval paintings in his numerous articles and books.[43] He studies the iconographic compositions and attempts to identify the different styles represented. Some of these studies delve into specific themes, particularly the representation of

39 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 76–77.

40 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 19–20.

41 See the Bibliography herein for citations of works by Nada Hélou.

42 Hélou 2007; Hélou 2008.

43 See the Bibliography herein for citations of works by Mat Immerzeel and works coauthored with Bas Snelders.

holy soldiers as horsemen, a common iconographic theme in Lebanon and the Near East,[44] and the portrayal of patrons.[45] He emphasises the involvement of Latin individuals in the construction and embellishment of Lebanese churches. In 2000 he published an inventory of wall paintings in Lebanon with a description of the different scenes represented, comparing them with Western and Eastern themes.[46] In his 2009 book *Identity Puzzles: Medieval Christian Art in Syria and Lebanon*, dedicated to the search for the artistic identity of wall paintings in Syria and Lebanon, he remarked on the existence of a Byzantine manner with a predominant Syrian element, which he referred to as the style of the 'Master of Behdidat'.[47] He came to conclusions similar to those of Hélou, both iconographically and stylistically. These authors, sometimes penning together, have led us to understand that the art of the Lebanese space is characterised by an amalgam of different traditions.[48]

Finally, Mahmoud Zibawi published a beautifully illustrated book in 2009, at the same time as *Identity Puzzles* appeared, that gives an overview of the state of wall painting in Syria and Lebanon.[49] Although the descriptions and analysis are synoptic and general, with references mainly directing readers to more comprehensive studies, his work is distinguished by its clarity and directness. His conclusions align closely with those of Hélou and Immerzeel, both in terms of iconography and style. In line with Nordiguian, Hélou, Immerzeel and other scholars, Zibawi has asserted that the art of this region is considered a provincial offshoot of Byzantine art. However, this notion is now contested due to the phenomena of artistic interaction and shared experiences among the diverse linguistic and religious communities residing in the medieval Mediterranean. What intrigues us is how each specific context uniquely adapts shared artistic standards or benchmarks to its circumstances. As a result, the art within the Lebanese region, much like the broader medieval Mediterranean, demonstrates a combination of common features and notable variations.

My own publications on the ecclesiastical paintings of Lebanon as evidence of a wide spectrum of transcultural and artistic interactions in the Mediterranean basin during the Crusades place emphasis on underexplored monuments, such as Deir es-Salib (monastery of the Cross) in the Houlat Valley, Mart Berbara (St Barbara) in Barghoun, Mar Elias Btina (St Elijah

44 Immerzeel 2004a, 29–60; Immerzeel 2003, 265–286.
45 Immerzeel and Snelders 2021, 137–174; Immerzeel 2018, 127–164; Immerzeel 2004b, 7–47.
46 Immerzeel 2000, 3–19.
47 Immerzeel 2009, 104–105.
48 Chmielewski *et al.* 2013, 291–322; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Hélou and Immerzeel 2005, 453–458.
49 Zibawi 2009.

Btina) in Beirut, Mar Elias en-Nahr (St Elijah on the River) in Kfar Qahel, Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad, Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh and the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis (St George) in Rashkida, among others.[50] These studies provide a novel perspective that surpasses the limitations of stylistic analysis and the persistent clichés that classify medieval Lebanese painting solely as a derivative of Byzantine, crusader or Islamic art. I aim at understanding the ways in which the holy was visually and spatially evoked and perceived in the original context of use of the images themselves, considering them not merely as compositional elements, but also as material objects intricately linked to specific spaces and performative actions, notably the liturgy, and the aspirations of the monument's users. The analysis reveals that the images not only respond collectively to local or widely disseminated models, but also encompass multiple meanings shaped by various factors, including religious, liturgical, devotional, cultural, political and social ones, among others.

With a keen awareness of the cultural and artistic interplay that has profoundly shaped the Lebanese context and acknowledging the often-overlooked significance of the liturgical domain in Lebanese historiography, the present study focusses purposefully on the pictorial programmes of Lebanon's churches. Specifically, my objective is to examine these programmes through the lens of ritual practices. I will concentrate in particular on the theme most frequently represented in the liturgical space, especially in the apse, while taking into consideration the rest of the decoration and even the monument as a whole: this theme being Christ enthroned between his mother, Mary, and St John the Baptist.

The combination of the images of Mary and John alongside Christ in Majesty carries a precise meaning: intercession. This composition, known as the Deesis, or Theophany–Deesis, has commonly been associated with the Universal Judgement in Byzantine and Eastern historiography and often interpreted as a foreshadowing of the Saviour's Parousia on Judgement Day. However, the placement of this image in the apse, above the main altar, where the Eucharist is celebrated, raises doubts about its exclusive association with an eschatological function. While images inherently possess polysemy, allowing for multiple layers of meaning, it is crucial to consider their relationship to the main function of the space. In this case, we refer specifically to the Holy of Holies, where the daily liturgical practice occurs, particularly the eucharistic sacrifice – the culminating event in Christian worship.

50 Nasr 2025, 135–164; Nasr 2024, 51–84; Nasr 2022b; Nasr 2022a; Nasr 2019b; Nasr 2019a; Nasr 2019c; Nasr 2018a; Nasr 2018b; Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 65–97.

In the context of this study, I wish to develop the hypothesis of a correlation between the apsidal theme of the Theophany–Deesis and the eucharistic liturgy performed directly below it on the high altar. I will argue that this image materialises the presence of Christ and his heavenly court (angels and saints) at the moment of the eucharistic sacrifice. This presence is affirmed by the liturgical and exegetical texts. As a result, this interpretation places the Theophany into the present time and anchors it specifically to the practice of the daily liturgy. Consequently, the imploration of the Virgin and St John the Baptist becomes relevant to the present time. My premise relies on evidence provided by the Divine Liturgy and liturgical, hymnographic and exegetical sources. I have also considered the physical location of the paintings, the associated themes, epigraphy and certain iconographic clues specific to the corpus. Complementarily, I examine the iconography depicted on some liturgical objects associated with the eucharistic celebration.

In order to accomplish my objective, I initially define the semantic field of the theme by referring to the textual and liturgical sources. Subsequently, I evaluate if any elements from the written sources have been preserved and emphasised in the depicted scenes. This process requires a comprehensive analysis of the composition of the Theophany–Deesis and its integration within different programmes. Furthermore, it is crucial to examine each programme independently to determine how this apsidal theme aligns with the overall decorative schemes. I will specifically discuss the programmes of Mar Tadros (St Theodore) in Behdidat, Saydet el-Kharayeb (Our Lady of the Ruins) in Kfar Helda, Saydet Naya (Our Lady of Naya) in Kfar Shleiman, Mar Semaan (St Simeon) in Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Mitr (St Demetrios) in Kusba, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos (Sts Sergius and Bacchus) in Kaftun, Saydet el-Rih (Our Lady of the Wind) in Enfeh and the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis (St George) in Rashkida.[51] These buildings are concentrated in the territory of the County of Tripoli, which extends from south of Jbeil to north of Tripoli, including the eastern highlands.[52]

Images of the Theophany–Deesis are certainly not found exclusively in the County of Tripoli. They are characteristic of the Eastern Christian world, more

51 Given the extensively deteriorated state of its paintings, Saydet Qassuba, including its apsidal Theophany–Deesis, will not be the subject of specific attention in this study. On this church, see Sader 1997, 53–55; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 404–405; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 380–383, pls 22, 1–3; Hélou 2008, 28; Immerzeel 2009, 114, 157.

52 Regarding the churches which were part of the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the southern half of Lebanon, which includes Beirut, the paintings found there are very fragmentary, and no apsidal remains have been found; for this reason this study does not assess this part of Lebanese territory.

specifically Cappadocia, Armenia, Georgia, Palestine, Syria, Egypt and Nubia. However, a fundamentally liturgical interpretation of the Theophany–Deesis has never been sufficiently emphasised, even in these programmes. In order to fully understand the liturgical aspect of the Theophany–Deesis in the churches of the County of Tripoli, it is important to study their formula in Eastern programmes, since these churches and their programmes undoubtedly belong to the Eastern Christian world.

This study also concerns several aspects of the relationship between images and church spaces in order to study them in their historical, artistic, religious and spatial/functional dimensions in the context of artistic and cultural interactions in medieval Lebanon. In the Middle Ages the Christian communities of the Near East had active and close relationships and interactions, not only with the Byzantine world and Western Europe, but also with the civilisations of Islam, which spread over the whole Mediterranean. In this regard it should be noted that there was no clear border between Christendom and the Muslim world. The two poles maintained, as today, flourishing relations, particularly on the political and commercial levels, which fostered artistic exchange, resulting in a cross-cultural marriage. This aspect is clearly visible in the religious monuments of Lebanon and their decorations, which prove to be rich in diverse intercultural contributions.

The analysis investigates existing visual and textual evidence, incorporating data from archaeology, graphic surveys, religious studies and social anthropology, with a specific focus on transculturality. This approach aims to prevent a narrow interpretation of the subject and enables a deeper understanding of the Theophany–Deesis as a symbolic depiction of the divine presence within the liturgical space. Furthermore, it seeks to situate the medieval paintings of Lebanon within their historical, artistic, cultural and, notably, liturgical framework.

This study consists of two main chapters. The first is devoted to textual sources and liturgical theophanies in the Byzantine world and the Christian East, while the second is reserved for the apsidal theophanies of Lebanon.

The first part of the first chapter, dedicated to the scriptural and liturgical foundations of the Theophany, is divided into four sections. The first presents the main rites and formulas of the eucharistic liturgy, which show a thematic connection with the image of the Theophany, with or without intercessors. Several of these prayers and rites are referenced in the iconographic analysis. The other three sections deal with the conception of sacred images according to the Church Fathers; the function of the Theophany and its correlation with the heavenly liturgy; and, finally, the earthly liturgy and the presence of God in Majesty.

The second part of the first chapter, devoted to the iconographic tradition of liturgical theophanies, is divided into two main sections dealing with the image of the Theophany without intercessors and with the image of the Theophany with intercessors, or the Theophany–Deesis, respectively. The first iconographical scheme is the foundation for the second. I thus interpret the different components of apsidal theophanies separately (Christ, the throne, the four living creatures, the seraph, the cherub, the celestial bodies and the intercessors) in order to specify how these elements are articulated on the liturgical and iconographic levels. In order to achieve this, I selected examples that explicitly show the relationship, on the one hand, between liturgical space and the Theophany and, on the other hand, between the Theophany and the eucharistic rites.

The second chapter, dealing with the Theophany in the ecclesiastical buildings of Lebanon, is divided into two parts. The analysis carried out previously allows for an exploration here of whether the image of the Theophany, with or without intercessors, is linked to the liturgy in the Lebanese corpus. I first dissect the scene to identify the function of each element present. Particular attention is given to the writings of Estephan Douaihy, who showed an exceptional interest in the medieval paintings of Lebanon in his works, both liturgical and historical. In the second part, I attempt to place the images of the apsidal Theophany in their iconographic context; this leads to a clarification as to whether it is indeed its liturgical significance that has been favoured in these programmes.

Finally, the study includes an appendix dedicated to the presentation of the corpus and images of it. Each building is accompanied by an overview of its architecture and a detailed description of the different scenes within its iconographic programme. Additionally, a brief discussion of the painting style is provided to assist in dating the artworks.

CHAPTER 1

Liturgical Theophanies

The image of the Theophany, depicting the manifestation of God to mankind, most often features a complex assemblage of figures and elements from various liturgical, exegetical and biblical sources, including Ezekiel (1:1–28 and its parallel 10:1–22), Isaiah (6:1–3) and sometimes Daniel (7:9–11), as well as from the vision of the Anonymous (4:2–8). The result is an iconic image of Christ, or one of his symbols (the cross[1] or the Lamb),[2] often in the middle of a luminous aureole. Christ is depicted either standing, enthroned or seated on a triumphal chariot,[3] displaying a codex or phylactery with his left hand and making a gesture of speech with his right. This composition is sometimes surrounded by celestial bodies (the sun, moon, stars), the four living creatures emerging from the throne or the aureole and various angelic motifs and orders, such as seraphim, cherubim, angels, archangels, wheels, flames and the sea, among others.[4] Sometimes one or more prophets appear in the scene. These elements and creatures may be represented separately or together, due to the phenomenon of thematic enlargement or elimination. However, the divine figure remains the central and crucial component, unchanged in this representation, to which Christ ensures a lasting identity.[5] Over time, the two supplicants of the Deesis, the Virgin and St John the Baptist, join the previous actors in the Theophany. These two characters become the primary protagonists at the heavenly throne, and the angelic creatures often assume a secondary role in

1 Dobrzeniecki 1974, 6–20.

2 Images of the cross and the Lamb are frequently seen on apsidal and triumphal arches (Angheben 2011b, 113–142; Roux 2009, 207–218; Nilgen 2000, 75–89).

3 As can be observed in room 6 (see Fig. 2) and chapel XVII (see Fig. 3) of the monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit (7th–8th century).

4 Examples can be found in the following chapters.

5 On the theme of Theophany, see Angheben 2011a, 1–31; Angheben 2011b, 113–142; Angheben 2008, 57–95; Cantone 2008; Skubiszwski 2005, 309–408 (with a complete bibliography); Spieser 1995a, 311–320; Spieser 1995b, 295–306; Spieser 1991, 575–590; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b; Hellemo 1989; Ihm 1989, 43–59; Ihm 1960, 42–51, 126, 198–199; van Moorsel 1978, 325–333; Dobrzeniecki 1974, 6–20; Snyder 1967, 143–152. The theme of the Divine Appearance was often repeated on apsidal and triumphal arches so that all visitors and participants in the liturgy could contemplate the Theophany. On the theophanies of apsidal arches, see in particular Angheben 2011b, 113–142; Roux 2009, 207–218; and Nilgen 2000, 75–89.

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the composition. In the medieval period this 'Theophany–Deesis' became the most frequent apsidal motif in the Lebanese space and the Christian East.[6]

Throughout its long history, the apsidal image of the Apparition of God underwent changes and additions that broadened its semantic scope, which includes such various aspects as devotional, dogmatic, ecclesiastical, political, apotropaic, liturgical and even eschatological dimensions. This chapter delves into exploring the possible connections between this apsidal theme and the eucharistic liturgy celebrated on the high altar. The idea is to interpret the Theophany with angels and intercessors as the embodiment of Christ and his heavenly court in his earthly dwelling during the eucharistic sacrifice. To achieve this, the first step involves outlining the semantic scope of apsidal theophanies based on the textual, exegetical and liturgical tradition. The second step requires an examination of the value and function of each element present, specifying whether the designer(s) considered any scriptural and liturgical aspects. Similarly, it is important to investigate not only the relationship between the figures and elements within the image, but also the image itself, based on the context in which it was introduced and with which it forms a more or less coherent composition. The analysis can clarify how the elements of the Theophany align within the apse and establish connections between the apse and its surroundings. After developing these arguments, it is crucial to explore whether this interpretation tends to place the Theophany and the intercession of the Virgin and John the Baptist in the present time and whether their connection to the eucharistic liturgy is thus facilitated.

1 Theophanies through Exegetical and Liturgical Sources

1.1 *The Theme of the Theophany in the Eucharistic Liturgy*

The eucharistic sacrifice, the essential feature of which is the transformation of the species into the body and blood of Christ – the fundamental point of Christian life and the main act of the rites and prayers celebrated, is offered to the 'Almighty' God. This was emphasised by Origen (185–253), who said: 'The offering is always made to the Almighty God through the intermediary of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as He communicates with the Father through his divinity, that the offering is not made twice, but to God through God.'[7] The

6 On the theme of the Theophany–Deesis, see Pace 2012, 79–84; Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102; Hélou 1998, 33–59; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b; Cutler 1987b, 145–154; Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 161–187; Walter 1968, 311–336; von Bogyay 1967, 59–72; von Bogyay 1966, 178–186.

7 Origène 1960, 62–63. On the Eucharist aspect of this offering, see Nautin 1961, 221–232.

theme of the Theophany, which reveals the majesty of God and his presence, is thus given a primary place in the eucharistic liturgy. This fundamental point in the Church's ritual life is well attested by texts about all the liturgical rites in both the East and the West. The glorious evocation of Christ in the midst of his heavenly kingdom – with angels and saints – is repeatedly invoked in the sacred rites of the Holy Liturgy. It is therefore necessary to delineate the semantic scope of apsidal theophanies by relying not only on iconographic tradition, but on liturgy as well. This dimension could shed light on the choice of the Theophany within the liturgical space.

In this section I will outline the main rites and formulas of the Divine Liturgy that feature a thematic connection with theophanies and, in particular, the Theophany–Deesis. Recognising that the theme of the Deesis is a Byzantine creation, specific, but not exclusive, attention will be given to the Byzantine liturgy, the most influential rite in the East. It is worth noting, however, that it does not matter whether the liturgy of the eucharistic service in use was Byzantine, Coptic, Maronite or Syriac, the key point being that they are all similar and have an almost identical structure. Thus, the invocation of divine majesty, glorified and beseeched by all creation, visible and invisible, and the chanting of the *Trisagion* hymn are essential elements in the prayers of all the Eastern anaphoras and in the Roman canon. Indeed, all these are fundamental, as we shall see, to the treatment of the Theophany, with or without intercessors.

In attempting to provide a brief account of the Divine Liturgy, I will follow especially the formulary of the Byzantine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom (347–407),[8] which, together with the Liturgy of St Basil (330–379),[9] is the result of a 'slow historical work accomplished on the Syrian liturgies'.[10] In fact, the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is the most frequently celebrated one in the Byzantine and Eastern worlds.[11]

The Byzantine Divine Liturgy consists of three parts: the 'Rite of Preparation', the 'Liturgy of the Catechumens' and the 'Liturgy of the Faithful'.[12] Church

8 Paprocki 1993, 71–79; Jasper and Cuming 1990, 129–134.

9 Paprocki 1993, 80–88; Jasper and Cuming 1990, 114–123.

10 Salaville 1942, I: 12; see also Taft 1996b.

11 The Liturgy of St Basil was initially more widespread than that of St John Chrysostom (Alexopoulos 2006, 127–137; Parenti 2001, 145–177; Bornert 1966, 163).

12 On the Byzantine and Eastern eucharistic liturgy, see, for example, Deseille 2016; Gogol 2014; Lash 1995; Paprocki 1993; Germanus of Constantinople 1984; Taft 1975; Solovey 1970; Evdokimov 1966; Bornert 1966; Hänggi and Pahl 1968; Hayek 1964; Salaville 1945; Salaville 1942; Salaville 1932; Salaville 1913; Cabasilas 1943; Mercier 1946; Mercenier and Paris 1953; Mercenier and Paris 1937; Atchley 1935; Jugie 1929, 1317–1346; Meester 1925; Brightman 1908;

Fathers and theologians, particularly since the *Mystagogy* of St Maximus the Confessor (7th century),[13] have generally seen the principal phases of the economy of salvation in these three divisions of the Holy Liturgy: the Rite of Preparation of the material for the sacrifice refers to the messianic preparation of the Old Testament, to the mystery of Bethlehem and to a reminder of the mystery of Calvary. The Liturgy of the Catechumens summarises Christ's life, and the Liturgy of the Faithful represents his passion, death, burial, resurrection, ascension and eternal reign.[14] Theodore of Stoudios (759–826) regarded the eucharistic liturgy as 'a recapitulation of the whole economy of salvation'.[15] This same notion is found especially in Nicholas of Andida (late 11th century),[16] Nicholas Kabasilas (d. 1392),[17] Symeon of Thessaloniki (d. 1429)[18] and others. Indeed, the ecclesiastical liturgy prolongs the divine action revealed by the scriptures. Several prayers and other information from the eucharistic office will be used in the following sections.

1.1.1 The Rite of Preparation

This preparatory phase, performed only by the priest and the deacon, is divided into three parts: the inner preparation of the ministers through special prayers, the outer preparation through the donning of liturgical vestments and the preparation of the offering (i.e. the bread and wine), called the *proskomide* (προσκομιδή) or *prothesis* (πρόθεσις).[19]

Inner and Outer Preparations. During their inner preparation,[20] the ministers of earthly worship (the priest and the deacon) recite penitential prayers, apparently dating to the 12th century, which are addressed to the 'Heavenly King' and his Mother, the Theotokos.[21] They ask the 'blessed Theotokos' to 'open the doors of compassion'.[22] The priest and the deacon then approach the icon of Christ and kiss it, saying: 'We venerate your most pure image, O Good One, and ask forgiveness for our transgressions […].' They then kiss the icon

Jugie 1906, 193–198; Brightman 1896, I. The discussions in this book about the main rites and liturgical formulas of the Byzantine Holy Liturgy rely mainly on these studies.

13 Maximus the Confessor 2011; Maxime le Confesseur 2005; Sotiropoulos 2002; Dalmais 1962, 277–283.

14 Salaville 1942, I: 21–22.

15 Theodore of Stoudios 1860c, PG 99: 340C.

16 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 420–421.

17 Nicholas of Kabasilas 1865, PG 150: 369–372.

18 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866b, PG 155: 256B.

19 Paprocki 1993, 157–214.

20 *Ibid.*, 159–163.

21 Mercenier and Paris 1937, 219; Salaville 1942, I: 28.

22 Mercenier and Paris 1937, 220; Salaville 1942, I: 28.

of Mary, saying: 'O Theotokos, since you became a fountain of mercy, count us worthy of your compassion and look upon a people that has sinned [...].'[23] The priest and the deacon here address the sacred image that conveys the presence of Christ and his Mother in the place of worship. In these prayers, the Virgin appears as the source of mercy. In fact, the liturgy devotes a prevalent position to the Theotokos. We find her present as a privileged mediator before the heavenly throne in several prayers throughout the eucharistic office. The priest and deacon then enter the *prothesis* to put on their liturgical vestments.[24] This act is accompanied by prayers.[25]

The Preparation of the Offering. It should be noted before explaining the rite of the preparation of the offering, or the *prothesis*, in its final version that this ceremony, which has undergone several modifications to its structure and formula, does not predate the 7th century and reached its definitive form only in the 14th century.[26] In the 8th century the preparation of the material for sacrifice was quite simple: it involved the incision of the bread and the mixing of the wine and water,[27] as attested by the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the Euchologion in the Vatican Library (MS Barb.gr.336) and a few authors at the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 9th.[28] From the 12th century onwards particles in honour of the saints, the living and the dead were added to the main bread.[29] Until the 13th century, at least in Constantinople, the *prothesis* was prepared in the *skeuophylakion*, or sacristy,[30] where sacred vessels and liturgical vestments were kept.[31] In the 14th century the particles of the saints had a specific place.[32]

In preparing the material for the sacrifice, the priest cuts a square from a loaf of bread. This square is stamped before baking with a cross, between the arms of which we read 'IC XC NI KA', meaning Jesus Christ Conquers (Fig. 1).[33] The priest traces the sign of the cross on the *prosphoron* (πρόσφορον), or bread, three times, saying: 'In remembrance of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ'.[34]

23 Mercenier and Paris 1937, 220; Salaville 1942, I: 28.
24 Paprocki 1993, 164–191.
25 Mercenier and Paris 1937, 221–222; Salaville 1942, I: 30–32.
26 Paprocki 1993, 157–159, 195–197; Evdokimov 1966, 15–20; Salaville 1942, I: 27.
27 Paprocki 1993, 195–196, 199.
28 Bornert 1966, 148–149.
29 Paprocki 1993, 204; Salaville 1942, I: 48; Bornert 1966, 228.
30 Paprocki 1993, 198; Pétridès 1899, 65–78.
31 Germanus of Constantinople 1984, 17–18.
32 Paprocki 1993, 204; Pétridès 1899, 65–78.
33 The victory acclamation 'IC XC NIKA' was introduced into the liturgy during the Middle Ages (Babić 1979, 5–6).
34 Salaville 1942, I: 35.

After this formula, the celebrant adds rites symbolising the Crucifixion and death of Christ. He then incises the *prosphoron* around the impression to cut the central part in the shape of a square. He first cuts the right side (in relation to the officiant), recalling the ancient prophecy of the Passion of Christ: 'As a sheep, He was led to the slaughter' (Acts 8:32; Is. 53:7).[35] He then does the same on the opposite side, saying: 'As a spotless lamb silent before its shearer, He opens not his mouth;'[36] then he trims off the upper part, saying: 'In his humiliation, his judgement was taken away';[37] and finally, the lower part, saying: 'And who shall declare his generation?'[38] Using a spear, the priest removes this central square, which henceforth takes the name *amnos* (αμνός), meaning lamb, and places it reversed in the middle of the paten. The *prosphoron*, from which the *amnos* is detached, is the image of the Virgin, according to the exegeses of Nicholas of Andida and Michael Psellos (*c.*1017/18–1078/81).[39] As he places the *amnos* on the paten, the priest recites formulas commemorating the sacrifice and death of Christ.[40] The priest sacrifices the Lamb, that is to say, he cuts it into the shape of a cross, without breaking it, because the breaking of the bread is done during the anaphora, saying: 'The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world, is immolated for the life and salvation of the world' (John 1:29).[41] He then turns the *amnos* over, so that the imprint of the cross is on top. The priest engraves the cross on the bread to express how the sacrifice was carried out, that is, through the cross.[42]

The priest pierces the right side of the *prosphoron* (to the left of the celebrant), signifying the wound on Christ's side.[43] The 'priestly spear', said Theodore of Stoudios, is the antitype of the spear that pierced the side of Christ on the cross.[44] This is why the priest, while performing these symbolic actions, says: 'One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness, and his witness is true' (John 19:34).[45] Thus, the blood and water that flowed from the side of Christ

35 *Ibid.*
36 *Ibid.*
37 *Ibid.*
38 *Ibid.*, I: 35–36.
39 Bornert 1966, 208.
40 Cabasilas 1943, 88; Brightman 1908, 263–264.
41 Salaville 1942, I: 36.
42 Cabasilas 1943, 88.
43 *Ibid.*; Brightman 1908, 263–264.
44 Theodore of Stoudios 1860a, PG 99: 489B; see also Paprocki 1993, 200. The same symbolism is found in *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Bornert 1966, 173; Brightman 1908, 263–264).
45 Salaville 1942, I: 36.

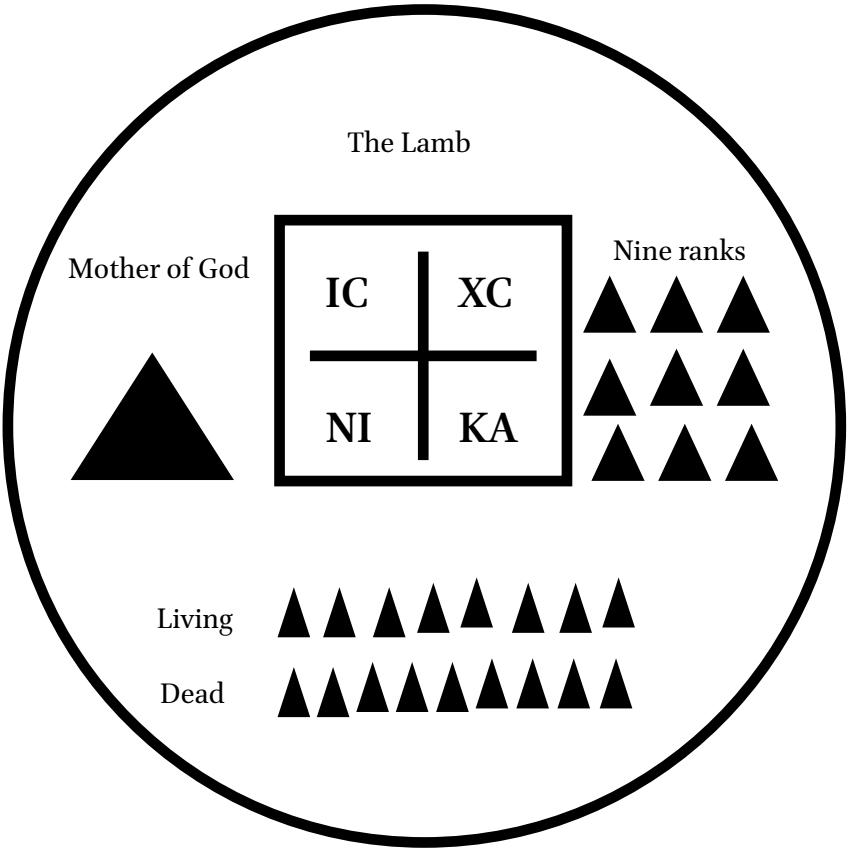

FIGURE 1 The distribution of the particles around the Lamb on the paten

are recalled with symbolic gestures.[46] Meanwhile, the deacon pours the wine and water into the chalice, saying: 'Bless, Lord, the holy union.'[47] The priest then provides a blessing, saying: 'Blessed is the union of your holy things, at all times, now and always and ever and ever.'[48]

Then comes the preparation of the other particles, called *merides* (μερίδες). However, this addition of the particles does not date back beyond the 12th century, as pointed out above.[49]

The priest takes a second *prosphoron* decorated with a triangle, surmounted by the cross and called the *Panagia* (the All-Holy), saying: 'In honour and

46 Brightman 1908, 263–264.
47 Salaville 1942, I: 36.
48 *Ibid.*, 37.
49 See p. 18, n. 29 herein.

memory of our most blessed Lady, the Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary. Through her intercessions, O Lord, accept this sacrifice upon your heavenly altar.'[50] We understand from this liturgical passage that the sacrifice of the 'lower tabernacle' is received on the altar of the 'upper tabernacle' through the intermediary of the *Panagia*. Here, we see a telling sign of the intercessory role the Virgin plays in the act of sacrifice. This same sacrifice is celebrated jointly in heaven and on earth, and this relationship between the two liturgies is ensured here by a movement of elevation.

The priest places this particle, bearing the imprint of the Theotokos, to the right of the Lamb (see Fig. 1), saying: 'The Queen stood on your right side, arrayed in golden robes, all glorious' (Ps. 44:10).[51] The particle of the Virgin thus occupies a place of honour to the right of the Lamb.[52]

He takes the third *prosphoron*, from which he removes nine particles and places them vertically in three parallel rows to the left side of the *amnos* on the opposite side of Mary's particle (see Fig. 1). The first place is offered to the angels. The priest, without repeating the expression 'in honour and memory', goes on to say 'of the great captains of the angelic armies, Michael and Gabriel, and of all the heavenly bodiless powers'.[53] This same place is otherwise given to the Forerunner in the Roman edition of the Euchologion and a number of manuscripts: 'Of the honourable and glorious prophet, the forerunner John the Baptist'.[54]

Below this first particle of the angels or the Baptist, to the left of the *amnos*, the priest places a new particle in honour 'of the holy and glorious prophets Moses and Aaron, Elijah and Elisha, David and Jesse; of the Three Holy Youths and the prophet Daniel and of all the holy prophets'.[55] While the particle of the angels comes immediately after that of the Theotokos, John the Baptist is mentioned at the head of the formula: 'Of the honourable and glorious prophet, the forerunner John the Baptist. Of the holy glorious prophets Moses and Aaron [...]'.[56]

The third particle is in honour 'of the holy, glorious and illustrious apostles Peter and Paul and all the holy apostles'.[57] The fourth particle is in honour 'of our Fathers among the saints, the great pontiffs and universal doctors Basil

50 Salaville 1942, I: 39; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 224.
51 Salaville 1942, I: 39; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 224; Pétridès 1899, 66.
52 Paprocki 1993, 203.
53 Salaville 1942, I: 39.
54 *Ibid.*
55 Salaville 1942, I: 39; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 224.
56 Salaville 1942, I: 40; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
57 Salaville 1942, I: 39; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 224.

the Great, Gregory the Theologian and John Chrysostom, Athanasius and Cyril, Nicholas of Myra and of all the holy hierarchs'.[58] The fifth particle is in memory 'of the holy archdeacon and proto-martyr Stephen, of the holy great martyrs, Demetrios, George, Theodore of Tyre, [...] and all the holy martyrs'.[59] The sixth particle is in honour 'of our holy saintly Fathers, the God-bearers Anthony, Euthymios, Sabas, Onouphrios, Athanasius of Athos, [...] and all the venerable fathers and mothers'.[60] The seventh is in memory 'of the holy wonderworkers and unmercenaries, Cosmas and Damian, Kyros and John, Panteleimon and Hermolaos, and all the holy unmercenaries'.[61] The eighth is in honour 'of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anne, of [name of the patron saint of the church or monastery or of the day] whom we commemorate today [...] and of all the saints, who by their prayers visit us, O God'.[62] The ninth particle is in memory 'of our Father among the saints, John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople'. If it is the Liturgy of St Basil that is celebrated, this reads 'Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea'.[63] This distribution of the particles is subject to some variation, since the celebrant is sometimes given complete freedom to add other holy pontiffs, martyrs, doctors, monks, prophets, apostles and others.[64]

The priest then places particles in memory of the living and the deceased. Having taken a fourth *prosphoron*, the priest detaches particles from it and places them for the living in a horizontal line beneath the Lamb (see Fig. 1). The priest may commemorate anyone living whom he wishes to mention and each time he may place a new particle. He then takes the fifth *prosphoron* and removes particles for the deceased, which he deposits in a line under the previous one, saying:

> In memory and for the remission of sins of the most holy patriarchs, bishops, priests, deacons and all monastics; and of all Orthodox and God-fearing rulers; and of all blessed founders of this holy church [or monastery]. Remember, O Lord, your servant [here he mentions the name of the deceased for whom the eucharistic service is offered]. Remember all of our Orthodox Fathers and brethren who have departed in the hope

58 Salaville 1942, I: 40; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
59 Salaville 1942, I: 40; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
60 Salaville 1942, I: 40; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
61 Salaville 1942, I: 40–41; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
62 Salaville 1942, I: 41; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
63 Salaville 1942, I: 41.
64 Paprocki 1993, 204; Salaville 1942, I: 41.

> of resurrection to eternal life in your communion, O Lord, the lover of mankind.[65]

This is how Symeon of Thessaloniki claimed the paten represents the Church gathered around the *amnos*.[66] The deacon may also commemorate those whom he wishes to among the living and the dead. Finally, the priest concludes by saying: 'Remember, O Lord, your unworthy servant and forgive me all my sins, both voluntary or involuntary.'[67]

In his treatise on the Divine Liturgy, Nicholas Kabasilas set out a succinct formula for this custom of commemorating the saints: 'For the glory of the all-holy Mother of God, in honour of [such and such a saint], for the remission of sins to the souls of the living or the dead'.[68] He explained this liturgical formula as follows: 'For the glory through intercession, that is to say, because of the glory and intercession; likewise, for the remission of sins means: in view of the remission of sins. This has a double meaning: either for an already existing good or for a hoped-for benefit [...].'[69] The supplication, Kabasilas continued, asks 'for the remission of sins, rest for the souls of the dead and other benefits'.[70] Thus, the intercessory roles of the Virgin and saints already take place through the eucharistic celebration, which benefits the souls of Christians, both living and dead.

As he puts incense in the thurible, the deacon says to the priest: 'Bless the incense, Lord.'[71] The priest recites the following prayer: 'We offer You incense, O Christ our God, for a perfume of spiritual fragrance. Receive it upon your heavenly altar and send down upon us in turn the grace of your all-holy Spirit.'[72] This passage demonstrates the correlation between the rites performed in the earthly Church and on the heavenly altar, which is also accentuated here with an ascending movement.

Placing the asterisk, or star-cover, over the *amnos*, the priest says: 'And the star came and stood over the place where the young Child was' (Matt. 2:9).[73] Here, we find a reminder of the manger of Bethlehem and the mystery of the

65 Salaville 1942, I: 42–43; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 226.
66 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866a, PG 155: 285A; Bornert 1966, 261.
67 Salaville 1942, I: 43.
68 Cabasilas 1943, 93.
69 *Ibid.*
70 *Ibid.*
71 Salaville 1942, I: 44; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 227–228.
72 Salaville 1942, I: 44–45; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 225.
73 Salaville 1942, I: 45; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 227.

Incarnation.[74] This led Nicholas of Andida to consider the rites of the *prothesis* as the virginal conception and hidden life of Christ in Nazareth.[75] Nicholas of Andida and Michael Psellos saw the image of the crib in the *prothesis* table.[76] The *prothesis* also recalls Calvary, the place of sacrifice, the Crucifixion and the burial, because of the incisions made with the spear on the *amnos*.[77] According to Nicholas Kabasilas, the body of Christ:

> became a victim at the end of his mortal life, when he was sacrificed for the glory of the Father. But he was dedicated to God from the beginning, he was a precious offering in the eyes of the Father, as the first fruits of mankind, and also because of the law, since he was the firstborn. However, the sufferings which Christ endured later for our salvation, his cross and his death, had been prefigured in the Old Law. This is why, before bringing the bread to the altar and offering it there as a sacrifice, the priest endeavours to confer these various symbolisms to it.[78]

A prayer in which the priest asks God to bless the offering and receive it on his celestial altar ends the long Preparation of the Offering: 'Bless, God, this offering and accept it upon your heavenly altar [...].'[79] Here again, an ascending movement ensures the union between the earthly liturgy and the heavenly liturgy, but it is Christ himself who presides over both.

The priest concludes the Rite of Preparation with an invocation of the intercession of the Virgin and the saints: 'Christ, our true God, through the prayers of his most pure Mother; of our Father among the saints John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople [or Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia]; and of all the saints: have mercy on us and save us, for He is the good one and loves mankind.'[80] The end of the *prothesis* prayer leads directly into the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.

The ritual of preparing the species promotes the themes of intercession and the remission of sins. In this regard, the Virgin and saints hold a privileged position, on either side of the divine Lamb, from the 12th century onwards.[81]

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74 Paprocki 1993, 206.
75 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 429CD; Bornert 1966, 203.
76 Bornert 1966, 208.
77 Brightman 1908, 263–264.
78 Cabasilas 1943, 84.
79 Salaville 1942, I: 47; Pétridès 1899, 68.
80 Salaville 1942, I: 48–49; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 228.
81 Paprocki 1993, 204; Salaville 1942, I: 48.

1.1.2 The Liturgy of the Catechumens

The Liturgy of the Catechumens, attended by the congregation, includes a long litany prayer in dialogue between the deacon and people and concludes with the Trinitarian doxology of the celebrant, psalm chants or antiphons interjected with short litany prayers. These prayers and chants represent the sovereignty of the merciful Christ, to whom believers refer through the intercession of the Virgin and the saints. This is followed by the Small Entrance, or the Entrance of the Holy Gospel, the prayer of the *Trisagion* hymn and the prayers of the Throne, the Epistle, followed by the Alleluia, a reading from the Gospel, the prayer of supplication and, finally, a prayer for the catechumens and their dismissal.

The Small Entrance. As the last psalm is sung, the Gospel is transferred to the altar. This rite is usually called the Small Entrance, or the Entrance of the Holy Gospel. In a procession of lights and incense, with the participation of all the ministers, the Gospel is carried by the deacon or, in his absence, the priest. The latter, as he arrives in front of the royal door and waits for the antiphon to be completed, prays to God to send his angels to enter the sanctuary with him, to take part in the liturgy and to join him in the glorification of the Lord: 'Master, Lord our God, You have set orders and armies of angels and archangels in heaven to minister to your glory; grant that, with our entrance, holy angels may enter, concelebrating with us, and with us glorifying your goodness.'[82] This prayer, already present in texts from the 8th century, not only illustrates the theme of the Theophany, but also acknowledges the angelic presence.[83] The mention of the angels, who celebrate the eternal liturgy in heaven and who concelebrate the ecclesiastical liturgy with the priest and the deacon, is in line with the teachings of the Church Fathers.[84] We will see this reappear for the Great Entrance and the anaphora. Indeed, the eucharistic liturgy, as stated by John Chrysostom, is a participation in the worship of angels.[85]

The Ostension of the Gospel. The priest raises the Gospel before the sanctuary and shows it to the people.[86] For Nicholas of Andida, the Gospel commemorates the first sharing of the Good News.[87] The Small Entrance and the Ostension of the Gospel are performed for the practical purpose of reading the

82 Lash 1995, 11; Salaville 1942, I: 48–49; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 228.

83 Germanus of Constantinople 1984, 19.

84 Marinis 2021b, 257–264; Papamastorakis 2001; Schulz 1986; Andronikof 1980, 1–18; Bornert 1966, 80–81, 176–178, 242–243.

85 John Chrysostom 1862b, PG 48: 681; see also Bornert 1966, 78.

86 Deseille 2016, 42; Lash 1995, 14; Salaville 1945, II: 77–80.

87 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 440C; see also Bornert 1966, 203.

Word of God, but they also recall the first coming of Christ into this world[88] and his public manifestation at the River Jordan.[89] After the Ostension of the Gospel, prophetic texts are no longer read, and attention is focussed on the mysteries of the New Testament.[90] According to Maximus the Confessor, this ceremony also recalls the Incarnation and represents conversion from sin and the return to the grace of the kingdom.[91]

The Trisagion. The rite of the Ostension of the Gospel leads into the chanting of the *Trisagion* hymn: 'Holy God, Holy Strong, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us' (three times).[92] During this triple exclamation, the celebrant recites a prayer, also called the *Trisagion*, which provides a glorious image of Christ interceded by the Virgin and the saints, adored by the celestial powers, glorified by the cherubim and praised by the seraphim's *Trisagion*:

> Holy God, at rest in the holy place, hymned by the seraphim with the thrice holy, glorified by the cherubim and worshipped by every heavenly power [...] You have counted us, your humble and unworthy servants, worthy to stand at this time before the glory of your holy altar and to offer You due worship and praise. Accept, Master, the thrice holy hymn even from the mouth of us sinners and visit us in your goodness. Pardon us every offence, voluntary and involuntary; sanctify our souls and bodies and grant that we may worship You in holiness all the days of our life; at the prayers of the Holy Mother of God and of all the saints who have been well-pleasing to You in every age.[93]

The Blessing of the Throne. The *Trisagion* of the Small Entrance is linked to a rite known as the Blessing of the Throne, in which the celebrant invokes Christ on the throne of the cherubim: 'Blessed are You on the throne of glory of your kingdom, who are seated upon the cherubim, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.'[94] Liturgists see this as a memorial of Christ's triumphal entry into Jerusalem or as a symbolic representation of the throne of the Trinitarian God receiving the acclamation of the *Trisagion*.[95]

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88 In the words of Maximus the Confessor and Germanus of Constantinople (Maximus the Confessor 1865a, PG 91: 688BC; Germanus of Constantinople 1984, 19; Bornert 1966, 101).

89 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 432A; 436CD; Cabasilas 1943, 241; Bornert 1966, 203.

90 Cabasilas 1943, 126.

91 Maximus the Confessor 1865a, PG 91: 688C; Bornert 1966, 108.

92 Lash 1995, 13; Salaville 1942, I: 74; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 236.

93 Lash 1995, 13; Salaville 1942, I: 74; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 236.

94 Deseille 2016, 42; Lash 1995, 14.

95 Salaville 1942, I: 78.

Sacred Readings: The Epistle and the Gospel. Then comes the reading of the Epistle, followed by the Alleluia, which recalls, according to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the prophecies announcing the coming of the Messiah.[96] The reading of the Gospel comes next. Both readings take place after the participants have sung glory to God.

The sacred readings prepare and purify the priest and the faithful before the sanctification of the eucharistic mysteries. Moreover, they make the Messiah's appearance known after his first ostension. Indeed, the 'veil of the letter' of the scripture and the 'veil of the flesh' are the two coverings of the Word of God, as Origen pointed out.[97]

Through the reading of the Gospel, the Word 'straightens our thoughts inclined towards the earth and raises them to spiritual realities', in the words of Maximus the Confessor.[98] Origen had already insisted on this same point, representing the incarnate Word as a guide to spiritual ascent.[99] Once again, this quest for mystical ecstasy, which elevates the priest and faithful to the realities of the heavenly liturgy, is distinguished with an ascending motion. This parallels the descending movement of Christ and his angels during the eucharistic celebration.

Prayer of Supplication. After the reading of the Gospel, the deacon invites the faithful to pray. The priest recites a prayer in a low voice, asking that the prayers of the faithful be accepted by God: 'Lord our God, accept this fervent supplication from your servants and have mercy on us according to the multitude of your mercy; and send down your pity on us and on all your people, who await your rich mercy.' He then voices the final doxology aloud and associates the faithful with the glorification of the Lord: 'For You, O God, are merciful and love mankind and to You we give glory, to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.'[100]

The Prayer for the Catechumens and Their Dismissal. In the final stage of the Liturgy of the Catechumens, the deacon invites them to pray to the Lord and bids the faithful to pray for the catechumens, so 'that the Lord may have mercy upon them and instruct them in the word of truth [...]'.[101] At this point, the priest makes the sign of the cross with the Gospel, which he holds upright in front of him. The deacon says: 'Reveal to them the Gospel of righteousness; unite them

96 Brightman 1908, 387.
97 Lubac 1950, 336–146.
98 Maximus the Confessor 1865b, PG 91: 692B; Bornert 1966, 102.
99 Harl 1959, 342.
100 Lash 1995, 18; Salaville 1942, I: 87; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 240.
101 Lash 1995, 19; Salaville 1942, I: 88; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 241.

to his holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church.' Then comes a direct invocation to God: 'Save them, have mercy on them, help them [...].'[102] Meanwhile, the priest says a prayer in a low voice, addressed to God residing in heaven:

> Lord our God, dwelling on high and beholding things below, who for the salvation of mankind sent forth your only begotten Son, our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, look upon your servants the catechumens, who have bowed their necks to You; and count them worthy in due time of the washing of rebirth, the forgiveness of sins and the garment of incorruption; unite them to your holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church and number them with your chosen flock.[103]

The catechumens are then dismissed.

1.1.3 The Liturgy of the Faithful

The Liturgy of the Faithful provides the essential structure of the eucharistic liturgy, as it represents the sacrificial and therefore most important phase. With the dismissal of the catechumens, the faithful are now the only participants in the Divine Liturgy. The main acts of the Liturgy of the Faithful are as follows: the Prayers of the Faithful; the Transfer of the Offering, or the Great Entrance, with the *Cheroubikon*, or Cherubic Hymn, and Offertory Prayers; the Kiss of Peace and the Symbol of Faith; the anaphora (the preface and the hymn of the *Trisagion*, the eucharistic canon and the anamnesis, the epiclesis, the Memory of Saints and the recapitulatory litany), the pater with blessings and a prayer over the bowed faithful; the elevation and division of the host, intinction and *zeon*; communion and prayers of thanks (preparatory prayers, communion for the priest and deacon, communion for the congregation, blessing of the faithful with the chalice, prayers of thanks, transfer of the species to the *prothesis*, consumption of the species and the purification of the vessels); dismissal of the faithful and distribution of the blessed bread; and the farewell kiss at the altar.

The Prayers of the Faithful, the Transfer of the Gifts and the Cheroubikon. The Liturgy of the Faithful begins with so-called Prayers of the Faithful, featuring intense supplication and intercession. The ceremony of the Great Entrance then begins.[104]

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102 Lash 1995, 19; Salaville 1942, I: 88; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 241.

103 Lash 1995, 19; Salaville 1942, I: 89; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 242.

104 On this ceremony, see in particular Taft and Parenti 2014; Taft 1975.

The deacon places incense in the thurible and has it blessed by the priest. He incenses the altar, the *prothesis*, the sanctuary, the iconostasis and the whole church, then the altar and the priest once again. The holy gifts are then incensed. The priest removes the great veil, or aër, over the gifts and places it on the shoulders of the deacon, saying: 'Lift up your hands to the holy places and bless the Lord.'[105] The paten, covered with its own veil, is then given to the deacon, who holds it with both hands, while carrying the thurible in his right hand. The priest takes the chalice, also covered with a veil, the spear and the spoon. They advance in the solemn procession of the Great Entrance into the nave, preceded by the *rhipidion* (a liturgical fan),[106] lights and incense.

During the procession of the gifts, the choir sings the *Cheroubikon*, which dates back to the 6th century: 'We, who in a mystery represent the cherubim and sing the thrice holy hymn to the life-giving Trinity, let us now lay aside every care of this life. For we are about to receive the King of all, invisibly escorted by the angelic hosts. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.'[107] As it is being sung, the officiant recites the secret in front of the holy table, in which he mentions the 'King of glory':

> None of those who are entangled in carnal desires and pleasures are worthy to approach or draw near or minister to You, King of glory; for to serve You is great and awesome, even for the heavenly Powers. Yet on account of your inexpressible and boundless love for mankind You became man without change or alteration and were named our High Priest; and as Master of all You have committed to us the sacred ministry of this liturgical sacrifice without the shedding of blood. For You alone, Lord our God, are ruler over all things in heaven and on earth, mounted on the throne of the cherubim, Lord of the seraphim and King of Israel, the only Holy One, resting in the holy place. Therefore, I entreat You, who alone are good and ready to hear: look upon me, your sinful and unprofitable servant, and purify my soul and heart from an evil conscience. By the power of your Holy Spirit enable me, clothed with the grace of the priesthood, to stand at this, your holy table, and celebrate the mystery of your holy and most pure Body and your precious Blood. For to You I come, bending my neck and praying: do not turn your face away from me, nor reject me from among your children, but count me, your sinful and unworthy servant, worthy to offer these gifts to you. For You are the one who offers

105 Lash 1995, 24; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 245.

106 See pp. 80–85 herein.

107 Deseille 2016, 51–52; Lash 1995, 22; Salaville 1942, I: 99; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 244.

> and is offered, who receives and is distributed, Christ our God, and to You we give glory, together with your Father, who is without beginning, and your all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.[108]

The *Cheroubikon* is replaced twice during the year: Holy Thursday and Holy Saturday. On Holy Thursday the choir sings: 'Of your Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant. For I will not speak of your mysteries to thine enemies, nor as Judas will I give You a kiss. But like the thief, I will confess to you: remember me, O Lord, in your kingdom.'[109] On Holy Saturday the choir sings a different hymn:

> Let all mortal flesh keep silence and stand with fear and trembling and lift itself above all earthly thought. For, behold, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Christ our God, comes forth to be our oblation and to be given for food to the faithful: before him come the choirs of angels, with every principality and power, the many-eyed cherubim and the six-winged seraphim who veil their faces as they exultingly shout the hymn: 'Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia'.[110]

The *Cheroubikon* in the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts is distinctive, because it is the body of Christ itself that is presented as an offering: 'Now the powers of heaven with us invisibly do minister. For lo! The King of glory enters now. Behold, the Mystical Sacrifice, all fulfilled, is ushered in. Let us with faith and love draw near that we may become partakers of life everlasting. Alleluia.'[111] The eucharistic Christ present in the presanctified gifts is addressed here. Since the gifts are already sanctified, it is only a matter of receiving the 'King of glory', for whom the angels form a cortege.

The *Cheroubikon* that opens the Liturgy of the Faithful presents a heavenly image of Christ accompanied by his angels and further expresses how men and angels are united in common praise.[112] This hymn specifies that it is not the cherubim who sing praise to the Lord, but the faithful who mystically represent them. The hymn refers to the entire Trinity. The Holy Saturday

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108 Deseille 2016, 51–52; Lash 1995, 22–23.

109 Salaville 1942, I: 99.

110 Deseille 2016, 109; Taft and Parenti 2014, 191–197; Salaville 1942, I: 100.

111 Salaville 1942, I: 116.

112 Marinis 2021b, 266; Cyril of Jerusalem 1886, PG 33: 1113B; see also the commentary on the *Historia Ecclesiastica* (Brightman 1908, 265–266, 390–391, 394).

Cheroubikon refers to the King of the Universe escorted by his heavenly hosts, the 'many-eyed' (πολυόμματα) cherubim and the 'six-winged' (εξαπτέρυγα) seraphim. The *Cheroubikon* in the Liturgy of Presanctified Gifts, on the other hand, refers to the heavenly creatures officiating, as seen in the Small Entrance. Similarly, the sacrifice is accomplished, and it is Christ himself who is carried in procession.

The secret recited by the priest during the singing of the *Cheroubikon* is also important. It shows the priesthood of Christ: 'You became man without change or alteration and were named our High Priest.'[113] It goes on to develop the image of heaven, where the Lord is enthroned on cherubim and rests among the saints: 'Lord our God, You are ruler over all things in heaven and on earth, mounted on the throne of the cherubim, Lord of the seraphim and King of Israel, the only Holy One, resting in the holy place.'[114] The end of this prayer is also distinctive, since it provides the notion of sacrifice: 'For You are the one who offers and is offered, who receives and is distributed, Christ our God.'[115] Christ is both the sacrificial priest and the sacrificed victim,[116] an identity affirmed by patristic tradition, as in Eusebius of Caesarea (263–339),[117] Isidore of Pelusium (d. *c.*450)[118] and John Chrysostom.[119]

According to such medieval liturgists as Nicholas of Andida, the transfer of the gifts during the chanting of the *Cheroubikon* represents the Messiah's triumphal entry into Jerusalem.[120] It also signifies, according to Theodore of Mopsuestia (352–428), the procession leading Christ to his sacrifice.[121] The deacons take the place of the angels who assisted Christ during the Passion. The placement of the gifts on the altar denotes his Crucifixion and burial.[122] The veils and liturgical cloths represent the shroud that wrapped the body of the Lord.[123] The altar signifies the Tomb of Christ and is also a replica of the heavenly altar.[124] The closing of the doors evokes the great stone placed at

113 Lash 1995, 23.
114 Deseille 2016, 51–52; Lash 1995, 22–23.
115 Lash 1995, 23.
116 Bedros 2007, 95.
117 Eusebius of Caesarea 1857, PG 22: 365D.
118 Isidore of Pelusium 1859c, PG 78: 784.
119 John Chrysostom 1862e PG 62: 612; John Chrysostom 1862d, PG 49: 380; John Chrysostom 1862a, PG 49: 397.
120 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 441AB.
121 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 15, 26: 503–505.
122 Paprocki 1993, 287; Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 15, 26: 505–507.
123 Bornert 1966, 79.
124 Paprocki 1993, 287; Brightman 1896, I: 259.

the entrance of the Tomb.[125] Thus, after being the recipient of the Hosannas of Palms, Christ becomes the subject of the ignominy of Calvary, followed by the glory of the Resurrection. The Great Entrance demonstrates the substantial identification of the bloodless sacrifice of the altar with the bloody sacrifice of the cross. Indeed, most of the rites are directly related to the sacrifice at Calvary, since the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy is in commemoration of the main stages of Christ's earthly life. His sacrifice on the cross was the culmination of his life, according to the commentary in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[126]

After placing the offering on the altar, the priest prepares for the act of consecration by praying in order to make himself worthy of touching the dreaded sacrifice. Likewise, he incenses the chalice and the paten covered by the aër. In the Liturgy of St James, a prayer recited by the priest accompanies this act of incensing: 'Sovereign Almighty, King of glory [...] manifest yourself to us calling upon You at this holy hour [...] and accept from the hands of us sinners this incense as a sweet scent, as You accepted the offering of Abel, and Noah, and Aaron, and Samuel and of all your saints [...].'[127] From this prayer, we understand that the officiant invites God to be present in the church and asks him to accept the offering of incense, just as he accepted Old Testament sacrifices.

The officiant then recites another prayer in a low voice, in which he asks 'God almighty' to receive the sacrifice and the supplication of sinners on his altar:

> Lord God almighty, who alone are holy and who accept the sacrifice of praise from those who call on You with all their heart, accept also the supplication of us sinners, bring us to your holy altar and enable us to offer You gifts and spiritual sacrifices for our sins and those committed in ignorance by the people. Count us worthy to find grace in your sight that our sacrifice may be well pleasing to You.[128]

In the Liturgy of St Basil, this text differs slightly from the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom. In the former, the priest asks that his sacrifice be accepted by God like the sacrifices of the Old Law, as the eucharistic celebration is the memorial of Christ's death, the fulfilment of the Old Testament sacrifices and the anticipation of the heavenly liturgy:[129]

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125 Salaville 1942, I: 110.
126 Bornert 1966, 174.
127 Mercier 1946, 179.
128 Lash 1995, 28; Salaville 1942, I: 112; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 248.
129 Bornert 1966, 173.

> Lord our God, [...] You have shown us the way to salvation and have bestowed upon us the revelation of heavenly mysteries [...]. Grant, therefore, O Lord that we may be accepted as servants of your new Covenant and ministers of your holy mysteries. Accept us as we draw near to your holy altar, according to the multitude of your mercy, that we may be worthy to offer You this spiritual sacrifice [...]. Grant that, having accepted this sacrifice upon your holy, heavenly and spiritual altar as an offering of spiritual fragrance, You may in return send down upon us the grace of your Holy Spirit. Look upon us, O God, and consider our worship; and accept it as You accepted the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the burnt offerings of Abraham, the priestly offices of Moses and Aaron and the peace offerings of Samuel. As You accepted this true worship from your holy apostles, accept also in your goodness, O Lord, these gifts from the hands of us sinners, that being deemed worthy to serve at your holy altar without blame we may obtain the reward of the faithful stewards on the fearful day of your just judgement.[130]

It is clear from this text that the spiritual sacrifice of the earthly liturgy rises towards the realities of the higher liturgy to be accepted on the heavenly altar.[131]

This prayer is followed by a diaconal litany, in which the deacon says: 'Help us, save us, have mercy on us and keep us, O God, by your grace.' The choir responds: 'Grants this, O Lord', and then five petitions follow: 'An angel of peace, a faithful guide, a guardian of our souls and bodies; pardon and forgiveness of our sins and offences; things good and profitable for our souls and peace for the world; that we may live out the rest of our days in peace and repentance; a Christian end to our life, painless, unashamed and peaceful, and a good defence before the dreaded Judgement seat of Christ'.[132]

This litany ends with a formula of commemoration to the Virgin and the saints: 'Commemorating our all-holy, pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, with all the saints, let us entrust ourselves and one another and our whole life to Christ our God.'[133]

The intensity of these supplications during the eucharistic office is noteworthy. Divine mercy is implored not only for the remission of sins and eternal life, but also for all the good things the faithful need. This is facilitated by the intercession of the saints.

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130 Deseille 2016, 114–115; Salaville 1942, I: 113.

131 Marinis 2021b, 262–264.

132 Lash 1995, 27; Salaville 1942, I: 115–116.

133 Lash 1995, 27; Salaville 1942, I: 116.

The Anaphora. The central part of the Liturgy of the Faithful, essential to the eucharistic celebration, is the anaphora. It is at this time that the sacrifice is completed, that is, the consecration, or transubstantiation, of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Jesus. It is Christ himself who invisibly performs this essential act, 'being at the same time the priest and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world',[134] while the earthly ministers visibly take his place at the altar by reproducing the gestures and words spoken by Christ at the Last Supper over the offering.[135]

Although invisible, Christ is present in his earthly temple: 'It is he,' said John Chrysostom, 'who prepared the table [of the cenacle], it is he who now adorns ours. For it is not a man who turns the gifts into the body and blood of Christ, but Christ himself, crucified for us. The priest is there fulfilling a role and pronouncing the words [...], but it is the grace of God in operation.'[136] This invisible intervention of Christ as the principal priest and victim of the sacrifice during the anaphora, as his spokesman, the priest of the earthly Church, offers it visibly at the altar, is affirmed by such Church Fathers as Neilos of Sinai (end of the 4th century and the beginning of the 5th),[137] Isidore of Pelusium[138] and Gregory of Nazianzos (329–390).[139]

Before proceeding with this ritual, the priest invites the faithful to raise their hearts and minds in order to attain a vision of God in his heavenly kingdom.[140] The words of the anaphora facilitate this elevation of the soul to heavenly realities, as they evoke a glorious image of Christ presiding over his court. This would help the priest and the faithful create a mental image that foreshadows the beatific vision, as we have mentioned. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* says that during the anaphora the priest 'stands before the propitiatory in the midst of two cherubim [...] in spirit, he sees heavenly worship [...], he contemplates the divine brilliance of the Trinity, which is a principle of life above all substance.'[141]

The Preface and the Trisagion. At the beginning of the anaphora, the preface, which is a solemn prologue to the prayers of thanks and praise, essentially develops the image of God enthroned in heaven, glorified and besought

134 Gregory of Nyssa 1863, PG 46: 612.
135 Filvedt and Wessbrandt 2015, 96–114; Jugie 1929, 1317–1346.
136 John Chrysostom 1862d, PG 49: 380.
137 Neilos of Sinai 1865, PG 79: 345.
138 Isidore of Pelusium 1859c, PG 78: 784.
139 Gregory of Nazianzos 1885, PG 35: 497B.
140 Paprocki 1993, 310–311; Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 151–152; Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 2 and hom. 3–4: 531, 539–541.
141 Brightman 1896, I: 393.

by all visible and invisible creation. The preface leads into the singing of the *Trisagion* by the angels, joined by the prayers of the faithful gathered in the church. Cyril of Jerusalem (d. 386) said:

> We make mention of the heavens, earth and sea, of the sun and moon, of the stars, of all creation, reasonable and unreasonable, visible and invisible, of the angels, the archangels, the virtues, the dominions, the principalities, the powers, the thrones, the cherubim with multiple faces, and we say the words of David with strength: 'Celebrate the Lord with me.' We also make mention of the seraphim, whom Isaiah contemplated in the Holy Spirit, arrayed in a circle around the throne of God, and two wings veiling their faces, and two more veiling their feet, and two more flying, all saying: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts'. Therefore, we say this doxology, which has been transmitted to us from the seraphim, so that, through this hymn, we may be associated with the heavenly hosts.[142]

This idea of a mystical concordance between men and angels through the singing of the *Trisagion* is a common theme among the Church Fathers.

The preface to the Liturgy of St Basil, which was initially more widespread than that of John Chrysostom, also evokes the celestial image of the Master of the universe enthroned in his glory:

> Master of all things, Lord of heaven and earth and of every creature visible and invisible, You are seated upon the throne of glory and behold the depths. You are without beginning, invisible, incomprehensible, beyond words, unchangeable. [...] For You are praised by the angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities, powers and the many-eyed cherubim. Round about You stand the seraphim, one with six wings and the other with six wings; with two they cover their faces; with two they cover their feet; with two they fly, crying out to one another with unceasing voices and ever-resounding praises: singing the triumphant hymn, proclaiming, shouting and saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord Sabaoth, heaven and earth are filled with your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna to God in the highest.'[143]

The preface in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom generally adopts the same formula of the heavenly Theophany as detailed in the anaphoric preface of

142 Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 154–155.

143 Jasper and Cuming 1990, 116–117; Salaville 1942, I: 14–15.

St Basil, in which the angelic retinue sings the hymn of eternal glorification for the glory of the Lord:

> We thank You also for this ministry; vouchsafe to receive from our hands, even though thousands of archangels and tens of thousands of angels stand before You, cherubim and seraphim, with six-wings and many eyes, flying on high, singing the triumphal hymn, proclaiming, crying and singing: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord of Sabaoth; heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.'[144]

The words in the preface to the anaphora imply the presence of Christ and his angels in the church during the eucharistic celebration, in accordance with the writings of the Fathers and commentators on the Divine Liturgy. This is what Gregory the Great (540–604) said: 'Who then among the faithful could doubt that at the time of this mystery of Jesus Christ the choirs of the angels are present, the most high unites with the most low, the terrestrial and the celestial are joined, the visible and the invisible merge into one.'[145] Similarly, long before this, Jacob of Sarug (450–521) proclaimed in his 77th homily: 'Here is the body of the Son of God placed on the altar surrounded by the spiritual powers, all of them standing in fearful purity, serving with the earthly ones, so as not to be despised.'[146]

The Institution Narrative and the Anamnesis. Before the definitive prayer to consecrate the divine gifts, the priest gives thanks to God and proceeds using the precise words spoken by Christ at the Last Supper. Once these words have been voiced, the consecration and the sacrifice reach completion. Indeed, 'The oblation which the priests now make, whoever the offeror may be, whether Paul or Peter, is the same that Christ gave to his disciples; the former are not inferior to the latter, because it is not men who consecrate it, but he who consecrated that of the Last Supper. For just as the words which God spoke then are the same words which the priests speak now, so the oblation is the same,' underlined John Chrysostom.[147]

144 Jasper and Cuming 1990, 132; Lash 1995, 31–32.
145 Grégoire le Grand 1978, 202–203.
146 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 230.
147 John Chrysostom 1862e, PG 62: 612.

The Epiclesis. Afterwards, the priest utters the liturgical epiclesis in a low voice, an invocation of the Holy Spirit that is the continuation of the act of oblation:[148]

> Also we offer You this spiritual worship without the shedding of blood and we ask, pray and implore You: send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here set forth and make this bread the precious body of your Christ and what is in this cup the precious blood of your Christ, changing them by your Holy Spirit, so that those who partake of them may obtain vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of your Holy Spirit, fullness of the kingdom of heaven and freedom to speak in your presence, not judgement or condemnation.[149]

Following this, the faithful receive the purification of their souls, the remission of their sins and eternal life through the Eucharist, so the idea of judgement and condemnation could be set aside. Furthermore, the consecration of the species, according to the commentary in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, renews the mystery of the eternal and temporal nativity of the divine Logos: the celebrant 'asks [God] to realise the mystery of the Son; that he be born or that this bread and wine be changed into the body and blood of Christ and of God. Thus is realised this word, today I have begotten You' (Ps. 2:7).[150]

The Memory of the Saints. Once the sacrifice is complete, the priest quietly expresses his requests to the Christ–Host. The intentions he observed in the *prothesis*, or when he presented the offering, begging them to be accepted by God, he now asks the mysteries, so that all of this may have its effect, which is common to both the living and the deceased.[151] This intercessory prayer is linked to the text of the epiclesis: 'Also we offer You this spiritual worship for those who have gone to their rest in faith, forefathers, Fathers, patriarchs, prophets, apostles, preachers, Evangelists, martyrs, confessors, ascetics and every righteous spirit made perfection in faith.'[152] The priest then continues aloud: 'Above all for our most holy, pure, most blessed and glorious Lady, the Mother of God and Ever-Virgin Mary, [...] For the holy prophet, the Forerunner and Baptist John, the holy, glorious and all-praised apostles, for [name of the saint of the

148 For the epiclesis, see Paprocki 1993, 321–328.
149 Lash 1995, 33–34.
150 Brightman 1908, 395.
151 Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 159.
152 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.

church], whose memory we keep today, and for all your saints, whose prayers visit us, O God […]'.[153] This prayer of intercession, which concludes the eucharistic epiclesis, mentions the Virgin and St John the Baptist as privileged intercessors to Christ.[154] Indeed, both have a close relationship with Christ, as they recognised him as God. They are not the only ones with this privilege, but they are some of the most prominent ones to recognise the divine Son, whether before the Incarnation or during his life in the flesh. Therefore, the Virgin and St John the Baptist are invoked together as intercessors in various offices. A hymn to the Theotokos and St John, sung during the consecration of the holy mysteries (4th century), says: 'O, *Panagia*, Sovereign Mother of God, intercede for us sinners […] St John, prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of our Lord Jesus Christ, intercede for us sinners.'[155]

The priest then commemorates the deceased by saying: 'Remember also all those who have fallen in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life, [names of the deceased for whom he is praying], and give them rest where the light of your countenance watches.'[156] Then he prays for the living: 'Remember, Lord, all the Orthodox bishops, who rightly proclaim the word of your truth, the whole presbyters, the diaconate in Christ and every order of clergy. Also, we offer this spiritual worship for the whole world, for the holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church, for those who live in chastity and holiness of life […].'[157] With these intercessory prayers, rest is requested for the souls of the deceased, as well as the inheritance of the kingdom in union with the saints. Additionally, mercy and all that it implies are sought for the living.[158] Indeed, the eucharistic liturgy, as outlined by Symeon of Thessaloniki, celebrates 'the cosmic sacrifice'.[159] After requesting grace for all, the celebrant also prays for himself, seeking purification through the holy mysteries for the remission of his own sins.

The prayer of supplication during the anaphora demonstrates faith in intercession, in the efficacy of sacrifice, in the union of the living with the dead and the saints in prayer and in the intention of the earthly Church.[160] The saints are the reason for giving thanks to God: it is through them – and, above all, through the Mother of God and St John the Baptist – that the Church

153 Lash 1995, 35; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
154 Paprocki 1993, 330–332; Evdokimov 1966, 185.
155 Velmans 1981, 50; Swainson 1884, 83, 92, 251.
156 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
157 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
158 Nicholas Kabasilas asserted that the Eucharist brings sanctification to both the living and the dead (Marinis 2021b, 264).
159 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866d, PG 155: 733A; Bornert 1966, 262.
160 Salaville 1942, I: 39.

obtains answer to prayer, the remission of sins and the kingdom of heaven; although people (living or dead) who have not yet reached final perfection and still require prayer are the object of the supplication.[161] One 'asks for all salvation and all the goods necessary or useful to each one'.[162]

The Recapitulatory Litany. What follows is a litany that recapitulates all the preceding prayers for the faithful, renewing the act of supplication. After all the saints, the deacon asks God, who received the offering on his 'holy and immaterial altar', to send his 'divine grace' in return, so that the faithful may be delivered 'from all afflictions, wrath, danger and constraint [...]'.[163] At the same time, the priest prays in a low voice for the same things: 'We entreat, pray and implore You: count us worthy to partake of your heavenly and awesome mysteries at this sacred and spiritual table with a pure conscience, for forgiveness of sins and pardon of offences, for communion of the Holy Spirit, for inheritance of the kingdom of heaven and for boldness before You; not for judgement or condemnation.'[164] The deacon then asks God for forgiveness, goods useful for souls, the grace to spend the rest of one's life in peace and penance and a peaceful death, as well as a good defence before the dreaded tribunal, among other things.

The Pater, Blessings and Prayer over the Bowed Faithful. After the Lord's Prayer of the Pater, the celebrant blesses the people by saying, 'Peace to all' and then recites a prayer in a low voice over the bowed faithful, followed by a formula for communion and another supplication for all the needs of the people.[165]

The following is the supplementary prayer uttered in a soft tone by the priest as part of the preparatory ritual for communion: 'Give heed, Lord Jesus Christ our God, from your holy dwelling place and from the glorious throne of your kingdom; and come to sanctify us, You who are enthroned on high with the Father and invisibly present here with us. And with your mighty hand grant communion in your most pure body and precious blood to us and through us to all the people.'[166] This prayer evokes the image of heaven, where Christ is enthroned in glory. The priest implores him to come and sanctify the people with his body and blood. This is ensured with a descending movement. Christ is thus present both in the heights of heaven and in the earthly Church.

161 Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 159–160.
162 Cabasilas 1943, 189–190.
163 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
164 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
165 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
166 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.

Elevation and Fraction of the Host, Intinction and Zeon. This secret of the priest and the deacon's invitation to 'Let us attend' are followed by the elevation of the Holy Bread and its ritual breaking, or *melismos* (μελισμός). The priest divides the Lamb into four parts, saying: 'The Lamb of God is broken and distributed, broken yet not divided, ever eaten yet never consumed, but sanctifies those who partake.'[167] Then he arranges the four pieces on the paten in the form of a cross, in this way:

IC
NI KA
XC

The celebrant takes the particle stamped with 'IC', makes the sign of the cross above the chalice and places it in it, pronouncing these words: 'Fullness of the Holy Spirit'.[168] This is the rite of intinction, which shows that Christ is indivisible, despite the appearance of bread and wine. According to Theodore of Mopsuestia, the fraction of the bread commemorates Christ's appearances after the resurrection.[169]

Another rite performed on the gifts of the sacrifice is the *zeon* (ζέον), when the deacon pours hot water into the chalice with a small spoon, making the sign of the cross. Some commentators on the Divine Liturgy see in this rite the water and blood that flowed from the side of Christ pierced by a spear, given that the eucharistic sacrifice itself is a reiteration of the sacrifice on the cross.[170]

The Communion and Giving Thanks. The preparatory prayers for communion follow. Once again the celebrant implores divine mercy through the intercession of the Virgin and the saints and asks that the communion of the holy mysteries be not for judgement, but for the healing of the soul and body.[171]

The celebrants then partake in communion. The priest goes first, saying: 'To me, the unworthy priest, is granted communion of the precious and all-holy Body of Our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life.'[172] Then the deacon, before taking communion, says: 'Behold, I draw near Christ, our immortal King and God. Grant me, the

167 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
168 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
169 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 16–18, 25: 559–561.
170 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 464B.
171 Salaville 1945, II: 58.
172 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.

unworthy deacon, communion, Master, of the precious and all-holy body of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life.'[173] Giving him the host, the priest says: 'To you, the devout deacon, is granted communion of the precious and all-holy body of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life.'[174]

Once the Communion of the Celebrants for the Species of Bread is complete, the priest takes the veiled chalice, saying: 'To me, the unworthy [name of the priest], is granted communion of the precious and all-holy Blood of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life.'[175] Then he invites the deacon to the communion of the precious blood. The latter says: 'Behold, again draw near to Christ, our immortal King and God. Grant me communion, Master, of the precious and all-holy Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of my sins and for eternal life.'[176] The priest has him drink from the chalice, saying to him: 'To you, the devout [name of the deacon], is granted communion of the precious and all-holy Blood of our Lord, God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of your sins and for eternal life.'[177]

The celebrant, after he and the deacon have received communion, recites the thanksgiving prayer in a low voice, detailing the intercession of the Virgin and all the saints: 'We give thanks to You, Master who loves mankind, benefactor of our souls, that even on this very day You have made us worthy of your heavenly and immortal mysteries. Make straight our path, fortify us in your fear, guard our life, make secure our steps through the prayers and supplications of the glorious Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and of all your saints.'[178] The communion of the faithful follows. The priest says to each communicant: 'The servant of God [name] is granted communion of the precious and all-holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God and Saviour, Jesus Christ, for the forgiveness of sins and for eternal life.'[179] These liturgical formulas highlight that the body and blood of Christ are given for the remission of sins and therefore become a pledge of eternal life, rather than judgement and condemnation. Furthermore, they demonstrate the importance given to the intercession of the saints in redemption, with the most prominent place given to the Mother of God.

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173 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
174 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.
175 Lash 1995, 44; Salaville 1945, II: 59; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 260.
176 Lash 1995, 45; Salaville 1945, II: 61; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 260–261.
177 Lash 1995, 45; Salaville 1945, II: 61; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 261.
178 Salaville 1945, II: 68.
179 Lash 1995, 34; Salaville 1945, II: 34; Mercenier and Paris 1937, 254.

After the congregation's communion, the priest blesses the people with the chalice. The ostension of the sacred vessels before the eyes of the faithful symbolises the ascension of the Saviour. A prayer to dismiss the faithful follows; it is known as the 'Prayer behind the Ambon [pulpit]',[180] because it was once said behind the ambon, situated in the centre of the church, in front of the barrier of the sanctuary. More songs and prayers follow.

The orations used in the current Euchologion are of relatively recent origin and duplicate the prayers of dismissal. Let us take the following priestly prayer as an example:

> May He who rose from the dead, Christ our true God, through the intercessions of his all-pure and all-immaculate holy Mother; the power of the precious and life-giving cross; the protection of the honourable, bodiless powers of heaven; the supplications of the honourable, glorious prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist; of the holy, glorious and praiseworthy apostles; of the holy, glorious and triumphant martyrs; of our righteous and God-bearing fathers; of [name of the saint of the church]; of our holy Father among the saints, John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople [if celebrating the Liturgy of St Basil, this is instead: 'of our holy Father among the saints, Basil the Great, Archbishop of Caesarea of Cappadocia']; of the holy and righteous ancestors of God, Joachim and Anna; of [name of the saint of the day], whose memory we celebrate today; and of all the saints; have mercy on us and save us, for He is good and loves mankind.[181]

This prayer, which originated in a later period, does not present a new theme, but rather proves the vitality of a tradition. It verifies the importance that Christians attach to the intercession of the Virgin Mary, St John the Baptist and all the saints. This act of supplication and intercession is thus continuous and perpetual throughout the eucharistic service.

The Dismissal of the Faithful, the Distribution of the Blessed Bread and the Farewell Kiss at the Altar. The Dismissal of the Faithful and the distribution of the blessed bread take place. The priest then enters the sanctuary to remove his priestly vestments, while reciting a prayer of thanksgiving, including the *Trisagion* and a trope for the Virgin. Finally, before leaving the church, the

180 Salaville 1945, II: 66.
181 *Ibid*., 72.

priest gives a kiss of farewell to the altar 'from which he has received the grace of the priesthood, as the source of divine graces and of sanctification'.[182]

The prayers and rites of the Liturgy of the Faithful thus make Christ present in his earthly temple, with the crowd of angels coming to concelebrate the eucharistic office with the priest of the church.[183] By singing the *Trisagion* and other angelic songs, the faithful join in the glorification and adoration the angels perpetually give to the Lord in heaven. In addition, the Liturgy of the Faithful presents a theophanic image of God as philanthropic and merciful towards sinful humanity through the intercession of the Virgin, St John the Baptist and all the saints. The call to intercession of the saints suggests the belief that salvation can be obtained through the Church by means of the eucharistic sacrifice.

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The Byzantine Holy Liturgy shows the invisible presence of the heavenly Church (Christ, angels and saints) concelebrating the eucharistic liturgy together with the ministers of the earthly Church. This presence becomes even more evident during the Liturgy of the Faithful, especially during the anaphora, which is a key structure in the eucharistic prayer, where the sacred mystery is fulfilled by Christ himself intervening as a high priest, as the Fathers affirm. The eucharistic sacrifice, a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, is offered in the name of the living and the deceased faithful for the remission of sins, the salvation of the soul and all benefits. In this way, the prayers and orations invoke a heavenly vision of God escorted by angels and interceded by the saints, with the Virgin and John the Baptist as privileged mediators. This theophanic manifestation is directly linked to the eucharistic mysteries.

Is the liturgical invocation of Christ, glorified by angels and called upon by saints at the moment of the sacrifice of the altar, materialised or translated by the image of the apsidal Theophany?

1.2 *The Sacred Image and Divine Presence of Christ in His Earthly Temple*

The apsidal Theophany seems to act as the visible manifestation of Christ and his angels in his earthly temple, the Church, since God is present in the icon. This divine revelation reflected through sacred image is a subject widely discussed by the iconophiles, especially John of Damascus (676–749), Theodore

182 *Ibid.*, 73.

183 Marinis 2021b, 255–268.

of Stoudios, Germanus (715–730) and Tarasios (784–806), the last two of whom were patriarchs of Constantinople. According to John of Damascus, 'The icon of God is God himself, just as the icon of a saint is the saint himself.'[184] The image is therefore a relative reality, as it concerns its prototype, the one it represents.[185] This relationship between the representation and the represented is explained by John of Damascus, who stated that Christ and the saints project their energy, their shadow, into the figures that represent them.[186] Theodore of Stoudios, for his part, compared what was represented to a seal and the representation to the imprints it leaves.[187] The image of Christ then allows us to contemplate the face of God through the incarnate Logos. The Second Council of Nicaea (787), the Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church, affirmed that the veneration of an image is directed not towards the image itself, but towards the reality it signifies.[188]

These theological arguments provide a real anthropology to the ecclesiastical image. This image, proclaimed sacred, can only be true. Consequently, the apsidal Theophany actualises the presence of Christ and his heavenly court in the church.

1.3 *The Function of the Theophany and Its Correlation with the Liturgy as an Icon*

The icon, or sacred image, is dedicated to deep contemplation that allows the faithful to be elevated and access celestial beatitude. It focusses their attention on a single point: the spiritual essence. It is at this level that the union between the contemplator (the whole liturgical community) and the contemplated represented in the image (Christ in Majesty) is achieved. This idea of elevation to invisible realities recalls a number of anaphoras, notably those of the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* VIII (4th century), St James, the Syriac versions of the Liturgy of St Basil, the so-called Anaphora of St Peter, the Armenian Anaphora of St Athanasius and all of the anaphoras in use in the Syriac and Maronite churches of Antioch, among others.[189]

184 John of Damascus 1864b, PG 94: 1264A.

185 Theodore of Stoudios 1860d, PG 99: 428C; Theodore of Stoudios 1860a, PG 99: 489A. On the iconology of Theodore of Stoudios, see Bratu 2003, 323–349.

186 Pallis 2015, 179–181.

187 Theodore of Stoudios 1860b, PG 99: 417.

188 Price 2020; Emery 2001, 17–30; Alberigo 1994, 303–305. For an overview of the history of the sacred image, several useful texts can be found in Menozzi 1991.

189 See p. 34 herein; Paprocki 1993, 310–311; Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 151–152; Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 2 and hom. 3–4: 531, 539–541.

In the liturgical rites the spiritual shines through a material envelope. In freeing itself from these tangible and sensible things, the spirit discovers high and intelligible realities, as the figures lead to the archetypes. This was particularly emphasised by Cyril of Jerusalem, Theodore of Mopsuestia[190] and Symeon of Thessaloniki,[191] who stated that the faithful are called upon at the beginning of the anaphora to raise the spirit of their souls to God and free themselves from all material things in order to visualise God in his heavenly kingdom. As a sacred image, the Theophany manifests this heavenly sovereignty. The priest and the participants in the eucharistic sacrifice are invited to create a mental image of the heavenly kingdom from the words of the anaphora and all the sacred gestures and formulas in the liturgy. The representation of Christ in the apse would thus be complementary, promoting this spiritual figuration and facilitating the soul's elevation towards God during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.[192] It is this visual contemplation of the realities of the upper tabernacle through the liturgy of the lower tabernacle[193] that would have made the image of Christ appear as a Theophany during the eucharistic service, especially during the anaphora.[194]

Nicholas of Andida claimed that iconographic images in the church made the liturgy understandable:

> The celebration of the entire Divine Liturgy symbolically shows, through the mysteries accomplished therein, the complete economy of the abasement of the true God and our Saviour Jesus Christ for our salvation [...] the unity, the connection of all the holy mysteries [is experienced] by the exhibition of holy icons: for all the mysteries of the Incarnation of Christ

190 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 2 and hom. 3–4: 531, 539–541. For Theodore of Mopsuestia, the eucharistic liturgy is the image of heavenly realities: 'The Liturgy of this dreadful sacrifice [...] is manifestly the similitude of heavenly realities' (Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 17, 20: 497); Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 150–151. Geir Hellemo examined the ascending eucharistic prayer in Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia at length in Hellemo 1989, 188–196 (Cyril of Jerusalem), 231–254 (Theodore of Mopsuestia).

191 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866a, PG 155: 296BC; Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866c, PG 155: 340; Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866d, PG 155: 729.

192 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 353. On the topic of the mental image formed from the words of the anaphora and the apsidal image of Christ facilitating elevation towards heavenly realities, see in particular Hellemo 1989, 236–238, 246–247, 259–262, 281–282, where the author underlined the idea by examining the conception of the cult of God in commentaries by Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia. See also Skubiszewski 2005, 361–362.

193 On the correspondence between the two tabernacles, see Daniélou 1944, 171–182.

194 Skubiszewski 2005, 362; Brinktrine 1931, 175–176; De La Taille 1921, 281.

> our Lord are represented to the eyes of the faithful, from the coming of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin to the ascension of the Saviour and his Second Coming.[195]

From this passage, we might understand that all the icons adorning the church redouble the action of the eucharistic celebration, which shows the history of salvation, from the Incarnation to the Parousia. Thus, the course of the liturgy would have a correspondence, or even correlation, with the unfolding of the iconographic programme, culminating in the apse. This is the focal point of the liturgy and of the church – a place around which the rites and iconographic scenes symbolically converge. The scene of the apsidal Theophany would translate the concrete and united presence of Christ in his celestial and terrestrial realms with the company of angels and saints into a tangible language.

1.4 *The Heavenly Liturgy, the Earthly Liturgy and the Presence of God in Majesty*

The concrete presence of Christ and his angelic procession in his earthly Church is confirmed in all the texts of the eucharistic liturgy. Christ is present during the eucharistic celebration as high priest. This single high priest, celebrated by angels and men at the same time, ensures the union between the liturgy of heaven and the liturgy of earth.[196] The earthly Church becomes the imitation of the heavenly Church.

Through this relationship between the upper and lower liturgies, the celebrant and the assembly of the faithful speak certain words on behalf of the heavenly powers represented in the apse. These 'angelic hymns' are the *Trisagion*, the Alleluia, the Gloria and the *Cheroubikon*. These hymns ensure co-citizenship and unity in the same glorification between the heavenly powers and men.[197] Numerous patristic texts and liturgical commentaries have emphasised this presence of angels and saints in the church, especially at the time of the eucharistic celebration.[198]

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195 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 421; see also 417; A. Spieser 1991, 580; Bornert 1966, 202.

196 Bornert 1966, 206.

197 Brightman 1908, 256–266, 390–391, 394.

198 Such as those of St John Chrysostom (Jean Chrysostome 1980, 316–318; John Chrysostom 1862c, PG 48: 734); Cyril of Jerusalem (Cyril of Jerusalem 1886, PG 33: 1113B); Maximus the Confessor (Maximus the Confessor 2011, 41–42, 47); Nicholas Kabasilas (Cabasilas 1943, 128); and Pseudo-Gregory of Nazianzos (Zheltov 2015, 223 text, 227 translation). On the role of angels in the liturgy, see Marinis 2021b, 257–261; Muehlberger 2013, 176–202; Peterson 1964; 1954, 45–60; Daniélou 1953, 76–92.

Christ is not only the sacrificial priest, but also the sacrificed victim.[199] The Eucharist in its present reality is therefore still an image – it is 'the antitype of the body and blood of Christ';[200] hence the intimate correlation between the image of Christ and the Eucharist, whose common point is true presence.[201] The descending movement of Christ, who becomes incarnate on the real altar through the bread and wine, transmits – as does the elevation of the priest and the faithful towards the heavenly court under the glow of mystical ecstasy – the intimate relationship between the two liturgies of the lower and upper tabernacles.[202] In fact, the conception of the real presence of divine majesty in the Eucharist is the core of this correspondence, expressed by ascending and descending movements in the liturgy.[203]

The descending movement can be found in certain anaphoras, including that of Serapion (4th century), in which the celebrant implores the Word to descend upon the bread and wine in the prayer of the epiclesis.[204] The notion of the Word descending to the altar during the eucharistic sacrifice in the presence of the choirs of angels is prominent in the liturgical prayers during the celebration of the eucharistic office and in certain commentaries on the Divine Liturgy,[205] in particular that of Jacob of Sarug. This author invited us to see the angels standing beside the officiating priest during the eucharistic celebration and to bow down to the eternal King now present on the altar.[206]

2 The Iconographic Tradition of Liturgical Theophanies

2.1 *Early Christian Programmes and Eucharistic Components*

As a sacred image, the apsidal Theophany could be a visible revelation of Christ and his angels in his earthly temple, as pointed out in the previous part. This presence is mentioned in numerous patristic and exegetical texts and reiterated several times in the eucharistic liturgy, especially during the Small and

199 We will return to this subject below; see pp. 55–59 herein.

200 Funk 1905, v, 14, 7 and VII, 15, 4: 273, 412. Likewise, Gregory of Nazianzos claimed that the eucharistic sacrifice is 'the antitype of great mysteries' (Gregory of Nazianzos 1885, PG 35: 497B). Other references using the term 'antitype' for the Eucharist are in Lampe 1961, 159, and Atchley 1935, 137–138.

201 Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 136–139.

202 Cantone 2008, 67, 109.

203 Cassingena-Trévedy 2003, 27.

204 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 130–131.

205 Marinis 2021b, 257–261.

206 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 230.



FIGURE 2 Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit (now in the Coptic Museum, Cairo), wall paintings of room 6, apse, 7th–8th centuries

Great Entrances, but is even more strongly reinforced by the words in the preface to the anaphora. In this sense, the representation of Christ and his angels would serve to actualise their presence during the moment of the eucharistic sacrifice. Such an interpretation effectively situates these compositions in the present and establishes their connection to the daily liturgy.

This liturgical reading has already been applied to theophanies in Coptic churches.[207] These feature scenes loaded with strong eucharistic resonance. In room 6 (Fig. 2) and chapel XVII (Fig. 3) at the monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit (7th–8th centuries) in Egypt the apsidal conches are occupied by a juvenile Christ, seated in the midst of glory, strewn with stars.[208] The Lord raises his right hand high in a gesture of speech or blessing.[209] With his left hand, he shows an open book with an inscribed triple *hagios*. The four living creatures

207 Jolivet-Lévy 2020, 15–16; Angheben 2011b, 114–115; Skubiszewski 2005, 309–408; Spieser 1995a, 311–319; Grabar 1972, 219.

208 Rochard 2017; Calament and Rochard 2016, 49–68; Maspero 1931; Clédat 1904a; Clédat 1904b; Bolman 2007, 423–430.

209 On this gesture, see Angheben 2013b, 22–34.



FIGURE 3 Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit, watercolour copy of the wall paintings of chapel XVII, apse, 7th–8th centuries

with ocellated wings in the form of wheels are arranged around Christ's aureole.[210] Two medallions personifying the sun and the moon flank the central figure of the Enthroned. On either side of Christ, two angels stand with bowed heads, holding only in chapel XVII a crown (?) in their veiled hands. Above the apse of chapel XVII, a bust of a woman is identified by the inscription 'the Holy Church'; she carries a eucharistic chalice. The thrice holy on the book carried by Christ probably refers to the liturgical chant of the *Trisagion*.[211] The covered hands of the angels perhaps allude to the sacrifice. The figure of the Church carrying the chalice further supports the eucharistic meaning of the apsidal programme.[212]

210 For the iconography of the four living creatures, see pp. 85–88 herein.

211 Angheben 2011b, 114; Cantone 2008, 69–110; Iacobini 2000, 47; Ihm 1960, 47–50; Millet 1945, 52–58; Meer 1938, 255–281.

212 Clédat 1904a, I: 76; Ihm 1960, 201. For the liturgical reading of these programmes, see also Jolivet-Lévy 2020, 15–16; Angheben 2011b, 114–115; Skubiszewski 2005, 309–408; Spieser 1995a, 313–315; Grabar 1972, 219.

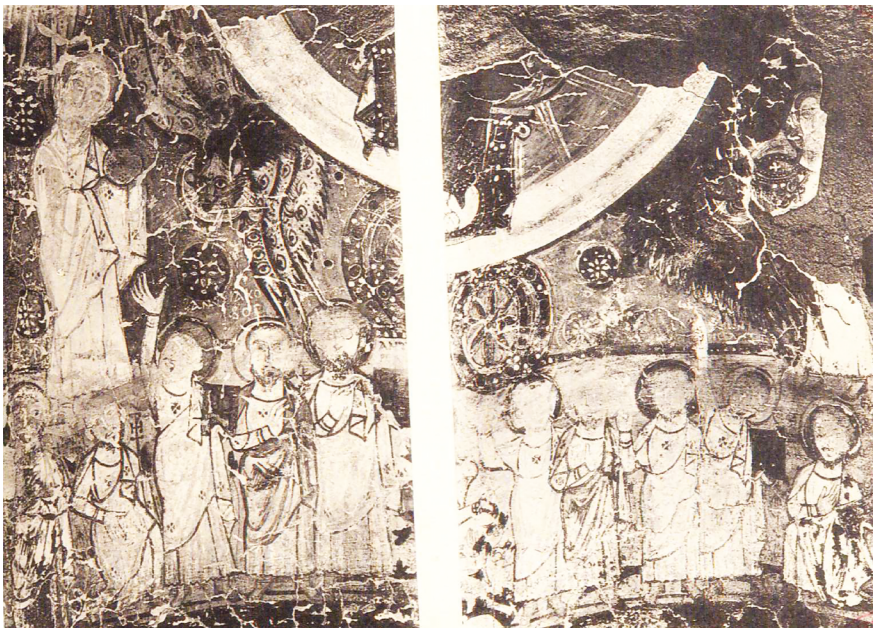

FIGURE 4 Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit, wall paintings of chapel XLV, details of the left and right halves of the apsidal Theophany, 7th–8th centuries

Chapel XLV in Bawit features a Theophany that is clearly linked to the main function of the sanctuary area, namely the eucharistic sacrifice (Fig. 4).[213] In the lower register, ten apostles are gathered around a central figure, identified as the prophet Ezekiel. Two figures placed above, presumably Peter and Paul, turn towards Christ, who is enthroned in glory, and present him with the eucharistic bread and chalice, both marked with a cross. The wheels, dotted with eyes, and the four living creatures stand out against a starry sky. This composition clearly fits into the context of the eucharistic celebration and is more closely associated with the earthly liturgy practised in the present.

The cave of the Pantocrator (9th–10th centuries), near Heraclea at Latmus in Turkey,[214] features a Theophany in which the enthroned Christ is placed within a triple constellated mandorla (Fig. 5).[215] This mandorla is carried by two theophoric angels and flanked by the four living creatures with their ocellated wings, displaying books bearing the *Trisagion*, as suggested in the Apocalypse, an indication that it is the four living creatures from the

213 Angheben 2011b, 114–115; Cantone 2008, 99; Iacobini 2000, 52–59, 114; Millet 1945, 54; Clédat 1904a, I: 80.

214 Jolivet-Lévy 2020, 18–19.

215 Ruggieri and Zäh 2016, 69–70, pl. 174; Wiegand 1913, III: 192, pl. 1.



FIGURE 5 Heraclea at Latmus, cave of the Pantocrator, watercolour copy of the wall paintings, apsidal Theophany, 9th–10th centuries

Anonymous vision that celebrate the heavenly liturgy. Furthermore, the full text of the acclamation of the *Trisagion* from the preface of the anaphora, 'Holy, holy, holy God Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory', is inscribed around the edge of the mandorla, affirming that this *Trisagion* is indeed that of the liturgy and not the one from the Apocalypse, whose wording is markedly different.[216] From this perspective, it could be suggested that the four living creatures officiate here as singers of the triple *hagios*, in the same way as the angelic ministers. Two medallions, featuring personifications of the sun and the moon, complete the composition and serve to underscore the present temporality of the Theophany, an idea into which we will delve deeper later.[217]

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216 Warland 2019, 127; Angheben 2011b, 115; Angheben 2011a, 346; Velmans 2006, 45–46; Peschlow 2005, 170; Ihm 1989, 45.

217 See pp. 83–93 herein.

The iconographic compositions of Bawit and Latmus are related to the eucharistic liturgy. This suggests that the likely intention was to create a correlation with the primary function of the place and to emphasise to the faithful that the earthly liturgy is the counterpart to what is celebrated by Christ and his ministers in heaven. This visual theme would thus be an extension of the eucharistic celebration. It could also be used to materialise the actions of God at the time of the liturgy and make Christ and his heavenly court present in the church and especially in the sanctuary, which is reserved for the consecration of the sacrifice.

2.2 *Medieval Programmes and Eucharistic Components*

After the iconoclastic crisis (726–843), the Christian East did not stop representing theophanies in the apse; this practice was amplified and even enriched with new elements. The pictorial decoration of the sanctuary progressively integrated an increasing number of liturgical themes closely linked to the daily practices of the eucharistic liturgy.[218] We find the Communion of the Apostles, the Officiating Bishops around the *amnos* or the *melismos*, priest–angels, deacon–angels carrying the instruments of the Passion related to the liturgy or waving *rhipidia* and deacons holding pyxides or swinging censers, among others. This is why it is necessary to continue this investigation by trying to find arguments in both texts and the sanctuary compositions that allow us to corroborate the liturgical hypothesis of the apsidal Theophany.

In this regard the iconographic and epigraphic clues found in Georgian, Coptic and Cappadocian paintings establish a firm basis for this liturgical analysis. It is worth noting that certain theophanies, particularly those observed in Cappadocia, took on a distinct liturgical interpretation.[219] Thus, it is necessary for the purposes of this study to identify the main components of the apsidal scene – Christ, the throne, the seraphim, the cherubim, the four living creatures and the celestial bodies – in order to understand their precise functions in the celestial and terrestrial liturgies. These components were subsequently maintained in the Theophany–Deesis, the preferred theme of apsidal decorations in the Lebanese space.

218 Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 161–201; Gerstel 1999; Spieser 1991, 575–590; Walter 1982.

219 Jolivet-Lévy 2020, 13–42; Jolivet-Lévy 1991, 335–340.

2.2.1 The Theophany

2.2.1.1 *The Throne–Altar and the Divine Majesty*

Christ is depicted, almost systematically, enthroned in the apsidal Theophany, which reflects his sovereignty, regality and power. His throne can take on various forms, providing a wide array of artistic interpretations that may include or exclude a seatback, armrests, cushions or drapery (see Figs 2, 3, 5, 7, 12, 19, 28, 34, 37, 39). Evoked in numerous biblical and liturgical passages,[220] the divine seat, placed in the semi-dome dominating the high altar, may correspond to some extent to the rite of the Blessing of the Throne during the eucharistic celebration.[221] The prayer, spoken by the officiant during this ritual, evokes God 'on the throne of glory' of his kingdom. Here, theologians saw, as noted, an allegorical representation of the throne of the Trinitarian God, who receives the triple *hagios*.[222] In addition, this prayer refers to the solemn entrance of the bishop, who enters to occupy his raised cathedra in the synthronon, after receiving the acclamation of the triple *hagios* from the faithful, who bow to his blessing.[223] The bishop is the vicar of Christ, the only true priest and the only victim accepted by God.[224]

One might assume, with caution, that the designer(s) of an apsidal programme sought to create a parallel between the heavenly throne and the ecclesiastical cathedra. Christ in Majesty celebrating the liturgy in the presence of the heavenly hierarchy would then represent a model for the bishop officiating with the priests, deacons and the faithful.

The throne of God is often equated with the altar of sacrifice. This parallel between throne and altar is mentioned by such theologians as Optatus of Milevis (4th century), who compared the altar to the seat of the Christ–Host: 'For what is an altar, but the seat of the Body and Blood of Christ?'[225] This same approach is mentioned in the liturgy of the presanctified gifts in a prayer recited by the priest before communion: 'Invisible king [...] look upon us, your unworthy servants who stand at this holy altar as at your cherubic throne, upon which lieth your only begotten Son and our God, in the dread mysteries

220 Among others, see Ps. 11:4, 45:6, 103:19; Is. 6:1, 66:1; 1 Kings 22:19; Matt. 5:34, 23:22; Acts 7:49; Dan. 7:9, Rev. 4:1–6, 4:2, 7:15, 20:11, 22:1, 22:3; and Heb. 12:2.

221 See p. 26 herein.

222 *Ibid.*

223 Salaville 1942, I: 78.

224 Bornert 1966, 79 (Isidore of Pelusium), 61 (Origen); Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, hom. 15, 17: 491; Roques 1954, 176–183 (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite); Isidore of Pelusium 1859b, PG 78: 272C.

225 Optatus of Milevis 1983, 143.

spread forth thereon [...].'[226] This same connection between the throne and the altar is attested in the *Historia Ecclesiastica*: the priest, at the moment of the anaphora, stands before the 'altar', as before the 'throne of God'.[227] The altar of the church is likewise a replica of the 'heavenly and spiritual altar' around which the angels worship.[228] Based on the same commentary, the ministers of worship represent 'spiritual hierarchs'. They hold 'the spiritual ember' in their hands, which is Christ himself. The priests represent cherubim, while the deacons are 'the image of the spirits in charge of a minister and sent in service'.[229] This liturgical symbolism seems to be the basis for the apsidal Theophany. The figure of Christ resting on the throne of majesty in the sanctuary scenes would evoke the heavenly altar on which the Lamb of sacrifice lies.

The altar, likened to the throne of God, is in turn assimilated to the manger of Bethlehem. John Chrysostom defined it as 'the spiritual crib'.[230] Christ is contemplated on the altar of the church, says John Chrysostom, in the same way as the Magi at the Nativity.[231] This explains why he saw in the eucharistic service not only the commemoration of the Passion and the sacrifice on the cross, but also a reminder of Jesus' childhood.[232] John Chrysostom also considered the altar as a symbol of the body of the Saviour.[233] The altar has likewise been compared to the burial: Theodore of Mopsuestia stated that Christ 'is placed on the altar as in a kind of tomb'.[234] In the 17th century Estephan Douaihy summarised these ideas by saying that the altar corresponds to all the locations that served as a place of refuge for Christ: the crib in which he lay as a newborn baby, the boat in which he sat, the mountain where he was transfigured, the table where he sacrificed his body and blood at the Last Supper, the cross on which he was sacrificed, the shroud in which he was wrapped and the tomb where he was buried and from where he rose.[235]

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226 Deseille 2016, 179; Arranz 1981, 342; Salaville 1942, I: 119.

227 Brightman 1908, 392, 396.

228 *Ibid.*, 259. The theme of correspondence between earthly and heavenly hierarchy is traditional among the Church Fathers, especially the Antiochians. See Bornert 1966, 78 (John Chrysostom), 80–81 (Theodore of Mopsuestia), 177–180 (*Historia Ecclesiastica*); see also Daniélou 1944, 152–182 (Gregory of Nyssa) and Roques 1954, 171–199 (Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite).

229 Brightman 1908, 261–262.

230 Bornert 1966, 79.

231 John Chrysostom 1862i, PG 61: 204.

232 Bornert 1966, 79.

233 *Ibid.*, 78; John Chrysostom 1862h, PG 61: 540.

234 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 505. The commentary on the *Historia Ecclesiastica* also highlights the same correspondence (Brightman 1908, 258).

235 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 139–140.

The symbolic associations with the altar may also apply to the throne it was equated to. We must ask whether these aspects (altar, tomb, crib, etc.) can be applied to the throne of Christ in apsidal theophanies. We should also inquire whether the theme in question provides evidence that supports this type of comparison: in many cases, Christ sits, for example, on a draped throne.[236] This cloth could refer to the cloth covering the main altar, which was equated with the Lord's shroud.[237] However, without other visual clues to reinforce this interpretation, the hypothesis remains fragile.

2.2.1.2 *Christ: Priest and Victim*

Liturgical and Exegetical Sources. The eucharistic office shows Christ as the main priest of the Divine Liturgy.[238] It is he who presides, invisibly but in person, over the Divine Liturgy inside the place of worship, while being the Lamb of the ultimate sacrifice at the same time:[239] 'He resorted,' said Gregory of Nyssa (d. 394), 'to a kind of sacrifice ineffable and invisible to mankind and offered himself as an oblation and a victim, being at the same time the priest and the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'[240]

During the Great Entrance, which inaugurates, as we observed above, the Liturgy of the Faithful, the celebrant addresses the secret prayer of the *Cheroubikon* to Christ, the initial priest of the eucharistic celebration and victim of the sacrifice. It emphasises that he is both the one offering the sacrifice and the sacrifice offered, while the officiant of the earthly liturgy, vested in his priesthood, visibly replaces him at the earthly altar.[241]

As already mentioned, Christ is invisibly present during the anaphora, at the moment when the transubstantiation of the species takes place.[242] It is he who carries out the sacrifice, while the priests visibly fulfil his priesthood on earth by pronouncing his words and replicating his gestures. Indeed, of all the widespread rites and prayers, especially from the 4th century onwards, in the various Byzantine, Eastern and Western liturgies, the essential and invariable act of the Holy Liturgy is when the officiant reproduces the gestures and recites

236 As in the apsidal compositions at St George in Ači (see Fig. 19), Mar Tadros in Behdidat (see Pl. 4), Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda (see Pl. 34), Mar Mitr in Kusba (see Pl. 73), the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis in Rashkida (see Pl. 120) and the chapel of the Four Living Creatures in the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea (see Fig. 28).

237 Bornert 1966, 79.

238 Filvedt and Wessbrandt 2015, 96–114; Songer 1985, 345–359.

239 Bedros 2007, 95.

240 Gregory of Nyssa 1863, PG 46: 612CD.

241 See p. 31 herein.

242 See p. 34 herein.

the words of Christ at the Last Supper over the offering: 'This is my body; this is my blood.' In other words, it is the act of consecrating the sacrificial material, which is truly transformed into the body of the Messiah. It is at this moment that Christ intervenes on the earthly altar as high priest, following the order of the Old Testament priest Melchizedek to present himself invisibly as an offering, while the celebrant visibly offers it. John Chrysostom said:

> The oblation which the priests now make, whoever offers it, whether it be Paul or Peter, is the same as that which Christ gave to his disciples; the former is not inferior to the latter, because it is not men who consecrate it, but he who consecrated that of the Last Supper. For just as the words which God spoke then are the same words which the priests speak now, so the oblation is the same.[243]

This takes place through a kind of mystical ecstasy that raises the priest to heavenly reality: 'When you see the Lord immolated and lying dead,' proclaimed John Chrysostom, 'and the priest bowing over the victim and immersed in prayer [...] do you think that you are still among mankind and that you inhabit the earth? Do you not think that you have suddenly been transported to heaven?'[244] This mystical transportation of the priest to the heavenly world is highlighted in the commentary on the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, which states that the priest stands before the earthly altar during the celebration of the anaphora as before the heavenly throne. He 'contemplates the great, inexpressible, unfathomable mystery of Christ'[245] and 'spiritually sees the heavenly worship'.[246] The apsidal Theophany, which materialises the presence of Christ and his angels in the earthly church, supports this contemplation of God and the mystical union of the celebrant with the heavenly liturgy, which is manifested through angelic chants, most notably the triple *hagios*.[247]

The Iconography. The function of Christ as both high priest and victim in the Eucharist is sometimes represented in images. This is notably observed in scenes portraying the Communion of the Apostles, where Christ himself assumes the role of priest before the altar, distributing the Eucharist to his disciples in accordance with the actual liturgical event. In scenes depicting the

243 John Chrysostom 1862e, PG 62: 612.
244 *Ibid.*
245 Bornert 1966, 172; Brightman 1908, 392, 396.
246 Bornert 1966, 172; Brightman 1908, 393–394.
247 Palazzo 2012, 33; Bornert 1966, 74 (Cyril of Jerusalem).



FIGURE 6 Mount Athos, monastery of Xeropotamou, Pulcheria paten, steatite, 14th century

Officiating Bishops, on the other hand, he is portrayed as the sacrificial offering placed on the altar.

The image of the Great Entrance in the inner row framing the central medallion of the 14th-century Pulcheria paten, from the monastery of Xeropotamou at Mount Athos (Fig. 6), is significant in this regard.[248] Here, the Christ Child is placed on an altar as a sacrifice, while he is represented as an archbishop with episcopal vestments twice, on either side of the same altar. The widespread depiction of Christ with priestly attributes in Byzantine art coincided with a significant artistic transformation during the Palaiologan period, characterised by a heightened emphasis on descriptive and narrative elements. This is the case, for example, in the sanctuary of the monastery of the Virgin of Treskavec in North Macedonia (*c.*1490), where Christ is enthroned as King of Kings and

248 Nasr 2020b, 58–60; Nasr 2018b, 103–104; Kalavrezou 2000, 185–193; Loverdou-Tsigarida 1997, 292–293, no. 9.5; Kalavrezou-Maxeiner 1985, 204–205.



FIGURE 7 Treskavec, monastery of the Virgin, wall paintings, Theophany–Deesis, *c.*1490

archbishop between the Virgin Paraklesis (the Intercessor) and St John the Baptist (Fig. 7).[249]

The long phylactery held by the Virgin Paraklesis features prayers written for mankind's salvation, which Mary addresses to her Son in the form of a dialogue.[250] This intercession is inspired by the canon on the Mother of God written by Theodore of Stoudios.[251] In the 11th and 12th centuries the image of the Virgin Paraklesis seems to be linked to the rite of the veneration of icons at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy.[252] During this rite, the bishop (who elsewhere presides alone during the celebration of the Eucharist; even today the priest celebrates through the bishop's delegation) refers to the Lord as 'King of Heaven'; bowing down before the icons of Christ and the Virgin, he pleads for

249 Bogevska-Capuano 2011, 1–21.

250 Marković and Djordjević 2000, 13–48.

251 Kalopissi-Verti 2017, 305–307.

252 Butyrsky 2000, 207–218; Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 229; Mouriki 1968, 13–28; Nersessian 1960, 69–86; Walter 1980, 261–269.

Christ's mercy for the forgiveness of sins and then asks Mary to intercede on behalf of humanity. In Treskavec Christ then appears as the king receiving the petitions of the faithful, as the archbishop presiding over the liturgy and, with the presence of the Baptist, also as the Lamb who redeems sins.

We might hypothesise that Christ, sitting on his cathedra in sanctuary compositions of the Theophany, plays the role of the archbishop, even when he is not clearly given priestly attributes, as at Treskavec. This is the case in room 6 and chapel XVII in Bawit: Christ is displayed with a book with the triple *hagios*, showing his priesthood without being explicitly dressed in liturgical vestments (see Figs 2, 3).[253] He may also be presented in the Theophany as a sacrificial victim because of his throne, which is assimilated to the altar, as mentioned above.[254] This image could then represent the double function of Christ, sitting on his throne–altar as priest and as victim of the sacrifice, thereby linking to the scene of the daily liturgy.

2.2.1.3 *Seraphim and Cherubim*

Seraphim and cherubim are angelic creatures frequently associated with the apsidal Theophany. Seraphim are typically depicted with three pairs of wings, whereas cherubim are sometimes portrayed with four ocellated wings, but more commonly with six eye-filled wings. In both cases, the cherubim may have a single face, like the seraphim, or four faces: a man's, a lion's, an eagle's and a bull's. Seraphim and cherubim are usually identified by the inscriptions accompanying them and are often associated with the chanting of the *Trisagion*. In a number of examples, seraphim are labelled as 'six-winged' (εξαπτέρυγα) and cherubim as 'many-eyed' (πολυόμματα) or four-faced (τετράμορφον).

Scriptural Sources. The fundamental scriptural source providing information on the physiognomy and function of the seraphim and cherubim is found in the Old Testament.[255]

Seraphim are six-winged angels, participating in the worship and praise of God by singing the triple *hagios*, as described by Isaiah: 'Above him stood seraphim, each having six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet and with two they were flying. And they were calling out to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory"' (Is. 6:2–3).

They are placed above the throne of God rather than beside it, like the cherubim. They are fiery beings: fire is the essential element of their appearance,

253 See pp. 48–49 herein.
254 See pp. 53–55 herein.
255 Anthonioz 2021, 93–113.

their nature and their purifying function (Is. 6:6–7).[256] Seraphim are at the top of the angelic hierarchy.[257] Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*c.*500) discussed the qualities and properties of seraphim in his treatise on the celestial hierarchy.[258] Gregory the Great attributed an ardent love for God to this category of angels.[259]

The cherubim are mentioned several times in the Bible. They are guardians and defenders of the altar of God in Exodus and Second Chronicles (Ex. 25:18–20; 2 Chron. 3:10–14). They are often cited in connection with the divine throne. Several passages state that God is seated between or above cherubim (1 Sam. 4:4; 2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chron. 13:6). In Ezekiel's vision, they support an arch with the Lord enthroned with two of their wings (Ezek. 1:22–23). In the Second Book of Kings, Psalms and Daniel, the cherubim carry the throne of God (2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 99:1; Dan. 3:55). In Psalm 18 they contribute to its vertical displacement (Ps. 18:10). In the Second Book of Samuel and Psalm 18, God is described as mounted on a cherub (2 Sam. 22:11; Ps. 18:10). In several passages God speaks between two cherubim (Ex. 25:22; Num. 7:89; 2 Kings 19:15; Ps. 80:1, 99:1). They are often included in the ornaments of the Ark of the Covenant, the tabernacle and the temple (Ex. 25:8, 26:1–31; 1 Kings 6:23, 29; 2 Chron. 3:14; Ezek. 41:18–25).

Ezekiel described the cherubim as tetramorphic four-winged angels with eyes, each with the face of a man, a lion, a bull and an eagle (Ezek. 1:6–10, 10:12–140).[260] Under their wings, they had the form of a human hand (Ezek. 1:8; 10:7–8, 21). In giving them the second rank in the angelic hierarchy, Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite[261] and Gregory the Great[262] attributed the property of enlightened contemplation of God to the cherubim, thanks to their reception of light.

Liturgical Sources. These two categories of angels hold a prominent place in the eucharistic liturgy. As part of a glorious image of Christ in the midst of his heavenly kingdom, seraphim and cherubim are enumerated during the *Trisagion*. This hymn accompanies the transfer of the Gospel book[263] and

256 Bruderer Eichberg 1998, 62–65.
257 *Ibid.*, 8–12.
258 Denys l'Aréopagite 1958, 106.
259 Gregory the Great 1857, PL 76: 1252B.
260 Cherubim can have two (1 Kings 6: 23–28), six (Philo of Alexandria) or eight wings (Ezek. 10: 21); Iacobini 2000, 130, 136–137.
261 Denys l'Aréopagite 1958, 108.
262 Gregory the Great 1857, PL 76: 1252B.
263 See pp. 25–26 herein.

the *Cheroubikon* during the transfer of the gifts.[264] However, it is in the preface to the anaphora that they are introduced with greater emphasis.[265]

The secret of the *Trisagion*, recited by the priest during the Small Entrance, evokes both the angels, at the top of the celestial hierarchy with all the angelic powers, and God, who dwells in the Holy of Holies: the seraphim praise the majesty of the Lord by chanting the triple *hagios*, the cherubim glorify him, the celestial powers adore him, and the Virgin and the saints implore him. Likewise, the celebrant asks God to accept the hymn of the *Trisagion* sung by the faithful.[266] In this prayer the seraphim are thus presented as the singers of the *Trisagion*, as in Isaiah, whereas the function of the cherubim is limited to glorification.

The *Trisagion* of the Small Entrance is associated with the rite known as the Blessing of the Throne, which features the cherubim supporting the heavenly throne, as in the scriptures: 'Blessed are You on the throne of glory of your kingdom, who are seated upon the cherubim, always, now and forever, and to the ages of ages.'[267] This is a symbolic representation of the throne of God receiving the hymn of the *Trisagion*.[268] Indeed, the throne manifesting the majesty of the Lord and his reign is sometimes supported by cherubim in the Theophany.[269] People also sing the triple *hagios*, just like the angels in the heavenly Church, as the Fathers point out.[270]

The *Cheroubikon*, accompanying the solemn transfer of the gifts, transposes the seraphic song in Isaiah's vision to the cherubim by specifying that the faithful, by proclaiming the thrice holy in honour of the Trinity, mystically represent the cherubim.[271] As noted earlier, the cherubim are often accompanied by a triple *hagios*, and this may refer to the *Cheroubikon*.

The *Cheroubikon* on Holy Saturday states that the angelic cohorts, the 'many-eyed' cherubim and the (many-eyed or not) six-winged seraphim sing the Alleluia hymn together, thus invoking all these categories of angels as singers of the heavenly liturgy.[272] Likewise, the cherubim are characterised as 'many-eyed' beings and the seraphim as 'six-winged', as in certain apsidal theophanies.

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264 See pp. 29–33 herein.
265 See pp. 34–36 herein.
266 See p. 26 herein.
267 *Ibid.*
268 *Ibid.*
269 See the example of Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman (13th century; see Pls 48, 49, 50).
270 See pp. 34–36 herein.
271 See pp. 29–30 herein; Deseille 2016, 51; Lash 1995, 22.
272 See p. 30 herein; Deseille 2016, 109; Salaville 1942, I: 100.

The secret prayer spoken by the celebrant during the *Cheroubikon* is also interesting in this respect, since it presents Christ as the sacrificing priest and the sacrificed victim and develops an image of heaven where the Lord of the seraphim is enthroned on the cherubim and rests among the saints: 'For You alone, Lord our God, are ruler over all things in heaven and on earth, mounted on the throne of the cherubim, Lord of the seraphim and King of Israel, the only Holy One, resting in the holy place [...].'[273] Here again, the seraphim and the cherubim are mentioned simultaneously, and we also find the notion of the cherubim as the seat of the divine.

The preface to the anaphora, leading to the chanting of the *Trisagion*, includes instructions about these two higher orders of the angelic hierarchy, which may also be significant for the liturgical question of apsidal theophanies. In a number of prefaces, the cherubim and other categories of angels are associated with the seraphic chant of the triple *hagios*. Several theological texts describe the cherubim as six-winged beings, but it is only in certain prefaces that the cherubim sing the *Trisagion* hymn. We might therefore assume that the liturgy played a role in shaping the depictions of six-winged cherubim, cantors of the *Trisagion*, in apsidal compositions.

The preface to the anaphora in the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* VIII gives the cherubim the six wings of the seraphim and lists 'the crowds of angels, archangels, thrones, powers, dominions, principalities, virtues and infinite armies' who prostrate themselves with 'the cherubim and the six-winged seraphim' before the celestial Sovereign and 'Cry out and sing unceasingly: Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of his glory [...].'[274] The Greek anaphora found at the Deir Balyzeh monastery in Egypt also names myriads of angels and archangels, cherubim and seraphim as the singers of divine holiness.[275] In contrast, only two seraphim sing the *Trisagion* in the Anaphora of Serapion.[276]

The anaphora known as St Mark's (5th century), yet already recognised by Athanasius the Great (295–373), Cyril of Alexandria (376–444) and Macarius of Egypt (300–390), presents a seraph and a cherub as the escorts of the divine throne and the cantors of the *Trisagion*.[277] This anaphora specifies that each of these two angelic orders is represented by a single delegate. However, the prayer recited by the officiant after the Lord's instructions is addressed to the

273 See pp. 29–30 herein.
274 This anaphora, of Syrian origin, is the oldest that survives in full (Metzger 1987, 176–205).
275 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 124–127.
276 *Ibid.*, 128–133; Kretschmar 1956, 161.
277 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 101–123.

God who 'sits upon cherubim' and is worshipped by the seraphim. Indeed, in several examples of apsidal theophanies, such as those of Lebanon (see Pls 4, 34), Christ's throne is flanked by a single cherub and a single seraph. One might assume that these representations were inspired by this kind of liturgical text, but since we lack iconographic or epigraphic evidence, the hypothesis remains uncertain. The image is not able to reproduce a text or precise passage faithfully from the liturgical office.

The Anaphora of St Basil, celebrated in Egypt, presents the seraphim and cherubim together as the singers of the holiness of the Lord.[278] In the Anaphora of Gregory of Nazianzos, however, only the seraphim sing the liturgical *Trisagion*.[279] The preface to the Anaphora of St James (*c*. mid-6th century) refers to 'many-eyed' cherubim and (many-eyed or not) six-winged seraphim.[280] They sing the triumphant song of the *Trisagion* with all the angelic creatures, celestial bodies, the earth and the sea.[281]

The Anaphora of St John Chrysostom indicates that the cherubim and seraphim have six wings, are covered in eyes and intone the hymn of the thrice holy with thousands of archangels and myriads of angels.[282] The preface to the Anaphora of St Basil, in turn, evokes the Lord of heaven, whom the cherubim praise together with the angels, the archangels, the thrones, the dominions, the powers and the virtues. However, only the six-winged seraphim sing the *Trisagion*.[283]

The Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles introduces four-faced cherubim and six-winged seraphim singing the *Trisagion* together in the heavenly liturgy: 'Before and about You stand in company the four-faced cherubim and the six-winged seraphim. They cover their faces with two wings, and their feet with two wings and with two wings they fly towards each other. They glorify together with pure voices and divine melodies, crying out and saying: holy, holy, holy […].'[284] Contrary to what the scriptures might suggest, certain texts of the eucharistic liturgy confirm that cherubim and seraphim could exalt the divine holiness separately or in concert and could share this praise with the other members of the heavenly hierarchy.

278 *Ibid*., 347–357.
279 *Ibid*., 358–373.
280 Skubiszewski 2005, 359.
281 Greek version: Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 244–261; Syriac version: *ibid*., 269–275; Greek version with Latin translation: Mercier 1946, 198–201; Maronite Antiochian version: Moubarac 1984a, 212.
282 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 230–229.
283 *Ibid*., 230–243.
284 Hayek 1964, 336.



FIGURE 8 Jerusalem, Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, liturgical scroll, Hagios Stavros 109: Christ, the Virgin, a seraph and a cherub, second half of the 11th century

The Iconography. Liturgical Scrolls. Byzantine liturgical scrolls included phylacteries used by priests or bishops celebrating the eucharistic office. Most often, the part read by the officiant is inscribed. The majority of the surviving scrolls report the office according to the Liturgy of St Basil or of St John Chrysostom. Most have no illustrations, though several show a portrait of Basil or John at the beginning as the authors of the liturgical office. However, there are a few with other kinds of illustrations, quite often forming an iconographic counterpart to the accompanying orations.[285] A scroll of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Hagios Stavros 109 (second half of the 11th century), and one at Mount Athos, Lavra no. 2 (14th century), are particularly valuable in this respect.[286] The *Trisagion* is illustrated by including members of the two highest orders of the heavenly hierarchy.

In the scroll of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, the illustration of the *Trisagion*, recited by the priest during the Small Entrance, presents the office according to the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom and is quite faithful to this prayer.[287] The enthroned Christ is shown in the initial 'O' of the first word of the prayer (Fig. 8). On the right, the Virgin turns towards him in a position of prayer. In the

285 Marinis 2017, 310–318.

286 *Ibid.*; Vokotopoulos 2002, 96–123; Cutler and Spieser 1996, 235; Kepetzi 1979; Lichačeva 1974, 121–128; Grabar 1954, 161–199.

287 Marinis 2017, 317; Vokotopoulos 2002, 96–123; Grabar 1954, 172–173, figs 2–5.



FIGURE 9 Jerusalem, Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, liturgical scroll, Hagios Stavros 109: deacon–angels, second half of the 11th century

column of the text, a 'many-eyed' seraph, a 'six-winged' cherub, the archangels Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael and two other angels are represented. All of these depictions are inspired by the same prayer, which presents an image of Christ implored by the Virgin and the saints, praised by the triple *hagios* of the seraphim, glorified by the cherubim and adored by the other angelic hosts.[288] This miniature, which makes use of the main terms of the liturgical text of the Small Entrance, clearly associates the 'many-eyed' cherub and 'six-winged' seraph with the thrice holy hymn. However, the procession of the Great Entrance is associated with two deacon–angels waving the censer, thus displaying the duties of the deacons during this ceremony (Fig. 9). Other deacon–angels – one of whom waves the censer, while another carries the paten and chalice – can be found next to the Christ–priest in the presence of the apostles (Fig. 10).[289] This demonstrates to the scroll's viewers and users that the earthly liturgy is modelled after the liturgy performed by Christ and the angels in heaven.[290]

The illustration of the *Trisagion* also suggests that the whole heavenly court gathers around the divine majesty with the seraphim and cherubim at the time of the liturgical celebration, as in the liturgical and exegetical texts. It shows the heavenly Church's participation in the earthly liturgy. Indeed, the depiction in the vignette that precedes this illumination shows Christ in Majesty with the earthly Church. A large arch with a richly ornamented square frames

288 See p. 26 herein.

289 Marinis 2017, 315–316; Kepetzi 1982, 443–451; Grabar 1954, 174.

290 Marinis 2017, 315–316.



FIGURE 10 Jerusalem, Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, liturgical scroll, Hagios Stavros 109: deacon–angels and the Communion of the Apostles, second half of the 11th century

a quadrilobed cartouche occupied by the enthroned Christ (Fig. 11). On the upper edge the Virgin and Child are flanked by Sts Basil, John Chrysostom and George and an anonymous bishop without a nimbus, who may be the officiating bishop of the local church. Each of these figures is depicted in prayer under contiguous arches supported by columns, as observed in depictions found on certain apse walls.[291] The large arch holding all of these figures reflects an ecclesiastical building where the Divine Liturgy would be held.[292] Several other liturgical scrolls, such as the one in the National Library of Greece in Athens (MS cod. 211, fol. 110v, late 11th century) and in Patmos (Library of the monastery of St John, MS no. 707, 13th century), depict a domed church in which the author(s) of the liturgy celebrate(s) the eucharistic office under arcades in the same location.[293]

The miniature from the Mount Athos scroll, Lavra no. 2, accompanying the *Trisagion* of the Anaphora of St Basil and the relevant secret prayer, is an iconographic transposition of the words of the hymn and the prayer: it represents the entire universe proclaiming divine holiness. Christ in glory is depicted under a

291 This is the case at Mar Tadros in Behdidat (13th century), the almost destroyed church of Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Akkar el-Atiqa (12th–13th centuries) and Mar Elias en-Nahr in Kfar Qahel (13th century), among others.

292 Grabar 1954, 167–168.

293 Marinis 2017, 312–314. Grabar 1954, 167–168.



FIGURE 11 Jerusalem, Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, liturgical scroll, Hagios Stavros 109: Assembly of Saints, Christ, the Nativity and the Annunciation, second half of the 11th century

rainbow surrounded by angels on the left and saints on the right. The aureole of the Lord is supported by two seraphim and flanked by two cherubim. Below it, the earth is represented by crowds of men.[294] It is clear that this Theophany is intended to illustrate the hymn of the anaphoric *Trisagion*, which is sung by angels and men together.[295]

The illustration from the Mount Athos scroll expands on the liturgical text by implying the presence of seraphim and cherubim and other categories of angels participating in the triple ecclesiastical *hagios*, in the midst of the celebrants and the faithful, at the time of the eucharistic sacrifice. It is worth noting that the beginning of the text of the anaphora is accompanied by an image showing an officiating priest holding the scroll containing the anaphoric prayer in his hand, in front of an altar with a ciborium above it, with a deacon

294 Grabar 1954, 170; Bréhier 1940, pl. 1, 2.
295 See pp. 34–36 herein.

standing behind him. Above them is God, an old man with white hair, in a rainbow between two deeply bowed angels. Angelic cohorts crowd the right and left of the arch.[296] All of this underscores the manifestation of God and his angels at the moment when the priest pronounces the words of the anaphora, as dictated by the Fathers.

These two examples from the liturgical scrolls of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem and Mount Athos show seraphim and cherubim next to the heavenly Majesty as the initial actors in the liturgical *Trisagion*. Their absence in representations of other prayers that provide a theophanic image with the militias of heaven during the eucharistic office reinforces this interpretation. They are given a place in accordance with the content of the illustrated texts. Here, the liturgical aspect of the cherubim and seraphim derives naturally from the context and eucharistic function of the scroll. The liturgical manuscript provides an extremely convincing and explicit illustration of the prayers that present the Theophany during the Divine Liturgy. It also helps to anchor these theophanic representations in the present moment of the eucharistic office by providing them with a liturgical dimension. It is therefore likely that the presence of seraphim and cherubim in apsidal theophanies would emphasise their function as cantors of the ecclesiastical triple *hagios*, particularly when portrayed holding the standard with the *Trisagion*.

Seraphim and Cherubim: Singers of the Heavenly Liturgy. The illustrations on the liturgical scrolls expand on the content of the liturgical text by suggesting the presence of seraphim and cherubim singing the triple *hagios* of the Church in concert with the faithful and the clergy officiating the bloodless sacrifice. The pictorial decoration of the apse has often taken up this iconography by transposing the melody of divine holiness to the seraphim and cherubim.[297] This is the case, for example, in St Dodo in the monastic complex of David Gareja in Georgia (9th century) and in Tokalı Kilise (12th century) in Göreme in Cappadocia.

In the main church of St Dodo the figure of Christ, enthroned in a large aureole, stands out against a star-studded background and occupies the centre of the composition. He makes the gesture of speech with his right hand and holds a book in his left. Above him, the hand of God coming out of the heavens is united with the dove of the Holy Spirit. The central figure of Christ is flanked by two four-faced cherubim with six wings, like the seraphim of Isaiah (Is. 6:2–4) and the four living creatures of the Apocalypse (Rev. 4:8), which

296 Bréhier 1940, pl. I, 1.

297 On the seraphim and cherubim chanting the *Trisagion*, see Angheben 2008, 57–95.



FIGURE 12 Desert of David Gareja, domed church of St Dodo monastery, wall paintings, apsidal Theophany, 9th century

will be discussed below. The two six-winged cherubim are covered with eyes (Ezek. 10:12) and keep their mouths open with tongues out to utter the famous cry of the liturgical *Trisagion* of the anaphora:[298] 'Holy, holy, holy God Sabaoth' (inscription).[299] Each is equipped with two wheels of fire, a theme referencing the vision of Ezekiel, although the wheels accompanying the cherubim are without flames (Ezek. 1:15–21, 10:9–11). These iconographic features belong both to the cherubim and the seraphim. Michael and Gabriel stand at each end of the semi-dome. In the upper part of the conch personifications of the sun and the moon flank Christ (Fig. 12).[300]

298 Brightman 1896, 1: 265–266, 390–391, 394; Bornert 1966, 177.

299 Velmans 2002, 59; Velmans 1981, 74–75, fig. 19.

300 The composition of the Theophany and its inscription is currently in a severely deteriorated state; the eastern part with the figures of the archangel and the tetramorph has almost disappeared (Skhirtladze 1997, 179; Velmans 2002, 59; Velmans 1981, 74–75, fig. 19).

The hand of God and the dove of the Holy Spirit form, together with Christ, an image to manifest the divine nature of the Lord, as in the baptismal scenes, and also reveal the Trinity, the recipient of most of the prayers in the eucharistic office. The presence of the six-winged cherubim contradicts biblical descriptions. Tania Velmans suggested that this iconographic mutation could have resulted from confusion between the tetramorphs of Ezekiel and the four living creatures of the Apocalypse and that 'This is due to the imprecision of the second account of Ezekiel (10:14).'[301] She insisted that the image refers to the Apocalypse, since it is the only one to evoke the six wings, the eyes and the Song of the Living Creatures.[302] However, this iconography could be explained in light of the liturgical orations mentioned above, such as that of the Anaphora of the Twelve Apostles, which describes the seraphim and four-faced cherubim as six-winged beings singing the liturgical *Trisagion* together.[303] Much more significantly, the inscription accompanying these two four-faced cherubim confirms that this *Trisagion* is indeed that of the earthly liturgy practised inside the church and states that these angels sing the triple *hagios* in honour of the Enthroned in the liturgy of heaven. Thus, by contemplating the Theophany of the apse the faithful unite their praises with those of the angelic orders and join in the words spoken by the cleric during the eucharistic prayer. This combination of components borrowed from the cherubim – the wheels and ocellated wings – and from the seraphim – the six wings and the hymn of the *Trisagion* – not only presents the cherubim as participating in the heavenly liturgy, but also expresses a desire to combine these two angelic creatures, in accordance with the liturgical text, into a synthetic image adapted to the function of the place. This Theophany can be linked to the liturgy[304] and, in particular, to the anaphora of the eucharistic liturgy.

The northern apse of the new church of Tokalı Kilise features an image of Christ sitting under a semicircle of sky. His right hand is in a gesture of speech, and his left hand holds a large, ornately bound book, resting on his knee. On either side of the central figure is a pair of ocellated and flaming wheels. At a slightly higher level, we find a six-winged seraph on the left side, a pendant to a four-winged cherub on the right side (Fig. 13). These are joined by three introductory participles of the thrice holy hymn that precedes the anaphora: 'Shouting, clamouring' (near the seraphim) and 'Saying' (near the cherubim). The entire text of the liturgical *Trisagion* is reproduced above this, according

301 Velmans 2002, 58; Velmans 1981, 73.
302 Velmans 2002, 58–59; Velmans 1981, 73.
303 See p. 63 herein.
304 Skhirtladze 1997, 179.



FIGURE 13 Göreme, Tokalı Kilise, wall paintings, apsidal Theophany, 12th century

to the Liturgy of St Mark, on both sides of Christ: 'Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory.'[305] The two archangels Michael and Gabriel frame the composition. They hold an orb and a sceptre.[306]

The centre of the apse wall depicts the Hospitality of Abraham. The figure in the centre of the table is identified as Christ, due to his cruciferous nimbus.[307] He carries a scroll in his left hand and makes the gesture of blessing over a cup resembling a chalice placed on a semi-circular table. The shape of the cup resembles the one displayed on the table of the Last Supper. At the foot of the table is the sacrificial calf. The table is not in the centre of the panel, but in the axis of the apse. Thus, the central figure of the scene and table are aligned with the figure of Christ painted in the conch.[308] At the northern end of the same register, a very damaged representation can be made out, featuring the Communion of Mary of Egypt and the weighing of her actions by an angel carrying a scale in front of a devil, all under a fragment of sky from

305 Brightman 1896, 1: 132.

306 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 99. On this church, see Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 73–80; Jolivet-Lévy 2012, 131–141; Jolivet-Lévy 2006, 45–51, 55–85; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 96–108; Teteriatnikov 2011, 51–63; Warland 2000, 325–352.

307 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 100.

308 *Ibid.*

which the divine hand seems to emerge.[309] The monk Zosimus holds a chalice and presents Mary the Egyptian with the liturgical spoon.[310] In the southern part, beyond the Hospitality of Abraham, there are holy monks and ascetics. The inner sides of the responds of the apsidal arch features two bishops. The apsidal programme of Tokalı Kilise holds a strong eucharistic connotation, and the iconographic components of the Theophany make it easy to link it to the preface of the anaphora. The introductory participles of the *Trisagion* hymn, which accompany the cherub and the seraph, explicitly state that the two highest levels of the angelic hierarchy intone the liturgical threefold *hagios* together.[311] These images expand on the liturgical text by associating a cherub singing the seraphic chant with a seraph, as seen in the liturgical scrolls.

The scenes in the lower register further support a liturgical interpretation of the apsidal Theophany, with two scenes that are very closely related to the Eucharist: the Hospitality of Abraham[312] and the Communion of Mary of Egypt.[313] In the first the three heavenly guests sit before a table with a chalice that recalls the eucharistic sacrifice, especially because it echoes the chalice placed on the Last Supper table, the eucharistic symbol *par excellence*. Furthermore, the calf in front of the table on the same axis as the chalice and the two superimposed figures of Christ may refer to the sacrifice. Similarly, the fact that the guest table is placed in an axial position with the figure of Christ in the conch and the chalice and calf is significant. The Communion of Mary of Egypt administered by the monk carrying the chalice and the liturgical spoon also contains iconographic clues demonstrating a very strong eucharistic link. As such, the entire apsidal programme matches the liturgical function of the space.

The Seraphim: The Image of the Priest Distributing Communion. Chapter VI of Isaiah describes a seraph purifying a prophet's lips with a burning ember taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. This theme was used in a series of apsidal programmes, notably in Cappadocia,[314] Egypt[315] and Catalonia

309 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 76; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 100.

310 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 76; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 100.

311 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 75; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 100.

312 On the link between the Hospitality of Abraham and the Eucharist, see Ştefănescu 1936, 157–160.

313 Catherine Jolivet-Lévy also underlined the liturgical connotation of these two themes (Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 99–100).

314 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 32–34, 338–339.

315 At the haikal of St Mark in Abu Makar and St Anthony of the Red Sea (van Moorsel 1989, 124; Leroy 1976a, 576, 585–586; Leroy 1976b, 347–379).



FIGURE 14 Lleida, Santa Maria d'Àneu church (now in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona), wall painting, apsidal wall: seraphim purifying the lips of the prophets, late 11th–early 12th century

(Fig. 14).[316] Numerous exegetical texts equate the burning ember with the body of Christ and the Eucharist and compare the seraph's gesture with the priest distributing communion to the faithful. Examples include John Chrysostom,[317] Theodore of Mopsuestia,[318] John of Damascus,[319] Germanus of

316 At Santa Maria d'Àneu (Angheben 2008, 75–76). Although Catalonia did not belong to the Byzantine realm, the church has a great affinity with Byzantine programmes, and its apsidal iconography is remarkable for its strong eucharistic-liturgical resonance.

317 John Chrysostom 1862f, PG 49: 345; John Chrysostom 1859, PG 56: 139.

318 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 591–595.

319 John of Damascus 1864a, 13, PG 94: 1149.

Constantinople[320] and Pseudo-Sophronius (7th century).[321] In addition, many Eastern liturgies cite the eucharistic connotation of the episode, such as St James[322] and the Coptic[323] and Armenian[324] liturgies. The prayer of thanksgiving recited by the officiant after the communion of the faithful in the anaphora known as the 'sharer', used in the Syriac-Antiochian liturgy, demonstrates the eucharistic significance of the episode in question:

> O devouring fire that our fingers have carried, o fiery embers that our lips have touched; the seraphim could not have taken it with his hand, but the prophet received it and was purified by it; purify, Lord, the mouths, the lips and the hands which have carried your body; sanctify the bodies, souls and spirits which have received your blood; purify their hearts, thoughts, minds, senses and limbs; mark them with the seal of your cross and unfound in them your hidden power.[325]

In a miniature (second half of the 9th century; MS Vat.gr.699, fol. 72v) from the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, a 6th-century traveller, a seraph accompanies the angel purifying the lips of Isaiah (Fig. 15).[326] The illustration is accompanied by the entire text of the anaphoric *Trisagion*. This shows the role given to the seraphim as ministers of the heavenly liturgy and marks these compositions with a powerful eucharistic interpretation, while also placing them in the present time.

In church no. 1 of Güllüdere in Cappadocia (10th century),[327] the apse is decorated with Christ, enthroned between the four living creatures, carrying the book. They were accompanied by the liturgical participles introducing the *Trisagion* of the anaphora, a matter to which we shall return.[328] A large starry aureole surrounds this central group. On the left of the gap above it, there are the ocellated and flaming wheels, while the symmetrical pattern on the right has been lost. Above, there is the hand of God between busts of the sun and moon. On either side of the aureole, there are two tetramorphs covered with eyes. Then, to the left, a seraph can be seen near a kneeling Isaiah. The latter

320 Germanus of Constantinople 1984, 66; Germanus of Constantinople 1865, PG 98: 433.
321 Sophronius of Jerusalem 1865a, PG 87c: 3984, 3988.
322 Mercier 1946, 162.
323 Brightman 1896, I: 181–182.
324 *Ibid.*, 418.
325 Moubarac 1984a, 108.
326 Bucur 2019, fig. 6.1.
327 Wallace 1991, 214–218; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 27–29; Thierry 1983, I: 105–109.
328 See pp. 85–88 herein.



FIGURE 15 Vatican Library, *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes (MS Vat.gr.699, fol. 72v): Christ in Majesty, seraphim intoning the liturgical *Trisagion* and an angel purifying the lips of Isaiah, second half of the 9th century

raises his veiled hands (most likely an allusion to the sacrifice) towards the seraph, who holds the tongs of burning ember to his face, according to the text of the prophet (Is. 6:6–7), signifying that the angel purified his lips.[329]

The inclusion of this episode in the apsidal Theophany suggests that the main altar of the church is superimposed on a heavenly altar where the seraph performs a gesture akin to the priest administering communion and clearly provides a eucharistic reading for the scene.[330] Indeed, priests in the East used tongs to offer the Eucharist. According to the testimony of Estephan Douaihy,

329 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 27–29.

330 Angheben 2008, 75; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 33.

tongs were still in use in some churches in Lebanon and Cyprus during his time.[331] The name 'tongs' (λαβίς), probably taken from the prophet's vision, is applied to the liturgical spoon, the use of which in the distribution of communion seems to have increased from the 8th century onwards.[332]

The image of the Virgin is revealed in the tongs used by this angelic creature and in Christ in the embers. The embers are made of two materials, wood and fire, assimilated to the two natures of Christ, divine and human.[333] The ember then symbolises the consecrated bread that the priest, in the image of the seraphim, offers to the faithful.[334] According to the text of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the ministers of worship symbolise 'the spiritual hierarchs' holding the 'spiritual ember', which represents the body of Christ,[335] while the altar is a replica of the heavenly altar where the angelic powers concelebrate their liturgy.[336] It is in this context that we must analyse the depiction of Isaiah purified by the burning ember. This episode also recalls the sanctifying and purifying power of the Eucharist.[337]

This sort of programme, with a seraph performing a gesture in the heavenly liturgy similar to that of the cleric, allows the priest and the faithful to visualise the immaterial reality of the liturgy carried out in heaven and accomplished simultaneously on earth. The presence of the prophet here cannot be taken merely in the sense of a guarantor of the vision's veracity,[338] but rather represents the Old Testament's foreshadowing of humankind's participation in the sacred and in the eucharistic communion.[339]

Seraphim and Cherubim as Thurifers. In Lebanon, as in Catalonia, we find apsidal theophanies representing seraphim and cherubim swinging the censer. With its incandescent ember, the censer is likened to Mary, who received Christ in her womb and was not burnt.[340] The three chains symbolise the three hypostases of the Holy Trinity, and the loop tying them together symbolises their union through divine nature. The incense burning on the ember echoes the Lord's Passion and his sacrifice on the cross. The fragrant smoke that

331 Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 181.
332 Solovey 1970, 70, 303; Salaville 1932, 137–138. On communion spoons, see in particular Taft 1996a, 209–238.
333 Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 167.
334 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 33; Brinktrine 1942, 213–214.
335 Brightman 1908, 261–262, 392.
336 Bornert 1966, 78, 80–81, 177–180; Brightman 1908, 259.
337 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 329–330.
338 Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968, 135–144.
339 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 330.
340 Evangelatou 2017, 221.

spreads honours God, who accepted the sacrifice of the Lamb. By spreading, the smoke evokes the fruit of the Son's redemptive sacrifice, which provides mercy, forgiveness of sins and universal salvation. It also symbolises the prayers of the saints and of the faithful, rising to God.[341] Finally, incense is considered a sign of the Holy Spirit, according to the commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[342]

There is no scriptural text that directly gives a thuriferous function to seraphim or cherubim. However, several biblical passages could justify this depiction; for example, those mentioning embers seen in the middle of the tetramorphs of Ezekiel (Ezek. 1:4), smoke filling the temple of God to the cries of the *Trisagion* raised by seraphim (Is. 6:4), the arrangement of the altar of incense before the Ark of the Covenant (Ex. 40:5), Gabriel's appearance to Zechariah, in which the latter received the charge of the altar of incense (Luke 1:19), and the angel with the censer of the Apocalypse (Rev. 8:3–4).[343]

The liturgical texts also do not explicitly correlate these two higher ranks of the heavenly hierarchy with the act of incensing. However, in some Eastern liturgies, one can find prayers that not only attribute the rite of ecclesiastical incense to the irreproachable ministers, but also mention that the earthly Church is merely the image of the heavenly Church. One such prayer is the prayer of forgiveness in the Syriac-Antiochian liturgy, recited by the priest as he incenses the gifts:

> God of goodness, You have called into existence everything that exists from nothing. You have established for your service ministers of soul and body, cherubim with countless eyes, seraphim with six wings, thrones and dominions and cohorts of fire and spirit. You have founded a Church on earth in the image of the Church in heaven, so that angels and men together may give glory to your lordship. You have adorned it with a multitude of prophets and apostles, martyrs and confessors, doctors of the true faith and priests of truth. You have populated it with monks and hermits, virgins and anchorites who have won the crown of victory after long struggles. You have established in it irreproachable ministers to burn incense in your honour, to distribute your body and blood and to accept your Divinity.[344]

341 Chevalier 2019, 4–6; Palazzo 2014, 336; Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 167–168.

342 Bornert 1966, 60.

343 On the textual sources which may have inspired this representation, see Angheben 2008, 77–84.

344 Moubarac 1984a, 176.

One might assume that the angels, waving a censer at the throne–altar of Christ in a Theophany arranged above the high altar where the Christ–Host rests, reproduce a gesture comparable to that of the ministers incensing the holy species.

The main oblation incensing is carried out by the priest at the beginning of the anaphora and after the prayer of consecration, thereby associating the incense with the Eucharist.[345] In fact, the sacrifice of the cross, to which the burning of incense refers, is constantly repeated by the bloodless sacrifice of the Church. Thus, the smoke sacrifice of incense is offered to God just as the sacrifice of bread and wine is offered to him. Furthermore, it is asked that this offering be accepted by God as he accepted the sacrifices of the Old Law to forgive the offences of humankind. As an example, the prayer of incense spoken by the cleric after the second antiphon in the Liturgy of St James states: 'O God, who accepted the gifts of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah and Abraham, the incense of Aaron and Zechariah, accept also from the hands of us sinners this incense for an odour of a sweet smell, for the remission of our sins and those of all your people.'[346] After placing the gifts on the altar, the priest recites a similar prayer.[347] It is significant that, in another prayer, the officiant asks God to accept the eucharistic sacrifice in the Liturgy of St James and the Liturgy of St Basil, as he accepted the Old Testament offerings.[348] The Liturgy of St Mark unites these two sacrifices in a meaningful way by preceding the anaphoric preface and the seraphic hymn with the following prayer: 'On your heavenly altar accept our offerings today, just as You accepted the gifts of your righteous Abel, the sacrifice of our father Abraham and the incense of Zechariah.'[349] These passages demonstrate the correlation between the sacrifice of the 'sweet smell' and the eucharistic sacrifice in liturgical literature.

The seraphim flanking Christ in the Theophany in the semi-dome of Sant Pau i Sant Pere in Esterri de Cardós in Catalonia swing the censer in an explicit manner over a series of liturgical objects: chalices, thuribles and reliquary horns (Fig. 16). The presence of the chalices attests to the eucharistic significance of the image and ensures a link between the rite of incense and that of the sacrament.[350]

345 On the oblation incense ritual in the Byzantine liturgy, see Taft 1975, 154–157.
346 Mercier 1946, 162–165.
347 See p. 32 herein.
348 *Ibid.*
349 Brightman 1896, 1: 129.
350 Angheben 2008, 84.



FIGURE 16 Esterri de Cardós, Sant Pau i Sant Pere church (now in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona), wall painting, apsidal Theophany: a six-winged angel swinging a censer, second half of the 12th century

Two deacon–angels in the margin of the Communion of the Apostles, one carrying the gifts and the other swinging the censer, illustrate the procession of the Great Entrance on the liturgical scroll Hagios Stavros 109 of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, as we have already noted (see Fig. 10).[351] This illustration is one of the earliest depictions of this liturgical ceremony. By wearing the liturgical vestments of deacons, the angels do indeed have a liturgical aspect, and the eucharistic resonance is unmistakable here. During the Middle Ages the association of thurifer deacon–angels with eucharistic themes was

351 Vokotopoulos 2002, 96–123; Grabar 1954, fig. 10.

widespread in sanctuary decorations. The deacon–angels then perform the same incensing ministry accorded to the seraphim and cherubim in some apsidal theophanies. Does this represent a semantic relationship between these angelic orders? The essential point remains that the thuriferous seraphim and cherubim in apsidal programmes perform a gesture similar to the priest or deacon in the earthly liturgy.

Rhipidia. The *rhipidion* is a fan used in the sacred liturgy. The oldest evidence of it comes from the *Constitutiones Apostolorum*, composed in the 4th century (VIII.12), which states that, during the celebration of the holy mysteries, from the offering to communion, two deacons, standing at the two ends of the altar, waved fans, usually made of peacock feathers, continuously over the gifts. Their main purpose was either to moderate the heat that might bother the celebrant or brush away flies or insects from the bread or chalices.[352] It is described as follows: 'On either side of the altar, two deacons shall each hold a fan of fine membranes, or a peacock's feather or even a light canvas; they shall discreetly chase away the small flies, so that they do not come near the cups [...].'[353] Theodore of Mopsuestia, who drew a connection between the Passion of Christ and the eucharistic rites, compared the deacons waving *rhipidia* over the holy species on the high altar to the angels standing around the Tomb of Christ:

> We believe that Christ is placed on the altar as in a kind of tomb. That is why the deacons spread cloths over the altar as if they were burial shrouds; others wave fans over the sacred body and guard it so that nothing will fall on it. By this ceremony, they keep the greatness of the body laid there; it is indeed a custom of the great of this world to wave fans over a dead person placed on a mourning bed. It is thus that the sacred, formidable and incorruptible body of Christ lets itself be deposited, he who, after an interval of time, will rise to an immortal existence. It is necessary that those who are assigned to this office, standing before him on all sides, render him this honour and by this pageantry express the greatness of the body which rests there [...]. And in remembrance of those angels at the tomb, who during his passion and death assisted our Lord, today the deacons surround the altar and wave fans.[354]

352 Immerzeel and Snelders 2004, 116–119; Metzger 1987, 496; Mango 1986, nn. 31–32; Braun 1973, 642–647; Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 509; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 170–171; Joannes Moschus 1865, PG 87c: 3081A.

353 Metzger 1987, 496.

354 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 509.

This passage makes a clear connection between the angels with their wings and the deacons with the *rhipidia*. The *Historia Ecclesiastica* and the liturgical treatise on the icon of Christ of Edessa (10th century) also mention the use of this liturgical instrument, which symbolises the presence of the six-winged seraphim[355] and the 'many-eyed' cherubim.[356]

In his 'Treatise on the Altar' Estephan Douaihy discussed the symbolism and function of the *rhipidia* in liturgical ceremonies extensively, obviously drawing on the writings of his predecessors:

> The use of *rhipidia* is traditional; it is prescribed in chapter XIX of the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* that two deacons stand on the sides of the altar and exhibit fans made of delicate materials to drive away small flies and prevent them from falling into the chalice.
>
> It is also written in the *Didascalia* that the bishop celebrates standing in front of the altar with the curtain drawn, with priests and deacons who are inside waving the *rhipidia* around him like the wings of the cherubim.
>
> In the Rule of St Dominic, it is prescribed for deacons, if a fly appears, to brush it away with a fan and push it aside so as not to disturb the celebrant. Until now it is still in use on the island of Malta and in the city of Messina in Sicily.[357]

Rhipidia, continued Douaihy, are used for the following reasons:

> Casting away the insects that might fall on the Eucharist indicates the elimination of troubling thoughts and the elimination of doubts sent by evil forces, so that our participation is effective. This is why the deacon waves the *rhipidion* to urge the faithful to unify their minds and thoughts to resist the enemy of faith. Moreover, the *rhipidia* are waved to venerate the presence of the Lord and to honour his body, he who has given humanity triumph over sin and death, just as soldiers glorify their victorious king with tambourines and trumpets. This is also reproduced by the sound of the wings of cherubim, according to the revelation of Ezekiel (Ezek. 10:4–5).

355 The same symbolism was used by Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite in his *De Ecclesiastica Hierarchica* (Braun 1973, 645).

356 Brightman 1896, I: 394.

357 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 171–172.

> When the *rhipidia* are waved and when the deacons raise their voices to say 'holy, holy, holy', the angels and their flight around the throne of the divine majesty are symbolised, as contemplated by Isaiah. This is why the Lord prescribed two golden cherubim with outstretched wings (Ezek. 25:18). The deacons also wave the *rhipidia* at the time of the epiclesis, while the priests wave their hands, thus signifying the descent of the Spirit onto the body of the Lord, as he descended on Christ in the Jordan in the appearance of a dove ('And the star came and stood over the place where the young Child was', Matt. 3:16). Gabriel said to Mary: 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; so the holy one to be born will be holy and he will be called the Son of God.' Christ was born in the same way on the altar at the time of the epiclesis by the power of the Holy Spirit through the bread and wine. This is why the celebrant said during the invitation of the Holy Spirit: 'Hear us Lord, and may your Living and Holy Spirit come and rest upon me and upon these gifts.' Liturgical fans are also waved over the oblation to evoke the angels' astonishment and perplexity when the Lord offered his life on the cross for our salvation and for the salvation of the world. In this way, the heavenly beings glorify his abundant mercy.[358]

It is understandable that the use of *rhipidia* is intimately linked to the eucharistic service. It evokes divine presence within the church and symbolises the waving of angel wings before the majesty of the Lord. By waving their wings, the seraphim, the cherubim and all the angelic creatures exalt the heavenly Sovereign on the throne of his glory, as depicted in scenes of the apsidal Theophany. Like the angelic hierarchy, the deacons would welcome his momentary coming to the real altar by waving the *rhipidia*.

Rhipidia were widely used in communion scenes of the apostles and the officiating bishops. They are generally carried by different categories of angels assisting Christ or the bishops at the altar. Take, for example, the Communion of the Apostles in the apse of St Sophia in Kyiv (11th century), where two deacon–angels wave the *rhipidia* above an altar with the main liturgical vessels.[359] Christ, depicted twice, distributes the Eucharist to the apostles in the form of bread and wine. This image reflects the temporal liturgy practised within the church: Christ represents the officiating priest, and the angels

358 *Ibid.*, 171–173.

359 Varalis 2014, 54; Lazarev 1966, 39–42, 227, figs 21–24; Povstenko 1954, 117–120, pls 52–60.



FIGURE 17 Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC, the Riha *rhipidion*, metal, 6th century



FIGURE 18 Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi, *rhipidion* of Parsman Laklakisdze from Zarzma, metal, 11th century

carrying the *rhipidia* represent the deacons usually beside the cleric in liturgical ceremonies. This expressly emphasises the eucharistic function of these liturgical fans.

As symbols of seraphim and cherubim, *rhipidia* are frequently decorated with images of angels. The Riha *rhipidion* (6th century), part of the Kaper Koraon treasure discovered in 1908 in Syria, shows a tetramorphic cherub with four wings and two wheels on both sides (Fig. 17).[360] Similarly, the central medallion of the 11th-century *rhipidion* of Parsman Laklakisdze from Zarzma, held in the Museum of Fine Arts, Tbilisi, displays a six-winged tetramorph, while the four medallions surrounding it each depict two angels (Fig. 18).[361]

The decoration of liturgical fans with the cherubim or seraphim motif is also widespread in painting. The apse scene of the Officiating Bishops at Bezirhane Kilisesi (13th century) in Cappadocia shows two small deacon–angels carrying a *rhipidion* decorated with a seraph above the holy table where the

360 Immerzeel and Snelders 2004, 113–139; Boyd 1998, 162, figs 6.8–6.9.
361 Eastmond 2011, fig. 5.4b.



FIGURE 19 Ači, church of St George, wall painting, apsidal Theophany–Deesis, late 13th century

Christ Child is lying on a paten.[362] The same motif can be found on the liturgical fans of the two deacon–angels assisting Christ in the Communion scene at Karabaş Kilise, also in Cappadocia (11th–12th centuries).[363] In this sense, the *rhipidia* played the role of the cherubim and seraphim flanking the Christ–Host on his heavenly altar.

The conch of the church of St George in Ači (Georgia, late 13th century) shows Christ in Majesty surrounded by a seraph and a cherub each holding a *rhipidion* (Fig. 19),[364] with the Virgin and St John the Baptist standing at either end. The fact that the angelic creatures hold a fan is very significant: by waving the *rhipidion* over Christ, enthroned on the heavenly altar, they echo the deacons waving the *rhipidia* over the Christ–Host on the main altar. The *rhipidion* thus asserts, without any ambiguity, the eucharistic function of these

362 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 118, fig. 12; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 315–317.

363 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 266–270.

364 Velmans 2002, 68–71; Velmans 1981, 89–92; Velmans and Alpago Novello 1996, 41; Losebidze 1989.

two angelic categories and, subsequently, the eucharistic meaning of this Theophany–Deesis. In addition, the procession of angels, arranged in a double row below the Theophany–Deesis, with their hands extended and their gaze fixed upon Christ, evokes the parallel imagery of the double row of apostles in scenes of the Communion.

2.2.1.4 *The Iconography of the Four Living Creatures*

The four living creatures – the man, the lion, the eagle and the bull – are one of the most frequent components in the Theophany theme. They are most often associated with the throne or the aureole of Christ and are sometimes accompanied by inscriptions that identify them as the four evangelists: the man for Matthew, the lion for Mark, the eagle for John and the bull for Luke.

Scriptural Sources. The vision in chapter IV of Revelation describes the four living creatures as six-winged beings with eyes everywhere, standing around the heavenly throne. The first looks like a lion, the second like a bull, the third like a human being and the fourth like an eagle. They are, along with the Elders, the actors in the heavenly liturgy who never cease to repeat the glorifying cry: 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is and is to come!' (Rev. 4:8).

These four creatures were interpreted in two different ways by Christian exegetes: they sometimes signify the four aspects of the incarnate Christ, who is simultaneously man in his birth, bull in his death, lion in his resurrection and eagle in his ascension; sometimes they signify the four evangelists, compared to the rivers of paradise, which flow from the same source. The latter interpretation has predominated.[365]

Liturgical Sources. A passage attributed to St Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople, refers to the four living creatures as the cantors of the anaphoric *Trisagion*: 'The animals with four faces cry out, responding to each other. The first, the one that looks like a lion, cries out: holy. The second, the one that looks like a bull, cries out: holy. The third, the one who looks like an eagle, cries out: holy. The fourth, the one like a man, cries out: Lord Sabaoth.'[366] This commentary also emphasises the participles introducing this hymn in the Byzantine liturgy by linking each of them to one of the four living creatures.[367] The author established an equivalence between the four participles and the

365 Mouilleron 2020, 31; Bogaert 2001, 457–478.
366 Germanus of Constantinople 1865, PG 98: 432–433.
367 *Ibid.*, 429CD.

names of the living creatures: the eagle, ἄδοντα, 'singing', the bull, βοώντα, 'shouting', the lion, κεκραγότα, 'clamouring', and the man, λέγοντα, 'saying'.[368]

The scriptural and liturgical sources therefore attribute various functions to the four living creatures. They could represent aspects of Christ or embody the four evangelists; they could also utter the seraphic cry of the heavenly liturgy in the same way as the seraphim and cherubim.

The Iconography. As symbols of the evangelists, the four living creatures can refer to the reading of the Gospel. This interpretation, suitable for the textual and liturgical sources, can easily be applied to Gospel bindings or pulpits featuring a Theophany with these four creatures.[369] For apsidal theophanies, however, this interpretation lacks strong arguments, apart from the presence of the Gospel verses displayed on the book that Christ holds.

They could also be related to the rite of the Ostension of the Gospel, which precedes the Blessing of the Throne during the rite of the Small Entrance.[370] The celebrant raises the Gospel and shows it to the people, representing the ostension of Christ at his first manifestation. Moreover, with his gesture of speech with the book – closed or open – sometimes bearing Gospel verses, Christ enunciated his own word and invited the spectators to contemplate him and read his word, revealed through the scriptures of the four evangelists. In fact, 'the first ostentation of the Gospel, the closed book, represents the first appearance of the Saviour', while the open book manifests his most perfect revelation revealed by reading the Gospel scriptures.[371] Yet, in order to apply these levels of interpretation to the living creatures, we would need clearer clues, which we scarcely have.

The living creatures were also seen as pulling the divine chariot, filling the same role as the tetramorphic cherubim in Ezekiel. This interpretation has already been applied to the unhistorical theophanies of Bawit:[372] in room 6, chapel XVII and chapel XLV (see Figs 2, 3, 4), the four creatures of the Apocalypse are associated with the wheels of Ezekiel that move the divine quadriga. Since these theophanies are part of a very marked eucharistic context, as noted above,[373] it could be assumed that the living creatures collaborate in the liturgy by ensuring the movement of Christ from heaven to the church where the celebrant invokes him daily. Consequently, they indicate his

368 On the liturgical participles that accompany the four living creatures, see Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 338; Jerphanion 1930, 250–259.

369 For these different readings, see Angheben 2011a, 337–338.

370 See pp. 25–26 herein.

371 Cabasilas 1943, 132–133.

372 Angheben 2011a, 340; Iacobini 2000, 161–162; Christe 1996, 123.

373 See pp. 48–50 herein.

presence among the monks and clergy during the Holy Liturgy.[374] However, this hypothesis does not exclude other levels of reading, such as that of Christ's eschatological return.

Another liturgical function could be assigned to the living creatures. They may have participated in the liturgical chanting of the *Trisagion* in the apsidal theophanies in which they are almost systematically present.[375] This was pointed out above in regard to the Pantocrator cave of Latmus (see Fig. 5).[376] The inscription 'Holy, holy, holy God Sabaoth, heaven and earth are full of your glory' on the edge of the mandorla and the liturgical *Trisagion* on the books of the four living creatures affirm that this is the hymn of the liturgy. This all goes to indicate that the living creatures are singers of the heavenly Divine Liturgy.[377] In this regard, in Cappadocian paintings there is an important series of apsidal programmes of the Theophany and the Theophany–Deesis associating the participles in the introduction of the liturgical *Trisagion* with the four living creatures, as set out in the passage by St Germanus of Constantinople.[378] We shall look at just one example: the church of St John no. 4 in the region of Çavuşin in Cappadocia (10th century).[379]

Here, the apse in the south chapel is decorated with what is now a very damaged image of Christ enthroned with the four living creatures. Three of the four participles introducing the *Trisagion* are still visible: 'singing' next to the eagle, the man 'saying' and the bull 'shouting'. An aureole with a starry border surrounds this central group. Below the glory, two cherubim appear symmetrically (though the left one has been destroyed). These are labelled 'tetramorphon'. On each side, a seraph labelled 'six-winged' is placed near a kneeling prophet. The seraph on the north side holds a burning ember with tongs, motioning towards Isaiah. This is confirmed by an inscription above the prophet: 'Isaiah receiving the divine fiery ember by means of tongs'. To the south, the object the seraph presents to Ezekiel is indecipherable, but we can read: 'And you, man, open your mouth and take what I give you' (Ezek. 2:8). The archangels Michael and Gabriel, in a pose of adoration, are on either side of the composition.[380]

374 Angheben 2011a, 340.
375 *Ibid.*, 343–348; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 338.
376 See pp. 50–52 herein.
377 Angheben 2011a, 346; Angheben 2011b, 115; Velmans 2006, 45–46; Ihm 1989, 45.
378 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 338; Jerphanion 1930, 250–259.
379 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 37–40; Thierry 1983, 1: 135–181.
380 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 37–40; Thierry 1983, 1: 135–181.

The introductory participles in the anaphoric *Trisagion*, according to St Germanus's text, explicitly state that the four living creatures officiate as cantors of this liturgical hymn. In addition, the terms 'tetramorphon' and 'six-winged' that label the cherubim and seraphim respectively are words not found in the scriptures, whereas they are very frequent in liturgical texts, as we have seen.[381] These terms demonstrate that the two angelic beings also participate in the eucharistic service that takes place jointly in heaven and on earth. The composition's inclusion of the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel strongly supports the seraphim's eucharistic purpose. As previously mentioned, the purification of Isaiah's lips by means of the burning ember evokes the sanctifying and purifying power of the Eucharist. Likewise, the iconography of Ezekiel swallowing a book would carry the same eucharistic interpretation.[382] Moreover, Arethas of Caesarea (860–931) applies the passage of the burning ember to Ezekiel.[383]

This Theophany thus includes iconographic and epigraphic clues confirming the liturgical function of the four living creatures, the cherubim and the seraphim. As a whole, it helps place the scene of the Theophany within the framework of the eucharistic liturgy and points to the anaphora. However, this hypothesis is difficult to demonstrate if not corroborated by convincing epigraphic and iconographic evidence, such as that seen in the church at Çavuşin.

2.2.1.5 *Celestial Bodies*

The sun and the moon, a recurrent motif in apsidal programmes, imbued the scene with cosmic symbolism (Fig. 20). Their imagery derives from the Eastern tradition of personifying divinities. Taken up by Roman civilisation in imperial representations, this iconographic tradition sought to glorify and magnify the accompanying figure, placing it among the celestial bodies.[384] These silent beings are considered as attributes of the prophetic visions that give the apsidal image of the Theophany an eschatological connotation – that of the Second Parousia – although the prophetic texts make no mention of them. However, these astronomical motifs appear in scenes of the Last Judgement only on the sky rolled up by the angel to signify their definitive disappearance (Is. 34:4; Rev. 6:14).

381 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 338; Jerphanion 1930, 253.
382 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 32–34, 338–339.
383 Arethas of Caesarea 1863, PG 106: 616.
384 Velmans 2002, 59; Velmans 1981, 74; Hélou 1998, 42.



FIGURE 20 Desert of David Gareja, domed church of St Dodo monastery, wall painting, apsidal Theophany: the personifications of the sun and the moon frame the head of Christ, 9th century

Scriptural and Liturgical Sources. Several biblical passages referring to the end of time corroborate this notion of a sky with the stars, sun and moon eclipsed: 'Before them the earth shakes, the heavens tremble, the sun and moon are darkened, and the stars no longer shine' (Joel 2:10); 'The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine' (Joel 3:15); 'The stars of heaven and their constellations will not show their light. The rising sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give light' (Is. 13:10); 'All the stars in the sky will be dissolved and the heavens rolled up like a scroll; all the starry host will fall like withered leaves from the vine, like shrivelled figs from the fig tree' (Is. 34:4); 'When I snuff you out, I will cover the heavens and darken their stars; I will cover the sun with a cloud, and the moon will not give its light' (Ezek. 32:7); 'Immediately after the distress of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken' (Matt. 24:29); 'But in those days, following that distress, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light' (Mark 13:24); 'The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord' (Acts 2:20); and 'I watched

as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The heavens receded like a scroll being rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place' (Rev. 6:12–14).

Nevertheless, the scriptures and the exegetical, hymnographic and liturgical tradition confer these astral elements with an important function that sheds light on why they might be included in apsidal compositions: the glorification and praise of the Lord reigning in the heavenly kingdom. Psalm 148, sung during the midnight and matins prayers, imparts the following:

> Praise the Lord from the heavens [...]; praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his heavenly hosts. Praise him, sun and moon; praise him, all you shining stars. Praise him, you highest heavens and you water above the skies [...]. Praise the Lord from the earth, you great sea creatures and all ocean depths, lightning and hail, snow and clouds, stormy winds that do his bidding, you mountains and all hills, fruit trees and all cedars, wild animals and all cattle, small creatures and flying birds, kings of the earth and all nations, you princes and all rulers on earth, young men and women, old men and children. Let them praise the name of the Lord, for his name alone is exalted; his splendour is above the earth and the heavens. And he has raised up for his people a horn, the praise of all his faithful servants, of Israel, the people close to his heart.

This psalm exemplifies one of the main themes of the whole psalter: praise. In this version of the Liturgy of the Hours, an appeal is made to the angels, celestial bodies and cosmic elements (highest heavens and waters above the skies); in the second part, to the sea monsters, mountains and all the hills, the trees of the orchards, all of the cedars, the beasts and the birds. Finally, man joins in.[385] From this hymn, we discover that mute creatures are able to praise the Lord. Indeed, the psalmist addressed them directly, so that they may magnify their Creator through song.

In the Book of Daniel, the three young Jews 'with one voice praised and glorified and blessed God in the furnace':

385 St Francis of Assisi composed a hymn very similar to Psalm 148, indicating the importance of this theme in the West as well. The Canticle of Creatures includes: 'Praised be You, my Lord, with all your creatures, especially Sir Brother sun [...].'

> Blessed are You, O Lord, God of our ancestors and to be praised and highly exalted forever [...]. Blessed are You in the temple of your holy glory. Blessed are You who look into the depths from your throne on the cherubim and to be praised and highly exalted forever. Bless the Lord, all you waters above the heavens; sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever [...]. Bless the Lord, sun and moon, sing praise to him and highly exalt him forever. Bless the Lord, stars of heaven [...] all rain and dew [...] all you winds [...] fire and heat [...] winter cold and summer heat [...] dews and falling snow [...] ice and cold [...] frosts and snows [...] nights and days [...] light and darkness [...] lightning and clouds [...] mountains and hills [...] all that grows in the ground [...] seas and rivers [...] you whales and all that swim in the waters [...] all birds of the air [...] all wild animals and cattle [...] all people on earth [...] you priests of the Lord [...] you servants of the Lord [...] spirits and souls of the righteous [...] you who are holy and humble in heart [...] all who worship the Lord, bless the God of gods, sing praise to him and give thanks to him, for his mercy endures forever. (Dan. 3:51–90)

The 'Hymn of the Three Jews' is most frequently sung during the midnight prayers.

This universal vision of praise is also alluded to during the Divine Liturgy. According to Cyril of Jerusalem, the celebrant invokes the sun, moon, stars and all visible and invisible creatures to celebrate the Lord together with all the angelic creatures at the beginning of the anaphora.[386] It is in this same vein that the preface of the Anaphora of St James added the sun, moon, stars, earth and sea to the angelic creatures singing the glory of the Lord.[387] It is worth noting that the Liturgy of St James was initially widely used in the East. It had a significant impact on the texts of the entire Antiochian eucharistic liturgy, which in turn provided the source for the two main Byzantine liturgies, those of St John Chrysostom and of St Basil the Great.[388] According to the anaphora:

> Whom the heavens of heavens praise, and all the host of them; the sun and the moon, and all the choir of the stars; earth, sea and all that is in them; Jerusalem, the heavenly assembly and church of the first-born that are written in heaven; spirits of just men and of prophets; souls of martyrs and of apostles; angels, archangels, thrones, dominions, principalities

386 See p. 35 herein.
387 Tarby 1972, 33–34.
388 Skubiszewski 2005, 359.

> and authorities and dread powers; and the many-eyed cherubim and the six-winged seraphim, which cover their faces with two wings, their feet with two and with two they fly, crying one to another with unresting lips, with unceasing praises: with loud voice singing the victorious hymn of your majestic glory, crying aloud, praising, shouting and saying: 'Holy, holy, holy, O Lord of Sabaoth, the heaven and the earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest; blessed is he that comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest.'[389]

The Anaphora of St James supports a vision of the cosmos in which both heavenly and earthly creatures, under the gaze of the Eternal, live in mutual interrelation to exalt the holiness of the Creator. By singing the triple *hagios*, people unite in 'theology', that is to say, in the glorification of God, which here belongs to this cosmic community and brotherhood.[390] Moreover, the 'stellar beings' in the Anaphora of St James sing the *Trisagion* in the same way as their cohorts in the eternal universe: the angels and saints. This cosmic praise of the Lord of the universe responds to exegetical interpretations of the *Trisagion* hymn. The celestial bodies therefore carry a similar liturgical connotation to the seraphim, cherubim and four living creatures. However, this does not imply that this potential liturgical aspect is the only one imaginable for these astral motifs.

The prayer of blessing for the water during baptism also evokes the celestial bodies as singers of divine glory. Indeed, hymns and countless liturgical prayers present the sun, moon and stars as 'spokespeople' in the acclamation of divine holiness in its higher court.

The Iconography. These celestial bodies, widely used in sanctuary compositions of the Theophany,[391] could collaborate with the other members of the heavenly court in the permanent glorification of Christ in Majesty, which would then make it possible to imagine the whole universe participating in the heavenly liturgy simultaneously with the earthly liturgy. It is this quality of singers of the liturgy of heaven that may have motivated the systematic personification of these voiceless bodies in apsidal programmes. Significant in this respect is the apsidal Theophany–Deesis in the chapel of the Four Living Creatures in the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea in Egypt (see Fig. 29). Here, the sun and moon, accompanied by angels and the living creatures, are

389 Moubarac 1984a, 212; Mercier 1946, 198–201.

390 Angels praise God with 'endless theologies': the *Trisagion* (Mercier 1946, 200).

391 Especially in Cappadocia; see Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 9, 16, 24, 27, 34, 38, 41, 59, 97, 109, 113–114, 138, 162, 166, 167–168, 181, 183, 221, 226, 246, 268, 301, 305.

associated to the *Trisagion* and the 'Hymn of the Angels' song in the Coptic liturgy, which clearly affirms their laudatory quality and relates the image to the present temporality of the liturgy.[392]

In any case, the sun and moon clearly make it possible to set aside the eschatological dimension usually attributed to apsidal theophanies. The course of time stops, and history reaches its final end; thus, the sun and moon, which make up the clock defining the current time, vanish for good. This would explain their total absence in the eschatological Theophany of the Last Judgement and would instead provide a present temporality for the apsidal theophanies and place these compositions in the practice of the daily liturgy. This hypothesis would then situate the intercession of the Virgin and St John the Baptist in the theme of the Theophany in the liturgical space in the present.

2.2.2 The Theophany–Deesis

At the end of the period of Byzantine Iconoclasm, when the image of the Virgin almost always occupied the apsidal conch in Byzantium and became the most important figure in religious buildings, after the figure of Christ had moved from the apse to the dome, a drastic change began to occur in the apsidal programmes of the Christian East. The two main actors of the Deesis,[393] the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist, began to take a place under the image of the Theophany, in the lower registers of the apse, with apostles and holy bishops surrounding them. This can be seen, for example, in Dörtkilise in Tao-Klarjeti (Turkey, 10th century), where the Virgin is depicted as an orant, a figure in a posture of prayer, with the Forerunner. The latter indicates Christ in the apse's conch with one hand and with the other unfurls a phylactery, the inscription of which has been completely lost. Apostles flank the two figures.[394] A similar type of representation can be found in Haçlı Kilise (10th century)[395] and St Simeon in the Zelve Valley (10th century),[396] both in Cappadocia. In Haçlı Kilise (see Fig. 27) the Forerunner carries the phylactery with a verse from John: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' (John 1:29), while in Zelve he shows the verses: 'I am the voice of one calling in the wilderness' (John 1:23) and 'Prepare the way of the Lord' (Matt. 3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4).

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392 See pp. 118–119 herein.

393 The Deesis generally occupies privileged locations (vaults and the upper parts of walls) in Byzantine programmes.

394 Thierry and Thierry 1975, 74–86; Velmans 2006, 56.

395 Lemaigre Demesnil 2010, 47–50; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 50–53, pl. 39; Thierry 1983, 1: 245–254; Thierry 1974, 5, fig. 19.

396 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 134–135; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 7–10; Rodley 1985, 189–192.

His right hand is raised towards Christ in the conch, as in Dörtkilise and elsewhere. This gesture of the Precursor, which is totally absent in scriptural texts, draws attention to prayers granting him the quality of august intercessor to the incarnate Word, giving particular importance to the gesture of his hand and finger, which he uses to point to the Son of God.[397]

The basis for these programmes with the Virgin and the Baptist in the lower register under the Theophany organised around Christ in Majesty is age-old and probably originated in Palestine.[398] The Bobbio ampulla no. 20 (6th century) provides clear evidence for this: Christ is seated on a rainbow, and four angels support his glory; lower down, he is followed by the praying Virgin surrounded by the Baptist and his father, Zechariah.[399]

This type of apsidal decoration, which brings together in a single space the themes of Theophany and intercession, may have smoothed the gradual movement of the figures of the Virgin and John the Baptist towards the conch to join the initial protagonists of the Theophany, Christ and the angels, as Tania Velmans has shown.[400] Transferred to the conch, the Virgin and the Forerunner take on, over time, a major role near the throne of God, while the celestial powers and other common elements of the Theophany tend to disappear or become ancillary. This combination of the elements of the Theophany and the two intercessors of the Deesis gave rise to a new composition or version of the apsidal Theophany, identified as the Theophany–Deesis.[401]

The theme is predominant in most apses of medieval churches in the Eastern Christian world (Georgia, Armenia, Asia Minor, Syria, Palestine, Egypt, Nubia, Ethiopia). However, it is the Theotokos that prevails at the same time in the apses of Constantinople, as in the whole Byzantine Empire, apart from Cappadocia. In Byzantium the Theophany–Deesis generally appears in an apsidal conch in cases of funerary sites. It is also found in small churches, such as on the Greek island of Crete and in the Peloponnese, in southern Italy and

397 See, for example, Mercenier and Paris 1953, 250, 260, 307.

398 This type of apsidal decoration seems to reveal the vitality of an age-old tradition that probably dates back to the Early Christian era, as attested by the decoration of the Bobbio ampulla no. 20 (6th century) and a miniature in the Vatican Library, gr. 699 (9th century); see Filipová 2015, 5–16; Frank 2006, 193–203; Grabar 1958, 43, 60. According to André Grabar, these reflect the monumental decoration of ancient religious establishments in the Holy Land (Grabar 1958, 43, 60, pl. III).

399 Filipová 2015, 5–16; Frank 2006, 193–203; Grabar 1958, 43, 60.

400 Velmans 2006, 56–57.

401 This image is generally titled Deesis–Vision, great Deesis or simple, enriched or composite Deesis (Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102; Hélou 1998, 33–59; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b; Cutler 1987b, 145–154; Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 161–187; Walter 1968, 311–236; von Bogyay 1967, 59–72; von Bogyay 1966, 178–186).

in many small caves or constructed churches. In the Christian East, however, this theophanic composition predominates regardless of the nature and function of the religious building, even where no evidence of a funerary purpose is present.[402] These are small churches compared to ones in Constantinople and do not have a dome. Because of this, the most sacred compositions are located in the apse, which becomes the most hallowed area of the building.[403]

The image of the Deesis, which usually shows an iconic figure of Christ between the Virgin and the Forerunner turned towards the centre, with hands raised towards the Lord,[404] is a Constantinopolitan creation, probably inspired by Roman aulic ceremonies.[405] As its name, derived from the Greek δέησις, indicates, the Deesis is a scene of intercession and prayer.[406] Byzantine and Eastern historiography generally relates this prayer to the Second Parousia and the end of time, regardless of its location. Therefore, the Virgin and John the Baptist have been interpreted by a number of scholars, including Nicole Thierry, Otto Demus, Viktor Lazarev, Jacqueline La Fontaine Dosogne, Thomas von Bogyay, Tania Velmans, Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Nada Hélou, as the supreme advocates of sinful mankind before the heavenly Judge.[407] Conversely, other scholars, such as Ernst Kantorowicz, Christopher Walter and Anthony Cutler, have pointed out that the Deesis is not necessarily dependent on the Judgement theme and can be found much earlier.[408]

Christopher Walter devoted more than one study to the Deesis in the Byzantine world. He considered the composition to have originally been an image of exaltation of the divinity of the Logos and that the Virgin and St John the Baptist are privileged witnesses. Their role of intercession was somewhat secondary and, in many cases, not appropriate to the scene. He added that

402 Velmans 2006, 58; Hélou 2006b, 32–47; Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 125; Hélou 1998, 33–52.

403 Velmans 2002, 75; Velmans 1981, 100; Hélou 1998, 36; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 337.

404 On the theme of the Deesis, see Pace 2012, 79–84; Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102; Hélou 1998, 33–52; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b; Cutler 1987b, 145–154; Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 161–187; Walter 1968, 311–336; von Bogyay 1967, 59–72; von Bogyay 1966, 178–186.

405 During these ceremonies, high-ranking officials would offer supplications to the emperor; the enthroned Christ assumed the place of the emperor, while the Virgin and the Precursor turned towards him in an attitude of prayer, mirroring that of the dignitaries (Walter 1968, 318–319; Grabar 1936, 205, 258).

406 Mouriki 1968, 13.

407 Hélou 1998, 33–59; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 61–132; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 337; Velmans 1981, 100; Thierry 1974, 5–22; Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968, 136; von Bogyay 1967, 59–72; Lazarev 1966, 38.

408 Cutler 1987b, 146; Walter 1980, 216–269; Walter 1970, 161–187; Walter 1968, 311–336; Kantorowicz 1942, 71.

the meaning of intercession was applied to the scene later – especially with the appearance of the Last Judgement – whereas originally it was 'a heavenly vision of the paradisiacal hierarchy'.[409]

In a masterly article dealing with the theme of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis in Georgia and other parts of the Byzantine world, Tania Velmans considered the image of the Deesis, whether or not it is merged with the elements of the Theophany, to be an intercessory scene with strong eschatological tones.[410] For her, this purely eschatological significance becomes more evident when dealing with the apsidal Theophany–Deesis 'because of the references to Daniel and Matthew'.[411] Indeed, according to Velmans, apsidal theophanies illustrate the Second Parousia of the Saviour and refer to the end of time; thus, the integration of the Virgin and St John the Baptist into these apsidal images only serves to reinforce their eschatological meaning, since they are privileged intercessors on behalf of men during the Universal Judgement.[412]

Unlike Walter and Velmans, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy has placed particular importance on liturgical sources in the development of the apsidal Theophany.[413] She has rightly emphasised the liturgical meaning of the image while maintaining its eschatological perspective, saying: 'Even if the composition makes no explicit reference to the Second Coming or to the Judgement, the expectation of the final end [and] the preoccupation with salvation occupied too important a place in monastic spirituality and in the thoughts of each Christian for this idea not to have been implicit. This seems all the more likely since the eschatological perspective is present in the eucharistic liturgy.'[414] With the insertion of the Virgin and St John the Baptist in these theophanic images, 'the image of the majestic and inaccessible Lord [...] gives place to the Saviour, who is closer to men [...] thanks to the intercession of the Theotokos and the Forerunner', the same researcher stressed.[415] Jolivet-Lévy, like Velmans, considered the image of the Deesis to express the hope of redemption every Christian has.[416]

For the two-register programmes depicting the Virgin and St John the Baptist under the apsidal Theophany, Jolivet-Lévy, like Sirarpie Der Nersessian, emphasised that their presence highlights the image's Redemption–Incarnation link

409 Walter 1980, 267.
410 Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102.
411 Velmans 2002, 76; Velmans 1981, 101.
412 Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102.
413 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 335–336.
414 *Ibid.*, 339–340.
415 *Ibid*, 336.
416 Velmans 2002, 75; Velmans 1981, 100; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 336.

and liturgical connotation.[417] Jolivet-Lévy pointed out that the two protagonists of the Deesis are related 'too precisely and too exclusively to the rite of *proskomide*'.[418] The link between the Virgin and John the Baptist with the *proskomide* ritual was also pointed out by Ernst Kitzinger, Andreas Xyngopoulos and Velmans.[419] However, these authors did not specify whether the intercession of the Virgin and John could be related to the present time. It seems that the notion of intercession has been considered exclusively eschatological, so that no researcher has dwelt on the question of temporality.

Doula Mouriki was also one of the few authors to have alluded to liturgy in their interpretation of the Deesis theme. In one of her articles, dedicated in its entirety to the question of style and dating of the Deesis icon in the Princeton University Art Museum, she noted very briefly that this theme had its origins in the liturgy, defining it as an 'illustration of the commemorative prayer of intercession of the Byzantine liturgy'.[420]

I believe the Deesis, or Theophany–Deesis, must be interpreted above all according to its context. When it is part of the Last Judgement, its eschatological meaning is indisputable, and the intercession of the Virgin and St John the Baptist is directly related to the Judgement and the end of time. However, when the actors of the Deesis are included in compositions and contexts that have no correlation with the theme of the Last Judgement and the Second Parousia, it would be unwise to impose this eschatological reading on them systematically. As we have seen, the two intercessors of the Deesis are included in the theme of the apsidal Theophany, which has, as I have attempted to show, a liturgical meaning. This liturgical meaning could modify the timing of their intercession. It is also clear that the image generally relates to the main function of the space. Therefore, the location of the image represents an essentially important factor in the selection of a liturgical meaning. In this case, it is the sanctuary, and the image of the Theophany with the two mediators of the Deesis dominates the main altar where the eucharistic sacrifice takes place. For this reason, it is important to continue to look for clues in the texts, as well as in the iconography, to support this liturgical meaning and the present temporality of the intercession. However, the semantic scope of the Deesis is immense and goes far beyond the repertoire of the liturgy. Other levels of interpretation (devotional, conventional, apotropaic, etc.) can be superimposed on it, but this study will attempt to establish the specifically liturgical hypothesis,

417 Nersessian 1960, 75–76.
418 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 340, n. 30.
419 Kitzinger 1949, 273–274; Xyngopoulos 1948, 114–228; Velmans 2006, 56.
420 Mouriki 1968, 13–28.

which has not been very widely used in historiography. It is worth mentioning that the present temporality of intercession does not necessarily have a liturgical connotation. There are also other contexts of intercession with no relation to the liturgical value of the image, as we shall see.

2.2.2.1 *The Virgin and St John the Baptist*

Patristic and Liturgical Sources. Since the earliest times, Christian tradition has attached particular importance to the intercession of the saints. This was compellingly confirmed in 787 at the Second Council of Nicaea, the Seventh Ecumenical Council of the Church, when the Fathers decreed the intercession of the Virgin, angels and saints and affirmed the legitimacy of the image.[421] During the 8th and 9th centuries, a period marked by the iconoclastic crisis, the role of the Virgin and St John the Baptist as privileged mediators on behalf of men occupied the minds of great theologians and liturgists, such as Andrew of Crete (b. *c*.650), Theodore of Stoudios, Patriarch Nikephoros (806–815) and others,[422] as Sirarpie Der Nersessian observed.[423] In fact, it was after the crisis of Iconoclasm that the scene of the Theophany with the Virgin and St John the Baptist began to appear (around the 9th century).[424]

The effectiveness of the intercession of the Virgin stems in the first place from her maternal authority, as Andrew of Crete, Theodore of Stoudios and the patriarchs Germanus and Nikephoros claimed, but also because she is 'more glorious than the angels and higher than the heavens'.[425] Mary is likewise 'more venerated than the cherubim and more glorious than the seraphim'[426] and she 'reigns over the angels'.[427] She could therefore naturally participate in the angels' worship in the liturgy of heaven and take a place with the angels before the heavenly throne. According to Patriarch Photios (858–867, 877–886), sinful

421 Emery 2001, 17–30; Alberigo 1994, II: 303–305.

422 Andrew of Crete 1865, PG 97: 1107; Nikephoros of Constantinople 1865, PG 100: 341C; Theodore of Stoudios 1860e, PG 99: 1528C.

423 Nersessian 1960, 71–86.

424 A number of authors have considered that the image of the Deesis was generally linked to the triumph of the iconophiles; see Hélou 1998, 35; Cutler 1987b, 145–154; Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 167–187; Walter 1968, 311–326; Nersessian 1960, 71–86; Kantorowicz 1942, 56–81.

425 Andrew of Crete 1865, PG 97: 1107; Nikephoros of Constantinople 1865, PG 100: 341C; Theodore of Stoudios 1860e, PG 99: 1528C.

426 Kantorowicz 1942, 71. John of Damascus also said of the Virgin: 'Dominating the cherubim, higher than the seraphim, close to God [...]' (Jean Damascène 1961, 73).

427 'A girl superior to the angels and who now reigns over the angels' (Jean Damascène 1961, 59).

humankind, helpless, implores the Virgin to intercede on its behalf with her only begotten Son.[428]

John was likened to the angels as well.[429] Sophronius of Jerusalem (560–638) expressly stated that the Baptist is 'the only angel to have appeared on earth',[430] which is why he is sometimes depicted with wings. Being an angel, he could participate in the heavenly liturgy and stand with the angels before the throne of God. Although the cult of the Virgin as intercessor, mediator and protector of the human race indeed surpassed that of John the Baptist, he is entrusted with the same qualities. Many prayers honour the Forerunner by citing his impressive intercession with the Incarnate Christ and exalting the finger with he which pointed to the divine Son and the hand with which he baptised him. In this regard, let us refer to an oration recited during the Office of the Epiphany: 'The hand that touched the immaculate head of the Lord, with which you pointed him out to us, stretched it out to him for us, O John the Baptist; you have full authority to do so, since He has testified to you that you are the greatest of all the prophets [...].'[431]

Mary and John the Baptist are considered to be the two privileged witnesses of the Incarnation and the divinity of the Logos.[432] Indeed, the Old Law prophets witnessed certain visionary theophanies of the Incarnation. The definitive coming of the eternal Word in the flesh fulfilled this preparatory incarnation, pronounced by prophetic words and visions.[433] Mary was, therefore, the first contemplative witness of the historical theophany of the Incarnate Logos at his birth. The flesh offered to him became the veil of his divinity,[434] which was reserved for a limited number of chosen ones: 'In the last days,' said Origen, 'the Word of God, clothed in the flesh taken from Mary, entered this world, and it was something else that was seen in him, something else that was understood. The sight of his humanity was accessible to all; the knowledge of his divinity, on the contrary, was given to only a small number of the elected.'[435] While Mary was the first to behold Christ's hidden theophany at the beginning of his earthly life, John the Baptist received the privilege of being the first witness to his public manifestation at his baptism. The Forerunner is therefore the

428 Photius of Constantinople 1958, 102, 327.

429 On the qualities of the Baptist, see Hélou 1998, 35; Velmans 2002, 36–37; Velmans 1981, 49–50; Nersessian 1960, 74–75.

430 Sophronius of Jerusalem 1865b, PG 87c: 3351.

431 Mercenier and Paris 1953, 260.

432 On this role, see in particular Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 161; Walter 1968, 311–336.

433 See, for example, Theodore of Stoudios 1860f, PG 99: 736D.

434 Bornert 1966, 55.

435 *Ibid.*, 56. See also Harl 1959, 201–203.

only one in a long chain of prophets announcing the coming of the Messiah who could see his temporal and historical theophany. The divine revelation at the Jordan thus completed the first manifestation of Christ in the flesh at his nativity. According to Early Byzantine imagery, the feast of the baptism formed the synthesis of all the mysteries of God's appearance to the world, hence its name 'Theophany' or 'Epiphany'.[436] The theophany of the baptism prolongs that of the nativity; the birth of Jesus and his baptism are therefore feasts of 'divine appearance'.[437]

The two intercessors, the Virgin and the Forerunner, in the words of Estephan Douaihy, then 'revealed the mystery of Jesus of Nazareth, and it was they who manifested his nature in the world'. Consequently, it is through them, having played an elemental role in the history of salvation, 'that the faithful understand that he who sits among them on the throne of glory and who is thus offered on the altar is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world' (John 1:29). This is what Douaihy claimed in explaining why these two protagonists are represented beside Christ 'in the ancient churches'[438] of Lebanon.[439]

The eucharistic liturgy, as we have already seen, has a special place for the two privileged intercessors. They are beseeched, so that the sacrifice, presented on the earthly altar, may be accepted before the throne of God. They are also called upon for the remission of sins, the rest of souls and other spiritual and worldly benefits. The two protagonists of the Deesis are invoked together several times during the eucharistic service. They are given special mention when distributing the particles of the *proskomide* office.[440] The particles dedicated to the Virgin and the Precursor are placed next to the *amnos* on the paten. They occupy a place similar to the one next to Christ in the scene of the Theophany–Deesis, with the Virgin on his right and the Forerunner on his left.[441] This location could be motivated by the iconographic motif, since, as

436 Mercenier and Paris 1953, 238.

437 Until 387 the two mysteries were celebrated together in the Eastern Church on 25 December; then, the Eastern Church separated the commemoration of these two temporal revelations of the incarnate God. All of the mysteries of the Birth of Christ, including the Adoration of the Magi, have since been celebrated on 25 December and his second manifestation at the beginning of his public life, that is, his baptism, on 6 January (Mercenier and Paris 1953, 238–239).

438 Douaihy was referring to the medieval churches that are the subject of this study.

439 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 139–140, 158.

440 See p. 21 herein.

441 Paprocki 1993, 205; Salaville 1942, I: 39.

already mentioned, the use of the particles in honour of the Virgin and the saints and in memory of the deceased and the living dates back to a period after that of the appearance of the Theophany–Deesis in the apse in the 12th century.[442] However, this position could also be the result of symbolic action, since in placing the particle bearing the imprint of the Theotokos to the right of the Lamb, the priest says: 'The Queen stood on your right side, arrayed in golden robes, all glorious' (Ps. 44:10).[443] This is why the Virgin is depicted as a crowned queen to the right of Christ in later representations of the Theophany–Deesis, as can be seen in the church of St Demetrios in the Markov monastery, in Markova Sušica, near Skopje, North Macedonia (1376/7), where she wears a crown.[444]

It is during the anaphora that the joint imploration of the Virgin and the Baptist comes out with greater force. As privileged intercessors, they are commemorated together in a hymn sung during the consecration of the holy mysteries (4th century): 'O *Panagia*, Sovereign Mother of God, intercede for us sinners [...] St John, Prophet, Forerunner and Baptist of our Lord Jesus Christ, intercessor for us sinners [...].'[445] Moreover, these two figures feature heavily in the prayer of intercession linked to the eucharistic epiclesis. During the epiclesis, God is implored to render the holy mysteries through his Holy Spirit, 'so that those who partake of them may obtain vigilance of soul and forgiveness of sins'.[446] Then the prayer of intercession is introduced, addressed to the same actors named in the *proskomide*. In fact, the office of the preparation of the offering is an anticipation or prefiguration of the true sacrifice that takes place during the anaphora.[447] This is why, after the invocation of the Holy Spirit, the priest states the same requests and intentions to the holy mysteries as he did during the ritual of the *proskomide*.[448] These formulas, directly linked to eucharistic consecration, promote the theme of intercession and the forgiveness of sins, which embody the scene of the Theophany–Deesis in particular. In this respect, the Virgin and John the Baptist are given a preferred position at the head of all the saints.

There are innumerable prayers and hymns expounding on the efficacy of the supplication and intercession of the Mother of God and the Forerunner.

442 See p. 20 herein.
443 See p. 21 herein.
444 On the paintings in this church, see Bogevska-Capuano 2011, 1–21.
445 Swainson 1884, 83, 92, 252.
446 See p. 37 herein.
447 Bornert 1966, 150.
448 See pp. 37–39 herein.

They are used extensively not only during the eucharistic office and in various liturgical and worship services, but also in several private devotional prayers and hymns. This supplication, integrated into both the public and private prayers of the faithful during various liturgical and cultic occasions, is also related to the present time.

The Iconography. Liturgical Scrolls. The illustration of liturgical scrolls enhances the prayers of the Holy Liturgy and represents irrefutable evidence of the correlation between liturgy and iconography. Although there is no image of the Deesis with the canonical *trimorphon* of Christ between the Virgin and St John the Baptist, in the scroll of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Hagios Stavros 109, this theme was used to illustrate the text of the intercessory prayer that ends the epiclesis during the anaphora.[449]

This anaphoric prayer of intercession is accompanied by a sort of Deesis, which, contrary to the general model with the three canonical figures of Christ, the Virgin and the Precursor, depicts St George replacing the Virgin to intercede on behalf of the faithful (Fig. 21). In the left margin the bust of Christ is shown in a medallion above St John the Baptist in prayer. The whole composition forms the initial 'T' of the first word of the prayer. The figure of St George in prayer in the right margin is a counterpart to the Forerunner.

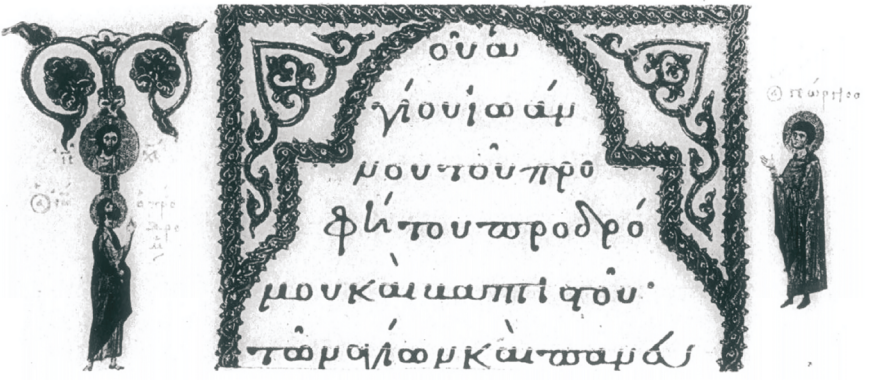

FIGURE 21 Jerusalem, Library of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate, liturgical scroll, Hagios Stavros 109: Deesis with Sts John the Baptist and George, second half of the 11th century

449 Vokotopoulos 2002, 96–123; Cutler and Spieser 1996, 235; Kepetzi 1979; Lichačeva 1974, 121–128; Grabar 1954, 161–199.

In many examples of the Deesis, the Virgin or the Precursor are replaced by other saints, as Anthony Cutler observed.[450] Here, the link between the Deesis and the Last Judgement is even weaker than has been claimed, since St George or other saints interceding with Christ in place of the Virgin or St John the Baptist never appear in images of the Last Judgement. This iconographic variation is based on several factors, such as the intention or choice of the designer, the veneration of a patron saint or the local cult relying on the presence of certain saints. In the Jerusalem manuscript it seems it was the text of the intercessory prayer that required the representation of St George in place of the Virgin.[451] From the beginning the anaphoric text of intercession in this scroll invokes not the Virgin, in keeping with customary practice, but St John the Baptist and, immediately after him, 'the saint whose memory we celebrate and all the saints'; the saint whose memory is celebrated is George, as André Grabar demonstrated.[452] The intercession of John the Baptist and George obviously serves to illustrate this liturgical passage, which awards them the role of privileged mediators on behalf of sinful humankind.

The intercessory prayer of the anaphora in the liturgical manuscript of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem is therefore illustrated by a Deesis adapted to the prayer's content. In the liturgical scroll of Mount Athos, Lavra no. 2, the figures of the Virgin and Forerunner were used to illustrate the same liturgical passage.[453] They were given a special place among the other saints. Could the presence of the Deesis in apsidal programmes be connected to prayers of intercession during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy and in particular during the anaphora?

The intercession of the Virgin was also given a prominent place in the Jerusalem scroll. The *Trisagion* prayer spoken by the cleric during the Small Entrance is illustrated with the Virgin stretching out her arms in supplication towards the image of Christ, placed in the text's margin (see Fig. 8). The figures of the Virgin and her Son are followed by a seraph, a cherub, four archangels and two angels.[454] This depiction seems to be faithful to the content of the liturgical text, as noted above.[455] The role of intercessor attributed to Mary in this prayer is clearly manifested in her prayerful attitude: 'The hands which

450 Anthony Cutler gave several examples in Cutler 1987b, 145–154.
451 Grabar 1954, 165.
452 *Ibid.*
453 Marinis 2017, 317; Grabar 1954, 171; Bréhier 1940, 1–19.
454 Marinis 2017, 317; Grabar 1954, fig. 2.
455 See pp. 64–65 herein.

carried God are stretched out, for you, towards the throne of the Master of the World', proclaimed Theodore of Stoudios.[456]

The image of the Virgin and John the Baptist has been used to illustrate the theme of intercession during the eucharistic office. Their beseeching is undoubtedly related to the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy and quite naturally goes beyond the highly confined temporality of the Last Judgement, since it is subject to the present temporality of the liturgy. The liturgical context of the scroll that sets out the text of the daily practices of the eucharistic liturgy supports this interpretation.

Liturgical and Secular Objects. Although it does not display a true Deesis, the Cosenza Staurotheke (*c*.1150) shows its two actors at the centre of the mystery of the sacrifice on the cross and the Eucharist (Fig. 22).[457] The recto displays a medallion depicting Christ in Majesty at its centre; just below there is a cross-shaped receptacle that contains the sacred *legnum*. The four medallions representing the evangelists are positioned on each of the cross's arms. On the verso, the central axis features a crucified Christ over the Golgotha rocks and Adam's skull. Flanking this central image, two medallions on the transversal arms portray the Virgin and St John the Baptist in prayer, on the left and right sides respectively. The medallion above the crucified Christ features the Archangel Michael bearing a standard and an orb stamped with the sign of the cross. The lower medallion showcases an altar with a dove, a chalice, the eucharistic bread and the instruments of the Passion. These elements are set on a red cloth adorned with a cross. The simultaneous presence of the sacrifice on the cross and the bloodless sacrifice of the Eucharist expresses the same theological, doctrinal and liturgical concept. The combination of the two protagonists of the Theophany–Deesis with these sacrificial themes unmistakably indicates that their intercession is not confined to eschatological time. It stresses the liturgical aspect of their intercession and its connection to the sacrifice on the cross, which echoes the offering on the altar. Moreover, the cross's ritual function naturally situates their supplication within the present time and within a liturgical framework.[458]

456 Cited by Ştefănescu 1936, 103.

457 Rodríguez Viejo 2021, 307–309; Coche de La Ferté and Ostuni 2001, 441; Dolcini 1995, 109–114.

458 The Deesis *trimorphon* was a very common theme on processional crosses, such as those held in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York; the Musée de Cluny, Paris; the Benaki Museum, Athens; and the Cleveland Museum of Art. According to Helen Evans and John Cotsonis, the presence of the Deesis on this type of cross 'stresses the role of the Cross as intercessor for humanity' (Evans 1997, cat. no. 24, 60; see also Cotsonis 1994, 47). In my view, the Deesis emphasises the apotropaic value of the cross and underscores the



FIGURE 22 Cosenza, Museo Diocesano, Staurotheke (reliquary of the True Cross), gold encrusted with enamel, *c.*1150

Similarly, when we observe the Deesis depicted on other types of liturgical objects, such as the bindings of sacred books, we are led to draw similar conclusions, given the relationship between the function of the support and its decoration. These liturgical items separate the *trimorphon* of the Deesis from

importance of the saints' intercession before God, rather than solely focussing on the cross itself. These liturgical crosses are often accompanied by dedicatory inscriptions specifying the present temporality of the intercession and the remission of sins.

the context of the Last Judgement and position it in service to the practices of worship. In this regard it bears citing the Theophany–Deesis carved on the ivory-plaque cover of the famous late 10th-century Gospels of Bishop Bernward (Dommuseum Hildesheim, DS 18).[459] This is a Byzantine ivory reused in a Western context. Christ, standing on a pedestal between Mary and the Baptist in prayer, carries the book and performs his usual gesture of speech (Fig. 23). On the lower and upper edges of the scene, the following inscription can be found: 'I pray that the threefold power is merciful to Bernward'.[460] The threefold power indicates the three actors of the Deesis. Below this scene is a small representation of Christ on the cross in silver gilt from the same period, which could connect the scene to the bloody sacrifice of the cross. The four corners are occupied by embossed medallions of the four symbols of the evangelists, most likely referring to the reading of the Gospels; these date from the 12th century. On the back cover there is a decoration and inscription incised on silver with parcel-gilt. It depicts the Virgin Mary carrying a palm in one hand and holding Christ with the eucharistic host in his hand in the other, an attribute that imparts a clear eucharistic dimension to the scene. The Virgin and Child are framed by an inscription celebrating the patronage of Bishop Bernward: 'Behold, God and your gracious Mother, this prominent work, created through the art of Bishop Bernward'.[461] Could it be said that Christ is depicted as a priest through the Theophany–Deesis and as a victim of the sacrifice by carrying the Eucharist in Mary's arms? The syntax accompanying the scene of the Theophany–Deesis appears to preclude an eschatological interpretation of the image. The bishop pleads for the mercy of the three figures and invites the reader of his inscription to perpetuate his request, placing the intercession within the framework of the present time. The use of the Gospels in the daily liturgy corroborates this reading and also gives the image of the Theophany–Deesis a liturgical aspect.

An illustration from the Gospel of Queen Keran, dated to 1272 (Jerusalem, Armenian cathedral of St James, MS 2563, fol. 380r), shows the royal family of Leo II of Armenia (the king, the queen and their five children) kneeling and raising their arms in a gesture of prayer below a depiction of the Deesis (Fig. 24).[462] The enthroned Christ in Majesty, dressed in white, is between Mary and the Baptist. The two supplicants are making an intriguing gesture:

459 Kingsley 2007; Little 1997, cat. no. 305, 466–467; Brandt 1993, 56–63.
460 Little 1997, cat. no. 305, 466.
461 *Ibid.*
462 Chookaszian 2017, 9–10; Grigoryan 2017, 135–136.



FIGURE 23 Dommuseum Hildesheim, cover of Bishop Bernward's Gospels, ivory and silver gilt enriched with filigree and embedded semiprecious stones, late 10th century: Deesis



FIGURE 24 Jerusalem, Armenian cathedral of St James, Gospel of Queen Keran, MS 2563, fol. 380r: the Theophany–Deesis above the royal family of Leo II of Armenia, 1272

they extend one hand in the direction of Jesus and the other downwards towards the royal family. Therefore, they are addressing Christ by pointing to Leo II and his family. Christ, with the book on his knees, performs a gesture with his two hands outstretched in the direction of the royal family, which potentially symbolises the bestowal of his grace upon this group of individuals. Indeed, seven rays with red flames emerge from the glory of Christ. Each ray of

light connects with a member of the family. The inscription that accompanies this image, 'all [the] troubles', is probably an addition from the years 1283–1285 to continue the sentence beginning on the previous folio (379v), which can then be read as follows: 'O, brothers, ask in your prayers to keep safe from all [the] troubles the sons of the queen, Constantine, Nerses, Oshin and Ruben.'[463] It seems that the royal scribe added 'all [the] troubles' at the request of Queen Keran, given that three of the five royal children portrayed in this manuscript died not long after its completion.[464] It should be noted that this inscription mentions only the male heirs eligible to succeed to the throne.[465]

The gesture of the two mediators of the Deesis indicates that their intercession is dedicated to this royal dynasty and not to all of humanity gathered at the end of time, completely excluding the concept of eschatological supplication. The inscription accompanying the image further confirms the present temporality of the intercession, asking to keep the princes safe. As for the hand gesture of Christ, this could be seen as an action of acceptance of the prayers that Leo II and his family addressed to him in the present time through the privileged mediation of his mother and cousin. However, this request could be continually renewed by contemplating the painted image and reading its accompanying text. The image and text would then be intended to commemorate and perpetuate the prayer of the royal family and the supplication of the two intercessors. The Theophany–Deesis in the Gospel of Queen Keran clearly illustrates that the supplication of the Virgin and the Baptist is connected to the present, without necessarily being associated to the liturgy.

No less interesting is the 13th-century military helmet in the Kremlin Armoury in Moscow, which features the theme of the Theophany–Deesis incised into the metal (Fig. 25).[466] The bust of Christ carries the book in his left hand and makes a gesture of speech with his right. He is flanked by the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist, with their hands outstretched in prayer. The archangels Michael and Gabriel, two seraphim and two evangelists continue this composition. In this case, the main actors of the apsidal theme are present on a soldier's helmet. Far from being linked to eschatology, the Theophany–Deesis on this object shows the great devotion given to the intercession and protection of saints and angels in the daily life of believers. The image thus has a devotional and apotropaic meaning. Although it is not remotely related to the liturgical rite, this representation supports the present temporality of the

463 Grigoryan 2017, 135–136.
464 *Ibid.*
465 *Ibid.*
466 Chkhaidze 2017, 122–132.



FIGURE 25 Moscow, Kremlin Armoury, conical helmet with the Deesis, steel, gold and silver, 13th century

intercession of the saints and further shows that such intercession in the present time goes far beyond the liturgical domain.

2.2.2.2 *Iconographic Programmes*

Mary and John the Baptist under the Enthroned Christ of the Apsidal Theophany. The two canonical mediators of the Deesis began to appear in some apsidal programmes around the 10th century, perhaps earlier. Examples from this time are usually placed beneath the image of the apsidal Theophany, in the lower



FIGURE 26 Çavuşin, Haçlı Kilise, wall painting, apsidal Theophany, 10th century

registers, as previously mentioned.[467] The apsidal programme in Haçlı Kilise provides one of the most illustrative models of this kind. Christ, depicted in a luminous aureole, appears in the apsidal conch. He carries a closed book in his left hand and performs the gesture of speech with his right (Fig. 26). The four living creatures are arranged on both sides of the throne. Haloed and holding books, they are accompanied by the introductory participles of the anaphoric *Trisagion*: 'saying' near the angel, 'singing' near the eagle, 'clamouring' near the lion and 'shouting' near the bull. Above, the divine hand, emerging from a segment, points to the Son of God. This central composition is framed by two angelic creatures designated as 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed'. These two types of angels are complemented by the archangels Gabriel and Michael, each

467 See pp. 94–95 herein; Velmans 2006, 56; Jolivet-Lévy 2002a, 9–10.



FIGURE 27 Çavuşin, Haçlı Kilise, wall painting, apse, 10th century

carrying a cruciferous orb in one hand and a standard with the triple *hagios* in the other.[468]

In the lower register there are 16 figures facing the viewer (Fig. 27). They frame the central niche, which contains a cross inscribed 'IC XC NI KA'. The Virgin and the Forerunner stand on either side of the niche: Mary, in prayer, to the right and John the Baptist to the left. He performs a gesture of speech with his right hand and displays a phylactery with the verse of John 1:29 with his left. The twelve apostles flank this central group. Peter and Paul stand at the head of the apostolic procession, near the centre, on either side. Finally, at both ends of the register, two martyrs, the unmercenary saints Niketas and

468 Lemaigre Demesnil 2010, 47–50; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 50–53, pl. 39; Thierry 1983, 1: 245–255; Thierry 1974, 5, fig. 19.

Kerykos, frame the group of apostles. Medallions of the prophets occupy the arch of the apse. At the entrance to the sanctuary, St George faces St Procopius.

The inscriptions accompanying the four living creatures provide strong evidence for their participation in the prayer of the anaphoric *Trisagion*. Similarly, the terms 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed' come from liturgical texts that describe seraphim and cherubim as singers of the celestial liturgy.[469] In turn, the archangels Gabriel and Michael cooperate in the praise of the Lord, as shown by the *Trisagion* inscribed on their standards. In reality, the biblical texts do not ascribe this activity to them; however, some anaphoric prefaces, such as those of the anaphora of the *Constitutiones Apostolorum* VIII,[470] of Deir Balyzeh,[471] of St James[472] and of St John Chrysostom,[473] describe the archangels singing the seraphic song along with all the categories of angels.[474] Thus, the entire heavenly hierarchy, represented here by a 'six-winged' being, a 'many-eyed' being, the four livings creatures and two archangels, is gathered around the heavenly Majesty to proclaim his divine holiness.

The iconographic components of the Theophany in Haçlı Kilise allow it to be easily linked to the anaphoric preface and therefore to the Divine Liturgy. The iconography of the lower register could complete this reading. The representation of the praying Virgin with the apostles and saints in the hemicycle under the apsidal Theophany recalls the Eastern Ascensions, or theophanies derived from the Ascension, or, rather, compositions that adopt the structure of this biblical episode without taking on its historical aspect.[475] This is the case for the theophanies in the monastery of Bawit, where the Virgin orant appears in the middle of the apostles.[476] This arrangement, which cannot be explained by the episode of the Ascension, has been interpreted either as a representation of the earthly Church in prayer[477] or as a composition that

469 On the liturgical participles and adjectives that accompany the four living creatures, the seraphim and the cherubim, see Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 338; Pallas 1971, 55–60; Jerphanion 1930, 251–256.

470 This anaphora, of Syrian origin, is the oldest that survives in full (Metzger 1987, 176–205).

471 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 124–227.

472 Greek version: Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 244–261; Syriac version: *ibid.*, 269–275; Greek version with Latin translation: Mercier 1946, 198–201; Maronite Antiochian version: Moubarac 1984a, 212.

473 Hänggi and Pahl 1968, 223–229.

474 See pp. 62–63 herein.

475 Angheben 2012, 43; Christe 1969, 66–67.

476 See pp. 48–49 herein.

477 Nasr 2019b, 31; Nasr 2018a, 31; Angheben 2006, 155–171; Thérel and Daniélou 1973, 125–133; Schiller 1966, I: 47–49.

essentially emphasises the dogma of the Incarnation through Mary.[478] St John the Baptist, depicted side by side with Mary in this type of composition, was primarily considered as a privileged witness of the mystery of the Incarnation. In fact, the Forerunner recognised the Lord even before his own birth, while in the womb of his mother, Elizabeth, during the Visitation.[479] By holding the scroll with the famous verse of John 1:29, the figure of John reflects, according to Sirarpie Der Nersessian, the dogma of the Redemption. Therefore, the figures of the Virgin and the Baptist together, again according to Der Nersessian, underline the link between the Incarnation and the Redemption.[480] This symbolism was also accepted by Catherine Jolivet-Lévy.[481]

Ernst Kitzinger, Andreas Xyngopoulos and Sirarpie Der Nersessian moreover pointed out in their studies of the mosaic of the Palatine chapel in Palermo, the icon of Thessaloniki and the Dumbarton Oaks ivory, respectively, that the simultaneous representation of these two figures – the Virgin and the Baptist – is directly related to the rite of the preparation of the offering.[482] This relationship between the service of the *proskomide* and the two supplicants of the Deesis has also been applied to apsidal programmes in which the Virgin and the Baptist are positioned beneath the apsidal Theophany, such as Haçlı Kilise and St Simeon in the Zelve Valley, by Tania Velmans and Catherine Jolivet-Lévy.[483] These authors based their hypotheses mainly on the resemblance with the position of the particles dedicated to the Virgin and the Baptist around the *amnos* and the fact that, in the majority of these examples, the Baptist displays the verse of the Redeeming Lamb (John 1:29), which is recited by the priest during the *proskomide*.[484]

The premise of a correlation between the *proskomide* and the joint presence of the Virgin and the Baptist bearing the verse of the Redeeming Lamb is plausible. However, the distribution of the particles dedicated to the Virgin and the saints during the preparation of the offering does not predate the 12th century,[485] which is later than the dating proposed by Jolivet-Lévy for the Haçlı Kilise paintings (10th century),[486] as it is for the works studied by Velmans, Kitzinger, Xyngopoulos and Der Nersessian. Thus, the correlation

478 Grabar 1946, II: 213.
479 Walter 1980, 261–269; Walter 1970, 161; Walter 1968, 311–336; Nersessian 1960, 75.
480 Nersessian 1960, 75.
481 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 340.
482 Velmans 2006, 56; Nersessian 1960, 76; Kitzinger 1949, 273–274; Xyngopoulos 1948, 114–128.
483 Velmans 2006, 56; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 51.
484 See p. 19 herein.
485 See p. 20 herein.
486 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 53; Hild and Restle 1981, 214.

between the invocation of the Virgin and the Baptist during the *proskomide* and their joint representation in apsidal programmes becomes highly doubtful.

The depiction of the Baptist with the verse of John 1:29 could underline his status as privileged witness, which gives him the role of august intercessor, as evidenced by the innumerable prayers addressed to him. Moreover, the intercession of the Virgin and the Baptist is invoked several times during the liturgy.[487] The composition could thus relate to several ritual sequences in the liturgy by offering a kind of ideal image or perfect vision. However, several elements of this depiction in Haçlı Kilise, as well as its syntax (the liturgical Theophany of the conch), point us towards the eucharistic consecration, in which the Virgin and the Baptist are invoked together as privileged intercessors, along with the apostles and different categories of saints, through the prayer of intercession that follows the epiclesis.[488] From this, we can deduce that, in a programme such as Haçlı Kilise, the representation of Mary, John the Baptist and the apostles in the rounding of the apse and under the Theophany can be explained not only by their quality as witnesses of the Incarnation, but also by their special mention during the eucharistic celebration, specifically during the anaphora, completing the meaning of the Theophany of the apse.[489] Presented as an orant, the Virgin raises her arms towards Christ, standing above her, demonstrating her quality as mediator. She lifts the prayers and offerings of the earthly Church with her two hands, so that they may be accepted by the heavenly Sovereign, as stated in the anaphoric intercessory prayer.

Furthermore, in Haçlı Kilise Mary and the Baptist flank a niche with a cross bearing the inscription 'IC XC NI KA'. This cross, equivalent to the image of Christ, may recall the eucharistic bread – always marked with the cross and the same triumphal inscription – which is none other than the *amnos* of the *proskomide*, but which takes the name *melismos* during the anaphora. So, the Forerunner's verse of John 1:29 could be associated with this depicted cross, which is the symbol of Christ and alludes to the eucharistic bread. This bread is the Lamb sacrificed for the salvation of mankind, as stated by the inscription on John the Baptist's phylactery. The celebrant also mentions the Lamb of God in breaking the *melismos*. We should add that this type of niche in the central apse is generally reserved for the Eucharist. The eucharistic symbolism of St John the Baptist in the apsidal compositions becomes even more evident when he is depicted holding the medallion with the image of the Lamb of God,

487 See pp. 98–102 herein.

488 See pp. 37–39 herein.

489 Nasr 2022a, 245; Nasr 2019b, 31; Nasr 2018a, 30; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 52.

as exemplified at Sant Pere del Burgal (11th century, now in the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya, Barcelona).[490] Here too, the apostles are portrayed beneath the image of the apsidal Theophany and with them are the Virgin carrying the flaming chalice[491] and the Baptist wearing the clerical chasuble and displaying the *Agnus Dei* medallion, akin to a priest displaying the body of Christ.

The figures of the Virgin, the Forerunner, apostles and saints, with the cross resembling the eucharistic bread, could generally reflect the image of the earthly Church concelebrating the liturgy.[492] In this vein, the apsidal programme of Haçlı Kilise, as with the one of Sant Pere del Burgal and elsewhere, superimposes the heavenly and earthly Church, united during the Divine Liturgy. The former is represented by the Theophany in the conch and the latter by the Virgin, the Precursor, apostles and saints in the lower register.

Mary and John the Baptist on Either Side of the Throne in the Apsidal Theophany. The insertion of the Virgin and John the Baptist within the apsidal Theophany gave rise to a new version of this apsidal theme: the Theophany–Deesis, which became prominent in the Christian East from the 11th century on.[493] Being present in the same heaven and on the same level as Christ seated on the throne of glory, Mary and the Precursor do not raise their hands upwards, as they do when they are placed below, but rather turn towards Christ, who occupies the centre of the composition, while the other two stretch their arms out towards him. This gesture of prayer gives the Virgin and John the role of privileged intercessors and mediators *par excellence* before the heavenly throne.[494] It is with these titles that they are usually invoked and glorified together during the Divine Liturgy, especially during the *proskomide* and the anaphoric prayer of intercession that follows the epiclesis.[495] Since the

490 Pagès i Paretas 2015, 194; Pagès i Paretas 2013, 48; Pagès i Paretas 2008, 53–100.

491 The Virgin raising a chalice is a characteristic iconographical element of Catalan Romanesque painting and was used to represent Mary as a symbol of either the Church or the priest. On the Virgin carrying a chalice, see Angheben 2012, 29–74, esp. 43–44. On the Virgin as a paradigm of the priest, see Nasr 2020b, 56–65; Nasr 2020a, 119–134; Nasr 2018b, 98–113; Angheben 2012, 29–74; Milliner 2011, 106–113; Bogevska-Capuano 2011, 1–21; Lidov 2009, 225–255.

492 Nasr 2022a, 246; Nasr 2019b, 31–32; Angheben 2012, 69–70, 74; Thérel and Daniélou 1973, 125–133.

493 Jolivet-Lévy 2002a, 10; Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102.

494 Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 63–65.

495 In the anaphoric intercession at the end of the epiclesis, God is asked to lower his gaze upon the faithful, to remember all those who have died in the hope of the resurrection to eternal life and to give them rest in the place where the light of his face shines. This is accomplished through the prayers of the Virgin, St John the Baptist, the apostles and the saints. Prayers are then dedicated to the entire episcopate, the priests, the deacons and

mention of these figures in the *proskomide* occurs much later than the appearance of the Theophany–Deesis theme in the apse, there is no need to dwell further on this ritual.

The presence of the Virgin and St John the Baptist in the apsidal Theophany above the main altar could reflect their prominent place in the eucharistic office, thereby extending the illustration of the liturgical scrolls and attesting to the present nature of their intercession. However, the image of intercession cannot be interpreted unilaterally. The imploring of the Virgin and the Baptist is mentioned in various liturgical rites and prayers outside the context of the Divine Liturgy: the funeral liturgy, public penance, the worship of the saints, devotional or private prayers and so on.

The Theophany–Deesis with the Celestial Powers Singing the Liturgical Trisagion. There are many examples of the Theophany–Deesis that associate the present participles of the seraphic hymn with the four living creatures and the *Trisagion* with the angels. These epigraphic motifs provide a strong argument in support of the link between the apsidal Theophany–Deesis and the daily liturgy of the Church. Take, for example, the apsidal programme of Ayvalı (13th–14th centuries?) in Cappadocia[496] and the chapel of the Four Living Creatures in the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea in Egypt (1232–1233).[497]

The apsidal composition of Ayvalı places Christ between the four living creatures, wheels of fire, the archangels Michael and Gabriel carrying an orb with a cross and a sceptre and the Virgin and Forerunner with their hands raised in supplication.[498] Only a part of the cruciferous nimbus of Christ, who dominates the composition, remains. Of the four living creatures around the throne, only the lion survives. It is accompanied by a present participle from the anaphoric *Trisagion*,[499] 'clamouring', which undeniably links it to the eucharistic prayer and thus helps associate the whole composition to the sanctuary's primary function. This manifests the present temporality of Mary and the Baptist's imploring, which is here related to the anaphora, and detaches this Theophany–Deesis from any eschatological perspective and the Last Judgement.

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all the sacred orders. Spiritual worship is offered for the whole universe, the Holy Church and then all of the faithful. It is at this point that the Virgin and Baptist intercede, in the present time, on behalf of all humanity (deceased and living) at the time of the eucharistic celebration (see pp. 37–39 herein).

496 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 202; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 151–154.

497 Zibawi 2003, 176–188; Bolman 2002; van Moorsel 1997; Leroy 1976b, 347–379.

498 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 151–154.

499 See pp. 85–88 herein.



FIGURE 28 Red Sea, monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea, chapel of the Four Living Creatures, wall painting, apsidal Theophany–Deesis, 1232–1233

The Theophany–Deesis occupying the apsidal conch of the chapel of the Four Living Creatures in the monastery of St Anthony features a similar typology. The central mandorla of the Christ in Majesty is carried by four angels (Fig. 28). The following inscriptions accompany them: 'And good will among people' and 'We sing to You, we praise You.'[500] These inscriptions are taken from the Hymn of the Angels, a song in the Coptic liturgy.[501] This central composition is surrounded by the sun, the moon and the four living creatures, which are depicted standing, two on each side of Christ. Under these celestial creatures, there are inscriptions belonging to the *Trisagion* and the Hymn of the Angels: 'And good will among people, we sing to You, we praise You'; 'Holy, holy, holy are You, O Lord God, heaven and earth are full of your holy glory,

500 Bolman 2002, 237.
501 *Ibid.*

amen'; 'Holy, holy, holy, O Lord God, for ever and ever. Amen'; and 'Holy, holy, holy' (Figs 28, 29).[502] The Virgin and Precursor are pushed to the two ends of the composition. The latter is labelled with the usual verse of the Lamb of God (John 1:29). This scene of the Theophany–Deesis is located above a niche in which a large cross is crowned with a red band of grapes and fruit, an allusion to the Eucharist[503] and the life-giving role of the cross (Fig. 30).[504] A veil hangs over the cross's transversal arm. This richly decorated cross is incensed by two angel–priests wearing chasubles, relating the image to the ritual dimension of the chapel and to the present time.

In the Theophany–Deesis depicted in St Anthony, the angels and living creatures take on the role of singers, performing liturgical hymns. The sun and moon also participate in this liturgical glorification, as they do in biblical and liturgical hymns, emphasising the present temporality of the apsidal scene. This clearly associates the Theophany with the Virgin and Forerunner to the liturgy of the altar and logically rules out any eschatological reading of the scene. The example of St Anthony, with heavenly powers expressly singing praises from the anaphora, serves as further evidence that the verse of the Redeeming Lamb, usually carried by the Baptist, does not necessarily depend on the rite of the *proskomide*, as has often been claimed.

The Theophany–Deesis with the Cycle of Officiating Bishops. Together with the epigraphy, iconography and topography, syntactic clues from the figures and connected themes provide a substantial argument for a liturgical interpretation of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis. These are themes that refer directly to the sacrifice of the altar, such as the Old Law sacrifices, the Communion of the Apostles and the Officiating Bishops. The apsidal programme of Bezirana Kilisesi (13th century) in Cappadocia,[505] which links bishops officiating around the *amnos* with the Theophany–Deesis, is interesting in this regard.

The apse conch in Bezirana Kilisesi contains a bust of Christ depicted in a medallion, as in the domes of Byzantine programmes, designated 'Jesus Christ Pantocrator'. He is flanked by busts of Mary and John, their hands raised in prayer. The lower register features officiating bishops around the *amnos*.[506] The procession of bishops converges in the centre, where, above the high altar of the church, the holy table with the Christ Child lying on a paten is depicted.

502 *Ibid.*

503 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 186.

504 *Ibid.*, 71.

505 Uyar 2021, 207–222; Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 107–142; Wallace 1991, 384–391; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 68–69; Rodley 1985, 26–33.

506 On this theme, see Konstantinidi 2008, 125–158; Gerstel 1999, 21–25, 29–36, 40–44; Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 69–78; Walter 1982, 200–214.



FIGURE 29 Red Sea, monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea, chapel of the Four Living Creatures, wall painting, apsidal Theophany–Deesis: living creatures and the moon, 1232–1233

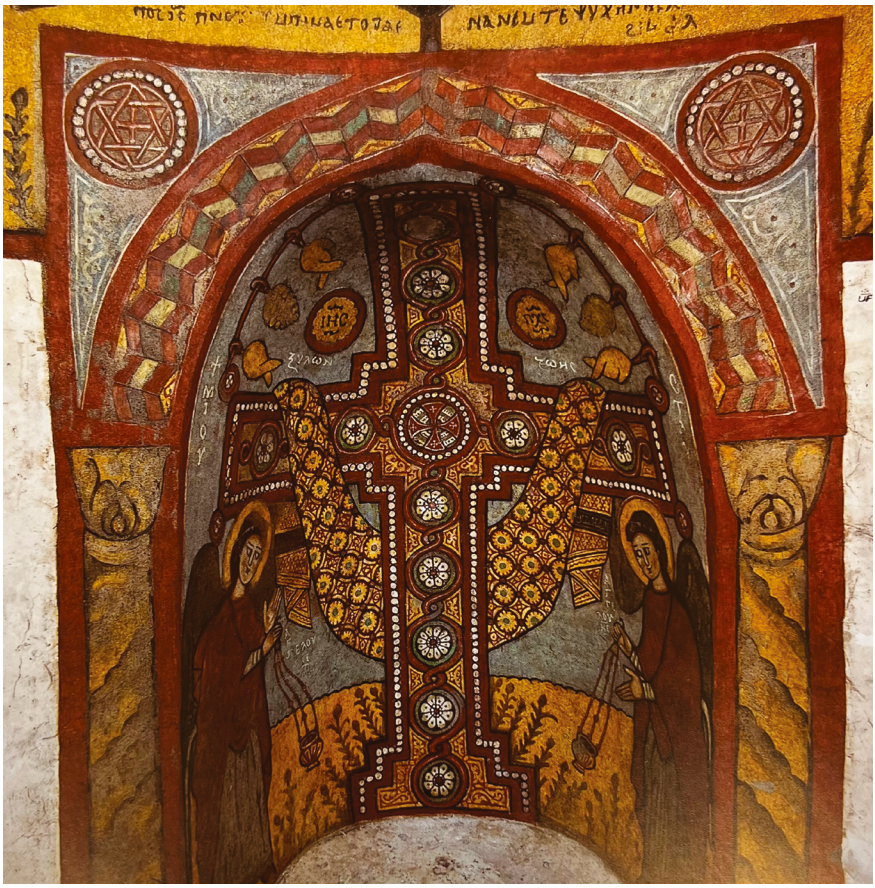

FIGURE 30 Red Sea, monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea, chapel of the Four Living Creatures, wall painting, apsidal niche: angel–priests incensing the cross, 1232–1233

The painting is badly damaged on the left, but the chalice can be made out on the right. The dove of the Holy Spirit hovering over the painted altar corresponds to the epiclesis.[507] Two deacon–angels are depicted behind the altar, to the left and right, each holding a *rhipidion* decorated with the image of a seraphim.[508]

The two bishops given the place of honour at the altar are, according to custom, John Chrysostom and Basil of Caesarea. With outstretched hands, they move towards the altar to sacrifice the *amnos*. Without the usual

507 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 316, n. 110.

508 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 118, fig. 12; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 315–317.

phylacteries, the liturgical prayer associated with them is located between the columns above the altar. This is the eucharistic prayer of the consecration of the species. Next to Basil is an extract from the text of his liturgy: 'Make this bread to be the precious Body of our Lord and God and Saviour.'[509] Next to John Chrysostom is a passage from the liturgy attributed to him: 'And that which is in this Cup, the precious Blood of Christ'.[510] Gregory of Nazianzos, who probably carried a text from the liturgy, stands behind Basil. The prelate Amphilochius of Iconium (b. *c.*339–340), who carries a phylactery featuring the prayer that follows the passage from John Chrysostom, stands behind that liturgist. This secret prayer is recited by the priest after the consecration in the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom:[511] 'So that those who partake of them may obtain vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of your Holy Spirit, fullness of the kingdom of heaven, freedom to speak in your presence, not judgement or condemnation'.[512] Behind Amphilochius, at the southern end, a fifth officiating bishop is depicted. The inscription on his phylactery is partly damaged, though the legible letters make it possible to decipher the content. It is the continuation of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom:[513] 'Also we offer You this spiritual worship for those who have gone to their rest in faith, Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists […].'[514] This lower register, representing the anaphora, a crucial moment of the Divine Liturgy, directly links the *trimorphon* of the Deesis to the liturgy of the altar.

In this context of the daily liturgy, the presence of Mary and John the Baptist could be associated with their specific mention during the anaphora and the prayers of forgiveness recited during the eucharistic office. Indeed, the host, which is the body and blood of Christ, represented both as the sacrificial priest (the central figure of the Theophany–Deesis) and as the sacrificed victim (the Child lying on the paten), holds paramount importance in the remission of sins and the sanctification of souls. This is why the officiant, when he calls upon the Holy Spirit to consecrate the bread and wine, adds: 'So that those who partake of them may obtain vigilance of soul, forgiveness of sins, communion of your Holy Spirit, fullness of the kingdom of heaven, freedom to speak in your presence, not judgement or condemnation' (the inscription placed on the phylactery of Amphilochius).[515] The priest then adds: 'Also we

509 Brightman 1896, I: 330, l. 3–6.
510 *Ibid*., l. 7–10.
511 *Ibid*, l. 13–19.
512 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 119.
513 Brightman 1896, I: 331, l. 12–20.
514 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 119.
515 Brightman 1896, I: 330, l. 13–19.

offer You this spiritual worship for those who have gone to their rest in faith, Forefathers, Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Preachers, Evangelists […]' (the inscription placed next to the fifth officiant). This oration is followed by an intercessory prayer, with the Virgin and the Baptist invoked as great mediators. Their presence in the conch of the apse next to Christ could thus underline the liturgical significance of the apse's decoration. It can therefore be deduced that the apsidal programme of Bezirana Kilisesi directly associates the *trimorphon* of the Deesis to the eucharistic liturgy.

The Apsidal Theophany–Deesis and the Deesis of the Last Judgement. Some churches present the Deesis two times, one with the apsidal iconography and the other with the Last Judgement. This may show that the meaning of intercession and the message conveyed by these two images, iconographically similar, is not necessarily identical, insofar as the meaning and the function of each image depends on its iconographic context and its location.

The programme of church no. 4 of Güllüdere is significant in this regard.[516] The apse of the north chapel, known as the funerary chapel, features a Theophany–Deesis. Only the top of the head of the figure of Christ enthroned in a luminous aureole between the four living creatures remains visible. On either side is a seraph next to a kneeling prophet. These are Isaiah (left) and Ezekiel (right) receiving the burning ember. The apsidal scene also contains two medallions with personifications of the moon and the sun. The composition is completed with the figures of the Virgin and John the Baptist, thus becoming a Theophany–Deesis. The lower register of the apse was probably dedicated to the apostles; only two survive. The prophets are depicted in medallions on the intrados of the apse arch. A liturgical inscription intended for the Eucharist runs through the archivolt of the apsidal arch: 'Consider the prodigy that has been accomplished, in which the body of Christ and his dreaded blood are found. Receive the communion with faith and fear […].'[517]

On the eastern tympanum of the same chapel, a Deesis with Christ enthroned between the two canonical supplicants is barely decipherable. This scene forms the centre of the Judgement court represented in the vault of the nave. Mary and John are accompanied by inscriptions that eloquently express their quality as eschatological intercessors. 'Son of God, have mercy on those whom your hand has created' is written near the Virgin. 'Have mercy, Lord,

516 Lemaigre Demesnil 2010, 41–44; Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 58; Wallace 1991, 234–245; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 41–44; Rodley 1985, 207–213.

517 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 42.

on the Christians' is written next to the Forerunner. The figure is flanked by a small ocellated tetramorphic cherub and a six-winged seraph.[518]

The apsidal Theophany–Deesis of Güllüdere presents iconographic motifs that are related to the daily liturgy of the church and to the temporary coming of Christ during the Divine Liturgy. The two prophets, Isaiah and Ezekiel, receiving the body of Christ in the form of an 'ember' gives the scene a sufficiently eucharistic connotation. Eastern Church Fathers and liturgical texts often referred to the body of Christ in the form of the eucharistic bread through the 'ember' in the purification of Isaiah's lips (Is. 6:6).[519] This helps, along with the presence of the sun and moon near Christ, to highlight the present temporality of the divine manifestation in contrast to an eschatological view.[520] More broadly, the presence of the two prophets alongside the Virgin and the Forerunner as humans in the heavenly court reflects the possibility granted to mankind to access the realities of heaven and the vision of God.[521] This is made possible through the 'spiritual ember' and the mystical ecstasy to which every believer aspires. This aspiration is particularly emphasised during the anaphora, when the celebrant exhorts the faithful to lift their spirits to God, envisioning the heavenly court illustrated by the Theophany on the main axis of the church: the apse.[522]

The liturgical meaning of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis is further supported by the liturgical inscription on the archivolt of the triumphal arch, which clearly references the eucharistic mystery and communion. In this perspective, it becomes clear that the intercession of Mary and John, who are part of the apsidal Theophany, refers to the present time, appropriate to the liturgy of the altar. It also implies that their appeal might be linked to the eucharistic liturgy, particularly considering that their eschatological intercession during the Second Parousia is clearly indicated by their presence in the depiction of the Last Judgement in this same church.

This type of programme, with an apsidal Theophany–Deesis coexisting with the Deesis of the Last Judgement in the same space, contradicts the arbitrary interpretation that takes the apsidal image as the intercessory prayer of the Virgin and the Baptist at the Last Judgement or even as an image that refers to both the present and parousiatic times. It is unlikely that two theophanies

518 *Ibid.*, 42–43; Thierry 1983, 1: 135–173.

519 See pp. 73–74 herein; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 32–34, 338–339; Brinktrine 1931, 34–35; Brightman 1908, 261, 394.

520 See pp. 83–93 herein.

521 Velmans 2002, 33–77; Velmans 1981, 47–102.

522 See p. 34 herein.

referring to the end of time would be juxtaposed in the same church; nor could this coexistence be justified as an emphasis on the theme of the Last Judgement, even if the chapel had a funerary purpose.[523] The eucharistic liturgy is also celebrated in funerary chapels, especially in the name of the deceased. The inscription that runs over the triumphal arch testifies to the eucharistic significance of the sanctuary programme. The grouping of such distinct theophanies (in the apse and in the Last Judgement) conveys, in my opinion, a persistent desire to separate the present-time Theophany from the parousiatic one and the intercession of the present from the eschatological intercession. All in all, the presence of Mary and John within the apse composition does not necessarily have the same symbolic and dogmatic significance as when they are part of the Last Judgement scene. It is important to clarify, however, that interpreting the apsidal Theophany–Deesis of Güllüdere from a eucharistic perspective does not imply that all Theophanies–Deeses should automatically be understood solely from this angle, nor that the present intercession of the Virgin and the Forerunner is exclusively connected to the eucharistic liturgy.

The Theophany–Deesis with the Anastasis and the Earthly Paradise. Another interesting case is the sanctuary programme of St Mary of the Resurrection in Abu Ghosh, Palestine (1160–1170).[524] An Anastasis occupies the central apse (Fig. 31) between a Theophany–Deesis, with only the *trimorphon* in the north apse (Fig. 32) and an earthly paradise with the three patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob receiving the souls of mortals in a landscape of trees and greenery in the south apse (Fig. 33). The Anastasis, focussed on Christ's triumph over death and the redemption of the righteous from the Old Law,[525] and the earthly paradise are two themes that belong in the present and therefore place the Theophany–Deesis in the present temporality as well. To begin with, the garden of paradise with souls welcomed by the patriarchs refers to earthly paradise, not heavenly Jerusalem or the kingdom of heaven. Indeed, after death, souls undergo an Individual (i.e. personal) Judgement. Following this Immediate Judgement, the righteous souls are led to a kind of temporary paradise, which, unlike the definitive heaven they enjoy after the Last Judgement, is full of trees and is often called the bosom of Abraham or earthly paradise. This is where virtuous souls must wait for the end of time.[526] In this

523 The north chapel of St John in Güllüdere is considered funerary (Jolivet-Lévy 2002b, 335; Thierry 1983, 1: 155).

524 Fishhof 2020, 14–35; Ouizemann 2019, 935–958; Delzant 2018; Virdis 2015, 545–560; Folda 1995, 382–390; Weyl Carr 1982, 215–243.

525 Kartsonis 1986, 227.

526 Baschet 2009, 103–123; Baschet 1995, 150–203; Angheben 2002, 105–134; Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 455–461.



FIGURE 31 Abu Ghosh, St Mary of the Resurrection, wall painting, central apse, Anastasis, 1160–1170

perspective, the image of earthly paradise, where the patriarchs are shown receiving souls into their bosoms in a landscape of trees and plants in Abu Ghosh, is undoubtedly associated with the Immediate Judgement, which is necessarily linked to the present time.[527]

The Anastasis, moreover, is an episode that refers to the resurrection of the ancestors of Christ and the righteous of the Old Testament during the Descent into Limbo. Likewise, the Anastasis, or 'Easter', together with the Nativity, or 'Christmas', are the two main events of the Byzantine liturgical year. The Anastasis is the foremost feast of the Christian faith and bears a fundamental reference to the eucharistic celebration.[528] The eucharistic liturgy is a sacramental representation of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ, according to the commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[529] This liturgical commentary, the most accepted, considers the ecclesiastical building to be the

527 Nasr 2022a, 256–257.

528 On the liturgical identity of the Anastasis, see in particular Kartsonis 1986, 168–186.

529 Brightman 1908, 248–267, 387–397; Bornert 1966, 125–180.



FIGURE 32 Abu Ghosh, St Mary of the Resurrection, wall painting, northern apse, Theophany–Deesis, 1160–1170

'antitype of the Crucifixion, burial and resurrection of Christ'.[530] It is from this sacramental perspective that the secret prayer of the preface opening the anaphora – the key component of the eucharistic liturgy – is most often accompanied by an image of the Anastasis in liturgical scrolls, clearly linking the image to the Divine Liturgy. This is seen in the manuscripts of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, Hagios Stavros 109, National Library of Greece no. 2759 and Lavra no. 2.[531]

It can be inferred that the Theophany–Deesis, associated with the theme of the Anastasis and the earthly paradise, explicitly reflects the present value of this apsidal image and its absolute detachment from eschatology and the Universal Judgement. Furthermore, this programme demonstrates the importance given to the present-time intercession of the Virgin and Forerunner on behalf of the faithful, especially the souls of the deceased, who are undergoing

530 Brightman 1908, 257; Bornert 1966, 173–176.

531 Kartsonis 1986, 183–184; Kepetzi 1981, 253–272; Grabar 1954, 161–199, fig. 11; Bréhier 1940, 1–19.



FIGURE 33 Abu Ghosh, St Mary of the Resurrection, wall painting, southern apse, detail of the earthly paradise, 1160–1170

Individual Judgement in order to repose in the bosom of the patriarchs in temporary paradise until their bodies are resurrected. The protoplasts were the first to undergo this preparatory judgement and to benefit from earthly paradise.[532] In this light, the programme of Abu Ghosh, which highlights the destiny of the separated souls, could be indicative of the theological debates that took place between the Western and Eastern Churches during the 11th to 13th centuries regarding the existence of a third location where the deceased could dwell after undergoing their personal judgement.[533] This grants a political significance to the painted ensemble.

The Theophany–Deesis with Priests and Supplicants. The apsidal Theophany–Deesis sometimes includes figures that are never found in a Last Judgement Deesis, such as prophets receiving 'embers' from the seraphim. These figures represent priests and supplicants and can bring the Theophany into the

532 Nasr 2022a, 257; Fishhof 2020, 14–35; Ouizemann 2019, 935–958; Virdis 2015, 545–560.
533 Nasr 2022a, 256–257; Le Goff 1990, 283–284.

current time, ruling out any eschatological meaning referring to the Second Parousia.

This can be seen, for example, in the church of Yüksekli (13th century, north-west of Gülşehir) in Cappadocia, where the apsidal conch features a Theophany–Deesis limited to the *trimorphon*.[534] Between the base of the throne of the Lord and the lateral figures of Mary and St John the Baptist are two large medallions with the busts of two Old Testament priests, Aaron and Melchizedek, in priestly attire. They are turned towards the centre of the conch, each swinging a censer with three painted chains out of the medallion and each holding a pyxis in the other hand. The apsidal wall shows prelates officiating around the Virgin and Child, assisted by the protodeacon Stephen. This arrangement clearly reflects the image of the eucharistic liturgy celebrated continuously within the worship space.

The depiction of the two Old Testament priests, each waving a censer and carrying a pyxis in the apsidal Theophany–Deesis, is very significant and most likely complements the liturgical meaning provided by the lower register, which depicts the officiating bishops. By holding the pyxis, they show their participation in the liturgy of the Eucharist, since the pyxis is a sacred box-shaped container strictly intended for the host. As for the representation of censers, it easily evokes the incensing practised on various occasions during the Divine Liturgy and in different ritual and devotional acts. Still, it is the pyxis in the hands of the priests that explicitly associates their act of incense with the Eucharist.

As the priests turn towards the centre, gracefully swinging their censers, and take their positions at the base of the throne and above the main altar of the church, it becomes evident that they are engaged in the act of incensing both the enthroned Christ and the physical altar.[535] In this way, the priests' gesture of incensing serves a twofold purpose, symbolically bridging the celestial and terrestrial realms and establishing a sort of correspondence or equivalence between the heavenly and the earthly altars in the eyes of the viewers. By waving the censer over the holy table, Aaron and Melchizedek make a clear connection with the primary incensing of the oblation on the physical altar. As such, their figures refer without any ambiguity to the Divine Liturgy. Consequently, the apsidal Theophany is naturally situated within the perspective of liturgical time and ensures, to some extent, that this scene belongs to the liturgy celebrated in the sanctuary. From this point of view, the representation of

534 Jolivet-Lévy 2002c, 209–212, 217–218; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 238–239.

535 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 238.



FIGURE 34 Göreme, Karanlık Kilise, wall painting, apsidal Theophany–Deesis, 11th century

the Virgin and St John the Baptist as intercessors in this same image refers to the eucharistic liturgy.

Another apse in Cappadocia includes two supplicants prostrating themselves at the feet of Christ in Majesty in the composition of the Theophany–Deesis. This is the central apse of Karanlık Kilise, the church of the Ascension, in Göreme (11th century; Fig. 34).[536] Here, the figure on the left is dressed as a priest with a *phelonion* and *epitrachelion*, accompanied by the following inscription: 'Prayer of the servant of God Nikephoros, priest' (Fig. 35, below). This would be the priest of the local church, who probably commissioned his depiction in the heavenly court. Over the figure on the right we read: 'Prayer of the servant of God Bassianos' (Fig. 35, above).[537] This is a lay believer. The inscriptions accompanying Nikephoros and Bassianos not only articulate the essence conveyed through their postures and the overall composition, but also transcend the boundaries of the present moment. As viewers engage with these inscriptions, their pleas resonate continuously, transforming the words into a conduit of remembrance. Through the harmonious integration

536 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 81–85; Jolivet-Lévy 2006, pl. 96; Yenipınar and Seracettin 1998, 61–62.

537 For the relationship between images and inscriptions at Karanlık Kilise, see Jolivet-Lévy 2019, 384–388.



FIGURE 35 Göreme, Karanlık Kilise, wall painting, apsidal Theophany–Deesis: layman (above) and supplicant priest (below), 11th century

of text and image, an enduring commemoration of Nikephoros and Bassianos is assured.[538]

The inclusion of the local church priest and a lay individual in the apse scene is significant. It reflects a desire for extreme rapprochement or a search for equivalence between God's heavenly residence and his earthly dwelling. Therefore, these servants present themselves in the modest and fairly widespread Byzantine attitude of *proskynesis* before Christ, which clearly shows the votive sense of the image and that the servants of God in his earthly dwelling are fit to serve him in his heavenly court. They thus blend the heavenly and earthly liturgies. Moreover, the fluidity of human movement from the earthly world to the Church in heaven reflects humankind's possibility of accessing the Theophany of God in the present time.

Indeed, the Theophany–Deesis, with its intercessory nature, proves to be an ideal theme for incorporating contemporary supplicants. In this vein, Neophytos, a revered saint–monk who resided in a cave near Paphos in the late 12th century, included himself in *proskynesis* in a Deesis as part of the artistic scheme for his *enkleistra* (hermitage) in 1183 (Fig. 36).[539] Dressed in his monastic habit, Neophytos surpasses Nikephoros and Bassianos in his profound devotion by taking it a step further: he firmly grasps the right foot of Christ, preparing himself to kiss it. This powerful gesture not only showcases his unwavering faith in the divine figure, but also reflects his humility and acknowledgment of his subservience to the spiritual greatness of Jesus. Above all, it reveals his fervent desire for a closer communion with the divine. In doing so, Neophytos not only highlights the spiritual and emotional significance embodied by the image of Christ, but also emphasises the sacredness of his physical body: by touching it, one was thought to have access to divine grace.

It is interesting to observe that in this composition both the Virgin and the Baptist are depicted with their gaze directed downwards towards Neophytos. This deliberate alignment serves to guide the viewer's attention towards Neophytos, further accentuated by the oblique angle of his figure positioned to the left of the painting. The intentional asymmetry within an otherwise carefully balanced composition adds a sense of movement and emphasises

538 Jolivet-Lévy 2019, 386.

539 Enkleistriotis 2011; Jolivet-Lévy 2004, 43–72; Panayotidi 2004, 152–153; Stylianou and Stylianou 1997, 353–381; Mango and Hawkins 1966, 119–206. Three centuries later, in 1514, the Zacharias family purposefully opted to be portrayed in the same scene in the church they donated, the Panagia Theotokos in Galata, situated approximately 80 km away from the *enkleistra*.



FIGURE 36 Paphos, *enkleistra* of St Neophytos, wall painting, Theophany–Deesis, 1183

Neophytos's presence.[540] His asymmetrical posture in *proskynesis* effectively captures the viewer's attention, directing their focus towards both him and the inscription beside which he kneels, which is centred beneath the feet of Christ: 'O Christ, through the prayers of your Mother and your Baptist, who stand with reverence beside your sacred throne, grant your mercy today and forever to the one who stands in supplication at your feet.'[541] This inscription serves as a plea from Mary and John, beseeching Christ's favour for Neophytos from the very moment the painting was created and enduring throughout time. It seems that this prayer is not only acknowledged, but also answered, as Christ extends his hand above the kneeling figure of Neophytos. This gesture carries added significance due to the intimate connection between Christ and the monk; Neophytos firmly grasps his foot, symbolising a direct appeal to Christ himself.

It is worth noting that the integration of local religious and lay individuals to the Theophany–Deesis would be absolutely impossible in a Last Judgement Deesis. Therefore, the compositions of Karanlık Kilise and the *enkleistra* of St Neophytos cannot reflect the Second Coming or Last Judgement in any way. These explicit examples place the supplication of the Virgin and John the Precursor within the present time and prove the scene's devotional and apotropaic meaning. Similarly, the apsidal Theophany with supplicants highlights, on the one hand, the creative freedom enjoyed by the programme designers in choosing motifs associated with apsidal compositions and, on the other hand, the exceptional role of the patrons,[542] with their image being included in the most significant area of church architecture: the apse.

3 Synthesis

These examples of the Theophany–Deesis, unrelated to the theme of the Last Judgement, demonstrate that the intercession of the Virgin and John the Baptist transcends the temporal boundaries of the end of time and the Second Parousia. Once freed from the eschatological dimension, their act of imploration naturally aligns with the present time, fulfilling both liturgical and secular requirements. However, it seems that the function of the material support of the Theophany–Deesis, as well as the iconographic, epigraphic and syntactic clues, enables us to identify different meanings for the intercession and to ascertain whether the image designer(s) indeed intended a liturgical

540 McNulty 2010, 53.
541 Jolivet-Lévy 2004, 49.
542 Jolivet-Lévy 2019, 386.

interpretation. When a Deesis is found on secular objects, such as pendants, helmets, lay clothing or icons used for personal devotion, its liturgical connotation is undeniably absent. In such cases, the choice of this image is driven by the devotion dedicated to the intercession of the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist, along with a deep reverence for the sacred image in the private lives of the faithful. On the other hand, when the Deesis is placed on objects of liturgical use, such as processional crosses, crucifixes, liturgical book bindings, reliquaries and antependia, a liturgical meaning is primarily intended, considering the relationship that unites the image to its support. However, this does not imply that the intercession of the Virgin and the Forerunner solely pertains to the Divine Liturgy, since these objects are not exclusively meant for the eucharistic celebration, unlike liturgical scrolls, chalices, patens and pyxides. In reality, there are countless liturgical acts and rituals associated with their use.

From this perspective, it can be assumed that the apsidal Theophany–Deesis that does not belong to the context of the Last Judgement or the Second Parousia could refer to both the present time and the ecclesiastical liturgy in its broadest sense, whether eucharistic or not. However, several iconographic, epigraphic and syntactic motifs indicate that this theophanic theme, featuring the prayers of the two canonical mediators of the Deesis, is more closely related to the primary function of the sanctuary, namely the celebration of the eucharistic mysteries. This sacred act unfolds in the present time, upon the physical altar located immediately below this image.

In the whole composition, a dual narrative unfolds. It depicts Christ in his role as the presiding Priest – not as Judge, as in the Last Judgement Deesis – accompanied by his heavenly court, overseeing the liturgy during the Divine Liturgy. Simultaneously, it conveys the intercessory prayer of the Virgin and the Baptist for the earthly Church and all faithful, whether living or departed. This supplication, linked to the requirements of the eucharistic rite, transcends time, encompassing the past, present and future. It commemorates the origin of the eucharistic celebration, continues through the current Divine Liturgy and extends into the future preceding the end of time. Consequently, this pleading, as indicated by the liturgical prayers, encompasses the departed of the past, the living of the present time and the generations yet to come. It constitutes a cosmic intercession for the entirety of humanity that will come together in the presence of the Virgin and the Baptist on the day of the Last Judgement.

This interpretation, which proposes a connection between the apsidal Theophany–Deesis and the eucharistic liturgy, does not confine the semantic scope of this image to this singular aspect, as demonstrated by examples from

Byzantine and Eastern art. Additional layers of meaning can seamlessly complement this liturgical aspect. Moreover, it is essential to recognise that each composition stands as a unique and distinct case.

This analysis has enabled the delineation of the semantic layers associated with the Apparition of God in the central part of the sanctuary. It provides the foundation for a scholarly discourse on the iconographic interpretation of this depiction in Lebanese wall painting.

CHAPTER 2

Theophanies in Lebanon and the Eucharistic Liturgy

1 Iconographic Tradition in Lebanon

After identifying clues suggesting a liturgical function for the main components of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis in Eastern churches, it makes sense to further explore this aspect in Lebanese churches. To do so, an analysis of the scene is necessary, specifying the role of each element and determining whether any written sources were used. Next, it is important to ascertain how these elements coalesce in the apse conch. Subsequently, a syntactic analysis will be conducted to discern whether the designer(s) prioritised the liturgical aspect. This entails examining iconographic programmes featuring the Theophany–Deesis in their apse, evaluating their liturgical significance and ultimately elucidating how the components of the Theophany–Deesis are arranged in the apse and between the apse and its surroundings. Finally, the nature and temporality of the intercession of Mary and John the Baptist will be clarified.

Before proceeding, it is important to note that, apart from my studies,[1] historiography has generally interpreted the apsidal Theophany–Deesis in Lebanese ecclesiastical painting as a symbol of the Second Parousia and a vision of the end of time.[2] As a result, the intercession of the Virgin and John the Baptist has been linked solely to the Last Judgement. However, Estephan Douaihy[3] interpreted the apsidal Theophany, with or without the intercessors, from an exclusively liturgical point of view, while highlighting the ecclesiastical factor that is linked to the authority of the Fathers of the Church and their ordinances.[4] He explained that the intercession of the Virgin, St John the Baptist and all saints referred to the present time and was often linked to the eucharistic liturgy.[5] Although the chronicler–patriarch had no impact

1 Nasr 2022a, 235–266; Nasr 2019a, 259–278; Nasr 2019c, 123–146.

2 Hunt, Doumet-Skaf and Capriotti 2017, 337; Zibawi 2009, 34, 68; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 219–235; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 32–36; Hélou 2006b, 32-47; Hélou 1998, 33–59.

3 Brock 2018.

4 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 104–105, 197.

5 *Ibid.*, 155–158.

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on 12th- and 13th-century medieval churches in Lebanon, which are the subject of this study, his liturgical and historical writings show a keen interest in the paintings adorning these buildings. This demonstrates the patriarch's deep familiarity with these works of art, which greatly enhances the value of his studies.

In his historical works written in the late 17th century, such as the *History of the Times*[6] and *Apology of the Maronite Nation*,[7] the patriarch imparted particular importance to the ecclesiastical paintings of Lebanon. This emphasis serves to authenticate their origins in the Christian tradition of the Fathers and to establish the Maronite community's historical relevance in the region. He was, in a way, an 'archaeologist' of his era.

In his liturgical writings, especially in his explanation of the Divine Liturgy, *Candelabra of the Holy Mysteries*, Douaihy commented on ecclesiastical iconography displaying a distinct preference for the depiction of the Theophany in the semi-dome above the main altar. His keen interest in this image is evident. Based on the Church Fathers, Douaihy underscored the liturgical aspect in the formation and use of this image.[8] For him, images of holy figures were an agent of the ecclesiastical liturgy, holding a significance equal to the word and the gesture.[9] Exhibiting the acumen of an art historian and showcasing himself as a pioneer of his era, he established a connection between the sacred image and the liturgy, as well as between the image and the primary function of the sacred space.

Our interest here in his liturgical work, which is of course later than the ecclesiastical heritage of the 12th and 13th centuries, is to demonstrate that the liturgical tradition from the Middle Ages to Douaihy's time remained unchanged. The Maronite patriarch revealed himself both as a liturgist belonging to previous tradition and as a theologian claiming, above all, the authority of the doctors of the Church and founders of the liturgy, such as Athanasius the Great, John Chrysostom, Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzos, as well as such theologians as Clement of Alexandria (d. *c*.215), Andrew of Caesarea (563–614), Jacob of Sarug and Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373).

The Images of the Apsidal Theophany and the Retrospective Value of Douaihy's Writings. Speaking of the Holy of Holies and its meaning in a chapter entitled

6 This history of the Near East exists in two versions, one traditionally called 'History of Christians' ranging from the First Crusade (1095) to the year 1699 (Duwayhī 1951), and another called 'History of Muslims', covering the time period from the Hijra in 622 to the year 1686 (Duwayhī 1976).

7 Duwayhī 1890.

8 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 104–105, 197.

9 *Ibid*., 155–158.

'Treaty of the Churches', Douaihy indicated that it comes from the apocalyptic passage IV: 'That the holy Fathers depicted God Sabaoth, in the apses of the churches, seated on the throne of majesty and that they represented the faces of the four creatures around the throne, with the angels standing and offering incense and the shining candelabra all around. This is so that the priest can look up to God when reciting intercession prayers during the holy sacrifice of the Divine Liturgy.'[10] Here, the patriarch established an extremely explicit correlation between the apsidal image of the Theophany and the eucharistic liturgy or, more precisely, the intercessory prayer during the anaphora. Douaihy also showed that this apsidal scene was an instruction from the Fathers, who relied on the apocalyptic passages to elaborate it. Indeed, in his studies the patriarch often underlined that the earthly liturgy echoes the heavenly liturgy, described by 'John' in his Revelation. In addition, he frequently referred to apocalyptic passages, including chapters IV and VI, in which the account encompasses the theophanic manifestation, which he related to the present time in order to prove the authenticity of the rites and liturgical formulas used in the eucharistic office and even the legitimacy of the various elements present in the church.[11]

At the end of this same section, Douaihy added:

> The Holy Fathers ordered that the eastern wall of the church be in the form of a niche, to signify the Father's bosom in the temple of his holiness. They also ordered that there be a small eastern window above the apse, because he is the Father of lights,[12] and that below the window and inside the apse, there be a cathedra in the episcopal churches to designate the throne of his majesty. As for what is depicted inside the apse and around him [Christ in Majesty] – a lit candelabra, angels praising him and incense pouring out perfume, the souls of the righteous crowding around him, this is so that we look up to him and ask for wisdom and the other gifts he lavishes on every man and especially on those he adorns with holiness, purity and mystical knowledge.[13]

10 *Ibid.*, 104–105.

11 Duwayhī 1895a; Duwayhī 1895b.

12 This type of small window can be seen in many medieval churches in Lebanon, such as Mar Tadros in Behdidat, Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda, Mart Berbara in Barghoun and Mar Girgis in Rashkida.

13 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 107–108.

Douaihy once again underscored that the depictions in the apse were prescribed by the Fathers, emphasising both the ecclesiastical and political aspect – the policy of the church's prelates – alongside the liturgical factor in the selection of the specific theme. Moreover, he linked the apse's iconography to the present time, when the faithful in the church can raise their gaze towards the image of God, accompanied by angels and saints, and seek blessings from him.

Even more significantly, Douaihy listed five major reasons that may motivate the embellishment of churches with holy images while privileging the apsidal figuration of the Theophany:

> The embellishment of the church with holy figures is motivated by the following reasons:
> 1. We know that their souls are in heaven in the joy of Christ.
> 2. We therefore give them the veneration due to those on earth.
> 3. Churches are decorated and beautified by these depictions.
> 4. Simple people are catechised; the figures of the saints present them with exemplary conduct and raise their spirits to meditate on their virtues.
> 5. Finally, the Father, God Sabaoth, is depicted in the apse, so that the priest may raise his spirit and his offering to him. Below this representation and around it, angels and saints are depicted, so that we may have recourse to them and implore their intercession.[14]

It is clear that Douaihy convincingly linked the figuration of God in the apse to the eucharistic liturgy and, more precisely, to the anaphora. He gave the angels and saints, who are depicted around him, the role of intercessors on behalf of the faithful participating in this liturgical event. Thus, the whole Theophany shows that, at the moment of the anaphora, Christ and his heavenly court (angels and saints) are truly present in the ecclesiastical building, the former to preside over the celebration of the holy mysteries and accept offerings and the latter to concelebrate and intercede. In the same section, Douaihy assigned a eucharistic meaning to the figures of the Virgin and the Forerunner, indicating that 'The Byzantines represent on one side of the iconostasis the Mother of Salvation [...] and on the other John the Baptist. It was they who revealed the Saviour to the world, and it is through them that the people understand

14 *Ibid.*, 158.

that the one offered on the altar is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.'[15]

In an eminently instructive way, Douaihy summarised the whole second part of his book at the end of the chapter 'Treaty on the Altar', giving the apsidal Theophany an essential role in the eucharistic celebration. This would have served to materialise, in the eyes of the officiants and the faithful, the participation of the Lord and the whole of the heavenly Church in the eucharistic liturgy:

> From what we have explained in this second candelabrum, it is clear that the edifice of the church was designed for the assembly of the faithful in order to listen to the law of the Gospel and for the celebration of the sacraments and in particular the Eucharist, because the holy altar was designed to offer the body of the Saviour, who is the new covenant in sacrifice through the priests, to whom he entrusted this in memory of him until his Second Parousia. This is why we set up the altar there, for the sacrifice and the offerings and to place the chalice and the patens on it to preserve the precious Body and Blood, and we raise the cross there for the memorial of the Lord's death on the cross and we burn candles and incense to honour his goodness and blessings. And we design the seats around the altar for the honour of the priests and leaders who have received the power to offer it. Also, we depict God Sabaoth in the apse surrounded by angels, because, at the moment of the consecration, the gates of heaven open for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Eucharist, and the angels come to sanctify it and the saints to venerate it. And the deacons stand with the *rhipidia* and the censers, and each one sings according to his rank to serve the body of the Lord and to honour him.[16]

In a section devoted to the attitude, gestures and words of the priest during the consecration of the holy species, Douaihy proclaimed:

> The priest must be disposed by his mind and his senses, and if the celebrant is a bishop he takes the mitre from his head, and, as he commands the people to lift up their hearts and minds to the heights, thus he makes the gates of heaven open to his spirit, and God the Father looks at him by sending his only Son in the Body to be present on the altar, and the

15 *Ibid.*
16 *Ibid.*, 197.

> Holy Spirit, hovering above his head, and the armies of heaven surround him with fear and trembling. To reinforce these things in the minds of all priests, the holy Church has ordered that they be painted in the apse above the altar, as we see in ancient churches.[17]

Thus, the apsidal Theophany, which reflects the realm of divinity and the sacred in its fullness, constitutes, for Douaihy, an agent favouring this spiritual figuration. It would help the officiant to reach the celestial world to which he aims and to recognise the radiance of his own mystical ecstasy at the decisive moment of the Divine Liturgy. This idea was also emphasised by such doctors of the Church as Cyril of Jerusalem and Theodore of Mopsuestia, who indicated that the faithful and the priest are invited to create, from the anaphoric words, a mental image of the heavenly court.[18] Similarly, in most Eastern anaphoras, the priest, at the beginning, asks the faithful to lift their minds and hearts upwards. Also, if we return to the liturgical commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, we might detect the same meaning for this representation, designed to decorate the apse.[19] According to this account, the cleric celebrating the anaphora stands before the altar as before the throne of the Lord: 'He contemplates the great, inexpressible, unfathomable mystery of Christ' and 'He spiritually sees the heavenly worship.'[20] Douaihy's writings are therefore strongly rooted in Early Byzantine and Syrian tradition.

In another passage, the Maronite patriarch again noted that the apsidal Theophany–Deesis is an agent of the Divine Liturgy: the author related Christ's gesture of speech in this image to the eucharistic rite. He suggested that the Lord participates in the sacrifice of the altar in person. Moreover, Douaihy placed the intercession of the Virgin and the Forerunner, who are depicted next to Christ, within this same act:

> That is why the Church has given an obligation to the priest, his representative [of the Son of God], to gesture them [his body and blood] with the sign of the cross and to draw God on the apses of the churches, in his glory on the hyacinth stone, signing them with the mark of the cross, and the angels offering him pleasant incense, in the presence of his Mother

17 *Ibid.*, 353.

18 Cyrille de Jérusalem 1966, 150–151; Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 539–541. For Theodore of Mopsuestia, the eucharistic liturgy is the image of heavenly realities (Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 497; Hellemo 1989, 236–238, 246–247, 259–262, 281–282).

19 Bornert 1966, 125–180; Brightman 1908, 248–265, 387–397.

20 Brightman 1908, 392–393, 396.

> and John the Baptist and the saints imploring his greatness for them [the faithful].[21]

In fact, Douaihy frequently emphasised that the intercession of the Virgin and the saints played an active and direct role in the lives of the faithful, ensuring their prayers were fulfilled. This is precisely expressed in the following passage:

> Finally, it is clear from what we have received from the Apostles and the Fathers, who ordered the building of churches, the erection of altars and the painting of sacred images dedicated to the Mother of Salvation and the saints, that we should have recourse to them in times of sorrow and ask for their help at the most urgent moment, hoping that through their intercessions, which are granted, the Lord will give us all that we ask of him. For this reason, the Church has established prayers, implorations and invocations for them, so that the faithful may gather in their churches and implore them with one heart and one mind.[22]

In a section dedicated to the holy figures adorning the interior of the ecclesiastical space in the chapter 'Treatise on the Altar', the patriarch recounted that the cherubim present in the sanctuary and the saints adorning the walls of churches are mediators of the faithful in the present time: 'The Lord commanded in the Old Testament that the cherubim be placed in the sanctuary to signify the angels to the people and to make them understand that God accepts prayers and grants requests through their mediation [...] As for the figures of the saints, they are placed in the churches to signify their souls and to make us understand that God has made them our intercessors in the kingdom.'[23] We can deduce that Douaihy therefore saw in the apsidal Theophany and Theophany–Deesis not an eschatological vision, but, on the contrary, a current vision linked to the eucharistic liturgy. Likewise, the anaphora assigns the Virgin, St John the Baptist and all the saints the role of intercessors on behalf of the faithful in the present, in particular during the eucharistic sanctification of the Holy Liturgy.[24]

This is how Douaihy envisioned and conceived the apsidal adornment of his patriarchal church, Saydet Qannubin (1703–1705). Within the apse of Qannubin, God, crowned by the papal tiara, assumes the role of the Grand

21 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 545.
22 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 443.
23 *Ibid.*, 156.
24 *Ibid.*, 455–456; Duwayhī 1895a, II: 417–420.



FIGURE 37 Qadisha Valley, Saydet Qannubin, wall painting, Theophany–Deesis, 1703–1705

Pontiff (Fig. 37). Exalted by the angelic Gloria, interceded by the Virgin and the protomartyr Stephen, Douaihy's patron saint, he imparts the eucharistic blessing upon the Lamb positioned on the painted altar. This draws a striking parallel with his earthly representative, the Maronite patriarch, who performed a similar action on the offering placed upon the physical altar. Furthermore, the presence of the protomartyr Stephen in his protodeacon attire beside the Heavenly Priest enhances the imagery of the eucharistic liturgy even more vividly.[25]

The Individual Judgement, the Eucharistic Intercession and the Exegesis of Douaihy. Estephan Douaihy associated the intercession of the Virgin and the saints not only to the living faithful, but also to the souls of the deceased. He devoted a complete chapter to them, in his explanation of the eucharistic service, in which he explained the 'Individual', or 'Particular', Judgement that directly follows death;[26] according to Douaihy, the souls of the deceased 'take advantage of the prayers and offerings offered to God for them'.[27] Among these, he said,

25 Nasr 2019c, 123–146.

26 This is the same Judgement that Marcello Angheben and Jérôme Baschet called 'Immediate' (Angheben 2002, 105–134; Baschet 2009, 103–123; Baschet 1995, 150–203).

27 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–456.

> There is nothing more noble and better than the offering of the body of the Lord, which is useful for the soul of the deceased. As we read in the invocation of the dead according to the tune of the [traditional Syriac] *Fsheeto* melody, the soul proclaims: 'Offer offerings for me, nothing can be useful for me like the body of the Lord [...] and you priests standing in the holy place, pray for me who leaves to be received before the Lord of the world.'[28]

Douaihy wrote that the living intercede through their prayers and eucharistic offerings in order to obtain God's mercy on behalf of the departed souls, so that they may be forgiven and taken to the place of rest. They ask for the intercession of the Virgin and the saints, saying: 'O pure and immaculate only Virgin! You who gave birth to God without seed, intercede for him to save your servant here. And also: O Christ! The victorious martyrs in the heavenly dwellings intercede to you forever for the faithful whom you have brought to you, making them worthy to possess eternal goods.'[29] In fact, in the Syriac-Antiochian liturgy, specifically that of the Maronites, one evokes the intercession, systematically after that of the Virgin, of the martyrs, including St John the Baptist and the protomartyr Stephen, who receive the most eminent place. Their intercession reaches its climax during the anaphora.[30] Thus, the deceased 'benefit greatly', Douaihy emphasised, 'from the prayers and eucharistic offerings of the faithful and the intercession of the saints and their supplications'. All this, Douaihy continued, is approved by 'the teachings of the Fathers, the foundation of the Church, who enriched the Byzantine Church and the entire universe with their divine sciences'.[31]

It is important to note that in this chapter Douaihy, who tirelessly insisted on the efficacy of the intercession of the saints during the eucharistic liturgy, both for the living and the departed, clearly marked a difference between the 'Individual Judgement', which the soul undergoes directly after death, and the 'Last Judgement', called the 'Universal Judgement', which 'will be at the end of the world'.[32] However, he never related the liturgical imploring of the saints to the Last Judgement. He shows that liturgical or, more specifically, eucharistic intercession is only beneficial to the deceased of the past, the living of the present and the generations of the future before the last end of man.

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28 *Ibid.*, 457.
29 *Ibid.*, 459.
30 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 419.
31 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 460–461.
32 *Ibid.*, 457–458.

1.1 *The Gesture of Speech and the Priesthood of the Lord*

It is necessary to emphasise that the Christ of the Theophany–Deesis in the apsidal conch is almost never seen raising his right hand and lowering his left hand. In fact, the gesture of the right hand with the open palm towards the spectator indicates a welcome for the chosen ones, while the lowering of the left hand, palm downwards, indicates a condemnation of the reprobate: this attitude is obviously characteristic of scenes of the Last Judgement. However, it is the gesture of speech that is omnipresent in apsidal theophanies.

This gesture has often been identified by art historians as a blessing. Chiara Frugoni and Marcello Angheben opposed this reading, relying on convincing examples. Chiara Frugoni pointed out that this gesture only referred to a blessing at the end of the Middle Ages and claimed that such a vocation would naturally involve the pronouncement of a word.[33] In continuing this investigation, Marcello Angheben tried to show the versatility of the Lord's gesture according to the context and the written sources of each examined image. He saw a biblical or liturgical blessing in it, a sign of the cross, an exorcism, the utterance of speech, a designation or an evocation of the Word of God or, more precisely, of the divine Logos in theophanies, among others. He also underlined that, in many examples, several of these meanings can coexist in the same representation.[34] Based on the vast semantic field proposed by Chiara Frugoni and Marcello Angheben, it is important to determine the meaning of the speaking gesture within Lebanese theophanies, since this could emphasise the liturgical character of the scene.

The enthroned Christ of the apsidal Theophany most often combines the gesture of speaking with an open book accompanied by an inscription, as can be seen at Behdidat (see Pl. 4) and Kaftun (see Pl. 80), or a closed book, as is the case at Enfeh (see Pl. 99), Kfar Shleiman (see Pls 48, 52), Kfar Helda (see Pls 34, 35), Kusba (see Pl. 71) and Rashkida (see Pl. 128). According to Douaihy, the Fathers gave particular importance to both the figure of Christ and his Gospel:

> When the Fathers gathered at the 8th Council in Constantinople, they ordered that the image of Christ should be honoured just as the Gospel is honoured. For the deeds of the Lord, about which we hear from the evangelists, we see them presented in figures. It was from this time that the Fathers also ordered that the Gospel be placed on the balustrade north of the royal gate and that it be hung next to the icon of the Saviour, of his Mother or of the patron saint of the church. This would allow it to

33 Frugoni 2010, 67–86.

34 Angheben 2013b, 22–34.

> be honoured by priests with incense, by deacons with candles and by all people with vows and metanias [bowing].[35]

In the open book of Christ enthroned in the theophanies of Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pl. 4) and Mar Sarkis and Bakhos of Kaftun (see Pl. 80), we read the usual verse from John 8:12: 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.' Christ could designate the Gospel by the gesture of his right hand; his word, as the only way to follow. Moreover, this Gospel verse implies that Christ's hand gesture materialises the words indicated in the codex and indicates that he speaks the word[36] as the Word of God.[37] The almost perpetual presence of the symbols of the evangelists – who appeal to the Logos and who could also refer to the reading of the Gospel – would support this theory.[38] The verse of John 8:12, conjugated in the present and future tenses, expresses a temporality that precedes eschatological time. On the other hand, this call, made by the Word of God at Mar Tadros of Behdidat and Mar Sarkis and Bakhos of Kaftun, would be aberrant in the context of a Last Judgement.

This interpretation of Christ's gesture is less obvious when he carries a closed codex, as in the theophanies found at Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh (see Pl. 99), Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman (see Pls 48, 52), Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda (see Pls 34, 35), Mar Mitr of Kusba (see Pl. 71) and the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis in Rashkida (see Pl. 128). However, it is the same gesture that the priest performs, by drawing the sign of the cross – the imprint of the Lord – to bless the people, the Gospel and the liturgical utensils and also to consecrate the eucharistic offering.[39] This liturgical blessing, accompanied by the sign of the cross, also implies speech. Douaihy supported this notion when examining the officiating priest's attitude, words and gestures during the recitation of the consecration formula. He assigned particular importance to the priest's blessing gesture, attributing it various aspects, such as biblical blessings, eucharistic blessings, the sign of the cross with an apotropaic or thaumaturgical purpose, the pronouncement of a speech and the evocation of the Divine Word, among others.[40] The gesture in question is capable, according to Douaihy's analysis,

35 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 157–158.
36 Angheben 2013b, 29.
37 Frugoni 2010, 79–83.
38 Angheben 2013b, 29.
39 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 206–210.
40 These fit with the interpretations suggested by Marcello Angheben (Angheben 2013b, 22–34).

of simultaneously representing several of these actions, but it is the eucharistic blessing to which he dedicated a large section.[41]

Based on the commentaries and writings of the doctors of the Church, Douaihy asserted that all kinds of blessings and consecrations within the church do indeed require the making of the sign of the cross during the recitation of the liturgical formulas:

> Nothing can be blessed in the church except by the sign of the cross; the faithful shall not be baptised, nor the churches consecrated, nor spouses married, nor the sins of penitents forgiven, nor the priests and deacons ordained, nor the branches blessed, nor the icons, water, oil, the vestments of the priests and the ornaments of the altar, nor the holy chrism, the seal of the Lord, consecrated, nor the oil of baptism, and nothing shall be accomplished of the affairs of the church, nor shall the Body of the Lord, the foundation of life, be consecrated unless it has been signed with the cross, as we say in the office of the cross: through the cross the children of the church are sealed to be spiritual lambs, it is the fulfilment of the sacraments and the sanctifier of the church. Cyprian the Martyr also spoke of the baptism of the Lord, saying 'The cross of the Lord is our pride, for by its power it fulfils all the sacraments and without this sign nothing is holy […].' John Chrysostom, in his interpretation of the Gospel of St Matthew, says: 'By the sign of the cross the body of the Lord will be consecrated, the water of baptism will be consecrated, the priests begin the sacrament of order in the church with the sign of the cross, and everything that is destined to be consecrated will be consecrated by this sign, the sign of the cross of the Lord and the invocation of the name of Christ, for this is the image of the sublime king and the seal of his name.'[42]

Douaihy stated in another passage, cited above, the Church's directive for priests, acting as representatives of the Son of God, to consecrate the body and blood of Christ by making the sign of the cross. Additionally, he highlighted the practice of depicting God's majesty on the apses of churches. These representations portray God signing by his hand the Eucharist, surrounded by angels offering incense. The sacred scene is further enriched by the presence of the Mother of God, John the Baptist and the saints, who fervently implore God's greatness on behalf of the faithful.[43]

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41 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 206–210, 353–356.

42 *Ibid.*, 208.

43 See pp. 142–143 herein; Duwayhī 1895a, II: 545.

Based on these accounts, it could be deduced that the right-hand gesture of Christ in the scenes of the apsidal Theophany refers to liturgical blessings. Moreover, it becomes evident that Douaihy distinctly linked the apsidal Theophany–Deesis with the eucharistic liturgy. In other words, he placed apsidal iconography at the service of the liturgical office that is permanently carried out within the ecclesiastical space. The hieratic gesture of Christ in the scenes of the apsidal Theophany could then refer to all the blessings and words spoken during the eucharistic service, suggesting his direct participation in the earthly office. He intervenes as high priest, as claimed by the Fathers and the Divine Liturgy.[44]

The Theophany–Deesis in Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman clearly shows Christ as a priest and provides a clear example for the eucharistic interpretation of the gesture of his right hand (see Pls 51, 52). It is true that the limited space on the eastern wall prevented the painter from depicting Christ enthroned on his cathedra, so this representation was transferred to the ceiling. However, he was not content to limit himself to this image, which embodies the temporary advent of Christ. He also intended to assign him the task of officiating, as the Saviour is once again depicted on the east wall, this time in bust between the Virgin and the Baptist.

In this last image of the Theophany, Christ, as the Word of God, displays the book and performs the gesture of speech right at the level of the main altar, which was placed directly on the wall. It is on this altar that the oblation would be consecrated. This arrangement of the altar and Christ's bust gives the impression that he is standing behind the altar, just like the celebrant. It should be noted that the holy table covers just the width of the figure of Christ. This depiction highlights the fact that the Christ dominating the altar presides over the liturgy, as affirmed by the Fathers. The gesture of his right hand symbolises the eucharistic blessing, referring to all the words spoken by the celebrant during the anaphora,[45] unequivocally conveying Christ's presence in the sacred edifice during the sacramental blessing of the offering. This interpretation does not negate the possibility that, through this gesture of speech, Christ, acting as the high priest, encompasses all the blessings and words spoken by the priest during the Divine Liturgy. However, it distinctly emphasises the significance of the eucharistic blessing above all else.

44 See pp. 55–56 herein.

45 Angheben 2013b, 29.

1.2 *The Draped Throne–Altar*

In the Lebanese corpus, Christ in Majesty rests almost systematically on a throne draped with a striped cloth, including a cushion: in Behdidat (see Pl. 4), in Rashkida (see Pl. 127), in Kaftun (see Pl. 79), in Kfar Helda (see Pl. 34) and in Kusba (see Pl. 71). The sheet covering the throne cushion at Kfar Shleiman is not visible or did not exist (see Pl. 48).

The throne of God can easily be compared to the altar of sacrifice, as previously discussed.[46] In this context, the striped cloth covering the altar–throne symbolises the cloth that covers the main altar. This is equated with the shroud that enveloped the body of Christ, an assimilation common among the Byzantines.[47] Theodore of Mopsuestia linked the altar to the Tomb of Christ, stating that 'The deacons spread cloths on the altar as if they were sheets for burial.'[48] Isidore of Pelusium explained the significance of the cloth covering the holy table, or *sindon*, in his epistle:

> The deployment of the pure *sindon* under the sacred offering signifies the ministry of Joseph of Arimathea. He wrapped the Lord's body in a shroud and placed it in the tomb from which the resurrection came forth for all of our race. Similarly, we consecrate the bread that was offered on a *sindon* and we find the Lord's body there with certainty, the source of that immortality that Jesus, buried by Joseph, gratified us by resurrecting.[49]

The commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica* places the veils and liturgical utensils, such as the paten and chalice, in parallel with the instruments of the Passion to which the eucharistic liturgy refers.[50] Douaihy stated that:

> The Holy Church received from the apostles the tradition of covering the altars with clean cloths. This has been confirmed by the majority of the theologians of the Early Church, such as in the letters of Clement, the Fathers and the traditions of all the Churches, and in the prayers provided for in all Christian confessions for this purpose. The reason is first the honour due to the holy altar, which is the Lord's cathedra and his litter [...] But there is also a reference to the cloth with which the Lord's body was wrapped in the stable, in the crib and in the sepulchre [...].[51]

46 See pp. 53–55 herein.
47 Bornert 1966, 70.
48 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 509.
49 Isidore of Pelusium 1859a PG 78: 264D–265A.
50 Brightman 1908, 257–265, 391–392.
51 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 148.

From these passages, one can see that the throne is treated like the altar or tomb. The draped cathedra that hosts the Supreme Priest and the Heavenly Victim in the apsidal theophanies of Lebanon and in numerous examples from the Christian Levant may refer to these exegetical interpretations. In this view, the draped throne on which Christ is seated could potentially provide an additional eucharistic indication to the apsidal image.

1.3 *The Celestial Bodies*

The celestial bodies surrounding the theme of the Theophany and the Theophany–Deesis in Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pl. 11) and in Saydet Naya of Kfar Shleiman (see Pls 48, 49) are considered attributes of prophetic visions that link the images in question to the Second Parousia,[52] although these prophetic revelations make no allusion to them or mention only their disappearance (Rev. 6:12–1). However, the absence of the celestial bodies in the representation of the Last Judgement, with the exception of those appearing in the sky being folded by the angel to mark their disappearance (Rev. 6:14; Is. 34:4), and in the eschatological literature emphasises the current temporality of these theophanic scenes, at the expense of the eschatological time of the Last Judgement, as I tried to demonstrate above. As stated in the scriptures and liturgical prayers, the sun, the moon and the stars partake in the praise and glorification of the Lord.[53] This role may elucidate their personification in the Lebanese programmes and elsewhere. Additionally, by evoking the calendar of the present time, the representation of the sun and moon in Behdidat and Kfar Shleiman emphasises the temporary advent of Christ as priest rather than judge during the daily liturgy of worship. In this event, the celestial bodies unite with angels and humans in praising the Lord through the thrice holy, as expressed by the Anaphora of St James.[54]

It can be inferred that the presence of the celestial beings is a substantial indication that clearly aligns with the present-time nature of apsidal theophanies and supports their potentially liturgical meaning.

1.4 *The Four Living Creatures*

Only Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pl. 4), Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda (see Pl. 34) and Saydet Naya of Kfar Shleiman (see Pl. 48) still preserve the protomes of the four living creatures. They may be participating in the seraphic chant, as mentioned in the Book of Revelation. However, the theophanies in the Lebanese churches lack any epigraphic or iconographic evidence to support

52 Hélou 1998, 42; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 56.

53 See pp. 88–92 herein.

54 Tarby 1972, 33–34.

this reading, like those seen in Cappadocian and Coptic examples.[55] The living creatures could also ensure the displacement of the 'altar that has become a chariot',[56] as suggested by Early Christian Coptic theophanies. In this perspective, the living creatures form the team pulling the divine quadriga.[57]

The living creatures, often manifested in Lebanese theophanies through the symbols of the four evangelists, as designated by inscriptions,[58] could by this quality reveal the identity of the Enthroned in Majesty. The latter holds an open book at Behdidat and Kaftun with the running verse of John 8:12, which allows the faithful to know his being and his mission better. This veracity is also revealed by the readings of the books written by the evangelists. The presence of the living creatures in the apse scene could also refer to the reading of the Gospel, as previously mentioned.[59]

It has also been pointed out that the presence of the book could refer to the rite of the Ostension of the Gospel.[60] This interpretation could be supported by the closed book displayed by Christ in Kfar Helda, Kusba, Rashkida and Kfar Shleiman. The Gospel also shows the figure and identity of the Word of God.[61] The eternal Logos, announced in the Old Testament and made visible through the Incarnation, continues to manifest himself through the reading of the scriptures and the liturgy of the Eucharist. Thus, as Origen said, 'What was first contained in the scriptures and was understood according to the letter has now become an intelligible word in the Churches of Christ, thanks to the revelation of the Lord.'[62] In this vein, the Theophany of the sanctuary manifests the Messiah under these two historical identities: God–Incarnate (Enthroned in Majesty) and God–Word (the Book), the first under the 'veil of the flesh' and the second under 'the veil of the letter', according to Origen.[63]

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55 See pp. 85–88 herein.

56 According to the Syriac prayer read during the Matins of Monday: 'Behold, the altar has become a chariot and the priests, like the seraph, distribute the body and blood of the Son of the Virgin' (Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 141).

57 Angheben 2011a, 337–338.

58 Immerzeel 2009, 102, 113; Zibawi 2009, 34, 48; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 339–340; Hélou 1998, 38.

59 See p. 86 herein.

60 *Ibid.*

61 Bornert 1966, 57.

62 *Ibid.*

63 *Ibid*, 56–57. On the manifestation of the Word in scripture, see also Lubac 1950, 336–346.

1.5 *The Four-winged and Six-winged Angels*

The Majesty of the Lord can also be recognised in the entourage of the heavenly powers.[64] In the Theophany–Deesis of Lebanon, the angelic cortege features four-winged angels, as seen at Kusba (see Pls 71, 72) and Rashkida (see Pl. 119), but also six-winged angels, as seen in Behdidat (see Pls 5, 6), Kaftun (see Pl. 81), Kfar Helda (see Pls 36, 37), Saqiet el-Kheit (see Pls 64, 65) and Kfar Shleiman (see Pl. 50).

1.5.1 Liturgical Literature and the Physiognomy of the Angels

The 'many-eyed' four-winged angels in Mar Mitr of Kusba (see Pl. 72) and the eyeless four-winged angels in the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis in Rashkida (see Pl. 119) are interposed between the throne and the two supplicants, due to the limited space of the conch. It is likely that the painter did not have enough room, especially in Rashkida, to develop a pair of vertical wings for these heavenly beings. In any case, these four-winged angels, with or without eyes, are unknown in the scriptures.

In Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pls 5, 6) and in Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda (see Pls 36, 37), the six-winged angels with multiple eyes are qualified by the accompanying inscription as 'cherub', while the one without eyes is referred to by the name of 'seraph'. It is evident that eyes distinguish the cherubim of Ezekiel; however, his vision attributes them with four wings and four faces, which is not the case here. Only liturgical texts, specifically the preface of some anaphoras, show this physiognomy with six wings, multiple eyes and a single face.[65]

At Kfar Helda, the names 'seraph' and 'cherub' are associated with the liturgical adjectives 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed', respectively (see Pls 36, 37, 38). These epithets from liturgical texts clearly indicate the source of inspiration for these theophanies and attest, without the slightest ambiguity, that these two higher orders of the angelic hierarchy participate in the liturgical service. They sing the seraphic song as they carry the standard, marked with the triple *hagios*.

64 Philip the Solitary (1081–1118) explored this thoroughly (Philip the Solitary 1864 PG 127: 875).

65 See pp. 59–63 herein.

1.5.2 The Angels' Function

1.5.2.1 *Cantors of the Liturgy*

The celestial creatures that gather on either side of the heavenly throne as guards of the great sovereign bear a standard printed with the seraphic song in Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pls 5, 6), in Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda (see Pls 36, 37, 39), in Mar Sarkis and Bakhos of Kaftun (see Pls 79, 81) and in Mar Mitr of Kusba (see Pls 72, 73). The scriptures attribute this hymn in the celestial liturgy exclusively to the seraphim, through Isaiah's vision and the four living creatures in the apocalyptic revelation.[66] The seraphim and the four living creatures could thus represent the singers of the heavenly liturgy. If the protomes of the evangelists in Lebanon do not feature any epigraphic or iconographic attribute to impose this function on them, as we have noted, the seraphim do so through the standard imprinted with the *Trisagion*.

However, the seraphim do not appear alone as singers of the celestial liturgy, as shown in Isaiah's vision, but are accompanied by multi-eyed, six-winged beings called 'cherubim'. These can be seen in Mar Tadros of Behdidat (see Pl. 4) and in Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda (see Pl. 34). Similarly, the carriers of the *Trisagion* in Kusba are multi-eyed, four-winged angels (see Pls 72, 73). These representations do not correspond to biblical scriptures, but refer, in appearance and function, to the liturgical readings recited in the Eucharist, frequently repeated at their feet. It is more precisely, but not exclusively, the anaphoric prefaces that attribute the seraphic song not only to the seraphim, but to different celestial creatures as well.[67] They all sing of the holiness of God together.

Additionally, some anaphoras, such as that of St Mark, known by Athanasius the Great, Cyril of Alexandria and Macarius of Egypt, specify that the singing of the *Trisagion* is performed by both a seraph and a cherub and that each of these two higher orders of the angelic hierarchy is represented by a single delegate.[68] One might suppose that the representations of a single cherub and a single seraph on either side of the throne of Christ at Mar Tadros of Behdidat, Saydet el-Kharayeb of Kfar Helda and possibly Mar Sarkis and Bakhos of Kaftun could be motivated by this type of liturgical text.

It is therefore possible that the thrice holy carried by these throne guards refers to the ecclesiastical *Trisagion*. One might assume that these celestial beings simultaneously sing the seraphic chant during the Divine Liturgy with

66 See pp. 59–85 herein.
67 See pp. 59–63 herein.
68 See pp. 62–63 herein.

the faithful, just as the seraphim and cherubim that illustrate the *Trisagion* on the liturgical scrolls do.[69] As a result, they bring a eucharistic angle to the compositions that include them. The liturgical adjectives 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed' used to describe the seraph and cherub in Kfar Helda strongly reinforce the eucharistic significance of these angelic beings and, subsequently, the entire Theophany–Deesis.

1.5.2.2 *Throne Guardians*

The very limited space of the Rashkida apse conch apparently prevented the painter from representing the four-winged angels with a banner (see Pl. 119). Nevertheless, they could participate in worship and divine praise, just like the seraphim of Isaiah, but they appear in Rashkida rather as guardians and defenders of the altar of God, a task entrusted to cherubim in different episodes in the Old Testament (Ex. 25:18–20; 2 Chron. 3:10–14). They are most often mentioned in connection with the divine throne, both in scripture and in the liturgy.

1.5.2.3 *The Feet of the Heavenly Throne or the Wheels of the Divine Chariot*

Two angelic creatures supposedly supported the celestial throne in the Theophany of Saydet Naya of Kfar Shleiman (see Pls 48, 50), of which only one remains. Appearing as the foot of the throne, it has six eyeless wings. Its physical appearance corresponds to the seraphim of Isaiah. However, it is the cherubim who carry the throne of God, both in biblical and liturgical sources.[70] Liturgical passages provide an understanding of this depiction, as it is only in these texts that the six wings of the seraphim are attributed to the cherubim, and the tasks of these two superior orders of the angelic hierarchy are often confused.[71]

The two angelic creatures in Kfar Shleiman present themselves as two wheels of the celestial chariot harnessed by the four living creatures, with Christ as the charioteer. Angels and the living creatures ensured the mobility of the Sovereign of the world by moving him in his chariot–throne from the celestial kingdom to the earthly church.[72]

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69 See pp. 64–68 herein.

70 See pp. 60–63 herein.

71 *Ibid.*

72 On the four living creatures serving as horses of the divine chariot, see Angheben 2011a, 337–338. For Christ intervening on his chariot to officiate the Eucharist, see Cantone 2008, 97–98.

1.5.2.4 *The Thurifer of the Liturgy*

The Theophany–Deesis at Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit features a six-winged angel swinging a censer, which is a rare representation in the repertoire of Christian art (see Pls 64, 65, 66). However, in his description of the apsidal Theophany, Douaihy often evoked the thurifer angels next to the divine majesty, as we have seen above.[73] This suggests that the patriarch, who showed a particular interest in apsidal iconography, was familiar with several examples, in Lebanon or elsewhere, of angels offering incense and noted this configuration on several occasions.[74]

At Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit, the eastern wall was not large enough to develop the Theophany–Deesis, which is why the programme was spread across a part of both the northern and southern walls. On the eastern wall, only a fragment of the throne and part of the ochre honeycombed floor can be seen. On the south wall, there are faint traces of the clothing of a figure who must have been, according to custom, St John the Baptist. On the north wall, the silhouette of Mary, preceded by a six-winged thurifer angel, can be discerned. The main altar, which is made of a flattened stone block, rests on the east, south and north walls, at the edge of the Theophany–Deesis scene. Thus, the thurifer angel swings his censer over the holy table.

The gesture of the thurifer at Saqiet el-Kheit lends a sacramental aspect to the six-winged angel, as well as to the whole composition. The eucharistic connotation of the image clearly emanates from its location. The incensing performed by the angelic creature corresponds to that carried out by the officiant after the gifts have been placed on the altar.[75] This shows that the celebrants of the liturgy of heaven officiate with the clergy of the earthly liturgy, as suggested by the prayers of the Small Entrance, the Great Entrance and the anaphora, through which the officiant implores God to send his heavenly ministers to celebrate the eucharistic liturgy with him.[76] Based on the writings of Gregory the Great and Jacob of Sarug, Douaihy also affirmed that, during the consecration, the doors of heaven open to the voice of the officiating priest, and the angelic powers come to serve Jesus Christ with the earthly ministers.[77] It is important to recall that certain prayers within the Syriac liturgy hold a significant meaning in this regard by referring to the heavenly powers as ministers of

73 See pp. 139, 142–143 herein; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 104, 107–108; Duwayhī 1895a, II: 545.

74 Douaihy made several trips and pilgrimages to Syria, Palestine, Cyprus, Italy and elsewhere (Moubarac 1984b, 3–5).

75 Angheben 2008, 82.

76 See pp. 25, 29–31 herein.

77 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 229–230.

the rite of incense and the distribution of Christ's body and blood.[78] Moreover, the symbolism of the incense offering should not be overlooked, as it refers to both the sacrifice of the cross and the eucharistic sacrifice. In this way the incense offering is presented to God, just as the eucharistic offering is. This is well indicated by the prayers that accompany the act of incensing during the Holy Liturgy, as we have seen.[79]

In this perspective, there is no doubt that the six-winged angel carrying the censer in Saqiet el-Kheit replicates a gesture akin to the officiating cleric. By standing over the main altar and engaging in the act of incensing the earthly liturgy's oblation, this celestial being attests to the eucharistic significance of the Theophany–Deesis, emphasising that the earthly liturgy is rooted in the celestial liturgy.

1.6 *The Two Supplicants*

The interpretation of the Virgin and the Forerunner has been often relegated to the end of time. However, Douaihy projected the invocation and mediation of these two major intercessors, both in liturgical texts and in iconography, in the present time preceding the Last Judgement, as he often put them at the service of the eucharistic liturgy.

In his commentary on the Divine Liturgy, Douaihy emphasised the effectiveness of the main intercessors in the worship life of the Church. He placed exceptional importance on them during the anaphora. The invocation of the Mother of God is essential during the eucharistic epiclesis and during the commemoration of the saints, in which she holds a privileged position, along with St John the Baptist and the protomartyr Stephen, at the head of all saints.[80] Similarly, Douaihy praised John the Baptist by speaking of the sanctification of the eucharistic sacrifice:

> All the prophets foretold the Incarnation of the eternal Word of God, but there is no greater than John the Baptist, among the children of women, because he showed him with his finger, saying: 'Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!' Thus, all parts of the Holy Liturgy, as well as all elevations, show the presence of the Lord's body forgiving sins on the altar. But the elevation that is referred to here and that sanctifies the sacraments is the most preferred and most sublime of all elevations,

78 Moubarac 1984a, 176.

79 See p. 78 herein.

80 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 417–420.

> because through it and through the power of the Spirit the presence of the body of the Son of God and his precious blood are revealed to us.[81]

The special significance that Douaihy attributed to Mary and St John the Baptist in the eucharistic prayers also marked their treatment in apse iconography. For him, they are the preferred intercessors before the celestial throne. By placing Christ's gesture of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis within the framework of the eucharistic blessing, the patriarch explicitly connected the invocation of the Virgin and the Forerunner to the sacrifice of the Church.[82] It could be argued that this intercession is dedicated to the present time, since it is linked to the Divine Liturgy. This is what I propose to call liturgical, or more precisely eucharistic, intercession.

The close connection between the intercessors and the Eucharist is also evident in an excerpt in which Douaihy emphasised that, by portraying the Virgin and the Baptist on the iconostasis, people are invited to realise that the one offered on the altar is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.[83] In another passage, Douaihy, without expressly naming the Virgin and St John the Baptist, considered that the saints represented with the divine majesty in the apsidal scene intercede on behalf of the faithful who participate in the eucharistic sacrifice with the priest. He explained that the depiction of 'God Sabaoth' in the apse serves to enable the priest to elevate his spirit and offerings towards God. Surrounding this representation, angels and saints are depicted to provide the faithful with the opportunity to seek their intercession and implore their help.[84] This is clearly an actual imploration that complies with the demands of the ecclesiastical liturgy.

Douaihy often granted the role of intercessors in the worship life of the faithful to the figures of the Mother of God and the saints:

> Finally, it is clear from what we have received from the Apostles and the Fathers who ordered the building of churches and the erection of altars and the painting of sacred images dedicated to the Mother of Salvation and the saints that we should have recourse to them in times of sorrow and ask for their help at the most urgent moment, hoping that through their intercessions, which are granted, the Lord will give us all that we ask of him. For this reason, the Church has established prayers,

81 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 203.
82 See pp. 142–143 herein; Duwayhī 1895a, II: 545.
83 See pp. 140–141 herein; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 158.
84 See p. 140 herein; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 158.

> implorations and invocations for them, so that the faithful may gather in their churches and implore them with one heart and one mind.[85]

The liturgical indicators identified so far in the apsidal theophanies in Lebanon match the statements of Douaihy and point to the celebration of the eucharistic liturgy. Thus, the presence of the Virgin and the Baptist in these compositions, located above the holy table, where the unbloody sacrifice takes place, seems to respond to their liturgical invocation as privileged intercessors. However, it is imperative to examine the iconographic framework in which the Theophany–Deesis falls in the sanctuaries of the churches and hermitages in Lebanon before determining the nature or temporality of the intercession of Mary and John.

2 Iconographic Programmes

Before examining the syntax in which the apsidal Theophany–Deesis is anchored, I will carry out a brief review of each church's main components and their meanings, in order to understand how this scene is articulated within the iconographic ensemble of the sanctuary and its surroundings.

2.1 *Mar Tadros in Behdidat*

2.1.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The Christ in Majesty is displayed in the apse of Mar Tadros (St Theodore) of Behdidat, guarded by two six-winged, one-faced creatures and surrounded by the two intercessors (see Pl. 4).[86] He is seated on a large throne adorned with two cushions that are draped in a white fabric embellished with black and red stripes, possibly mirroring the contemporary local cotton or linen textile production.[87] This seat, with no backrest and draped, may refer to the altar of sacrifice.[88] From behind the throne, the four living creatures emerge; the six-winged angels standing beside it hold the standard with the thrice holy, suggesting their laudatory nature (see Pls 5, 6). The one to the right of Christ, with its eyeless wings, is named as a seraph, while the one to his left has multiple eyes and is named as a cherub.

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85 Duwayhī 1895b, 1: 443.

86 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 339–341; Hélou 1998, 39–40; Hélou 2006b, 33–36.

87 Hunt, Doumet-Skaf and Capriotti 2017, 331. For 13th-century fabrics found in Lebanon, see Figuié and Kallab 1999.

88 See pp. 53–55, 150–151 herein.

The seraph and cherub should sing the anaphoric *Trisagion* here, as it is during this hymn that they sing together.[89] Let us recall that some Eastern anaphoras – the Anaphora of Athanasius the Great, Macarius of Egypt, Cyril of Alexandria and St Mark – exclusively present, as in the painting of Behdidat, only one seraph and one cherub as singers of the anaphoric *Trisagion*.[90] The depiction of Behdidat could be motivated by this kind of text. Moreover, the physiognomy of the cherub, which does not correspond to any scripture, could be explained by the liturgical texts, as shown above.[91]

These features argue in favour of a liturgical reading. In this vein, the presence of the Virgin and the Forerunner, standing on either side of the Lord in an attitude of supplication, could also reflect their mention as privileged intercessors during the Divine Liturgy, more precisely in the anaphoric prayer of intercession that concludes the epiclesis.

2.1.2 Emmanuel, the Sun, the Moon and the Divine Hand

In the centre of the apsidal arch, a medallion surrounded by precious stones contains the bust of Emmanuel (see Pls 11, 12). On either side of this central medallion are the personifications of the sun and the moon.[92] These could, on the one hand, enhance the divinity of Christ by placing him in the transcendence of heaven[93] and, on the other hand, contribute to placing the events that take place on the apsidal arch, as well as the Theophany–Deesis of the apse, in the perspective of the present time.[94]

The representation of Emmanuel in bust suggests his human nature, which can only be partially revealed.[95] The circle of the medallion, which has neither end nor beginning, could signify his eternity. His figure comes from a prophecy from Isaiah (Is. 7:14–15) that evokes the Saviour in his mother's womb before the Incarnation.[96] In this way, the image of the juvenile Christ of Behdidat echoes the scene of the Annunciation, which unfolds in the middle part of the apsidal arch. A parallel can be seen in Mar Musa el-Habashi in Syria, where Emmanuel's medallion, placed at the top of the triumphal arch, was framed

89 See pp. 60–63, 154–155 herein.
90 See pp. 62–63 herein.
91 See pp. 60–63, 153 herein.
92 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342; Hélou 2007, 13.
93 Hélou 1998, 42.
94 See pp. 88–93, 151 herein.
95 Grabar 1979, 70–72; Grabar 1957, 209–210.
96 Nasr 2018b, 106–107; Nasr 2017, 330; Bacci 2006, 212; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 158, 174, 198; Glichitch 1990.

by the two figures of the Annunciation (1208–1209).[97] The same arrangement can be found in the church of the Panagia Arakiotissa in Lagoudera in Cyprus, where the medallion with Emmanuel at the apex of the triumphal arch separates the two central figures of the Annunciation placed within the dome's pendentives (1192).[98]

The image of Emmanuel above the apse is very common, both in Byzantium and in the East.[99] It is a reminder of the event of the Incarnation of the Word, repeated regularly in the eucharistic mystery.[100] A manuscript from Constantinople, currently housed in the Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria in Turin and dated to the last third of the 11th century, provides a particularly striking illustration;[101] a decorated letter 'rho' is used to emphasise the word δώρα (meaning 'gifts') in Gregory's funeral oration for Basil. The letter is depicted as a deacon holding a chalice, from which the young Christ emerges. It is from this eucharistic perspective that Emmanuel is related to the programme of the sanctuary of Behdidat and elsewhere.

Above Emmanuel, at the very top of the apsidal arch, there is a small window with a red frame (see Pls 11, 12), which is currently blocked. It could have been used for ventilation or light,[102] but it is very small to let the sun's rays through. Douaihy informed us that this type of opening in the eastern wall was an order from the Church Fathers to suggest that God is the 'Father of lights'.[103] On either side of this window the hand of God emerges from the constellated orbit. The representation of the divine hand on the left corresponds to the sacrifice of Isaac, while the one on the right holds out the Law to Moses.

As a result, three theophanies have been grouped together in the axis of the Behdidat building, echoing each other: the Christ in Majesty of the Theophany–Deesis in the apse; Emmanuel inscribed in a medallion on top of the apsidal arch; and the divine hand at the top of the same arch. In the first Theophany, the priest appears, offering; in the second, the victim who is offered; and in the third, the divinity who receives the sacrifice.

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97 This image is no longer extant, but was still present when Erica Cruikshank Dodd visited (Cruikshank Dodd 2001, 31–34, 128, pls v, 9a-b; Cruikshank Dodd 1982, 171; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 61–132; Immerzeel 2009, 64–65; Westphalen 2007, 122–123, n. 48a).

98 Nicolaïdès 1996, 66–71.

99 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 174.

100 Nasr 2018b, 106–107; Nasr 2017, 330; Schroeder 2008, 33–38; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 61–132. Niketas Choniates specifically emphasised the association between the infant Christ and the Eucharist in the 12th century (Niketas Choniates 1894, PG 140: 164AB, 165D).

101 Galavaris 1969, 172–173.

102 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 159; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 367–368.

103 Nasr 2019a, 261; Nasr 2018b, 100; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 107–108.

2.1.3 Abraham and Moses

The two scenes over the figures of Gabriel and Mary of the Annunciation on the upper part of the arch of the apse are, respectively, Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac (see Pls 11, 13, 14) and Moses receiving the Ten Commandments (see Pls 11, 15).[104] The apsidal image of the Theophany–Deesis was therefore framed by two Old Testament scenes, including that of Isaac, which directly refers to the eucharistic sacrifice. These two themes belong to an ancient iconographic tradition linked to liturgical spaces.[105] A similar layout can be found on the arch of the southern apse of the chapel attached to the basilica of Mar Girgis in Rashkida (13th century)[106] and in Mar Yakub in Qara, Syria (13th century).[107]

In Behdidat, Abraham, who points the knife towards his bound son, seems to intend his human sacrifice both for Emmanuel – the subject of the supreme sacrifice, depicted in the medallion at the top of the apsidal arch – and for the divine hand which dominates that image (see Pls 11, 12). The scene of the sacrifice of Isaac shows Abraham's great faith in God as he prepares to sacrifice his only son to him, as well as Isaac's deliverance by divine intervention.[108] From a Christian perspective, this episode is a prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, which thus obviously refers to the Eucharist.[109] Abraham's sacrifice is especially related to the eucharistic celebration, since it is one of the biblical paradigms evoked in the secret that immediately precedes the anaphora in the Liturgy of St James and of St Basil.[110] Here, the priest asks God to accept his sacrifice, as he accepted the sacrifices of the Old Testament, while evoking the liturgical services of Moses and Aaron: 'Lord our God [...] accept this [sacrifice], as you accepted the offerings of Abel, the sacrifices of Noah, the burnt offerings of Abraham, the sacred services of Moses and Aaron, the

104 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342; Hélou 1998, 43–44.

105 Nasr 2022a, 240–243; Nasr 2019a, 266–267.

106 Nasr 2019a, 266–267.

107 Westphalen 2005, 69–153.

108 John Chrysostom 1992, 14–24.

109 Dulaey 1994, 3–40. The concept of the eucharistic sacrifice being prefigured and foretold by the sacrifices of the Old Law finds affirmation in the writings of Early Church Fathers, such as St Gregory of Nazianzos (Gregory of Nazianzos 1885, PG 35: 497B) and St Cyril of Alexandria (Cyril of Alexandria 1864, PG 69: 14A). The commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiatica* took up this same symbolism, while insisting on the fact that the Old Testament sacrifices are only the prefiguration of the sacrifice of the cross and that the eucharistic celebration is only its antitype; Brightman 1908, 257–259, 300, 390–391, 397. On eucharistic prefiguration in the Old Testament according to patristic catechesis, see Bornert 1966, 61, 65, 73, 75, 77, 81, 173, 175–176, 205.

110 Nasr 2022a, 242; Nasr 2019a, 267.

peace offerings of Samuel [...].'[111] The representation of Isaac's immolation in Behdidat appears to materialise the priest's words from the anaphora and links the scene directly to the sacrifice of the altar.

Isaac, who foreshadows the crucified Christ,[112] is depicted in a golden ochre tunic similar to that of Emmanuel. This creates a connection with the image of Emmanuel, which also portrays Christ as a sacrificial victim. Abraham, the priestly patriarch, is shown wearing an orange-ochre tunic with a red cloak, much like the attire of Christ in the Theophany–Deesis. The probable intention was to draw a comparison between the attire of Abraham, who serves as a model for priests,[113] and the clothes of Christ in the apse, who presides over the liturgy, as well as between Isaac and Emmanuel, the subjects of the sacrifice. However, it is also important to keep in mind that the colour palette of the time was limited.

The second representation is that of Moses, with his two hands veiled under his mantle, receiving the Ten Commandments from the hand of God. The scene parallels Abraham's sacrifice on the opposite side of the apsidal arch. The prophet Moses, standing, makes an upward movement, leaning his knee on a sort of stepped mountain showing stems of vegetation.[114] With this representation the designer(s) of the iconographic programme of Behdidat recalled that the reception of the Ten Commandments was a hallowed act that took place on hallowed land: Mount Sinai.[115] The sacred service was performed by Moses, who offered the sacrifice to God by going up the Sinaitic mountain and by erecting the altar under it as prescribed by divine prescription (Ex. 24:4–8), which is echoed by the main altar in Behdidat. Indeed, the holy table was announced by the Tablets of the Law, according to the *Historia Ecclesiastica*.[116] From this perspective, the image of Moses receiving the tablets on Mount Sinai could refer to the sacred services of the prophet, to which the priest refers while presenting the eucharistic offering in the Liturgy of St James and of St Basil, while mentioning the holocausts of Abraham.[117]

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111 Salaville 1942, I: 113; Mercier 1946, 194–195.

112 Mulard 2011, 99; Origène 2003, 230; Clément d'Alexandrie 1960, 152; Cyril of Alexandria 1864, PG 69: 14A.

113 Nasr 2022a, 242.

114 The stepped mountain has been identified by some scholars with the burning bush. See Hélou 1998, 45; Zibawi 2009, 31; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 31.

115 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342.

116 Brightman 1908, 258.

117 See pp. 162–163 herein.

Located on the upper part of the apsidal arch and above the actual altar, the images of Abraham preparing to sacrifice his son and of Moses obtaining the Ten Commandments seem to give substance, or serve as a visual support, to the words of the officiant during the anaphora, attesting to their connection on an iconographic and liturgical level. These two Old Testament episodes therefore strengthen the liturgical significance of the apsidal Deesis.[118]

2.1.4 The Annunciation

The two figures of the Annunciation, the Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary, placed on the middle part on either side of the entrance arch of the apse, frame the Theophany–Deesis (see Pls 16, 17, 18).[119] Like Christ in the apse, the Virgin is seated on a white fabric with black and red stripes.

The Annunciation,[120] a fundamental event in the history of salvation, is often included in Byzantine and Eastern iconographic sanctuary programmes, especially on apsidal arches. The scene evokes the virginal conception and the mystery of the Incarnation, which initiates the story of the Redemption.[121] This mystery is constantly repeated and actualised through the sacrifice of the Church,[122] which is likely why this theme is commonly associated with the programme of the sanctuary, the place of the eucharistic sacrifice. According to the *Protheoria*, the deacon who separates the *amnos* from the *prosphoron* in the rite of the *proskomide* is equated with the angel who said 'Ave' to Mary at the Annunciation.[123] Indeed, the *proskomide* symbolises the miraculous conception and the hidden life of the Saviour, according to the words of Nicholas of Andida.[124] The Small Entrance prayer that opens the Divine Liturgy text in the Jerusalem scroll is accompanied by the Annunciation and Nativity scenes (see Fig. 11).[125] This location is very significant, since these two scenes mark, like the prayer of the Small Entrance, the Saviour's first coming into this world.[126] Moreover, the Angelic Salutation is constantly recalled in the so-called intercessory prayer in the liturgies of Alexandria and Syria and is also found in certain Byzantine manuscripts containing the liturgies of St Basil and of John

118 Nasr 2019a, 267.
119 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342; Hélou 1998, 44–45.
120 U 2019, 27–28; Dell'Acqua 2015, 102–125; Maguire 1994, 44–52.
121 Nasr 2018a, 34; Hélou 2009a, 16; Jolivet-Lévy 2002b, 48.
122 Nasr 2018a, 35; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 154.
123 Nicholas of Andida 1894, PG 140: 429CD.
124 Bornert 1966, 203.
125 Grabar 1954, 172.
126 Maximus the Confessor 1865a, PG 91: 688BC.

Chrysostom.[127] As has been noted by Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, the relationship between the Annunciation and the intercession prayer in the liturgy could explain the juxtaposition of the Theophany–Deesis and the Annunciation on an iconographic level.[128]

The eucharistic celebration is the memorial or anticipation of the mystery of the Incarnation, which took place at the same moment as the Annunciation. The Infant depicted on the mantle of the Virgin in the renowned Russian icon of Novgorod, the Annunciation of Ustyug (*c.*1120–1130; Moscow, State Tretyakov Gallery), declares that the Incarnation occurred precisely during the Annunciation.[129] The Lord becomes incarnate in the bread and wine, through the power of the Holy Spirit, in the same way he was once incarnated in the womb of the Virgin.[130] It is in this sense that the celebrant asks God, during the consecration, 'to realise the mystery of the Son: that He be born, or that this bread and wine be changed into the body and blood of Christ God'.[131] The dove, depicted in Behdidat in Mary's aureole and near her ear, could represent the liturgical epiclesis that is the call addressed to the Holy Spirit to come, through his divine operation, to consecrate the gifts presented by the Church.[132] The image of the Annunciation could thus materialise the double incarnation of Christ: historical during the Annunciation; and sacramental during the Divine Liturgy.[133]

Even more significant from a liturgical point of view is the location of the Annunciation on the apsidal arch. This was the essential place devoted to the scene[134] from at least the 11th century on.[135] The arch of the apse, under which the priest enters carrying the eucharistic offering, symbolises the closed door of Ezekiel (Ezek. 44:1–2). This space is crossed only by Christ, an allusion to the virginal conception evoked by the Annunciation.[136] The proposed symbolism suggests that the entry of the officiating priest carrying the eucharistic offering under the apsidal arch is assimilated to the entry of Christ into the womb of Mary at the very moment of the Annunciation. According to John of Damascus

127 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 154.
128 *Ibid.*
129 Lidova 2020, 3–28; Nasr 2018a, 35.
130 Nasr 2018a, 35.
131 Brightman 1908, 395.
132 For more information on the depiction of the dove in the aureole of the Virgin, see Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 57–59.
133 Nasr 2018a, 35.
134 Regarding the location of the Annunciation, see Kitzinger 1949, 269–292.
135 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 154.
136 Ernst Kitzinger revived the significance of this symbolism (Kitzinger 1949, 277 and n. 41).

(d. 749), Mary is described as 'the eastern door, which will give Christ entry and exit'.[137]

While acknowledging the multiple aspects of the Annunciation – historical, narrative, commemorative, dogmatic and others – it appears that the image and its placement in Behdidat hold rich liturgical symbolism that can complement and strengthen the liturgical nature of the Theophany–Deesis, for which it serves as a frame.

2.1.5 The Apostles

In the apse's rounding the apostles are depicted standing frontally, under Seljuk arches adorned with chain-pattern motifs resting on columns with stylised Corinthian capitals (see Pls 9, 10).[138] This architectural motif, which highlights the holy figures,[139] could be a pictorial representation of the physical arches that run along apses and may thus reflect the grandeur of the liturgical spaces in large churches.[140] It is worth noting that this motif of columns with arches, as well as the stylised geometric and vegetal patterns, scrolls and arabesques that adorn, for example, the rim of the apse conch, the throne of Christ and that of the Virgin and even the embroidered clothing worn by some figures, such as Daniel and Stephen, are also commonly found in Muslim art. Parallels can be seen in illustrations of Al-Hariri's *Maqāmāt*, which showcase furnished

137 Jean Damascène 1961, 105–107.

138 The motif of arcades adorned with interlacing hexagons in the Seljuk chain-pattern style is prevalent in the Syro-Palestinian region. It features prominently in various 12th- and 13th-century paintings, including those at Mar Phoca in Amiun, Mar Elias en-Nahr in Kfar Qahel, Saydet Hamatura in the Qadisha Valley, Mart Shmuni in the Houlat Valley (the paintings of which have been destroyed), the chapel of St Barbara (?) in Beirut (on display at the National Museum of Beirut) and Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Qara. An identical motif can also be observed on the arches crowning the images of the Virgin and Christ at the church of the Panagia in Moutoullas (1280) and surrounding the nimbus of St George at the church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa at Asinou (end of the 12th century), exemplifying the vibrant artistic interaction between Cyprus and the Syrian-Lebanese sphere; see Andronikou 2022, 84–85; Andronikou 2017, 6–29. Additionally, the elongated hexagonal motifs of the Seljuk chain pattern featured in these murals is reminiscent of the hexagons observed in royal Mamluk basins; one exhibited at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is estimated to have been crafted around 1300, potentially commissioned for either Baybars I (reigned 1260–1277) or Baybars II (reigned 1309–1310); see Atil 1981, 64, cat. no. 15, and 69–71, cat. no. 18.

139 Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 138; Hélou 1998, 40.

140 Nasr 2019b, 28; Velmans 1981, 67.

and architectural backgrounds, and in the decoration of Mamluk architecture, wooden furniture and attire, among others.[141]

The arrangement of the apostles beneath the apsidal Theophany[142] follows a long tradition dating back to the Early Christian era, as seen in the 7th-century paintings from the Bawit monastery in Egypt (see Figs 2, 3).[143] All the apses in Lebanon that have preserved their pictorial decoration represent holy apostles or bishops and other standing saints in the first register.[144] This is the case at Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad (13th century),[145] Deir es-Salib in the Houlat Valley (late 12th–early 13th centuries),[146] Mar Phoca in Amiun (13th century),[147] Mar Mitr in Kusba (12th century)[148] and in the apse of the almost destroyed church of Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Akkar el-Atiqa (12th–13th centuries).[149] At the monastery of Mar Musa el-Habashi in Syria (13th century), the Virgin and Child stand between bishops in the apse rounding.[150]

Witnesses of the Incarnation,[151] the apostles can attest to the dual human and divine nature of Christ enthroned in the apse.[152] Their presence in the apsidal programme could be linked to their mention during the eucharistic commemoration, just like the Virgin and the Forerunner during the intercessory prayer following the epiclesis.[153] Let us recall that Mary and John the

141 Roxburgh 2013; Bolshakov 2018; Gallin 2017; Grabar 1963; Buchthal 1940. On Mamluk architecture, see Rabbat 2010; Blair and Bloom 1994; and Behrens-Abouseif 2007. On Mamluk manuscripts, metalwork, glass, ceramics, woodwork, textiles and rugs, see Atil 1981.

142 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 340–341; Hélou 1998, 40.

143 Iacobini 2000; Maspero 1931; Clédat 1904a; Clédat 1904b; Zibawi 2003, 78–82.

144 Bacci 2006, 210.

145 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 74–82; Akiki and Hélou 2023–2024; Kahwagi-Janho 2016, 95–135; Immerzeel 2009, 105–162; Hélou 1999a, 139–162; Chausson and Nordiguian 1996, 37–46.

146 Nasr 2025, 135–164; Nasr 2018a, 26–46; Abdul Massih, Chaaya and Hajj 2014, 187–222; Immerzeel 2009, 1118–119; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 49–50, 89, 92, 250–261.

147 Immerzeel 2009, 89–92; Immerzeel 2004b, 15–17; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 158–179; Westphalen 2000, 491–493; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 363–364; Hélou 2006b, 40–43; Sader 1997, 165–177.

148 Immerzeel 2009, 93–99; Nassif *et al.* 2007, 366–377; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 192–200; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 394–395; Hélou 2006b, 37; Sader 1997, 178–189.

149 Only the lower part of the figures remains; the Apostle Peter can still be identified by his keys.

150 Immerzeel 2009, 56–57; Immerzeel 2007b, 127–131; Cruikshank Dodd 2001; Cruikshank Dodd 1992, 61–132; Cruikshank Dodd 1982, 167–182; Westphalen 2000, 493–496.

151 Zibawi 2009, 34; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 340; Walter 1970, 169.

152 Nasr 2019b, 31; Nasr 2018a, 30; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 340.

153 Nasr 2018a, 30; Nasr 2022a, 245; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 52.

Baptist were often placed in the centre of the apostolic college in the lower registers of the apse, before their definitive displacement towards the Theophany of the apsidal conch, as in the cases of St Simeon in the Zelve Valley and Haçlı Kilise, both in Cappadocia (see Fig. 27).[154]

The assembly of the apostles, founders of the Church, has been interpreted as a way of representing the earthly Church in prayer, especially when they are accompanied by the Marian figure.[155] In Catalonia the apostles sometimes stand around the Virgin holding a chalice. Here, the Virgin is represented as an officiant raising the eucharistic offering.[156] Along with the apostles, sometimes joined by prophets and bishops, Mary embodies the local Church gathered in her place of worship to celebrate the liturgy.[157] There is no such explicit representation in Lebanon to reflect the ecclesiological meaning of the apostles, but the presence of thurifer deacons or bishops with the apostles clearly attests to their ecclesiological and liturgical value.

In Behdidat it is the protodeacon Stephen who stands next to the apostles on the south respond of the apsidal arch, carrying a thurible and pyxis that clearly link him to the eucharistic office. Stephen thus attests to the ecclesiological significance of the apostles, specifically their priestly function. Together, they represent the ecclesiastical community gathered around the altar to concelebrate the liturgy of worship.[158] In this hypothesis the apsidal iconography of Behdidat could represent the superimposition of the two Churches in prayer: heavenly and earthly, united through the intermediary of the liturgy. The former is represented by the Theophany–Deesis and the latter by the apostolic college.

2.1.6 Stephen and Daniel

The two figures that follow the assembly of the apostles on the responds of the apse arch are the protodeacon and protomartyr Stephen and the prophet Daniel (see Pls 19, 20).[159]

154 See pp. 93–94 herein.

155 Nasr 2022a, 246; Nasr 2019b, 31–32; Angheben 2012, 69–70, 74; Thérel and Daniélou 1973, 125–133.

156 Nasr 2020a, 119–134; Nasr 2020b, 56–65; Nasr 2018b, 98–113; Angheben 2012, 29–74; Bogevska-Capuano 2011, 1–21; Milliner 2011, 106–113; Lidov 2009, 225–255.

157 Nasr 2022a, 246; Nasr 2019b, 31–32; Angheben 2012, 69–70, 74; Thérel and Daniélou 1973, 125–133.

158 Nasr 2022a, 246; Nasr 2019b, 32–33; Nasr 2018a, 33–34.

159 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 341–342; Hélou 1998, 41–42.

Stephen was the most popular deacon in the Christian East.[160] He holds a significant position in Eastern liturgies, such as the Syriac Liturgy of St James, the Jacobite Liturgy of St Cyriacus of Nisibis[161] and the Coptic liturgy,[162] in which his name is mentioned before that of St John the Baptist.[163] Therefore, the choice to present the protodeacon Stephen at Behdidat could be related both to his widespread veneration and to his special position in the liturgy.

The placement of deacons at the entrance of the sanctuary is customary in Byzantine and Eastern Christian art. It is primarily their liturgical service that grants them this prominent position.[164] Here, Stephen is well-dressed in deacon's vestments (see Pl. 20): a red sticharion (dalmatic) decorated with different patterns and a light-coloured orarion adorned with red Latin crosses, worn diagonally in the manner of Latin deacons, visually highlighting the attachment of the Maronite church, particularly that of Behdidat, to the Roman Church.[165] With his right hand Stephen swings a censer with three chains, while in his left he carries a pyxis, closely linked to the eucharistic liturgy. As such, he should perform his duties as a protodeacon by assisting the apostles in their liturgical office.

As for Daniel, he is one of the four great visionary prophets of the Old Testament and thus considered a witness or visionary of the apsidal Theophany (see Pl. 19).[166] Presented in prayer between two lions,[167] Daniel perhaps illustrates the power and strength of prayer, which repeatedly saved him. This is why he was often associated with prayers for the deceased.[168] However, at Behdidat, Daniel, like Stephen, extends the assembly of apostles, as if their tasks were somehow combined. At Deir es-Salib in the Houlat Valley, Daniel also completes the assembly of the apostles, bishops and deacons in the northern apse.[169] The Prophet Elijah stands with apostles and bishops in the apse of Mar Elias en-Nahr (St Elijah on the River) at Kfar Qahel.[170] This iconographic formula can be traced back to the Early Christian period, as demonstrated by

160 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 71.
161 Kantorowicz 1942, 80.
162 Brightman 1896, 1: 169.
163 Kühnel 1988, 65–69.
164 Nasr 2018a, 31–33; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 48; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 74.
165 According to the testimony of Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre (1214–1228), the Maronites adopted the traditions of the Latin Church under the mandate of Amalric of Nesle, the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem (1158–1180) (Issa 2014, 325–339; Vitry 1825, 1: 156–158).
166 Zibawi 2009, 36–37; Hélou 2007, 13–14; Hélou 2006b, 34; Hélou 1998, 41.
167 Dulaey 1998, 38–50.
168 Igarashi-Takeshita 1980, 46–47; Cassin 1951, 129–162; Ntedika 1971, 72–73.
169 Nasr 2025, 142–143; Nasr 2018a, 33; Abdul Massih, Chaaya and Hajj 2014, 210.
170 Nasr 2019b, 23–35.

the depiction of Ezekiel in a central position among the apostles on the apse wall of chapel XLV in Bawit.[171]

While the figures of the apostles attest to New Testament priesthood, the prophet Daniel should represent Old Testament priesthood.[172] Moreover, the depiction of Stephen wearing diaconal vestments, holding a pyxis and swinging the censer gives this assembly a distinctly clerical tone and lends it, without a doubt, a liturgical value. The apostles, the prophet and the protomartyr represent an image of the earthly Church in prayer and appear to be prominent examples of ministers of the earthly liturgy. This equivalence would become evident when the local clergy of Behdidat would gather in the apse, around the main altar, to celebrate the liturgy of worship.[173]

2.1.7 St Theodore and St George

The north and south walls of the choir depict St Theodore – as patron of the church – and St George, riding horses (see Pls 21, 26). They come immediately after the prophet Daniel and St Stephen.[174] However, their images are significantly larger in size compared to those of Stephen, Daniel and the apostles, indicating that Theodore and George are not part of the group of the apostles, protodeacon and prophet displayed in the first row of the apse and on the responds of the apse arch. This difference in size could be intended to create a visual distinction between the liturgical space and the space designated for the faithful.

From the 9th and 10th centuries it was common to see St Theodore depicted alongside St George, and this became a popular iconography starting in the 11th century,[175] as seen in Göreme at Saklı Kilise,[176] Yusuf Koç Kilisesi[177] and church no. 20.[178] At Behdidat Theodore, riding a red horse, grips the reins with his left hand, while he uses his right hand to wield a lance and strike down a serpentine monster with a human head (see Pl. 22),[179] symbolising the

171 Angheben 2011b, 114–115; Cantone 2008, 99; Iacobini 2000, 52–59, 114; Millet 1945, 54; Clédat 1904a, I: 80.

172 Nasr 2019b, 32.

173 Nasr 2018a, 34.

174 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342–343; Hélou 1998, 45–46.

175 Vanderheyde 2012, 203; Arkhipova 2007, 225–228, fig. 1; Iamanidzé 2005, 39; Grabar 1976, 88–90, pl. LXII-b.

176 Jolivet-Lévy 2008, pl. 11, fig. 2.

177 *Ibid.*, pl. 12, fig. 1.

178 *Ibid.*, pl. 16, fig. 2.

179 This can also be seen in depictions in the church of the Panagia in Moutoullas (Cyprus, 1280) and the church of St George in Ortaköy (Cappadocia, 13th century) (Jolivet-Lévy and

triumph of good over evil.[180] As for George, he rides a white horse, holding a lance in his left hand and reins in his right, which also holds a child dressed in an Eastern type of trousers, a *sirwal* (see Pl. 27). The child is associated with the miracle performed by St George for the youth of Mytilene, also named George.[181] This is the most popular iconography of St George in areas that were under the rule of, or in conflict with, Muslim rulers.[182] The young boy was taken into slavery and sent to Crete, where he was appointed cupbearer to the emir.[183] Responding to his mother's plea, St George freed the child from slavery and brought him home on his birthday, which coincided with that of the saint.[184] The depiction of St George above a sea full of fish symbolises his journey across the sea to free the child and reunite him with his family. At Behdidat, the child holds a cup and a ewer, representing his former enslavement, and wears a white *mandil* with red stripes, draped over one side of his chest and around his arm. The female slave cupbearer in a manuscript of the *Kitab fi Ma'rifat al-Hiyal al-Handasiya* by Al-Jazari of 1354 AD (Cambridge, MA, Harvard Art Museums/Arthur M. Sackler Museum, 1919.138r) also clasps a *mandil* in her hand.[185] In fact, the *mandil*, or kerchief, draped over the shoulders or carried in the hands, was worn across social classes and stood out as a distinctive feature of Mamluk attire.[186]

The tradition of placing equestrian saints[187] at the entrance of the sanctuary dates back to the Early Christian period, but it became rare during the Byzantine Middle Ages.[188] However, the practice remained widely observed in the Levant, where figures of holy riders are frequently oriented towards the apse and depicted close to it.[189] Theodore and George were highly venerated

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Lemaigre Demesnil, 2015, 1: 252, 254; Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 346; Stylianou and Stylianou 1997, 328, fig. 195).

180 Vanderheyde 2012, 202–203; Jolivet-Lévy 2008, 359.

181 Immerzeel 2009, 102; Hélou 2007, 16; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 343.

182 Vanderheyde 2012, 205–206; Meinardus 1973, 148–151.

183 Grotowski 2003, 27–77.

184 Festugière 1971, 315.

185 Jazarī 1974, pls XX–XXI.

186 The Italian traveller Simone Sigoli (1349–1401) noted in his 1384 account that all men carried a scarf or kerchief, either in their hands or draped over their shoulders (Sigoli 1831, 18). On Mamluk attire, see Behrens-Abouseif 2023; Fathy and Zidan 2017, 50–66; Mayer 1952; Stowasser 1984, 13–20; Taghizadeh Borujeni, Bozorgmehr and Akbarzade Niaki 2021, 94–108.

187 On the holy riders, see Bormpoudaki 2017, 143–156; Vanderheyde 2012, 201–211; Grotowski 2010; Velmans 2009, 233–239; Folda 2007, 87–107; Immerzeel 2004a, 29–60; Immerzeel 2003, 265–268; Walter 2003.

188 Velmans 2009, 233; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 190.

189 Velmans 2009, 233; Folda 2007, 87–107; Immerzeel 2004a, 29–60; Immerzeel 2009, 104.

saints in Lebanon and throughout the region.[190] Their presence at the entrance to the sanctuary may be due to their devotional value, given their great popularity, or to their apotropaic value as defenders of the sacred space.[191] However, the choice of depicting St Theodore at Behdidat is primarily due to his patronage of the church. In the iconographic tradition Theodore and George were often associated and represented together, hence the presence of his confrère George on the opposite wall at Behdidat.[192]

Theodore and George, who stand at the entrance of the sanctuary, do not have, in my opinion, any liturgical value. Known for their apotropaic and protective powers, they are above all defenders of the sacred space and protectors of the faithful.[193] If they were linked to the liturgy, it would undoubtedly be through prayers of intercession, but nothing directly links them to the sacrifice. It is obvious that the further one gets from the sanctuary, the more the images deviate from the functional perspective of the liturgical space.

2.1.8 The Lay Supplicants

Each of the holy riders of Behdidat is accompanied by an individual image of a lay supplicant who must have been involved in the construction or decoration of the church in some way.[194] The one accompanying the bearded St Theodore is a small figure of a bearded man kneeling in the Latin manner of prayer and extending his arms towards the holy rider (see Pls 24, 25). Wearing a beard in the Latin states of the Levant was not exclusively reserved for individuals of Eastern descent. Rather, it held symbolic significance as a representation of virility and authority, adopted by men regardless of their social status, ethnic origins or religious beliefs.[195] This is evident from the depictions of such influential figures as Baldwin of Boulogne, King of Jerusalem (1100–1118), and Tancred, Prince of Antioch (1100–1103, 1105–1112), which provide evidence that the practice of having a beard was widely acknowledged and embraced in the region.[196] As for his hands in prayer, they are slightly separated, a custom that was becoming less popular in the Western tradition, but remained prevalent

190 On St Theodore, see Jolivet-Lévy 2008, 357–372; Walter 1999, 163–195. On St George, see Walter 1999, 109–144.

191 Nasr 2022a, 246–247, 259; Vanderheyde 2012, 205; Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 343; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 190.

192 Vanderheyde 2012, 203.

193 Nasr 2022a, 246–247, 259; Vanderheyde 2012, 201–211; Walter 2003, 133–134.

194 Immerzeel and Snelders 2021, 156–157; Immerzeel 2009, 102–103; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 342; Hélou 2020, 237–238.

195 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 79.

196 Ciggaar 2006, 261–282.

among Eastern Christians during that era. The Latin supplicants depicted on the columns of the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem adopt a similar posture of prayer, kneeling with hands slightly apart and gently raised.[197] Beseeching St Theodore, the male individual is shown in a three-quarter pose, wearing a dark sleeveless coat that reveals the fitted sleeves of a white tunic underneath.[198] A red stripe runs down from his left shoulder, gradually widening toward the end. While this stripe may have signified social, religious or ethnic identity, it most likely represents a *mandil*, a garment that held a prominent place in Mamluk dress, as noted just above for the youth of Mytilene, and reflected the cultural traditions and sartorial practices of the time. The male supplicant also wears a black skullcap[199] with a white under-cap, or coiffe.[200] This white headpiece, conceived in Europe, was a type of cap made of silk, cotton or linen and was designed to fit snugly on the head, often tied under the chin. It was worn by people of all social classes, with the only distinction being the material used for it.[201] The coiffe was also used in the Levant starting in the 13th century,[202] as evidenced, among other examples, by the figure of Michael Katzouroubes, the founder of the church of St Demetrianos in Dali, Cyprus, in 1317, who wears a dark red skullcap with a white coiffe.[203] Furthermore, three Maronite infants discovered within the Asi-l-Hadath grotto in the Qadisha Valley, dating back to the 13th century, were wearing coiffes.[204] This item likely made its way into the Latin states of the Levant as a result of the flourishing fabric trade and the presence of European textile artisans, garment makers and artists.

197 Bacci 2022, 10.

198 Similarly, the male supplicants of Mar Elias Btina in Beirut and Mar Phoca in Amiun wear a long white tunic with snug sleeves, layered with a sleeveless coat (Nasr 2024, 68–72, fig. 10; Immerzeel and Snelders 2021, fig. 6.1; Hélou 2020, 243, fig. 16.8). Additionally, the male supplicant of Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad also wears a white shirt with fitted sleeves beneath a wide, short brown waistcoat (Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 77–80, fig. 4; Immerzeel and Snelders 2021, 153, fig. 6.9; Hélou 2020, 236, fig. 16.3).

199 For a 13th-century skullcap in Lebanon, see Baroudy *et al.* 2011, 100–109, 116–131; Abi Aoun *et al.* 1994, 39, 43–44.

200 In 1596 Girolamo Dandini (1554–1634) documented that 'Frankish Christians usually dress in black' and that 'Italian and Greek Christians wear a black hat or cap' (Dandini 1675, 45, 50).

201 Norris 1999, 176–177; Boucher 1983, 184, fig. 332.

202 Meyer-Fernandez 2020, 215.

203 Meyer-Fernandez 2019, no. 29; Immerzeel 2018, 143–144, pl. 13; Bitha 2012, 192, fig. 17; Stancioiu 2009, 211–212, 376, fig. 6.8; Kalamara 2004, 107–108, 114, 130, fig. 2; Christoforaki 1999a, 14–15, pl. 3; Christoforaki 1999b, 97–102, 254–255, n. 4, pls 38b, 39; Stylianou and Stylianou 1997, 425–427, fig. 256.

204 Baroudy *et al.* 2011, 98–99; Abi Aoun *et al.* 1994, 36.

The lay supplicant accompanying the image of St George is a child, probably in line with the iconography of the youth of Mytilene saved by St George (see Pl. 28).[205] The child supplicant is shown beneath the horse's belly as a small standing figure, facing forwards. His hands are open-palmed and placed in front of his chest in a prayer-like position. He is dressed in a parti-coloured red and blue tunic with a brown belt around his waist; this follows the Western European fashion known as *mi-parti*, which emerged in the 12th century and became the height of fashion throughout the Middle Ages.[206] This type of clothing was also seen in the East, as exemplified by several pictorial testimonies from the 13th century onwards, such as the one of 1272 with the sons of Queen Keran (see Fig. 24)[207] and one of a young Latin boy depicted in the narthex of the church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa in Asinou, Cyprus (*c.*1300).[208] In the church of the Archangel Michael in Sarakina on Crete, the young captive freed by St George is wearing a half-white, half-red garment (14th century).[209] The frontal stance of the child supplicant of Behdidat may serve to emphasise his *mi-parti* tunic. However, the child's full-frontal position stands in contrast to the three-quarter posture of the adult supplicant who kneels before St Theodore. The child's frontality gives the impression that he is addressing the spectators, the faithful of the church, engaging them in his prayers instead of directing them and himself towards the sacred figure depicted above him, with whom he shares the same pictorial space. In this vein, the child himself becomes an object of veneration. One may speculate if the depicted child is deceased, as the frontal pose with hands placed over the chest in prayer or crossed is often associated with funerary figures.[210]

Although the tunic worn by the child supplicant and the white coiffe worn by the adult supplicant may suggest a Western tradition, it is difficult to attribute these garments definitively to a single cultural identity. This is because, during the period of Latin domination, Lebanon was home to various ethnic and religious communities who engaged in frequent and complex interactions with each other, resulting in a mutual exchange of fashion and ideas. These articles of clothing can be viewed as evidence of the presence of Western

205 Hélou 2020, 239–240.

206 Meyer-Fernandez 2020, 209; Parani 2016, 137.

207 Chookaszian 2017, 9–10; Grigoryan 2017, 135–136.

208 Meyer-Fernandez 2019, 252–254, fig. 143, no. 27; Immerzeel 2018, 144, 164, pl. 14; Bitha 2012, 192–193, 195, figs 18–19; Kalopissi-Verti 2012, 125; Stancioiu 2009, 209–211, 213–214, 227, 229–230, 256, 372–373, figs 6.4–6.5; Kalamara 2004, 109–110, 131, fig. 3; Christoforaki 1999b, 89–96, 258, no. 5, pls 35–36.

209 Bormpoudaki 2017, fig. 3; Gallas, Wessel and Borboudakis 1983, 207, fig. 159.

210 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 90; Semoglou 1995, 5–12.

fashion in the Lebanese space, specifically in Behdidat, reflecting an openness to external cultural trends. However, the symbol of a red eagle with outstretched wings adorning the red leggings of St George could be seen as a declaration of ethnic and cultural identity. A symbol of power and strength,[211] the eagle with outstretched wings was a prominently used emblem of several Latin families in the Latin East, especially in ecclesiastical pictorial commissions.[212] For instance, in the icon of St Nicholas commissioned by a Frankish knight to be displayed in the church of St Nicholas tis Stegis in Kakopetria, Cyprus (1300), the knight's horse, shield and surcoat feature the symbol of an eagle with outstretched wings.[213] One might wonder if this eagle motif could suggest Latin patronage in Behdidat and consequently a Latin identity to the depicted lay supplicants. Regardless, it is evident that the message of the family lineage was intended to be visible and recognisable to the observing audience.

As for the 'zunnar', the belt worn by the child, this is typically associated with Christians living under Muslim rule.[214] In this context, the depiction may represent a Christian child taken captive in a territory under Muslim control. The child is shown appealing to St George for liberation, as George had freed the youth of Mytilene, an image that could symbolically represent all Christian children enslaved in Muslim lands. It seems, however, that a family tie could link the two supplicants of Behdidat: a father may have chosen to be depicted with his son, his male heir. This implies that their individual images not only reflect a yearning for the benevolence of the holy soldiers to whom they are attached, but may also be charged with social and political motivations.

2.1.9 The Crosses of the Nave

On the north, south and west walls of the nave, three red crosses are painted (see Pls 29, 30, 31).[215] The two-barred cross on the southern wall, flanked by

211 Imhaus 2013, 67, n. 11.

212 According to David Talbot Rice, approximately 30 families adopted this type of eagle with outstretched wings as their emblem (Talbot Rice 1937, 156).

213 Meyer-Fernandez 2019, 259–285; Olympios 2014, 48–50, 55–56, fig. 1; Wollesen 2013, figs 8, 16, 19, pls 6–7, 9; McNulty 2010, 75–97; Stancioiu 2009, 277, 389, fig. 6.2.

214 According to Burchard of Mount Sion, 'Besides these there are the Syrians or Syri. The whole land is full of them [...] They are clothed wretchedly, are thrifty and do not give alms. They live among Saracens and, like most of them, work as servants. In dress they are like the Saracens, being only distinguished from them by a woollen girdle' (Burchard of Mount Sion 2011, 315).

215 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 343. These are similar to the ones found in various locations in the Lebanese sphere, such as on the south wall of the annex chapel at Mar Girgis in

two smaller Latin crosses, likely referencing the two thieves crucified alongside Christ, bears the Greek inscription 'IC XC' between its arms, identifying it as a symbol of Christ.[216] While the two-barred form evokes the True Cross, it may also signify high ecclesiastical authority, possibly of a patriarchal rank.[217] In contrast, the frame surrounding the cross depicted on the western wall suggests secular or political authority. It retains rosette motifs and, notably, features stylised fleurs-de-lis that may evoke a heraldic emblem, potentially linked to a French noble lineage, given the fleur-de-lis's strong association with French royal and aristocratic heraldry. These elements raise compelling questions about the identity and intentions of the church's patrons – perhaps the very supplicants portrayed in its painted programme – and whether the decorative scheme was intended to express the allegiance of the Maronite Church of Behdidat or its patrons to the political power of the Frankish rulers of the region.

Whatever the case, cross motifs are common to both Eastern and Western Christian traditions and are closely associated with the consecration of churches. During the building's consecration ceremony, the bishop used a mould imprinted with the cross to draw it on the walls, typically with a mixture of myrrh and red pigment. According to Douaihy:

> The Church has ordered the sign of the cross to be inscribed on the walls of churches, on altars and their cloths, on priestly vestments, on the railings, on the hosts and on everything that is offered to God, so that we may know that it belongs to God and has been marked with his seal. It is important not to build a new church before the bishop first erects a cross on the chosen location, like the way army leaders, after winning a victory, erect the king's banner on the place they have conquered.[218]

Rashkida (Nasr 2019a, 262), near the entrance of the Saydet Hamatura and in the apse of St Michael in Hamatura (Nordiguian 1998, 67–89).

216 On cryptogram crosses and their prophylactic meaning, see Rhoby 2017; Walter 1997, 193–220; Walter 2006, 139–166; Babić 1979, 1–13.

217 The two-barred cross, also known as the patriarchal cross, was historically associated with pilgrimages and the Crusades in the Holy Land. Around 1244 a relic of this form was brought back from the East and came to be venerated by the Dukes of Anjou, notably under Louis I of Anjou in the 14th century, becoming known as the Cross of Anjou. In 1477 René II, Duke of Lorraine, a descendant of the Anjou dynasty, adopted the cross as his emblem following his victory at the Battle of Nancy, thus marking its transformation into the emblematic Cross of Lorraine.

218 Duwayhī 1895b, I: 151.

2.1.10 Synthesis

The image of the Theophany–Deesis in Behdidat reveals the presence of Christ and his angels in his earthly dwelling, emphasised by the anaphoric preface. The scene serves to materialise the words spoken during the anaphora, enabling the clergy and the faithful to ascend mystically to celestial realms. This implies a nuanced correlation with the primary purpose of the location.

The themes surrounding the Theophany–Deesis reinforce its liturgical meaning to different extents. The sacrifice of Isaac and the depiction of Emmanuel obviously convey the theme of sacrifice, echoing the sacrifice on the altar. The protodeacon Stephen holding the pyxis and swinging the censer at the apse entrance further serves this purpose. The Annunciation in the middle of the apsidal arch could also correspond to this eucharistic symbolism, albeit less strongly than the immolation of Isaac. Although the reception of the Ten Commandments by Moses is a sacred act, its liturgical interpretation referring directly to the eucharistic sacrifice remains uncertain. The ecclesiological meaning introduced by the assembly of apostles, the protodeacon Stephen and the prophet Daniel could to some extent reinforce the liturgical significance of the Theophany–Deesis. Moreover, this grouping emphasises the ecclesiological aspect of the apsidal Theophany, insofar as it represents the heavenly Church concelebrating with the earthly Church. The first Church stands above the second, which is lined up horizontally below a series of arcaded columns, so that the terrestrial Church supports the celestial one.

The complete absence of iconographic elements referring to the end of time and the Last Judgement in the Behdidat apsidal programme and its surroundings reinforces the liturgical symbolism of the Theophany–Deesis. The intercession of the Virgin and the Baptist is thus anchored in the present time and probably in daily liturgical practice.

The liturgical meaning of these images becomes less evident outside of the liturgical space. As such, the placement of the holy horsemen, Theodore and George, known for their miraculous and protective qualities, is appropriate. They are the guardians of the sacred space, fighting evil and defending the faithful. Two supplicants, likely a father and son, are depicted in prayerful poses before the saintly horsemen, adding a secular and devotional sense to the religious symbolism of the sacred image. These two individuals could have been involved in the church's construction or decoration, which would explain why they were given the privilege of including their bodily images in the church's iconographic programme. This may indicate that they had a certain level of wealth and were able to finance the work. Moreover, their inclusion as secular individuals in the religious programme of the church reveals their multifaceted

spiritual and worldly desires. By being portrayed alongside saints, they aspire to ensure the perpetuity of their prayers, memory and presence among saints. Simultaneously, their bodily images, serving as tools for self-expression and propaganda, reflect the self-consciousness of these two characters and convey their gender, age, identity, social status, power and aspirations in the context of divine patronage.

Perhaps the motif of the eagle with outstretched wings included in the scene featuring the child could be considered as the family's coat of arms, thus revealing the identity of both supplicants to the public of the church of Behdidat. It is important to recall that the emblem of the eagle with outstretched wings held a significant position among numerous Latin families in the Latin East, especially in the context of ecclesiastical pictorial commissions. In fact, wealthy aristocratic families who were actively involved in the construction or ornamentation of religious structures were often keen on highlighting their heraldic emblems. Their goal went beyond mere decoration; it was an endeavour to propagate and celebrate their lineage, leaving a lasting impact on both contemporary and future audiences. Seen in this perspective, the fleurs-de-lis motifs framing the cross on the western wall of the nave may point to Latin involvement in the church's decoration. These emblems could indicate the Latin identity of Behdidat's patrons or, alternatively, reflect an expression of allegiance, either by the patrons or the broader Behdidat community, to the political authority of the Frankish rulers in the region, from whom they may have actively sought protection.

The clothing worn by the two supplicants has elements of Western European fashion that were found in the East. In contrast, the clothing of the youth of Mytilene features Eastern dress. In fact, the church of Behdidat stands out for its unusual emphasis on ornamentation, with architectural, geometric and vegetal motifs that have parallels in various configurations in buildings that are both religious and secular, Christian and Muslim, in both the Eastern and Western worlds. All of this reflects the eclectic and open-minded spirit of the patrons and designers of Behdidat.

2.2 *Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda*

2.2.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The Christ in Majesty is depicted at the centre of the apsidal conch in Saydet el-Kharayeb (Our Lady of the Ruins) in Kfar Helda, flanked by two angelic beings, each with six wings and a single face (see Pl. 34).[219] The composition is

219 Hélou 2016b, 352.

further framed by the Virgin and St John the Baptist (see Pls 40, 41). The Lord is seated on a cushioned throne with a rectangular backrest. The throne is supported by the busts of the four evangelists, of which only John's eagle and the abbreviation of Matthew's name remain. The draped seat with a striped fabric, on which Christ, the object of sacrifice, rests, may resemble an altar covered with a liturgical cloth,[220] hinting at the local textile production.[221]

The two angelic guardians of the heavenly altar are depicted as liturgical singers holding a banner with the triple *hagios*. The Syriac inscription refers to the being on the left, with eyeless wings, as the 'six-winged seraph' (see Pl. 38), while the one on the right, with multiple eyes, is known as the 'many-eyed cherub' (see Pls 36, 37). The liturgical terms used to describe them suggest that both angels are singing the liturgical *Trisagion*, specifically the one that precedes the anaphora.[222] It is worth noting that cherubim and seraphim only join together in praising the holiness of the Eternal One in the preface of the anaphora. Additionally, the depiction of the cherub in Kfar Helda differs from the description of cherubim in the scriptures, suggesting an inspiration from liturgical texts instead.[223]

The Theophany–Deesis of Kfar Helda is thus distinguished by its specific features related to the anaphora, which imbue it with strong liturgical symbolism and make it an essential reference for interpreting apsidal theophanies. The image suggests that the idea proposed in some liturgical and exegetical texts that the heavenly Church participates in the earthly liturgy has been applied to visual representation, allowing for the interpretation of works that may lack explicit signs. The positioning of the Virgin and the Forerunner, slightly inclined towards Christ and with their hands raised in prayer, likely signifies their role as intercessors during the Divine Liturgy, particularly during the anaphora, and is connected to the present.

2.2.2 The Officiating Bishops and the Two Figures of Saints

A fragment of a heavily worn painting on the north wall beside the entrance to the apse reveals a bishop in three-quarter view wearing an *omophorion* around his neck and unrolling a phylactery, depicting the iconographic type of St John Chrysostom (see Pl. 42).[224] Additionally, part of a halo is visible further along the same wall, suggesting the presence of a figure of a saint, along with

220 See pp. 150–151 herein.
221 See p. 159, n. 87 herein.
222 The *Trisagion* of the Small Entrance is sung only by the cherub.
223 See pp. 60–63, 153 herein.
224 Hélou 2016b, 350.

the right side of St Domatius (see Pl. 43).[225] Although heavily damaged, the two holy figures appear noticeably larger than the bishop, who stands at the entrance of the apse.

2.2.2.1 *The Officiating Bishops*

The presence of John Chrysostom, author of the eucharistic liturgy, on the north wall at the entrance to the apse is highly significant (see Pl. 42). Heading towards the apse and unrolling a phylactery that, according to custom, should contain secret prayers recited by the officiant during the Divine Liturgy,[226] the bishop here proves his quality as officiant and therefore his participation in the eucharistic ceremony. Indeed, this prelate position is typical of scenes of Officiating Bishops that clarify the pivotal event of the ecclesiastical liturgy for the faithful.[227] Placed next to the altar, this configuration can only resonate with the terrestrial liturgy and therefore enhance the eucharistic value of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis.

Traditionally, the procession of Officiating Bishops is presided over by Basil of Caesarea and John Chrysostom.[228] This suggests that in Kfar Helda Basil was either positioned as a complement to John's image on the opposite wall or came after him on the same wall.[229] Due to the limited space between the figure of John Chrysostom and the other two holy figures depicted on the north wall, only one additional figure could have been included. This constraint also applies to the opposite (south) wall, between the presumed portrayal of Basil the Great and the Nativity scene. Moreover, the motif of Officiating Bishops in Byzantine programmes often follows the Communion of the Apostles on the apse wall. St Panteleimon in Gorno Nerezi, North Macedonia (1164), is one of the most emblematic examples.[230] It is likely that the apse of Kfar Helda also featured a Communion of the Apostles, but the limited space within it made it impossible to show the scene of Officiating Bishops. As a result, they were portrayed at the entrance of the apse.

In the late 11th century the theme of Officiating Bishops, showing church prelates performing the eucharistic service, emerged in the apses of Byzantine churches, taking the place of the frontal placement of bishops holding a

225 Hélou 2016b, 350; Nordiguian 2003, 187–192.
226 Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 175; Babić and Walter 1976, 269–280.
227 Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 174–193; Gerstel 1999, 21–23; Walter 1982; Walter 1977, 321–331.
228 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 118.
229 Hélou 2016b, 353.
230 Sinkević 2000, 35–39.

closed book.[231] It went on to gain greater prevalence, particularly in the mid-12th century.[232] However, this subject was not very common in the Christian East, where the frontal representation of bishops was generally preferred.[233] The church of Mar Elias in Maaret Saydnaya, Syria, dating from the end of the 12th century to the third quarter of the 13th, provides the closest example to the Lebanese space.[234] In the Kfar Helda programme, the depiction of officiant bishops in the liturgical space is reminiscent of Byzantine programmes. Note that the paintings were executed with a typically Byzantine technique.[235] As an officiant, St John Chrysostom in Kfar Helda serves as a model for priests celebrating the earthly liturgy. The purpose of his image in the Holy of Holies is to give tangible form to the religious practices that take place within it.[236]

2.2.2.2 *The Two Saints*

The inscription that identifies the partially destroyed figure on the north wall indicates it as St Domatius, a highly revered figure among all Christian denominations in Lebanon (see Pl. 43). The companion figure that was once depicted alongside him, now almost entirely destroyed, is believed to be his brother, Maximus.[237] This hypothesis is supported by several versions of his hagiography in the Coptic, Syrian and Melkite Orthodox traditions, which connect his life closely with that of his brother.[238] Domatius and Maximus are depicted together under an arch on the northern wall of the nave of the church of St Anthony in the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea (1232–1233).[239]

In contrast to the officiating bishop shown moving towards the apse, St Domatius, and likely the accompanying saint as well, are portrayed facing forward and on a larger scale. This creates a contrast – in terms of size and posture – between the figure of the officiating bishop standing at the entrance to the apse and those of the two frontal saints following on the same wall. This visual distinction indicates that the two frontal saints are not directly involved

231 Both the church of the Panagia in Veljusa (North Macedonia; 1085–1094) and the church of St John Chrysostom in Koutsovendis (Cyprus; 1092–1118) feature frontal bishops and officiants together.

232 Hélou 2016b, 352; Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 175.

233 Jolivet-Lévy 2017, 116; Hélou 2016b, 352–353; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 341.

234 Immerzeel 2009, 49–55.

235 Hélou 2016b, 359–364.

236 Immerzeel 2007a, 185–194.

237 Hélou 2016b, 354.

238 Bīṭār 1995, 232.

239 Bolman 2002, 55, fig. 12.1.

in the actions of the officiating bishop. It appears that the designers of the programme intended to differentiate their roles by using this method. The themes depicted in the apse and its immediate surroundings are invested with liturgical meaning, and in many cases their eucharistic value is highly significant, as in the theme of Officiating Bishops. As one moves away from the Holy of Holies, the connection to the altar liturgy diminishes or is no longer present.

In this sense, the presence of St Domatius and his companion saint in the vicinity of the Officiating Bishops and the liturgical space is not necessarily linked to the liturgy, although some saints may be invoked in intercessory prayers. Rather, their representation must be related to the devotion of the worshippers and the preferences of the patrons. Saints are recognised for their role as intercessors with God, protectors of the faithful and also for their abilities to ward off evil and perform miracles. Regarding Domatius, he is known to have been a deacon and ascetic with healing powers.[240]

2.2.3 The Nativity

On the southern wall of the nave (see Pls 44, 45, 46), there is a Nativity scene that faces the figures of Domatius and the saint standing by his side on the north wall. Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit[241] and Saydet el-Haqleh[242] in Bsarma also feature images of the Nativity.

The Nativity carries historical significance, as it portrays the actual birth of Christ and also serves a didactic and narrative purpose by portraying a scene from the Gospel. In Byzantine iconographic programmes the Nativity is often featured as part of the narrative cycle of Christ's life, which also includes his childhood and the main events of the Redemption.[243] This moment marks a turning point in the history of Salvation, as the Messiah is revealed and recognised as human. The Church views the Nativity as a theophany, symbolising the first appearance of Christ in this world.[244] It is in this sense that the prayer of the Small Entrance, which holds the same symbolism and opens the text of the Holy Liturgy in the Jerusalem liturgical manuscript (Hagios Stavros 109), is accompanied by images of the Annunciation and Nativity (see Fig. 11).[245]

240 Sauma 1994, 234–240.

241 Immerzeel 2009, 114–115; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 410–411; Hélou 2007, 28; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 362–372.

242 Immerzeel 2009, 100; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 284, 374; Hélou 2008, 40–43; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 394–398, pl. XCIV.

243 Ouspenski 1993, 230; Hélou 2016b, 355–356.

244 Nasr 2017, 327; Mercenier and Paris 1953, 238.

245 Grabar 1954, 172.

The Nativity, also known as Christmas, holds a prominent position in the Byzantine liturgical calendar, alongside Easter. While the Nativity of Kfar Helda could have been part of the Christological cycle, or Dodekaorton, it appears that the programme of this church includes only an image of the Officiating Bishops and two frontal saints on the northern wall; additionally, a scene at the entrance to the apse, probably presenting an officiating bishop, precedes the image of the Nativity on the south wall and is now completely destroyed. As a result, the pictorial decoration concludes with Domatius on the north wall and the Nativity on the south wall, with the red borders on the plaster marking the programme's end.

The Nativity celebrates not only the birth of the Lord, but also the divine motherhood of Mary, to whom the church of Kfar Helda is dedicated, and the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word of God.[246] According to the liturgical commentary of the *Historia Ecclesiastica*, the mystery of the eternal and temporal birth of the divine Logos is continuously renewed and made present in the church. During the anaphora, the celebrant prays for God to bring about the mystery of the birth of the Son on the altar, through the bread and wine.[247] Moreover, the Nativity has strong liturgical connections to the rites performed in the sanctuary, starting with Bethlehem's Aramaic name, meaning 'the house of bread', and also Christ proclaiming himself as 'the bread which came down out of heaven' (John 6:41).[248] During the Nativity, the Gloria was sung by the angels and it was incorporated into the church's liturgy: the angels sing it in concert with the faithful during the eucharistic service.[249]

The symbolic language on which the iconography of the Nativity is based is significant, but unfortunately is no longer extant in Kfar Helda. The black crib the Child and his mother stand in front of, which prefigures the Descent into Limbo and the Resurrection, is compared to the altar of sacrifice.[250] The liturgical homilies of Timothy of Jerusalem indicate that the cave where the Messiah was born foreshadows the church, where the celebration of the holy mysteries takes place.[251] The Child's crib is compared to the Tomb of Christ and the altar,[252] so in some examples, like at the church in Bsarma, the crib takes the form of a stone altar. The bath scene, which usually accompanies

246 Hélou 2016b, 354; Ouspenski 1993, 230; Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311.
247 Nasr 2017, 328; Brightman 1908, 395.
248 Nasr 2017, 328; Grégoire le Grand 2005, 214–219; Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311–312; Schiller 1966, I: 70, 74–75.
249 Nasr 2017, 330–331; Brightman 1908, 265–266.
250 Nasr 2017, 324; Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311; Bornert 1966, 79.
251 Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311; Bornert 1966, 206; Capelle 1949, 19–20.
252 Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311.

the Nativity scene, but has been destroyed in Kfar Helda or may never have existed, usually takes the form of a chalice. The gifts carried by the Magi prefigure the perfumes carried by the holy women to the Tomb of Christ and the eucharistic offering.[253] The Magi and shepherds were considered prototypes of the ecclesiastical community, who come to the true Bethlehem – the church, the heavenly crib of the Son of God – to celebrate the body of Christ.[254] As a result, the image of the Nativity is enhanced with signs and symbols that suggest the Eucharist, and it is reasonable to assume that its proximity to the apse programme of Kfar Helda is due to its liturgical significance. However, by placing this scene opposite to the figure of Domatius, a new dimension of meaning can be added. Domatius, renowned for his prophylactic and healing abilities, enhances the significance of the Nativity scene, which honours the divine motherhood of Mary, the Theotokos. Mary can be viewed as a potent symbol of intercession for women seeking to conceive and as a powerful protector of women during the process of pregnancy and childbirth.[255] In this context, the Nativity may also be associated with the patronage of the church dedicated to 'Our Lady'.

2.2.4 Synthesis

The liturgical adjectives – 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed' – defining the seraph and the cherub, the physiognomy of the latter and their laudatory quality as cantors of the *Trisagion* are more than enough to place the apsidal Theophany–Deesis of Kfar Helda at the service of the eucharistic liturgy. This suggests that the intercession of Mary and St John the Baptist should be given a liturgical interpretation and that their imploration is related to the present. This eucharistic aspect of the apsidal Theophany–Deesis is also revealed through the associated themes, especially the Officiating Bishops standing at the entrance to the apse. While the Nativity has a broad semantic field, it could be linked to the altar sacrifice due to its eucharistic connotations, although its liturgical meaning is not as obvious as the bishops officiating the Eucharist. By celebrating Mary's motherhood, the Nativity could also be associated with the church's dedication to Our Lady and serve as a tribute to her role as a guardian of women during childbirth. The portrayal of saintly figures in the church, such as Domatius and the saint depicted by his side, is not directly related to the liturgy. Other factors, such as patrons' personal preferences, local veneration,

253 Nasr 2017, 326.

254 Nasr 2017, 319–332; Nilgen and Franciscono 1967, 311–316.

255 Gerstel 1999, 87; Herrin 1987, 308.

the figures' reputation as healers of the faithful and their role as intercessors, among other things, may explain their representation.

2.3 *Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman*

2.3.1 Christ in Majesty

The Christ in Majesty dominates the entire eastern half of the ceiling of the rock-cut chapel of Saydet Naya (Our Lady of Naya) in Kfar Shleiman (see Pls 48, 49).[256] He is seated on a throne with a wide, star-covered backrest, which is upheld by the four living creatures, although only the faces of the angel and the lion are still visible. The celestial cathedra was originally meant to be supported by two angelic creatures, but only the one on the left remains, depicted as a six-winged angel with a single face (see Pl. 50). Two discs representing the sun and moon frame the head of Christ. The remaining portion of the ceiling is adorned with a simple starry design.

The star pattern, along with the sun and moon, may suggest the current temporal nature of the divine presence and allows for the rejection of the commonly held notion of an eschatological vision in favour of an actual Theophany. The personification of the sun and the moon in Kfar Shleiman could be inspired by their quality of praising the Lord in numerous biblical and liturgical texts.[257]

The only remaining angelic creature that upholds the heavenly throne appears at the base of the cathedra with six eyeless wings, like the seraphim described by Isaiah. However, it is the cherubim who bear the responsibility of carrying the divine throne and facilitating its vertical movement (Ps. 17:11). This iconography can find its rational in the liturgical passages in which the tasks of the cherubim and seraphim are often conflated, with the six wings of the seraph being attributed to the cherubim.[258] Moreover, certain prayers suggest that seraphim could also assume the task of the cherubim by supporting the throne of God. For instance, an Akathist hymn from the mid-7th century attributes the cherubim's role to the seraphim: 'Rejoice, most holy dwelling of him who sits above the seraphim.'[259] In this vein, the angelic creature in question could be interpreted as either a cherub or a seraph.

The living creatures and the two angelic creatures were responsible for moving the celestial throne from the kingdom of heaven to the earthly Church, ensuring its vertical mobility. The two angelic creatures can be seen as the two

256 Hélou 2010a, 382–384; Immerzeel 2009, 113; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 307.

257 See pp. 88–93, 151 herein.

258 See pp. 59–63, 153 herein.

259 Georgius Pisida 1865, PG 92: 1335–1346.

engines of the divine quadriga, which is harnessed to the four living creatures. Although the four living creatures could possibly participate in the praise of the Lord, as seen in some Coptic and Cappadocian examples,[260] the absence of iconographic or epigraphic evidence supporting this function makes the hypothesis uncertain.

2.3.2 The Theophany–Deesis

The upper section of the eastern wall of Kfar Shleiman features a Theophany–Deesis, which is limited to the *trimorphon* (see Pl. 51). Christ holds a book in his left hand, revealing himself as the Word of God. With his right hand, he makes the gesture of speech immediately above the altar, indicating that he is standing behind it, like a priest performing the eucharistic blessing (see Pl. 52). The presence of deacons on either side of the altar confirms his priesthood (see Pl. 54). The designer of the artwork likely intended to underscore the idea that Christ himself descends from his kingdom to perform the eucharistic blessing. This idea connects the Theophany–Deesis in Kfar Shleiman to the primary function of the place, that is, the eucharistic liturgy and particularly the anaphora during which the species are consecrated. The liturgical dimension places the scene in the context of the present time. The Virgin and John the Baptist stand on either side of Christ, at the level of the real altar, not as eschatological intercessors, but to implore his mercy during the Divine Liturgy.[261]

2.3.3 The Thurifer Deacons

Two deacons stand on either side of the high altar, below the figures of the Virgin and St John the Baptist (see Pls 51, 54).[262] Despite their poor state of preservation, the three chains of the censer and the top of a pyxis displayed by the deacon on the north side of the altar are still visible. The deacons holding the censer with the host box create a meaningful connection to the incensing of the gifts on the altar, strongly indicating their association with the ritual act of the eucharistic celebration. The deacons at Kfar Shleiman seem to function as assistants to both Christ the priest and to the earthly celebrant during the Holy Liturgy.

260 See pp. 85–88, 151–152 herein.
261 See p. 149 herein.
262 Hélou 2010a, 368; Immerzeel 2009, 113; Zibawi 2009, 48.

2.3.4 The Galaktotrophousa

On the north wall, to the left of the Theophany–Deesis, the image of the Galaktotrophousa (see Pls 53, 55),[263] or the Virgin nursing the Child, stands as a unique example in medieval Lebanese painting,[264] but it is a widespread iconographic theme in the Christian East, particularly in Egypt.[265] The closest instances are found in the church of the Nativity at Bethlehem (1130)[266] and at Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Qara (late 12th century).[267]

This representation allows for multiple interpretations, with the prevailing view suggesting that it evokes the Incarnation of the Divine Word.[268] It affirms the divine maternity of Mary, who nursed the Son of God, emphasising his human nature. The divine Child suckles from his mother like any other child in this world. Thus, John of Damascus said of Mary: 'You are truly more precious than all creation, for from you alone the Creator received the first fruits of our human matter. His flesh was made of your flesh, his blood of your blood; God was nourished by your milk.'[269]

In addition, the Galaktotrophousa has been given a eucharistic interpretation.[270] This was emphasised by a number of theologians, including Clement and Cyril of Alexandria.[271] According to Clement of Alexandria, milk is only blood coloured white, certifying the motherhood of each woman and, of course, the motherhood of Mary, the Mother of God. As a virgin, Mary could not have milk for her child, so the milk with which she breastfed her newborn baby came from God. Thus, milk is the Divine Word itself. The Church is also assimilated to the Virgin, and, from this perspective, the Church nurses her children with sacred milk, which is none other than the body of Christ.[272] Cyril of Alexandria, who declared that milk is the blood of the Logos, repeated these ideas by explaining that God granted Mary the milk in her breasts in the heavens.[273]

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263 Davidson Bekker 2022, 1–12; Bolman 2017, 13–22; Muller and Mathews 2017, 3–11; Cotsonis 2011–2012, 193–207; Hélou 2010a, 387–391; Cutler 1987a, 335–350; Lazarev 1938, 27–36.

264 Hélou 2010a, 387–391; Immerzeel 2009, 113; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 307–308.

265 Bolman 2017, 13–22.

266 Folda 1995, pls 6.14a-b.

267 Immerzeel 2009, 69, pl. 38; Westphalen 2000, 496.

268 Hélou 2010a, 387, 395; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 46; Langener 1996, 133–135, 145–146.

269 Jean Damascène 1961, 65, 71–73.

270 Bolman 2017, 13–22; Hélou 2010a, 390–391.

271 Bolman 2017, 17–18; Budge 1915, 719–721; Clément d'Alexandrie 1960, 183–195.

272 Bolman 2017, 17–18; Clément d'Alexandrie 1960, 183–195.

273 Bolman 2017, 17–18; Budge 1915, 719–721.

One might say that the Galaktotrophousa is an incarnation of the earthly Church, which, like Mary, nourishes the faithful with the sacred Milk, which is the Incarnate Logos. The Incarnation of the Eternal Word is constantly renewed on the main altar. Like the altar or the priest carrying the body of the Lord,[274] Mary carries the divine Son, the Eucharist of the Church. It is probably this eucharistic sense that inspired its placement to the left of the high altar[275] and the Theophany–Deesis; the nursing Virgin thus creates a compelling argument that reinforces the liturgical dimension of the two theophanies of Kfar Shleiman.

2.3.5 Supplicants (?)

On the southern wall, opposite the Galaktotrophousa, there is an almost completely destroyed composition (Fig. 38). Traces of clothing in blue and red can be discerned. The red cloth stands roughly horizontally, followed by a white element, and the remainder is in a brown colour. At the bottom of the scene, part of a decorated brown element survives. Next to it, a small figure of a standing person is still visible: his head is almost completely destroyed; he is dressed in a long white robe and stretches his arms towards the eastern part of the chapel. It may be the individual image of a lay supplicant somehow



FIGURE 38 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, wall painting, supplicants (?). The current state is shown on the right, while the digital reconstruction appears on the left.

274 Nasr 2020a, 119–134; Nasr 2020b, 56–65; Nasr 2018b, 98–113.

275 Hélou 2010a, 390–391.

involved in the pictorial decoration of the chapel.[276] In front of this figure, slightly lower, a white element appears, possibly representing the garment of another supplicant.

2.3.6 A Saint, an Archer and a Holy Horseman

The separation between the images that decorate the eastern part of the chapel, surrounding the altar, and the images that adorn the western part of the chapel is marked by a star-studded area on the south wall and by the entrance door on the north wall (see Pls 56, 57, 58, 59).

A Saint. Towards the western third of the southern wall, there is a small fragment featuring a halo and a white garment against a blue background, likely depicting a standing saint (see Pl. 57). The selection of saints is typically determined by the patron's intentions and the local veneration, as saints are often regarded as intercessors and mediators, possessing thaumaturgical and protective qualities.

An Archer. To the left of the entrance door, on the northern wall, stands an archer without a halo, dressed in a short Western tunic and preparing to shoot a deer or ibex with a curved bow.[277] This type of tunic and bow can be found in the illuminations of the History of William of Tyre (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS fr. 9084, fols 53r and 66v), dating to 1295.[278] A Latin cross as high as the archer and stamped with 'IC XC NI KA' is inserted between the hunter and his prey (see Pl. 56). The composition of the archer is noticeably distinguished from the other paintings by a very 'Latin' design. His cheekbones, marked by red highlights, are a characteristic feature, as is the thickening of the hair behind his neck.

The image of the archer has been considered a representation of St Eustace,[279] whose iconography was very popular during the Middle Ages in the Eastern Christian world, especially in Trebizond, Cappadocia and

276 These minimal traces of paint have been interpreted in several ways. Nada Hélou and Mat Immerzeel, for example, have assumed that it may be a seated Virgin with a donor (Hélou 2010a, 378, 391; Immerzeel 2009, 113), while Erica Cruikshank Dodd and Glenn Peers have reconstructed a Virgin Nicopeia (Bringer of Victory) (Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 42–43; Peers 2007, 46).

277 Hélou 2010a, 391; Immerzeel 2009, 113–114; Peers 2007, 44–53; Nordiguian 2005, 163–169; Nordiguian 1995, 100; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 308.

278 Buchthal 1957, pl. 136d.

279 Hélou 2010a, 391; Immerzeel 2009, 114; Zibawi 2009, 48; Nordiguian 2005, 163–169; Nordiguian 1995, 100.

Georgia.[280] However, the archer without a halo may not belong to the rank of saints. Moreover, the representation in Kfar Shleiman does not correspond to the traditional iconography of Eustace, who is usually depicted on horseback, dressed as a soldier, often holding a lance, as in Cappadocia, or, rarely, a bow, as in Georgia.[281] The cross usually appears between the antlers of the animal and not between the saint and his prey.

In several Western and Eastern iconographic themes, especially those involving the notion of threat, the cross appears as a sign of victory. Indeed, the cross, marked with the triumphal 'IC XC NIKA' acronym, forms a barrier here, separating the archer from the quarry. In this interpretation, the animal could represent the faithful protected from evil (the archer) by the cross of Christ or Christ triumphant over the forces of evil through his cross.[282] The image would then be a symbol of the Salvation brought about by the cross or a sign of Christ's triumph over evil. It was from this perspective that Ernest Renan and Henri Lammens postulated, in the 19th century and the early 20th, that 'The meaning of the painting is therefore the victory of Christ over the demon.'[283] We can retain, in any case, the idea that the cross with its inscription carries a triumphal and apotropaic value, whatever the identity of the archer.

A Holy Horseman. The western wall features a beardless holy horseman with curly hair and a halo adorned with a foliage motif, riding a white horse on ground lined with traces of bush and vegetation. This figure has been identified either as St George[284] or St Theodore (see Pls 58, 59).[285] In the Levant the prevalent iconography of St Theodore portrays him with a beard riding a red horse while slaying a dragon, whereas St George is typically depicted beardless on a white horse above a sea of fish, often carrying the youth of Mytilene.

The beardless face, curly hair and white horse of the rider in Kfar Shleiman are features typical of St George. A significant iconographic comparison has been made between the holy horseman in Kfar Shleiman and the crusader icon of St George in the British Museum,[286] which dates from the third quarter

280 Amprazogoula 2008, 163–172; Jolivet-Lévy 1991a, 205–218; Jolivet-Lévy 1991c, 101–106; Thierry 1991, 33–100; Koumoussi 1985, 51–60; Delehaye 1966, 212–239.

281 The representation of St Eustace shooting a bow is rare in the East, but is frequent in the Western world (Amprazogoula 2008, 165–166).

282 The stag is often compared by liturgists either to Christ or the faithful. On the Christian symbolism of the stag, see Bayet 1954, 21–68; Puech 1949, 17–60.

283 Renan 1864, 251–252; Lammens 1913, I: 88.

284 Immerzeel 2009, 113; Hélou 2010a, 391–393.

285 Nordiguian 1995, 103.

286 Hélou 2010a, 392–394.

of the 13th century.[287] In both depictions the saint rides a white horse over a landscape of grassy hills. The vermiculated pattern adorning the halo of the holy soldier in Kfar Shleiman, reminiscent of models with metallic sheathing or gessoed relief commonly found in icons and murals in the Holy Land and Cyprus,[288] is also present in the British Museum's icon of St George. Regardless of the rider's identity, the critical point is that holy soldiers and martyrs have an apotropaic and protective significance.

2.3.7 Synthesis

The iconographic programme at Kfar Shleiman is well-structured and highly precise, visually divided into two distinct groups that are separated by the entrance door on the north wall and a star-covered area on the south wall. The first group is centred around the altar, including the eastern part of the ceiling, the eastern wall and roughly two-thirds of both the north and south walls. This group depicts Christ in Majesty, a Theophany–Deesis, a nursing Virgin and an unidentifiable scene featuring a lay supplicant (?), who probably had the privilege of being depicted in the most sacred space of this chapel due to his patronage of the painted decoration. The second group is located in the western part of the hermitage, spread across the west, north and south walls. This group includes depictions of a standing (?) saint, an archer and a holy horseman.

The Christ in Majesty, featured in the more sacred areas of the Kfar Shleiman hermitage, depicts the invisible presence of Christ in his earthly dwelling. The figures of the four living creatures and angels seem to assist his movement from the kingdom of heaven. In contrast, the Theophany–Deesis, also in a sacred area behind the altar, portrays the Word of God presiding over the earthly Church's sacrifice. The High Priest is accompanied by two deacons and receives the prayers of the Virgin and St John the Baptist in the present time. The image of the Galaktotrophousa, which attests to the human nature of the Word of God and the divine motherhood of Mary, is invested with a eucharistic meaning, contributing to strengthening the liturgical symbolism of Christ in Majesty and the Theophany–Deesis, as well as the whole area bordering the main altar.

The iconographic and structural features of the liturgical area suggest that its entire programme (Christ in Majesty, Theophany–Deesis, Galaktotrophousa) is organised around a current and repetitive reality: the sacrifice on the altar, which regularly took place inside this sacred building.

287 Folda 2005, 329; Cormack and Mihalarias 1984, 132–141.

288 Folda 1992, 107–132; Frinta 1981, 333–347.

The figures of the holy horseman, the archer and the saint at the back of the hermitage should not be interpreted in relation to the liturgical event that takes place at the opposite end. The visual division created by the entrance door and the star-covered area accentuate this distinction. Instead, these figures are likely represented for their roles as intercessors, protectors or defenders of the faithful. The composition of the archer, with the cross marked with the acronym 'IC XC NIKA', may also hold a triumphal and apotropaic meaning.

The integration of Latin criteria in the archer scene and that of the holy horseman highlights not only an openness to Latin traditions, but also their presence in the Lebanese artistic landscape. The decision to incorporate specific stylistic and iconographic features could have been inspired by the artistic preferences of the hermitage's users or the patrons who commissioned the artworks. These individuals may have had a certain connection to Latin art or may have been of Latin origin themselves.

The distinct style of the scene of the archer and of the holy horseman, most probably George, which differs from other images linked to local Eastern art, raises the question of whether there were two artists working together at the hermitage or if it was a single one capable of painting in both the Latin and local styles. It is possible that the artist was able to adapt, so as to meet the patrons' preferences, demonstrating a high level of artistic versatility and adaptability.

2.4 *Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit*

2.4.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The eastern wall of the hermitage of Mar Semaan (St Simeon) in Saqiet el-Kheit and its surrounding area feature a scene of the Theophany–Deesis, accompanied by a well-preserved figure of a six-winged angel swinging a censer (see Pls 63, 64, 65).[289] Only minimal traces remain of the enthroned Christ on the eastern wall and of St John the Baptist on the southern wall. The figure of the Virgin, preceded by the thurifer angel, can still be discerned on the northern wall, although it is very damaged (see Pl. 65). The main altar is limited to this composition (see Pl. 63).

The image of the six-winged angel holding a censer at the main altar instils the Theophany–Deesis with a strong eucharistic significance and places the intercession of Mary and John within the context of the present time.[290] According to the Church Fathers, angels are believed to assist Christ in serving alongside the earthly Church ministers during the consecration.[291] Therefore,

289 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 228; Hélou 2007, 28; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 363.

290 See pp. 156–157 herein.

291 Marinis 2021b, 259.

the six-winged angel depicted in this scene suggests its participation in the earthly liturgy along with the celebrant.[292] The angel's act of swinging the censer at the level of the high altar establishes a direct connection to the primary incensing performed by the priest when placing the offering on the main altar, as already pointed out.[293] The angel's gesture in heaven thereby mirrors that of the officiating priest on earth. In fact, the censer itself serves as a powerful link between the celebrant of the celestial liturgy and the earthly officiant, wielding the same liturgical object.

2.4.2 The Nativity and the Dormition

The scene adjacent to the Theophany–Deesis on the northern wall and part of the ceiling depicts the Nativity of Christ.[294] However, only a few figures from the scene remain recognisable, including Joseph (see Pl. 65), with his hand on his cheek, part of the midwife bathing the newborn[295] and angels adoring the Child (see Pl. 66).

Adjacent to the Nativity scene, there is an image of the adult Christ making a gesture of speech (see Pl. 67). Two standing saints can be seen further to the south (see Pl. 62); one is wearing a bishop's *omophorion*, and the other, likely an apostle, is holding a closed book. The composition also includes fragments of hallowed faces and figures that cannot be identified due to the poor state of preservation. It is possible that Christ, along with the bishop and saints depicted on different levels, was originally part of a Dormition scene, where Jesus receives the soul of his mother.[296] In this type of scene, the Mother of God is often surrounded by apostles, bishops and saints as she lies on her deathbed. Dormition scenes can be found in two other churches in Lebanon: in the burial chamber of Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad (second half of the 13th century)[297] and Mar Saba in Edde el-Batrun (end of the 12th century).[298]

As already noted in the case of Kfar Helda above, the Nativity holds important theological significance as a pivotal event in the history of Salvation.

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292 Duwayhī 1895a, II: 229–230.

293 Angheben 2008, 82. On the ritual of censing the offering in the Byzantine liturgy, see Taft 1975, 154–157.

294 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 410–411; Immerzeel 2009, 114; Hélou 2007, 28; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 363.

295 On the two midwives at the Nativity, see Bogevska-Capuano 2015, 237–238.

296 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 363.

297 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 74–82; Akiki and Hélou 2023–2024; Kahwagi-Janho 2016, 95–135; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 395–396; Immerzeel 2009, 105–108; Immerzeel 2004b, 12–13; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 96–97; Hélou 1999a, 139–162; Sader 1997, 101–119.

298 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 162–163; Immerzeel 2009, 108–111; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 21–22; Hélou 2003, 397–434.

Moreover, its placement near the holy table may suggest a liturgical value, as several of its iconographic components refer to the liturgy celebrated on the altar.[299] The image could represent the birth of the Messiah renewed during each Holy Liturgy. Thus, at the moment of the consecration, the celebrant implores God to give birth to the body of Christ on the altar, just as he did during the Nativity.[300]

As for the Dormition, a subject from the apocryphal texts, it describes the death of the Virgin, which is compared to a deep sleep.[301] Her soul, separated from her body, is received by Christ in the form of a swaddled child, with the apostles present at the event. The iconography also adds angels and bishops, such as James, the brother of Christ, and Dionysius the Areopagite. The episode takes on a narrative aspect that commemorates the glorious death of the Mother of God.

The Nativity and the Dormition, both of which exalt the Mother of God, are frequently linked in iconography. They are placed facing each other or side by side in various examples in Byzantine art.[302] The cathedral of the Transfiguration of the Saviour (1157) in the Mirozhsky monastery in Pskov is a particularly noteworthy example, as the illustrations of Christ's life are arranged not in chronological order, but in a symbolic pattern.[303] The Nativity and the Dormition are positioned on the eastern walls of the southern and northern arms of the transept, respectively, flanking the entrance to the apse. The Nativity highlights the physical birth of the Son of God, while the Dormition depicts the spiritual birth of the Mother of God, made possible by the Incarnation of the Word, with Mary serving as the instrument. Both scenes could be interpreted as a reciprocal exchange between the Virgin and Christ. In the Nativity Christ was born into the flesh given to him by Mary, while in the Dormition it is Christ who bestows spiritual birth and eternal life upon his Mother.[304]

If the Nativity is invested with symbolism referring to the eucharistic liturgy, the Dormition, on the other hand, could allude to the funeral liturgy. In fact, the iconography of the Dormition adopts several motifs that could refer to the latter, such as candles held by the deacon–angels assisting Christ, as seen

299 See pp. 182–184 herein.

300 Nasr 2017, 328; Brightman 1908, 395.

301 U 2019, 29–30; Evangelatou 2017, 117–131; Daley 2001, 155–177; Maguire 1994, 59–68; Hadermann-Misguich 1975, 181–186; Wenger 1955; Okounev and Wratislaw-Mitrovic 1931, 134–180.

302 Evangelatou 2017, 118; Maguire 1994, 59–68.

303 Sarabyanov 2010, 177–181.

304 Evangelatou 2017, 118; Sarabyanov 2010, 178; Maguire 1994, 59–68.

in Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad,[305] and the censer usually carried by the Apostle Peter standing at the head of the Virgin.[306] The presence of deacon–angels and bishops, as seen in Mar Saba in Edde el-Batrun,[307] also emphasises this liturgical meaning. Thus, through images of the Nativity and Dormition, one could compare the sacrificial liturgy with the funerary liturgy.

While it may be difficult to conduct funeral ceremonies in the hermitage of Saqiet el-Kheit, the Dormition alludes to the peaceful death and rest of the souls of the righteous, to which the hermit and every Christian aspires. The exemplary model of a good death is that of the Virgin. Let us recall that prayers dedicated to the deceased play an important role in the eucharistic liturgy, and the sacrifice is often offered for the rest of their souls.

2.4.3 The Stylite Saint

On the left-hand side of the entrance, located on the southern wall, the bust of a monk is displayed on a column (see Pl. 68). It is believed that the monk is St Simeon the Stylite, the patron saint of the hermitage.[308] Simeon was a Syrian ascetic, highly revered by various Christian communities in the region, particularly in Lebanon.[309] Mar Phoca in Amiun presents on one of its pillars an image of St Simeon (13th century).[310] His portrayal in the hermitage of Saqiet el-Kheit could not only signify his local veneration and devotion, but above all assert the hermitage's patronage. Additionally, the figure of St Simeon suggests that the hermitage was associated with an ascetic lifestyle and therefore served as an exemplary model for the hermits of Saqiet el-Kheit.

2.4.4 Synthesis

The presence of the six-winged angel holding a censer in the Theophany–Deesis serves as a clear indication of the image's eucharistic significance. It emphasises that the earthly liturgy is modelled on the heavenly liturgy, thereby contributing to establishing this example as an essential reference for the liturgical interpretation of the apsidal Theophany. The intercession of Mary and

305 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 74–82; Akiki and Hélou 2023–2024; Kahwagi-Janho 2016; Immerzeel 2009, 105–62; Hélou 1999a, 139–162; Chausson and Nordiguian 1996, 37–46.

306 Evangelatou 2017, 119; Walter 1982, 140–141.

307 Hélou 2003, 397–434.

308 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 410–411; Immerzeel 2009, 114; Hélou 2007, 28; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 364.

309 Sauma 1994, 244–253.

310 Immerzeel 2009, 89–92; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 158–179; Westphalen 2000, 491–493; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 363–364; Hélou 1999b, 22–23.

the Baptist is thus linked to the present time. Furthermore, the absence of indicators related to the Second Parousia and the end of time in related themes, such as the scenes of the Nativity, the Dormition and the figure of St Simeon, reinforces the present temporality of the Theophany and the intercession.

Beyond their narrative, historical and liturgical significance, the juxtaposition of the Nativity and the Dormition scenes underlines the symbolic interplay between Christ's physical birth and his mother's spiritual birth. This parallel can also be seen as an embodiment of the aspiration of the hermit of Saqiet el-Kheit, whose cell is located below the chapel (see Pl. 60). By embracing the ascetic life of St Simeon, he sought the reward of a peaceful passing, mirroring Mary's death, and aimed to undergo a spiritual rebirth in the hands of Christ and his apostles in the heavenly realm.

2.5 *Mar Mitr in Kusba*

2.5.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The apse of Mar Mitr (St Demetrios) of Kusba showcases a Theophany–Deesis that includes the customary intercessors and an image of Christ, who is being worshipped and guarded by two four-winged angels (see Pls 70, 71).[311] Christ is depicted seated on a large throne at the centre of the scene. The throne is adorned with geometric patterns, commonly seen in both Christian and Muslim art, and does not have a backrest, but rather has two draped cushions. The striped fabric over the throne is reminiscent of the altar cloths and local textile production, creating a symbolic link between the divine seat and the sacred table.[312]

The two four-winged angels, with numerous eyes, hold aloft the banners bearing the *hagios* invocation, which confirms their role as singers of the seraphic hymn (see Pls 72, 73). The laudatory function of these 'many-eyed' four-winged angels may be attributed to the liturgical texts, in which the anaphoric *Trisagion* could be sung not only by seraphim and cherubim, but also by several types of angels and celestial beings, as emphasised above.[313] The depiction of four-winged angels covered with eyes in Kusba could potentially serve as an image–synthesis that combines these diverse categories of angels. This leads to the interpretation of the Theophany of Kusba as the embodiment of the image developed in the anaphoric preface: God, present in the church at the time of the sacrifice, is praised and glorified by the triple *hagios* of the

311 Immerzeel 2009, 93; Zibawi 2009, 59; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 230; Hélou 2006b, 36; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 193; Hélou 1998, 37.

312 See p. 159, n. 87 herein.

313 See pp. 59–63, 154–155 herein.

angelic creatures. This reading tends to place the Theophany in the present time and to anchor it in the daily practice of the liturgy. The Virgin and St John the Baptist, who stand on the edges of the conch, their hands outstretched in prayer, thus intervene on behalf of the faithful in the present time.

2.5.2 The Medallions of the Prophets

Of the medallions encircling the apsidal arch, only two have survived (see Pls 70, 76). These two medallions feature busts of figures facing towards the conch's composition. The figures are commonly associated with the prophets,[314] and each one is depicted with a raised hand and carrying a phylactery meant to show an inscription. The phylacteries are unfurled outside the medallions and towards the Theophany of the apse. The arrangement of the prophet medallions on the apsidal arch is a prevalent feature that dates back to the Early Christian era.[315]

In several iconographic programmes in Georgia, Armenia and Cappadocia, prophets are depicted participating in the Deesis of the apse.[316] They were sometimes considered witnesses to the eschatological vision.[317] However, prophets do not appear in relation to the Deesis of the Last Judgement; rather, they were heralds of the arrival of the Messiah on earth. Thus, their images on apsidal arches are often related to the medallion at the top, which may feature Christ or his cross, as is the case at St Simeon in the Zelve Valley in Cappadocia.[318]

Framing the apsidal conch at Kusba, the prophets seem to introduce or complete the manifestation of Christ.[319] The way they unroll their phylacteries, which were meant to bear their words about the Messiah, confirms their connection to the theophanic image of the apse.[320] The scrolls are unrolled almost horizontally, in the direction of the apsidal Theophany, instead of falling vertically (see Pl. 76). The posture of the prophets' hands could reflect a

314 Immerzeel 2009, 93; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 264; Zibawi 2009, 59; Hélou 2006b, 36; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 194; Hélou 1998, 38. For examples in Cappadocia, see Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 11, 14, 25, 28, 40, 42, 48, 53, 59, 84, 89, 162, 168, 178, 222, 242, 246, 248, 262, 303, 309, 322, 325, 326.

315 In Mren and Talin, Armenia (7th century), busts of prophets can be found on the intrados of the apse. They are depicted alongside a Theophany scene (Thierry and Thierry 1971, 76–77).

316 Velmans 1981, 66–72.

317 *Ibid.*, 48; Lafontaine-Dosogne 1968, 135–144.

318 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 11.

319 *Ibid.*

320 Hélou 2006b, 36; Zibawi 2009, 59.

gesture of speech or preaching to transmit the words written on their phylacteries. The prophets thus testify to the faithful that the Christ enthroned in the apse is indeed the Messiah they foretold.

2.5.3 The Assembly of Bishops, Monks and Saints

Beneath the conch of the apse, there are nine saints depicted in a frontal position (see Pls 70, 74). Among them, the prominent monk Sabas can be identified, as well as figures of bishops dressed in episcopal attire. The inscriptions indicate that these figures include Nicholas, James and the three doctors of the Church Gregory of Nazianzos, Basil the Great and John Chrysostom.[321] Positioned behind the high altar, they make a gesture of speech with their right hands, while holding a book in their left, echoing the posture of Christ in the Theophany depicted in the apse.

The presence of the bishops in the apse's rounded space is commonly associated with their roles as defenders of Orthodoxy and creators of eucharistic liturgies and, above all, with their liturgical function.[322] Bishops are considered as representatives of Christ the priest in his earthly dwelling, as frequently highlighted by such authors as Origen,[323] Isidore of Pelusium[324] and Theodore of Mopsuestia.[325] With their priestly attire, the prelates serve as exemplary models for priests celebrating the liturgy. As for the monks, their presence in or around the apse is almost systematic in conventual churches.[326] In Kusba the inclusion of the monk Sabas, one of the founders of Eastern monasticism, among the Fathers of the Church could provide insight into the nature of the faithful who attended this monastic church, as well as into its function and founders.[327] Furthermore, in the eyes of the monastic community, the main faithful of this sanctuary, they could represent the prominent place given to the holy monks. They are viewed as eminent models for monasticism.

Beneath the apsidal Theophany of Kusba, the bishops and monks (with one additional monk depicted on the respond of the apsidal arch) could be interpreted as conveying to the monastic faithful of this conventual church the potential for men, particularly men of the Church, to attain a vision of God. However, their frontal position and fixed gaze suggest they are collaborating

321 Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 193–194.
322 Immerzeel 2007a, 185–193; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 341; Walter 1982, 166–167; Walter 1977, 321–331; Walter 1974, 81–98; Chatzidakis 1959, 91–95.
323 Bornert 1966, 61.
324 *Ibid.*, 79; Isidore of Pelusium 1859b, PG 78: 272C.
325 Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 491.
326 On hermits and monks in mural painting, see Tomekovic 2016.
327 Hélou 2006b, 36; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 20.

with what is happening in front of them on the altar or communicating with the clergy or the faithful, rather than participating in the theophanic vision of the apse. Instead, these figures of prelates and monks seem primarily to represent the monastic or local community, gathered in their place of worship and around the altar to celebrate the liturgy in concert with the celestial Church, depicted through the Theophany–Deesis in the apse, much like the apostles and monks in Bawit.[328]

2.5.4 The Stylite Saints

The figure on the south respond of the apse arch is that of a stylite monk (see Pl. 75). Unfortunately, the right hand and lower part of the depiction of this ascetic have been destroyed. He is holding a book in his right hand and is presumably making a gesture of speech with his left. The accompanying stylite, if there was one on the north respond, has been entirely lost.

The presence of the stylite in the church of Kusba is primarily linked to its belonging to a monastic community.[329] He likely continues the image of the earthly Church represented on the curved wall of the apse. By virtue of their ascetic practices, stylites aligned themselves with the Passion of the Lord, which could have motivated their prominence in the sanctuary programme.[330] Furthermore, these ascetics served a dual purpose, extending beyond their spiritual endeavours to encompass a protective function within the context of the sacred space.[331] Their usual placement on the responds of the apsidal arch presents them as pillars of heaven. As in Byzantine tradition, the conch of the apse, along with the dome, constitutes the celestial sphere in the cosmic hierarchy of the church. The stylites of Kusba are thus capable of supporting the celestial vault with their column, where the heavenly Church, represented by the theophanic Deesis, resides.

2.5.5 Synthesis

The presence of the four-winged angels, singers of the liturgical *Trisagion* in the apsidal Theophany, refers to the presence of Christ and his angels during the eucharistic office, more precisely at the moment of consecration. The prophets bear witness to his temporary vision in his earthly dwelling and to the Incarnation reiterated on the physical altar. From this perspective, the intercession of Mary and John the Baptist is carried out in the present. The assembly

328 Iacobini 2000; Maspero 1931; Clédat 1904a; Clédat 1904b; Zibawi 2003, 78–82.
329 Brodbeck 2010, 131; Hélou 2006b, 36.
330 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 101.
331 Brodbeck 2010, 131.

of the saints, bishops and monks standing beneath the Theophany–Deesis depicts the earthly Church. Positioned in front of the high altar, they unite with the celebrants of the monastic church of Kusba, who perform the earthly service daily. Thus, the apse programme of Kusba reveals the superimposition of the heavenly and earthly Churches, united through the liturgical office. The stylite saint(s) on the respond(s) of the apsidal arch facilitated this union by serving as the pillars supporting the celestial church. This imagery reinforces the recurring metaphor of saints as the 'columns' and 'pillars' of the Ecclesia, which is formed in Kusba by the community of faithful monks.[332]

2.6 *Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Kaftun*

2.6.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The apse conch of Mar Sarkis and Bakhos (Sts Sergius and Bacchus) in Kaftun features a Theophany–Deesis, though its lower portion has been entirely destroyed (see Pl. 79). At the centre of the scene, Christ is portrayed seated on a throne without a backrest, with a cushion covered with a striped fabric.[333] This textile alludes to the liturgical cloth of the altar, creating a symbolic connection between the throne and the holy table.[334] In Christ's hands is an open book that displays the passage from John 8:12, emphasising that the Lord's call is relevant in the present, rather than solely at the end of time (see Pl. 80).[335] Christ's right fingers are bent towards the open book in his left hand, suggesting the transmission of the word written in it[336] and, therefore, revealing the Lord as the Divine Word, spreading the Gospel message.

Only one of the two heavenly creatures standing on either side of the throne remains, located on the left side (see Pl. 81). This six-winged angel has one face and is praising the holiness of the Lord with a standard marked by the thrice holy. The intercessors are portrayed on the edges of the conch, adopting a customary stance of prayer and supplication (see Pls 82, 83).

2.6.2 The Annunciation

An Annunciation scene on the upper part of the apsidal arch serves as a frame for the Theophany–Deesis (see Pls 79, 84, 85). Since the interpretation of this theme in the programme in Mar Tadros of Behdidat has been extensively

332 Reudenbach 1980, 310–351.
333 See pp. 150–151 herein.
334 See pp. 53–55, 150–151 herein.
335 See pp. 146–147 herein.
336 *Ibid.*

discussed, it is enough to recall its main features here.[337] The Annunciation's semantic field is vast, ranging from didactic, conventional, dogmatic and apotropaic to liturgical aspects. Its location on the apse arch seems to emphasise its eucharistic value. The Annunciation brings the mystery of the Incarnation into the present, which is continually actualised through the eucharistic service.[338] Both the angelic Salutation and the dogma of Incarnation are connected to intercessory prayer in the liturgy.[339] This link between the Annunciation and intercessory prayer may explain their association on an iconographical level.[340] As a result, the eucharistic significance of the Annunciation could align with the liturgical meaning of the apse Theophany, for which it forms the framework.

2.6.3 The Location of the Communion of the Apostles and the Purported Assembly of Bishops

Traditionally, the middle register of the apse between the conch scene and the depiction of Officiating Bishops would be reserved for the Communion of the Apostles, which portrays Christ as a priest distributing the Eucharist to his disciples. This arrangement can be seen in St Sophia of Kyiv (1037),[341] St Sophia of Ohrid (1028)[342] and St Panteleimon of Gorno Nerezi (1164),[343] among other examples.

In contradiction to this general rule, the Communion of the Apostles at Kaftun spreads across the northern and southern walls of the central aisle (see Pls 86, 87). The scene adjoins the upper part of the apse wall on each side. A similar arrangement of the Communion of the Apostles can be found in the chapel of St Euthymios in the basilica of St Demetrios in Thessaloniki (1302–1303):[344] the Officiating Bishops around the *melismos* are placed on the wall of the southern apse, due to three windows being on the central apse wall. However, standing bishops unfurl their liturgical phylacteries at the entrance of the same apse, while busts of bishops are inserted into the spandrels that separate the round-arched windows. Moreover, the entire tripartite space of the sanctuary is filled with figures of bishops and deacons.

337 See pp. 164–166 herein.
338 Nasr 2018a, 35; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 154.
339 Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 154.
340 *Ibid.*, 154.
341 Lazarev 1971, 221–238; Povstenko 1954.
342 Lidov 1998, 381–405; Epstein 1980, 314–329; Grabar 1965, 257–265.
343 Sinkević 2000, 30–39.
344 Gouma-Peterson 1991, 111–129, figs 6–7; Gouma-Peterson 1976, 168–183.

The monk and traveller Vasili Grigorovich-Barsky (1701–1747), who visited the monastery of Kaftun between 1728 and 1744, wrote: 'It was known that the entire church was painted with images of saints, and even today the images of holy fathers can be seen at the altar.'[345] It is difficult to determine from Grigorovich-Barsky's brief description whether they were standing bishops, officiating bishops or both. However, in the Byzantine tradition, especially from the end of the 11th century and increasingly throughout the 12th century, there was a growing preference for the representation of Officiating Bishops on apsidal walls, and the themes of the Communion of the Apostles and the Officiating Bishops became complementary.[346] These two subjects show that the earthly liturgy is modelled on the heavenly liturgy, continuously celebrated by Christ and his apostles in heaven.

If it was indeed the procession of prelates that once resided in the hemicycle, one might hasten to think that, due to lack of space on the apsidal wall, the Communion of the Apostles was relocated to the heights of the north and south walls of the central aisle converging towards the apse.[347] However, the apse wall is large enough to accommodate both themes. Otherwise, the figures of the purported bishops would have been excessively monumental and disproportionate to the other figures represented in the church.

To clear up this ambiguity, one might examine the distribution of images on the north wall of the central aisle, which opens directly onto the rounding of the apse (Fig. 39). The north wall is divided into two registers, with the top register featuring the Communion of the Apostles, as previously noted, and the lower register depicting the Archdeacon Lawrence on the spandrel, followed by two standing monks painted on the eastern embedded pillar (see Pl. 90). The separation between the two registers is marked by a red border, as is customary. This division creates the impression that these two registers extend those of the apsidal wall. Thus, from this perspective, the Communion of the Apostles should continue the first register, and Lawrence should continue the second register of the apse wall.

It is possible to assume that the first register on the upper level of the hemicycle of Kaftun held a group of Officiating Bishops. This would explain the presence of the Communion of the Apostles in the upper sections of both the

345 Hélou 2009a, 10; Grigorovich-Barsky 2005, 67. Translated by Natalia Chitishvili.

346 Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 175. In the church of the Panagia in Veljusa (North Macedonia; 1085–1094) and in the church of St John Chrysostom in Koutsovendis (Cyprus; 1092–1118), frontal bishops are depicted alongside the Officiating Bishops.

347 Hélou 2009a, 16; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Hélou and Immerzeel 2005, 453–455.



FIGURE 39 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, interior, distribution of images

north and south walls of the central aisle, which follow this theme. The second register likely featured standing saints, as seen in the decoration of other Lebanese church apses, including bishops, apostles, monks or a combination thereof. Together with the Archdeacon Lawrence, they would form an image of the earthly Church assembled in its place of worship. However, this interpretation remains hypothetical until more specific evidence becomes available. In any case, this deviation from the main convention could be explained by the location of the Communion of the Apostles itself: to establish a parallel or analogy between Christ distributing the Eucharist in the heavenly Church[348] and the priest administering communion before the altar in the earthly Church. As a result, the apostles, depicted in procession along the central aisle, serve as examples for the faithful, who prepare to receive the Eucharist from the priest's hands, mimicking the apostles in heaven.[349] The location of the

348 This idea does not in any way suggest that Christ conducts a separate liturgy or offers communion in heaven; on the contrary, Christ, along with the saints and angels, takes part in the same liturgy celebrated on earth. This iconographic concept stems solely from the belief held by artists and their patrons that if Christ is the High Priest, then there must be a heavenly worship that mirrors the earthly one – a service in which the Eucharist is distributed (Marinis 2021b, 255–268).

349 Hélou 2009a, 16.

Communion of the Apostles in Kaftun is a remarkable topographical clue in support of this interpretation.

2.6.4 The Communion of the Apostles

The apostolic procession of the Communion of the Apostles is typically divided into two groups, each with six apostles. On the northern wall, the disciples are led by Peter, who receives the bread (see Pl. 86). On the opposite southern wall, the figure of Paul, which is now destroyed, was intended to depict him receiving the chalice (see Pl. 87).[350] The apostles approach Christ with dignity, holding a part of their cloaks in their hands. Christ is depicted twice and offers communion behind a balustrade that represents the altar of sacrifice. On the southern wall, behind Christ, the ciborium can still be distinguished: it reproduces the shape of Christ's tomb, which was topped by a baldachin in the church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. It is with this in mind that the *Historia Ecclesiastica* represents the altar as the place of burial[351] and the ciborium as the place of the Crucifixion.[352] Here, too, the symbolism of the Passion and the sacrifice is clearly evident.

The Communion of the Apostles is a quintessential eucharistic theme, expressing the close link between Christ's reference to the institution of the Eucharist during the Last Supper and the eucharistic celebration performed in the Church and based on the concept of Christ as a priest in the order of Melchizedek.[353] The eucharistic service performed in the church is indeed a participation in the service that Christ celebrates for eternity.

2.6.5 The Archangel

A large medallion, encircled in a red frame, is situated near the Communion of the Apostles on the northern wall (see Pls 88, 89). The medallion depicts the bust of an archangel holding a sceptre. Two figures with remains of medallions

350 It is worth mentioning that Peter is accompanied by a Syriac inscription that mistakenly identifies him as Paul, whereas the intended inscription for Peter was meant for the now-destroyed figure of Paul on the opposite wall. Unlike the painter responsible for these depictions, it seems the calligrapher was unaware of the distinct iconographic characteristics of Peter and Paul, leading to this error.

351 Brightman 1908, 258. Theodore of Mopsuestia asserted that Christ is placed on the altar in a manner similar to that of a tomb (Théodore de Mopsueste 1949, 509).

352 Brightman 1908, 258.

353 On the Communion of the Apostles, see Marinis 2021a, 1–20; Varalis 2014, 43–64; Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 162–174; Coulson 2003, 145–156; Gerstel 1999, 48–59; Walter 1982, 184–189, 195–196, 215–217.

follow, one of which is identified as Domatius, accompanied by the Greek letters *ΔO*[...]*E*.[354]

The angels depicted alongside the Communion of the Apostles could signify that the eucharistic liturgy represented participation in the liturgy of the angels in the church during the eucharistic sacrifice,[355] as stated by John Chrysostom.[356] By observing this scene, the faithful can grasp that 'those who commune in this rank stand with the angels, the archangels and the powers from above', as St John Chrysostom further explained.[357] However, the archangel of Kaftun does not belong to the scene of the Communion of the Apostles, as his medallion stands out clearly on a frame that is well isolated from the scene in question, and the scale of the archangel is obviously larger (see Pl. 88).

The sceptre held by the archangel is a symbol commonly associated with those entrusted with guarding the holiest part of the temple.[358] In Byzantine art it was common to depict angels as guardians of the sanctuary, or bema.[359] Therefore, the archangel in Kaftun is presented as the protector of the most sacred space of the church, as emphasised by his sceptre and location. It is possible that another medallion containing the image of another archangel was placed on the opposite wall to create a pair. The archangel medallions could also have been intended to delineate the liturgical space and distinguish the images associated with the practices of the sanctuary, such as the Communion of the Apostles, from other images, like Domatius and the saints that follow.

2.6.6 Archdeacon Lawrence

The easternmost spandrel of the northern wall of the central aisle is occupied by Archdeacon Lawrence, accompanied by an angel holding a cloth (see Pl. 90). The corresponding figure on the easternmost spandrel of the southern wall no longer exists. As in Mar Tadros of Behdidat[360] and Deir es-Salib in the Houlat Valley,[361] the archdeacon is meant to extend the image of the earthly Church,

354 Chmielewski *et al.* 2013, 316; Hélou 2009a, 13; Immerzeel 2009, 97; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Hélou and Immerzeel 2005, 453–458.

355 Marinis 2021b, 255–268.

356 John Chrysostom 1862b, PG 48: 681.

357 John Chrysostom 1862g, PG 59: 262.

358 Giorgi 2014, 95.

359 Thierry 1983, I: 157. For examples of archangels protecting the church or bema, see Koumoussi 1987, 125–126. On the guardian archangels of the gates, see Tatić-Djurić 1989, 359–366.

360 See pp. 168–170 herein.

361 Nasr 2025, 141–144; Nasr 2018a, 26–46; Abdul Massih, Chaaya and Hajj 2014, 187–222; Immerzeel 2009, 118–119; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 49–50, 89, 92, 250–261.

which is usually portrayed by apostles and bishops and may also include the Virgin Mary, monks and prophets. Note that the image of Lawrence is followed by two monks painted on the eastern embedded pillar (see Pl. 91).

As previously mentioned, the deacons' placement at the entrance to the apse was determined by their liturgical function.[362] Moreover, Lawrence is particularly associated with the Lord's Passion, because of the torture and suffering he endured during his martyrdom, which further justifies his placement in Kaftun. The angel approaching Lawrence with a cloth in hand could reinforce this interpretation. Indeed, when Lawrence was stretched out on a rack and cruelly tortured, the Lord sent an angel from heaven to relieve him in his agony, wiping the sweat from his forehead and the wounds on his body with a cloth.[363]

It can be inferred that the angel, carrying some sort of cloth in his hands and heading towards Lawrence, is linked to this episode of the archdeacon's life. In this context, the angelic figure connects Lawrence to the symbolism of the sacrifice that takes place inside the sanctuary. Certainly, this evidence is somewhat less solid than that of the censer and the pyxis, usually held by deacons painted at the entrance to the sanctuary.

2.6.7 The Holy Monks

Four figures of monks are portrayed in pairs on the eastern embedded pillars of the central aisle, facing the congregation (see Pl. 91). In conventual churches, it is customary for monks to occupy a prominent position at the entrance of the sanctuary or inside the apse. At Mar Mitr of Kusba, one or two monks are positioned amidst a group of prelates of the Church.[364]

The depiction of monks suggests the presence of a monastic community associated with the church of Kaftun.[365] They indicate the identity of the founders and the main worshippers of the church. By extending the figure of the deacon and the possible group of bishops, as Grigorovich-Barsky informed us,[366] the monks complete the image of the local community gathered in their place of worship to celebrate the liturgy. It seems that the representation of the earthly Church in the lower register of the apse programmes of churches in Lebanon is common, as all the apse walls that retain their paintings indicate.

362 Nasr 2018a, 31–33; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 48; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 74.
363 Croiset 1886, 687.
364 See pp. 198–199 herein.
365 Hélou 2009a, 17; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 19–20.
366 See p. 202 herein.

2.6.8 The Holy Soldiers

Four holy soldiers stand upright on the intrados of the arches of the four pillars of the nave: Theodore and George are facing the apse, while St Sergius and St Bacchus, the patron saints of the church, are standing facing the entrance (see Pls 92, 93, 94, 95). The depiction of these holy warriors in Kaftun follows Byzantine tradition, with the figures standing without a horse,[367] contrary to the common custom in the East, where they are often shown on horseback facing the apse.[368]

As previously noted in the case of Behdidat and Kfar Shleiman, the representation of warrior saints, whether on horseback or standing, does not correspond to the liturgy of the altar.[369] Their depiction is generally limited to their apotropaic function as guardians and defenders of the place of worship. The selection of Sts Sergius and Bacchus at Kaftun is also due to their patronage of the church. Hence, their images at the entrance could fulfil a dual role: signifying the church's patron saints and safeguarding the entrance.

2.6.9 Synthesis

The apsidal Theophany–Deesis of Kaftun is placed in a context that explicitly refers to the eucharistic sacrifice. The Communion of the Apostles, which directly precedes the founding episode of the first sacrament, the Last Supper, is sufficient to introduce the Theophany–Deesis in the context of the Divine Liturgy. The scene of Officiating Bishops is also a clear reference to the altar liturgy, but its presence in Kaftun remains uncertain. The Annunciation, which frames the Theophany–Deesis on the apse arch, could also refer to this eucharistic symbolism, although it is less evident than the scene of the Communion of the Apostles. From this perspective, the apsidal image of Kaftun materialises the temporary presence of Christ among the monks inside their church. The Lord intervenes with inhabitants of heaven (angels and saints) to preside over the Liturgy, in accordance with the liturgical texts and their commentaries. As defenders and protectors of the monks and their church, the saints intercede with Christ on behalf of the faithful (both deceased and living) in the present time, undoubtedly passing through the privileged mediation of the Virgin and St John the Baptist.

367 Chmielewski *et al.* 2013, 317; Hélou 2009a, 16; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317.

368 This is the case at Mar Tadros of Behdidat and at Mar Saba of Edde el-Batrun in Lebanon.

369 See pp. 170–172, 190–191 herein.

2.7 *Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh*

2.7.1 The First Layer of Painted Plaster

2.7.1.1 *The Theophany–Deesis*

A Theophany–Deesis scene depicting Christ between the Virgin and John the Baptist occupies the low conch of the apse of Saydet el-Rih (Our Lady of the Wind) in Enfeh, though it is significantly damaged (see Pl. 99). The central bust of Christ can still be identified in the composition, while only a few fragments of Mary's *maphorion* and St John the Baptist's hand, outstretched in prayer, have survived.[370] Christ possibly holds the book in his left hand as the Word of God and makes a gesture of speech or blessing at the main altar level, suggesting that he personally presides over the Divine Liturgy as a priest standing behind the altar.[371] From this point of view, the supplication of Mary and John appears to be connected to the daily practice of the liturgy. This is supported by the fact that the programme at Enfeh features the theme of the Last Judgement in its western section, which should hold an eschatological Deesis.[372]

2.7.1.2 *The Sacrifice of Isaac*

The scene of the sacrifice of Isaac is located on the north-eastern side of the barrel vault, overlooking the actual altar (see Pl. 101). However, the image of Abraham is only partially visible and heavily damaged, with his head appearing to turn back towards the angelic figure intervening to stop his sacrifice. Two flames are depicted under the celestial segment where the angel is placed. The figure of Isaac is no longer visible.

The sacrifice of Isaac evokes the themes of piety and salvation.[373] Piety is exemplified by Abraham's obedience to the voice of the Lord, without question, and his willingness to sacrifice his son. Salvation is depicted in the divine intervention that saves Isaac and the ram as a substitute for the sacrifice. As highlighted earlier,[374] Christian exegetes have long viewed the sacrifice of Isaac on Mount Moriah as a prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.[375] Isaac's act of carrying the wood for the sacrifice on his shoulders on the way to Mount Moriah is seen as a symbol of Christ carrying the cross on his shoulders

370 Nasr 2022a, 235–266; Nasr 2022b, 287–298.
371 Filvedt and Wessbrandt 2015, 96–114; Holmes 2007; Barker 2003.
372 Nasr 2022a, 238–240.
373 John Chrysostom 1992, 14–24.
374 See pp. 162–164 herein.
375 Dulaey 1994, 3–40.

on the way to Mount Golgotha.[376] The flames of the sacrifice symbolise the paternal love of God[377] and also represent the presence of the Holy Spirit, often described as a hidden fire operating in the sacrifice.[378] The ram, caught in a bush by its horns, foreshadows Christ, the Lamb of God, who was hung on the cross by his hands.[379] This image brings to mind the human nature of Christ, who experienced suffering and death on the cross, while Isaac represents his divine nature, which conquered death.[380] Isaac also serves as a symbol of humanity in two ways: first, as a representation of humanity's mortality and need for salvation through the sacrificial ram–Christ sent by God; and second, as a prefiguration of Christ himself, who was destined for sacrifice by his Father and triumphed over death through his resurrection.[381]

Isaac's immolation, with its eucharistic value as a prefiguration of Christ's sacrifice on the cross, establishes a direct link to the sacrificial ritual of the church[382] and explains its common association with the liturgical space, as underlined in Mar Tadros of Behdidat.[383] Additionally, Abraham and Isaac serve as a model of the sacrificial priest and the designated victim for sacrifice.

2.7.1.3 *The Assembly of Saints*

Figures representing apostles, prophets and bishops were likely present on both sides of the barrel vault in Enfeh, but only one part remains, on the north side next to the depiction of the sacrifice of Isaac (see Pl. 101). Except for the image of the bishop, the holy figures are arranged under arches, in the same manner as in Behdidat.[384] A similar arrangement of the twelve apostles under arches can be seen on the northern and southern sides of the barrel vault in the 9th-century church of Niketas the Stylite (Üzümlü Kilise) in Cappadocia.[385] Typically, this frontal arrangement of apostles, with or without

376 Méliton de Sardes 2008, 234; Origène 2003, 222; Amphilochius Iconiensis 1978, 300, 405–409; Irénée de Lyon 1965, 434; Clément d'Alexandrie 1960, 151; Cosmas Indicopleustes 1860, PG 88: 241B.

377 John Chrysostom 1992, 18.

378 Brock 2006, 229–243; Siman 1971, 222–242.

379 Méliton de Sardes 2008, 234, 236; Amphilochius Iconiensis 1978, 302, 413–417; Jean Chrysostome 1703, II: 80–81.

380 Origène 2003, 230; Clément d'Alexandrie 1960, 152; Cyril of Alexandria 1864, PG 69: 144A.

381 Mulard 2011, 99; Dulaey 1994.

382 Van Woerden 1961, 214–220.

383 On eucharistic prefigurations in the Old Testament according to patristic catechesis, see Bornert 1966, 61, 65, 73, 75, 77, 81, 173, 175–176, 205; Gregory of Nazianzos 1864, PG 35: 497B; Cyril of Alexandria 1864, PG 69: 14A; Brightman 1908, 257–259, 300, 390–391, 397.

384 See pp. 166–168 herein.

385 Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, 153–154.

the prophets and bishops, is found painted on the apsidal wall beneath the image of the Theophany, with or without intercessors. However, in Enfeh the apsidal conch is low and the apsidal wall is hidden by the altar, making it impossible to include such figures. It is likely that this lack of visibility led to the placement of the figures of prophets, apostles and bishops on the barrel vault in Saydet el-Rih.[386]

As previously discussed,[387] the assembly of apostles with prophets and bishops represents the earthly Church gathered in its place of worship.[388] The ecclesiological aspect of this assembly is further emphasised by the inclusion of the prelate figure. The bishop's episcopal vestments, including the *omophorion*, *epitrachelion* and *epigonation*, highlight his clerical and liturgical role (see Pl. 102). While the prophets represent Old Testament priesthood, the apostles, as founders of the Church, and their successors, the bishops, represent New Testament priesthood.[389] Together, they represent the assembly of clergy celebrating the Eucharist, particularly in Eastern liturgies, in which multiple priests can officiate the same sacrifice around a shared altar.

2.7.1.4 *The Holy Soldiers*

The barely discernible figures of holy soldiers depicted on the north and south walls of the nave are a common sight in Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions of the Levant (see Pl. 100).[390] In Enfeh these figures may have been included for their devotional value or for their protective and intercessory role as conquerors of evil and defenders of the sacred space, soldiers and worshippers.[391]

2.7.1.5 *The Judgement*

At the western end of the barrel vault, two angels are depicted preparing to roll up the sky (see Pl. 103), introducing the Judgement theme that continues in the western part of the church. However, only fragments of this grand scene remain, including a celestial choir of four standing angels on the top of the groin vault, the apostolic tribunal on the barrels of the groin vault, two trumpeting angels on the lunette of the south wall, allegorical figures of the earth and sea on either side of the south door, a saint on the western

386 Nasr 2022a, 245.
387 See pp. 168, 199 herein.
388 Nasr 2022a, 246; Nasr 2019b, 31–32; Nasr 2018a, 31; Angheben 2012, 69–70, 74; Thérel and Daniélou 1973, 125–133.
389 Nasr 2022a, 246.
390 Pancaroğlu 2004, 151–164.
391 Nasr 2022a, 246–247, 259; Vanderheyde 2012, 201–211; Walter 2003, 133–134.

face of the south-eastern pier and a stack of skulls on the northern face of the south-western pier (see Pls 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109). It is possible that the Christ–judge, flanked by the canonical intercessors, the Virgin and the Forerunner, was depicted on the lunette of the west wall.[392] The placement of this Judgement composition follows Byzantine tradition, typically situated on the western part of the nave or in the narthex, with the exception of funerary chapels. The Mar Elias (St Elijah) church in Bziza and the Saydet Hamatura church in present-day Lebanon also feature Judgement scenes in their western part.[393]

The Last Judgement represents the ultimate judgement of all humanity at the end of time,[394] different from the Individual Judgement that determines the immediate fate of souls after death.[395] Painted compositions may intertwine aspects of both judgements, showcasing the dual temporality of the action: the present time for Individual Judgement after one's passing; and the eschatological temporality of the Last Judgement, which signifies the Second Coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead. These depictions address key concerns of medieval societies, such as death, sin, resurrection, divergent destinies for the righteous and the damned, hell and the heavenly beatitudes.

In Enfeh the event's duality is suggested by certain characters. The two angels who are depicted as preparing to roll up the scroll of the sky signify the end of time. This motif, commonly seen in scenes of the Last Judgement from the 11th century onwards,[396] typically features a single angel rolling up the sky. However, in some cases, such as in the narthex of St Nicholas tis Stegis in Kakopetria, Cyprus, two angels are shown rolling up the sky, which may be explained by the presence of curved spaces, like the intrados of an arch or a vault.[397]

The apostles form part of the celestial tribunal (see Pl. 105), along with the angelic choir (Matt. 25:31–32). This tribunal is described in the Bible, which states that, during the renewal of all things, the Son of Man will sit on his glorious

392 Nasr 2022a, 248–258.

393 Nordiguian 2015–2016b, 397–405; Immerzeel 2009, 93–94; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 93, 208–217; Nordiguian 1998, 67–89.

394 Rapti 2015, 95–118; Angheben 2013a; Angheben 2002, 105–134; Pace and Angheben 2007; Baschet 2009, 103–123; Baschet 1995, 159–203; Christe 1973, I: 68; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–465.

395 Baschet 2009, 103–123; Pace and Angheben 2007; Angheben 2002, 105–134; Baschet 1995, 159–203; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–465.

396 Bérard 2004, 51; Kepetzi 1994, 99–112.

397 The motif of two angels rolling up the sky became common in the Palaiologan era; see Kepetzi 1994, 104.

throne, and the apostles who followed him will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). At Enfeh the enthroned apostles serve as assessors of Christ the Judge, who should sit beside them, possibly on the lunette of the western wall, at the centre of an eschatological Deesis.[398]

The trumpeting angels (Matt. 24:31) are closely intertwined with the theme of the Universal Judgement and, specifically, the resurrection of bodies from tombs, the land and sea. One of the trumpeting angels in Enfeh is depicted above a personification of the earth, preparing to pour the first bowl of divine wrath on the earth, in accordance with the apocalyptic text (Rev. 16:1). At the Panagia in Moutoullas, Cyprus (1280), personifications of the earth and the sea are each crowned with an angel playing a trumpet, accompanied by creatures that appear to be vomiting human limbs.[399] This representation is intended to symbolise the resurrection of the dead, buried in the earth or drowned in the sea, through the sound of the trumpet.[400] In contrast to what is customary, the allegory of the sea and the earth at Enfeh, under the trumpeting angels, does not feature any discarded human limbs or bodies (see Pls 106, 107). The image encourages viewers to understand that the events of the Last Judgement, emphasised by the angels rolling up the sky and the trumpeting angels, will take place at the end of time, in contrast to the Individual Judgement, which occurs in the present.[401]

The infernal cave in Enfeh (see Pl. 109), which holds a pile of stylised skulls, was intended as evidence of the existence of temporary hells, which relate to the concept of the Individual Judgement. Within these hellish dwellings, sinners are punished according to the transgressions they committed.[402] The Tetraevangelion of the Stoudios monastery (11th century; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Grec 74, fol. 51v), icons no. 150 (11th century) and no. 151 (12th century) of Sinai and the mosaics of Santa Maria Assunta of Torcello (created in the 11th century and reworked in the 12th)[403] combine both the

398 Nasr 2022a, 251–252.

399 Nicolaïdès 1995, 75.

400 The allegorical representation of the earth and the sea with their creatures, yielding rising bodies, was commonly used in 12th- and 13th-century Cyprus, which was closely associated with the County of Tripoli and Enfeh. This representation can be observed, for example, at St Nicholas tis Stegis in Kakopetria (late 13th–early 14th centuries), at the church of the Transfiguration in Sotira (second half of the 13th century) and at the Panagia Kanakaria in Lythrankomi (14th century).

401 Nasr 2022a, 253–254.

402 For details of Individual Judgement, see in particular Angheben 2013a, 113–128; Angheben 2002, 105–134; Baschet 2009, 103–123; Baschet 1995, 159–203; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–466.

403 Krauze-Kołodziej 2019.

Eschatological and Immediate Judgements and depict temporary hell divided into compartments, with some of these featuring the same motif of piled-up skulls seen in Enfeh. The presence of the skulls emphasises the perishable nature of the human body and the fact that it is man's actions that will be judged.[404] In the Individual Judgement the souls of the condemned do not suffer physical torments; it is only at the end of time that their souls will join their resurrected bodies and suffer the pain of the flesh. The scene painted at Karşı Kilise (1212) in Cappadocia represents only the Immediate Judgement, featuring a representation of *psychostasia* (the weighing of souls), earthly paradise and temporary hell.[405]

The absence of human limbs and the presence of temporary hell, shown by the skulls plunged into the infernal cave, in Enfeh's image accentuate the Individual Judgement that takes place in the present, as stated by Estephan Douaihy.[406] The fate of separated souls after death depends on the prayers and alms dedicated to them, and the eucharistic sacrifice is often offered on behalf of the deceased for the remission of sins and eternal salvation.[407] This could stress the role of the Church and clergy in the Immediate Judgement and the salvation of separated souls.

In this perspective, the Judgement scene at Enfeh brings together the two judgement sequences, the Immediate and the Eschatological, by showing that separated souls undergo an initial judgement in the present and that Christ will appear with the heavenly tribunal to judge all of humanity at the end of time. The purpose of this was to inspire the living faithful to repent and offer prayers and sacrifices for the deceased with the assistance of the Church and its clergy.

2.7.2 The Second Layer of Painted Plaster

2.7.2.1 *The Holy Horseman with a Female Figure*

A bearded holy horseman with a female figure in front of him is depicted on the western end of the south wall of the nave (see Pl. 110). This scene dates back to the 13th century and belongs to the second phase of the church's decoration.[408] The equestrian's horse is red, and the hagionym, written in Greek, has only the letter ε remaining. The holy soldier depicted is not St George, since his established iconography features him beardless and riding

404 Nasr 2022a, 254.
405 Jolivet-Lévy 2001b, 272–274.
406 See pp. 144–145 herein; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–461.
407 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866d, PG 155: 733A; Duwayhī 1895b, I: 455–466.
408 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 90–94; Nasr 2022a, 258–264; Nasr 2022b, 292–296.

a white horse. Instead, it could be Theodore or any other equestrian saint venerated in Enfeh and depicted riding a red horse.[409]

Rather than moving towards the apse, as is customary, the horse moves towards the western part of the church, where the Judgement scene is illustrated, suggesting a possible relationship between the holy soldier and this scene, similar to other instances found in Syria, Cappadocia and Georgia,[410] where the holy soldier represents the victory of faith over evil and the ultimate triumph of piety.[411] In this context the female supplicant appears to be addressing her prayer and intercession for her salvation towards the holy rider. Her figure symbolises the deliverance of her soul through divine grace – depicted by the hand of God emerging from the celestial orbit in the upper right-hand corner.[412] This concept becomes more compelling when we consider the funerary posture of the female figure, which confers her with the status of a deceased individual. She maintains a frontal stance with her hands clasped together over her chest, following the Latin tradition of prayer, distinguishing it from the more commonly observed crossed hands in Eastern funerary customs.[413] Her posture, evoking the pose of a departed soul within a tomb,[414] appears to have drawn inspiration from engraved tomb slabs featuring Latin individuals, such as the tombstone of Simone de Gibelet, located in the

409 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 90; Nasr 2022a, 258–259. St Theodore Tiron (St Theodore the Recruit) should be distinguished from the Egyptian St Theodore of Shotep (St Theodore Stratelates), who in Coptic iconography is shown on a white horse. For this reason, the well-known story of the Egyptian Theodore saving a widow's two sons from a dragon in Euchaita cannot be applied to the Enfeh image, where the saint is unmistakably mounted on a red horse and the supplicant's Western-style attire and, above all, her Latin gesture of prayer with joined hands do not correspond to the traditional portrayal of the widow. An example of this specific life episode of St Theodore of Shotep, mounted on a white horse, survives in a 1232–1233 mural at the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea. Another was found in the church of the Dragon Slayers, Tebtunis (Fayum); although the building has since disappeared, photographs of the paintings are preserved in the Griffith Institute, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; see Bolman 2002, 42–44, figs 4.8, 4.10; Walters 1989, 193–194; Winstedt 1979, 123–132; O'Leary 1937, 262–264; Immerzeel 2023–2024, pp. 130–132, pl. 2.

410 As in Mar Musa el-Habashi in Syria (Immerzeel 2007b, 127–131; Cruikshank Dodd 2001); St Theodore (Pancarlık Kilise), church no. 2b in Göreme and Karşı Kilise in Cappadocia (Jolivet-Lévy 2001a, 163–181); and a carved relief in St George (Mcxet'a) in the village of Joisubani in the Rač'a region of Georgia (Iamanidzé 2015, 59–63).

411 Iamanidzé 2015, 59–63.

412 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 90; Nasr 2022a, 260.

413 Semoglou 1995, 5–12.

414 A prevalent posture among the uncovered female bodies discovered at Asi-l-Hadath is with their hands positioned over their chest and secured by a leather belt. This tradition persisted throughout modern times (Baroudy *et al.* 2011; Abi Aoun *et al.* 1994; Figuié and Kallab 1999; Hourani 2000, 103–109).

parish church of the Panagia Angeloktisti, Kiti (1302).[415] The arrangement of the female figure in a funerary posture and the depiction of the Judgement scene might collectively indicate a funerary function for the western section of the chapel.[416]

By revealing her hair,[417] the deceased woman embraces the vulnerability of her departed soul, placing unwavering trust in the hands of the holy soldier.[418] Her attire, a long-sleeved bliaut reserved for the Western elite, serves as a symbol of the wearer's wealth and power,[419] suggesting her likely association with the Latin aristocracy.[420] Her Western hand gesture of prayer and the proximity of the crusader castle of Nephin further strengthens this hypothesis. In Ibn Jubayr's travel narrative, it appears that affluent Latin families in the Lebanese region maintained Western fashion customs, especially at their public events.[421] The presumed Latin family of the deceased woman thus publicly represented her in Western attire as an expression of their own cultural traditions. The bliaut remains a clear indicator of this woman's high status and of the presence of Western fashion in the region.[422]

2.7.3 Synthesis

Despite being heavily damaged, the paintings of Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh appear to feature a well-organised and clearly defined iconographic programme. The apsidal Deesis represents the unseen presence of Christ as Priest, who

415 Imhaus 2004, I: 142–143, 525, pl. 121; II: 243, pl. 285, fig. 271. For further examples, see Imhaus 2004, I: pl. 3, fig. 2; pl. 11, fig. 13; pl. 13, fig. 15; pl. 14, fig. 16; pl. 15, fig. 17; pl. 16, fig. 18; pl. 17, fig 19; pl. 20, fig. 22; pl. 22, fig. 25; pl. 25, fig. 32; pl. 26, fig. 35; pl. 40, fig. 81; pl. 45, fig. 95; pl. 52, fig. 104; pl. 67, fig. 142; pl. 116, fig. 261; pl. 120, fig. 269; pl. 121, fig. 271; pl. 123, fig. 275; pl. 126, fig. 278; pl. 127, fig. 279; pl. 135, fig. 287; pl. 138, fig. 292; pl. 145, fig. 310; pl. 198, fig. 470; pl. 244, fig. 660.

416 The only burial within the church grounds dates back to the 18th century, leading to speculation about whether this burial might have replaced an earlier one, given that it was unearthed at the 13th-century ground level.

417 The daughter of the depicted knight and his wife, kneeling near the Virgin Glykophilousa (of Tenderness) in the church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, also reveals her uncovered hair; see Bacci 2022, 36. See also the 14th-century tomb slab of the French woman Jaque Visconte from the cathedral of St Sophia in Nicosia (now in the Lapidary Museum, North Nicosia), where she is portrayed without a veil, her hands clasped in prayer over her chest; Imhaus 2004, II: 229, pl. 271, fig. 158.

418 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 91; Bacci 2017, 131.

419 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 91–92; Nasr 2022a, 261; Snyder 2016, 85–102; Wilson and Burns 2017, 100; Wright and Burns 2017, n. 78.

420 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 91–92; Nasr 2022a, 261.

421 This is evident from his detailed description of the clothing worn by a Latin bride in Tyre when he visited in 1194; see Lindsay and Mourad 2021, 22.

422 Nasr, Šćepanović and Zoitou 2023, 94.

performs the eucharistic sacrifice behind the main altar and receives prayers from the intercessors, namely the Virgin and John the Baptist. It is likely that the iconographic programme of Enfeh, like that of church of St John in Güllüdere no. 4, includes a dual Deesis image, with one located in the apse and the other included in the Last Judgement.[423] This duality served to highlight the two-fold nature of the scene and emphasises the distinction between the apsidal Theophany–Deesis and the parousiatic one, present intercession and eschatological intercession, and the Christ–priest and the Christ–judge. Unfortunately, the eschatological Deesis did not survive in Enfeh, due to the destruction of a significant portion of the Judgement scene.

The imagery featured on the intrados of the barrel vault serves to reinforce the liturgical symbolism transmitted by the apsidal Deesis. The image of Isaac's immolation effectively conveys the concept of sacrifice, which is mirrored by the eucharistic sacrifice performed on the main altar. The standing figures of saints, likely apostles accompanied by prophets and bishops, represent the earthly Church. As for the holy soldiers on the northern and southern walls of the nave, they are renowned for their miraculous and protective qualities.

The images portrayed at the western end of Saydet el-Rih may have conveyed the concept of both the Individual and Eschatological Judgements. The former is underlined by the cave of skulls, representing temporary hell, and the absence of human limbs thrown from the sea and the land, while the latter is marked by two angels unfurling the scroll of the heavens and two trumpeting angels. The duality of the Judgement image could serve to encourage the faithful to engage in penance, in order to be among the chosen ones at the end of time, while also motivating them to offer prayers and eucharistic sacrifices in the present in honour of the separated souls. This highlights the active role of ecclesiastics, who could intervene in the Individual Judgement and the destiny of separated souls through prayer and sacrifice. These ideas may reflect the concurrent theological discussions between the Eastern and Western Churches on the existence of a third place for separated souls to reside, which would eventually evolve into the concept of purgatory in the 13th century.[424] The scene of the Judgement may reveal an ecclesiastical or political intent – possibly the political motives of the prelates of the church – in the choice of this theme.

The holy horseman and the female figure depicted on the second layer of painted plaster face towards the western part of the church. It is possible that this scene was created to replace a damaged image from the first layer of plaster, and it may be associated with the Judgement theme, which it faces.

423 See pp. 123–125 herein.
424 Le Goff 1990, 283–284.

In this scenario, the horseman symbolises the triumph of faith over evil, while the female supplicant represents the salvation of righteous souls through the intercession of saints and divine grace. This notion is further enhanced by the funerary posture of the female figure. Her depiction would, therefore, have been created for the sake of her soul, perhaps following her final wishes. Michele Bacci characterises this form of representation as 'pro anima imagery', wherein compositions portray dead individuals expressing their yearning for admission to paradise by simulating closeness to the saints.[425] Furthermore, her attire, the bliaut, unmistakably highlights the elevated social status and power associated with her family. Her placement alongside the holy horseman galloping westwards could suggest a connection to the Latin aristocracy of Nephin Castle.

2.8 *The Chapel Attached to Mar Girgis in Rashkida: Sts Peter and Paul (?)*

2.8.1 The Theophany–Deesis

The southern apse of the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis (St George) in Rashkida features a Theophany–Deesis, the lower part of which is completely destroyed (Pls 119, 127, 128, 129).[426] In the conch directly above the altar (no longer extant), Christ sits on a throne covered with a white cloth with red stripes, alluding to the one covering the holy table (Pls 127, 128).[427] On either side of his cathedra stand two four-winged angels. Their appearance does not match the scriptural sources, leading us to speculate that the limited space in the apse prevented the painter from fully developing their horizontal pairs of wings or even giving them the holy standard with the triple *hagios*. Yet, their physical aspect is explained in liturgical texts, specifically in the prefaces of certain anaphora in which seraphim, cherubim and various types of angels gather around the heavenly altar to celebrate the liturgy in concert with the earthly Church.[428] The image of the four-winged angel in Rashkida could be considered a synthesis of these different angelic categories.[429] It is possible that these angels partook in the Lord's holiness, but the absence of the triple *hagios* standard does not support this hypothesis. Instead, the two angelic creatures in Rashkida appear to be guardians of God's throne.[430]

425 Bacci 2016, 76–105.

426 Nasr 2019a, 259–278; Immerzeel 2009, 111–112; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 22–23, 272–279; Hélou 2006b, 37–40.

427 See pp. 55, 150–151 herein.

428 See pp. 59–63, 154–155 herein.

429 Nasr 2019a, 264–265.

430 *Ibid.*, 265.

The Theophany of Rashkida, with the intercession of the Virgin and St John the Baptist, is grounded in the temporality of the daily liturgy, as emphasised by the scene of Isaac's immolation on the apsidal arch.[431]

2.8.2 The Sacrifice of Isaac

The sacrifice of Isaac is depicted on the north side of the south apse arch (Pls 119, 121). Indeed, the presence of this scene in this location is a deeply rooted tradition in the Near East spanning from the late 12th century to the 13th. In addition to the 13th-century examples found in Lebanon, depictions of the sacrifice of Isaac can also be observed on the triumphal arch of the Syrian church of Mar Yakub in Qara[432] and in the Cypriot church of the Panagia Phorbiotissa in Asinou.[433] Additionally, there are four surviving instances from the late 12th century and the 13th in Coptic churches in Egypt: one in St George at Deir Seifein in Old Cairo;[434] another in St Mark at Abu Makar[435] and one in the church of the Holy Virgin at Deir al-Baramus,[436] both situated in the Wadi el-Natrun; and the fourth in St Anthony on the Red Sea.[437]

The upper part of this scene in Rashkida, along with the southern side of the same arch, is heavily covered by calcite and dirt, accumulated over the centuries. As a result, it is difficult to determine the image that mirrors Abraham's sacrifice on the opposite side of the apsidal arch with any certainty. We might suggest an image of Moses receiving the Tablets of the Law, like the depiction in Mar Tadros of Behdidat.[438] However, only after cleaning will it be possible to identify the figures in this painting accurately.

Abraham, whom we can suppose holds the knife, is seen bending towards his bound son. However, the upper part of his figure is not visible. Based on the similar scenes at Behdidat and at Enfeh, we might infer that Abraham is looking at the divine hand or the angel stopping his sacrificial gesture: both must have been positioned at the top of the apsidal arch. The replacement ram is placed underneath the figures of Abraham and Isaac.

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431 *Ibid.*, 265–266.
432 Westphalen 2005, 111.
433 Weyl Carr 2012, 219–223.
434 Van Loon 1999, 4, 22–30, figs 23–26.
435 *Ibid.*, 4, 30–59, figs 47–48.
436 *Ibid.*, 4, 65–74, figs 83–85.
437 Bolman 2002, 66, fig. 4.32; van Loon 1999, 4, 91–107; van Moorsel 1997, I: 35–36; II: pls 9–10.
438 Nasr 2019a, 266.

As mentioned above with regards to Behdidat and Enfeh,[439] the scene depicting Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac is strategically placed within the Holy of Holies, because of its eucharistic connotations.[440] It serves as an Old Testament foreshadowing of Christ's sacrifice on the cross and the eucharistic sacrifice.[441] In framing the entire northern side of the Theophany–Deesis, this Old Testament motif reinforces the liturgical significance of the Theophany, while highlighting the present temporality of the intercession.[442]

2.8.3 The Theotokos

The conch of the north apse holds an image of the Virgin and Child Enthroned in Majesty (Pls 118, 124, 125, 126) with Peter and Paul framing this central composition. A similar representation can be found at the church of the Holy Apostles in Pera Chorio, Cyprus, with the two apostles surrounding a standing Virgin with the medallion of the Child on her breast (the Virgin of the Sign).[443] Positioned alongside the depiction of the Virgin, the images of Peter and Paul strongly imply that the chapel annexed to the church of St George in Rashkida is dedicated to these apostles, following the example of the Cypriot church.[444]

The image of the Theotokos attests to Mary's divine motherhood and the Incarnation of the Logos, while emphasising his human nature. It can also convey dogmatic, devotional or thaumaturgical values, as well as referring to the cult of the Virgin and, likely, her liturgical invocation. Nevertheless, the placement of the Virgin and Child in the sanctuary lends the image a liturgical interpretation. It is located directly above the altar and next to the sacrifice of the cross on the right. The altar that was once placed in front of the northern apse of Rashkida should serve as a *prothesis* altar.[445] The latter, reminiscent of Bethlehem and the manger, is always placed next to the main altar and on the north side to show that Bethlehem is in proximity to Jerusalem and the Holy Sepulchre.[446] This is where the species are prepared before being moved to the main altar during the Great Entrance. In numerous cases the phenomenon of churches with double apses and altars, so widespread on Mount Lebanon, can

439 See pp. 162, 209 herein.
440 Van Woerden 1961, 214–220.
441 See p. 162, n. 109 herein.
442 Nasr 2019a, 266–267.
443 Megaw and Hawkins 1962, fig. 12.
444 Nasr 2019a, 268.
445 Nasr 2019a, 270.
446 Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866a, PG 155: 263, 274, 286; Symeon of Thessaloniki 1866c, PG 155: 347.

be explained in this way:[447] the first altar would serve for the preparation of the gifts, while the second would be dedicated to the actual sacrifice.[448]

The Theotokos is seated with the Infant on a lavish throne that underscores their shared majesty. Draped in voluminous fabric, the throne evokes the altar,[449] suggesting Mary's offering of her Son as a sacrificial gift. She holds the Child along the central axis of her body, gripping his arm with her left hand, an uncommon gesture in Eastern iconography that may allude to the Child's destined sacrifice that will take place on the altar opposite.[450] In this light, Mary appears as a paradigm of the priest holding, through the Holy Species, the true body of her Son.[451] The symbolism of sacrifice and the Passion is further reinforced by the adjoining image of the Crucifixion to the right.

Peter and Paul (Pls 125, 126),[452] standing on either side of the Virgin and Child, can be seen as privileged witnesses to the Incarnation of Christ resting in the lap of his Mother. The Child extends both hands almost horizontally towards the two apostles, as if presenting them as patrons of the Rashkida chapel, founders of the Church and bearers of his Word. This interpretation is reinforced by the scroll held in the Child's left hand. Notably, both apostles also hold a scroll in one hand, while extending the other towards the Child, creating a visual connection among the three figures. The image of the Virgin flanked by the apostles thus becomes an embodiment of the earthly Church in liturgical communion with the heavenly Church, whose presence is materialised by the Theophany–Deesis.[453]

2.8.4 The Crucifixion

A Crucifixion is featured on the spandrel that separates the two apses, above a niche that could have served as the eucharistic tabernacle (Pls 114, 120). Christ

447 This type of church, with dual apses and altars, has generated various interpretations among researchers. These include speculation that the church was dedicated to two saints, that the religious service was conducted in two languages or that the two aisles served different religious communities. Others believe the design may have been intended to separate men and women or to provide more space or cost-effective construction. See Kahwagi-Janho 2019, 107–140; Nordiguian 2018, 408–483; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 23–26; Pringle 1993, I: 206; Dimitrokallis 1978, 577–579; Lassus 1947, 191–193.

448 Nasr 2019a, 270.

449 See pp. 53–55, 150–151 herein.

450 Nasr 2019a, 272.

451 Nasr 2020a, 119–134; Nasr 2020b, 56–65; Nasr 2018b, 98–113; Angheben 2012, 29–74; Milliner 2011, 106–113; Bogevska-Capuano 2011, 1–21; Lidov 2009, 225–255.

452 Tatić-Djurić 2002, 129–136.

453 Nasr 2019a, 272–273.

is suspended on the cross, between his Mother and his disciple John. The holy woman and Longinus are added to this central group.

The depiction of Christ's sacrifice on the cross is a common feature in the sanctuaries of Cappadocia and beyond, including at Rashkida. In Tokalı Kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia, a 10th-century Crucifixion scene is placed in the central apse, with a liturgical Theophany in the southern apse and possibly a Virgin and Child scene in the northern apse. This placement suggests a liturgical interpretation, although the meaning of the Crucifixion scene extends beyond the realm of the liturgy.[454]

The Crucifixion marks the end of the Messiah's earthly life and serves to glorify the human nature of Christ, who willingly suffered the Passion and died on the cross. It is an image that represents one of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith: the redeeming Passion. From the Early Christian period theologians and exegetes recognised the potentially eucharistic significance of the Crucifixion. John Chrysostom, Isidore of Pelusium and Theodore of Mopsuestia stated that the immolation of Christ on the cross is commemorated through the eucharistic sacrifice.[455] This sacramental typology of the Eucharist remained traditional, particularly among the Antiochenes, and was further developed by Theodore of Mopsuestia, who regarded the eucharistic celebration as a reproduction of the essential stages of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.[456]

Viewed from this angle, some Crucifixion images show the Church receiving the blood of the Lord in a chalice, such as the example of the *enkleistra* of St Neophytos near Paphos in Cyprus.[457] Additionally, the physical support for the Eucharist is often adorned with depictions of the cross or the Crucifixion. For instance, a paten from the church of the Holy Apostles in Constantinople (mid-12th century; Halberstadt Dom und Domschatz) portrays a Crucifixion scene with an inscription from the account of the inception of the Eucharist around the composition: 'Take, eat; this is my body, which is broken for you for the remission of sins.'[458] This juxtaposition symbolically affirms that the eucharistic sacrifice is a re-enactment of the sacrifice on the cross.

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454 Jolivet-Lévy 2019, 392–394; Jolivet-Lévy and Lemaigre Demesnil 2015, I: 345–348; II: fig. 84.2; Jolivet-Lévy 2006, pl. 56; Jolivet-Lévy 1991b, 96–98; Epstein 1986, figs 83–87; Restle 1967, II: figs 117–119.

455 Bornert 1966, 78 (for John Chrysostom), 82 (for Isidore of Pelusium and Theodore of Mopsuestia).

456 *Ibid.*, 1966, 75–82.

457 Jolivet-Lévy 2004, 43–72; Mango and Hawkins 1966, 148–149, figs 32, 34.

458 Boyd 1998, 180–183; Wixom 1997, nn. 30, 68–69.

The Crucifixion at Rashkida, placed above a niche that could have served as the eucharistic tabernacle between the altar of preparation and the altar of sacrifice, seems to strengthen its association with the Eucharist. Moreover, it is directly juxtaposed with the sacrifice of Isaac. Placing these two scenes together in the holiest area of the chapel, near the holy table, highlights their eucharistic nature. Thus, these two scenes enhance the liturgical significance of the Theophany–Deesis and the Virgin and Child images.[459]

2.8.5 Synthesis

In the Rashkida chapel the eastern part features three primary themes: the Virgin and Child, a Crucifixion and a Theophany–Deesis. This iconographic triad aligns with the directive of Gregory the Great in his Epistle LII which outlines a tripartite portrayal of Christ: resting on his mother's knees, suspended on the cross and seated on the throne.[460]

These three themes represent fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, including the Incarnation, the redemptive Passion and the glory of the Lord. They also emphasise the duality of Christ's human and divine nature. However, the theological and iconographic depth of these images extends beyond these doctrinal dimensions. The fact that they are jointly represented in the most sacred space of the building imbues them with a liturgical significance.

The Theophany–Deesis dominates the main altar, while the Virgin and Child preside over the *prothesis* altar. The Crucifixion is located above the eucharistic tabernacle, positioned between these two altars. This arrangement mirrors the liturgical structure: the *prothesis*, typically located north of the main altar, is where the offering is prepared, while the main altar is where the sacrifice is enacted. This configuration may help to explain the architectural phenomenon of churches with a double apse and altar.

The Theophany–Deesis serves to materialise the invisible presence of Christ in the church, with the image positioned above the main altar. Acting as high priest, Christ officiates the unbloody sacrifice, symbolised by the adjacent images of the sacrifice of Isaac and the Crucifixion. Guarded by two four-winged angels, Christ receives prayers from, and the intercession of, the Virgin and the Forerunner in the present time. The placement of the Theotokos, above the *prothesis* altar, likely reinforces her liturgical significance as a model for the celebrant holding the host. The draped throne and Christ Child emphasise the sacrificial nature of the image and its relation to the Eucharist. Together with Peter and Paul, presented as founders of the Church,

459 Nasr 2019a, 276.

460 Gregory the Great 1849, PL 77: 991.

the Virgin and Child represent the earthly Church. The Crucifixion, placed between this image and the Theophany–Deesis, further underscores their shared liturgical function. Therefore, the iconography and spatial arrangement of the Rashkida chapel articulate a vision of two Churches, centred around an ongoing and ever-present reality: the celestial Church, represented by the Theophany–Deesis, and the earthly Church, embodied by the Theotokos with Peter and Paul.

Conclusion

The research outlined in this study provides insights into the liturgical significance of the images in programmes in Eastern sanctuaries, specifically those depicting a Theophany or Theophany–Deesis in their apses. Through an examination of several examples, the findings reveal the close connection between these programmes and the eucharistic liturgy, highlighting their central role in Eastern Christian tradition. In this context the visual imagery itself assumes a crucial role in shaping the liturgical experience for both the clergy and the faithful, while conveying diverse messages related to spirituality, religious and social mentality, theology and devotion, among others.

The apsidal Theophany, whether depicted with or without the intercessors, ensures the ascent of the clergy and the faithful towards higher and invisible realities and reveals the divine by materialising the presence of Christ, angels and saints in the church at the time of eucharistic consecration. The preface of the Eastern anaphora and the Western canon clearly evokes this presence, affirmed by the patristic tradition. The Fathers asserted that, at this decisive moment of the eucharistic celebration, the heavenly liturgy unites with the earthly liturgy, so as to form one. Christ, being at the same time the priest and the victim of the sacrifice, intervenes invisibly with his celestial cortege to present himself as an offering of the Church. The earthly celebrant replaces him, while the faithful actively join the angels in the acclamation of the thrice holy. This reading places the apsidal Theophany and the intercession of Mary and John the Baptist within the present temporality of the daily practice of the Divine Liturgy. The presence of Mary and John as privileged intercessors is undoubtedly related to their joint mention during the eucharistic celebration, especially through the prayer of intercession during the anaphora.

Several clues firmly support this liturgical reading, including the illustrations in liturgical scrolls, which provide irrefutable evidence of the correspondence between liturgy and iconography. Expanding on the texts of the Holy Liturgy, these illustrations attest that the seraphim and cherubim are the primary cantors of the ecclesiastical *Trisagion*, praising the divine majesty, as exemplified by the scrolls of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem (Hagios Stavros 109) and Mount Athos (Lavra no. 2). Additionally, these miniatures present the image of the Virgin and the Baptist as favoured representations of the theme of intercession during the eucharistic liturgy and illustrate the prayer of intercession during the anaphora through a type of Theophany–Deesis.

The apsidal image of the Theophany also offers several relevant iconographic and epigraphic motifs in this regard. The nature and physiognomy of

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the angels singing the *Trisagion* generally correspond to the liturgical texts, particularly the anaphoric preface. This is evident in such examples as Mar Tadros in Behdidat, Mar Mitr of Kusba and Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda. The angelic beings swinging censers, as observed in Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit and Sant Pau i Sant Pere in Esterri de Cardós, as well as those who administer communion in the same manner as the earthly celebrant, as witnessed at church no. 1 of Güllüdere in Cappadocia and Santa Maria d'Àneu in Catalonia, imbue the apsidal image with eucharistic symbolism. Such liturgical adjectives as 'six-winged' and 'many-eyed', accompanying the seraphim and cherubim respectively, such as in Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda, indicate that these angelic creatures celebrate the liturgy of the Church by intoning the triple *hagios*. Similarly, the present participles 'singing', 'clamouring', 'shouting' and 'saying', which introduce the *Trisagion* of the anaphora, affirm, by accompanying the four living creatures, that the latter are considered as the cantors of the liturgy, as evidenced in numerous examples from Cappadocia and elsewhere.

The presence of the sun and the moon, such as in Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman and the church of St Dodo monastery in the Desert of David Gareja, testify in their turn to the current temporality of the Theophany: these celestial bodies, which constitute the clock of time, disappear definitively at the last end. This is why they are never found in an eschatological Deesis of the Last Judgement, where they appear only in the sky rolled up by an angel, indicating the end of time by their disappearance. However, biblical, hymnographic and liturgical passages confer to the celestial bodies the glorification and praise of God. It is in this perspective that they are invoked at the beginning of the anaphora and participate in the chanting of the *Trisagion* in the Anaphora of St James. This likely explains why they are present and systematically personified in Theophany scenes, such as the case in the chapel of the Four Living Creatures in the monastery of St Anthony of the Red Sea, where they are explicitly associated with the liturgical *Trisagion*.

The inclusion within the apsidal Theophany of prophets receiving burning embers, a prefiguration of the body of Christ in the Old Testament, as seen in the church of St John in Güllüdere no. 4, of priests, as in the church of Yüksekli (north-west of Gülşehir), and even of local individuals, as observed in Karanlık Kilise (Göreme), contributes to setting aside the eschatological meaning of the scene in favour of the present time, just like the personification of the sun and the moon. These characters are absent in a Deesis of Universal Judgement. Additionally, substituting the two canonical mediators of the Deesis, the Virgin and the Baptist, with other intercessors is also inconceivable in a Deesis of the Last Judgement. It is noteworthy that the Christ depicted in the apsidal

Theophany almost never performs the characteristic gesture of Judgement by raising his right hand to welcome the elect and lowering his left in a gesture of condemnation of the reprobate, as evidenced in the Lebanese corpus. Instead, he generally makes the gesture of speech with his right hand and carries the book in his left. Furthermore, the Virgin Paraklesis continues to connect the Theophany to the present time by displaying liturgical or private petitions, as in the case of the monastery of the Virgin of Treskavec.

In addition to iconographic and epigraphic evidence, syntactic arguments are also drawn from the iconographic setting in which theophanies are situated. Some apsidal Theophany–Deesis compositions, such as in Güllüdere church no. 4 and most likely in Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh, face a Deesis of the Last Judgement, highlighting the difference in temporality between the two compositions. The former refers to the present time and, if linked to judgement, it is the Immediate Judgement that follows directly after death, whereas the latter is part of the end of time. The presence near the apsidal Theophany of Abraham's bosom or the earthly paradise, which corresponds to the Immediate Judgement, strengthens this interpretation, as seen in the programme of St Mary of the Resurrection in Abu Ghosh, Palestine. Themes of eucharistic value also reinforce the present temporality of the sanctuary's Theophany and its relationship to the Divine Liturgy, through their sacrificial dimension. These themes include the sacrifices of the Old Law, the Communion of the Apostles, the Officiating Bishops, the Crucifixion, the Galaktotrophousa, the deacon–angels waving *rhipidia* and the deacons carrying a censer or a pyxis, among others.

The analysis of iconographic programmes in present-day Lebanon reveals a remarkable recurrence of eucharistic themes within the liturgical space. However, as one moves away from the Holy of Holies, the iconography increasingly diverges from the functional perspective of the sanctuary. This is evident in the images found in the naves of Behdidat, Kaftun, Enfeh and Kfar Shleiman of holy soldiers, known for their thaumaturgical and apotropaic qualities, as well as their role as defenders of the Church and the faithful. Additionally, many apsidal walls in Lebanon, like their Byzantine and Eastern counterparts, depict the image of the earthly Church, represented mainly by apostles, bishops and deacons, along with prophets, monks or saints. These figures appear gathered behind the altar, celebrating the liturgy of worship in harmony with the heavenly Church, often represented by the apsidal Theophany.

It is worth noting that the liturgical interpretation of the Theophany and Theophany–Deesis is not exclusive, but rather serves as a foundational ground for other layers of meaning, such as apotropaic, devotional, conventional and ecclesiastical. This is particularly evident when the Virgin's supplications

are addressed on behalf of specific secular individuals, when laypeople of the local community are included in the Theophany or when devotional inscriptions are present. Furthermore, the present temporality of the Theophany and the intercession does not necessarily imply a liturgical reading. In fact, the image can extend far beyond the liturgical context, as seen in private icons or the garments of laypeople, such as the soldier's helmet found in the Kremlin Armoury in Moscow. These objects primarily serve a devotional or apotropaic function and have no direct or indirect connection to the liturgy.

In addition to the Theophany and Theophany–Deesis, the liturgical perspective has been used in this study to investigate other themes commonly encountered in the liturgical space of Lebanese churches, such as the Annunciation, Nativity, Crucifixion and the Galaktotrophousa. This interpretation has the potential to be applied to other iconographic programmes and can encompass other themes within the liturgical space, such as the Adoration of the Magi and the Presentation in the Temple.

The liturgical function of the paintings and their placement may provide insights into the architectural design. For instance, some churches have dual apses and altars, which have generated various interpretations among researchers. An analysis of the paintings in the chapel annexed to the church of Mar Girgis in Rashkida suggests that the northern altar, surmounted by an apsidal image of the Virgin and Child, was used as a *prothesis* for preparing the bread and wine before being moved to the main altar in the south, dominated by an image of a Theophany–Deesis. It is on this latter altar that the eucharistic sacrifice took place. In the Byzantine and Eastern world, it was common to decorate the *prothesis* altar with the image of the Virgin and Child. The meaning of another architectural detail was also highlighted: the small openings in the eastern walls of Lebanese churches, frequently referred to as sources of ventilation or lighting. However, according to the Church Fathers, these openings with the light shining through them were intended to symbolise divine light as an emblem of God as the 'Father of lights'.

The examination of the iconographic programmes of the medieval churches of present-day Lebanon allowed not only for the evaluation of the liturgical significance of certain images, but also for the shared cultural experiences among diverse linguistic and religious groups coexisting in the region. For instance, Mar Tadros of Behdidat features similar aniconic designs that are commonly found in Islamic art, such as architectural, geometric and interlace motifs. This underscores the lively artistic and cultural exchanges between Muslim and Christian cultures in the region. The assimilation of Muslim artistic traits into medieval ecclesiastical paintings in Lebanon extended beyond the mere use of aniconic motifs, such as the Seljuk chain-pattern arches and

cornices. This motif, characterised by a chain of hexagons resembling precious stones in red, white and blue, is also found in Syria, Cyprus, Armenia and southern Italy and bears a resemblance to the intricate geometric patterns found in luxurious Islamic metalwork from the Mamluk period. Moreover, certain figures are portrayed wearing embroidered fabrics or donning well-known Islamic attire. For example, in Behdidat the youth from Mytilene, saved by the holy horseman George, is shown wearing a *sirwal* and a *mandil*. Furthermore, images of holy riders are also prevalent in Islamic and Jewish traditions. In fact, artists, regardless of their religious beliefs, could be commissioned by a diverse clientele, practising their art in Jewish, Christian and Muslim contexts, showcasing their ability to cater to various religious preferences and to blend elements from different traditions harmoniously.

The integration of Western elements into Lebanese ecclesiastical paintings is also noteworthy, as it reflects the complex interplay between Eastern and Western cultures. For example, European fashion can be seen in the attire of certain lay figures, such as the bliaut of the female supplicant of Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh, the white coiffe of the male supplicant of Mar Tadros in Behdidat and the parti-coloured robe of the child supplicant depicted in the same church. However, it should be noted that these features alone cannot be used to determine the depicted patrons' local or Latin origin, as fashion was widely exchanged between different regions. By contrast, heraldic and symbolic motifs may offer more explicit evidence of Latin involvement in the decoration of these churches. In Behdidat, for instance, the presence of an eagle with outstretched wings, Latin crosses and stylised fleurs-de-lis may suggest a direct or indirect connection to Latin patronage or authority. Both Latins and their local counterparts contributed to the construction, decoration and renovation of local churches, driven by personal, religious, social or political motivations. Through their patronage, they gained the privilege of publicly displaying their image, which emphasised their desire for physical interaction with the divine and served as an efficient means of propaganda to convey their spiritual and temporal ambitions. Although their identity and contributions may not be explicitly documented in writing or inscriptions, their portrayal provides evidence of the diverse ways in which medieval individuals, both male and female, contributed to religious institutions and held a high status within the community. Whilst these characters allude to specific individuals, it seems that there was no attempt to reproduce their physical appearances faithfully. Instead, their bodily depictions were designed to convey their social status, gender and age, highlighting their devout and humble attitude of prayer as a model of behaviour worthy of emulation.

The depiction of an archer in Kfar Shleiman raises interesting evidence about artistic transfer. The archer is shown wearing a hunter's short tunic and wielding the curved bow commonly used in medieval Europe. His distinct features, such as red cheeks and thick hair behind the neck, indicate furthermore that the drawing style is heavily marked by Latin art. This suggests that the painter may have been a Latin artist collaborating with a local painter responsible for the rest of the iconographic programme or he was a single artist skilled in both Western and Levantine artistic traditions. The dynamic amalgamation of these varied artistic styles in Lebanon reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds of the artists, as well as the patrons, and their receptiveness to external models.

It is likely that artists had a catalogue of designs, allowing patrons to choose their preferred style and composition, resulting in greater personalisation and customisation in the artwork. This could explain the discovery of rare iconographic themes in geographically distant locations. For example, the six-winged angel swinging a censer in the apsidal composition is found only at the Saqiet el-Kheit hermitage in Lebanon and in such Spanish models as Sant Pau i Sant Pere in Esterri de Cardós. Another example is the image of seraphim purifying the lips of prophets, which is present in a series of eight painted programmes in Cappadocia and Egypt, as well as in a Catalan example, Santa Maria d'Àneu.

The studied artworks showcase the intricate interplay and artistic exchange among diverse Mediterranean cultures, demonstrating that the boundaries between East and West were either non-existent or not precisely delineated. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted nature of these religious paintings, it is crucial to explore new research perspectives that extend beyond the established scholarship. The analysis of the liturgical context, the primary focus of this monograph, provides an intrinsic perspective that elucidates the complex nature of the production and function of religious painting. Further investigation could attempt to explore the concept of the 'beholder's share', particularly in understanding how the faithful perceive, interpret and experience iconographic and theological themes within ecclesiastical structures. Drawing on reception theory, this approach could explore the sensory dimensions of religious experience, examining how verbal, visual and sensory elements of worship are interconnected. By doing so, it would raise important questions about the role of churchgoers in engaging with and inhabiting sacred spaces, offering fresh insights into how these environments affect and shape their spiritual and social lives. Admittedly, such an approach would be challenging due to the lack of written and material sources in the

Lebanese space. Additionally, it is worth investigating the nuanced roles of patrons, both female and male, in shaping the artistic production of religious paintings in the Eastern Mediterranean through their motivations, tastes and aspirations. These perspectives would not only deepen our understanding of religious art and architecture, but also highlight the active participation of believers and patrons in the dynamic process of meaning-making and artistic expression within the church.

Finally, exploring the material culture reflected in these sacred paintings, with a particular focus on the textiles, bookbinding and woodwork, as well as their associated trade networks, could emphasise the economic and transcultural landscape of the region. Analysing the depiction of fabrics can reveal much about the extensive textile manufacturing that thrived in the area. This includes, for example, the renowned cotton production of Baalbek during the Middle Ages, which held significant importance both locally and on the international stage. It is a type of fabric which continues to thrive in folkloric and artisanal production today, reflecting a long-standing tradition of craftsmanship. Similarly, delving into the production of manuscripts, as reflected by those held by some depicted figures, such as Christ, the apostles and bishops, as well as the wooden furnishings in these paintings, could offer worthwhile insights into regional bookbinding, woodworking and decorative traditions. This examination could enhance our understanding of the distinctive skills of artisans and the aesthetic preferences of the period, shedding light on how material culture and artistic expression intersected with religious, economic, cultural and societal values, as well as the role of trade networks. Such a comprehensive approach may enable a deeper appreciation of how medieval ecclesiastical paintings not only fulfilled religious and functional purposes, but also acted as symbols of cultural diversity and artistic excellence.

Appendix: Presentation of the Lebanese Corpus

1 Mar Tadros in Behdidat

1.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

Mar Tadros (St Theodore) at Behdidat is a modest chapel (Pls 1, 2). It was constructed with local rough-cut stone and does not feature any architectural embellishments. The chapel consists of a single barrel-vaulted nave without any openings, except for a small rectangular window positioned at the top of the apse arch.[1] A window on the north wall was added at a later stage, causing the destruction of a portion of the image of St Theodore. The nave culminates in a semicircular apse integrated into a straight chevet. A porch covered by a barrel vault precedes the entrance to the chapel. The entire eastern part of the church is adorned with paintings (Pl. 3).

1.1.1 The Apsidal Conch

A Theophany–Deesis is depicted in the apsidal conch (Pl. 4). The composition is centred around a prominent figure, identified as 'Jesus Christ' by Syriac inscriptions on either side of his head. He is portrayed wearing a reddish-brown chiton and an almost yellowish-orange himation, evoking a golden aspect. Christ is seated on a large throne adorned with two draped cushions, featuring woodwork decorated with aniconic motifs, pearls and cabochons. His head is adorned with a cruciform halo. Christ is depicted making a gesture of speech, with his right hand forward, and his left hand holds the book on his knee. The book is open and secured with two ties, adorned with pearls. The two inscriptions on it, first in Greek and then in Syriac, are from John 8:12, 'I am the light of the world […].' His feet, slightly apart and wearing sandals marked by a few lines, are resting on a purple cushion.

The four living creatures emerge from the four corners of the throne, identified as evangelists by accompanying Syriac inscriptions (Pls 5, 6). Turning their haloed heads towards the Theophany, each of them holds a book richly decorated with precious stones and pearls. Positioned on Christ's right and left sides, respectively, are a seraph (Pl. 5) and a cherub (Pl. 6), designated by Syriac inscriptions. Both of them have six wings. The seraph stands upright and wears red shoes. The wings of the cherub are adorned with numerous eyes. These two

1 The small window was later expanded, resulting in the destruction of a portion of the painting.

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members of the higher orders of the angelic hierarchy each carry a banner in their right hand with the word 'holy' written in Syriac three times.

On the sides the two haloed intercessors are depicted standing in three-quarter length, with their hands extended towards Christ in the customary prayerful posture. The 'Mother of God' (Syriac inscription) is shown to the north, wearing a blue robe and reddish-brown *maphorion* (Pl. 7). 'John the Baptist' (Syriac inscription) is depicted to the south, dressed in an ochre tunic and dark greenish-blue mantle (Pl. 8).

The background of the Theophany–Deesis is divided into three bands. The lowermost band presents a honeycombed ochre pavement imitating marble, extending to the centre of the throne. This pavement is overlaid with a dark green band that reaches up to the lower level of the throne's cushions. The rest of the conch is covered in deep blue. The border of the conch is outlined by a chain of floral-patterned triangles, while vermiculated motifs decorate the lower section.

1.1.2 The Apsidal Wall

In the lower register of the apse, against a blue background and a honeycombed ochre floor imitating marble, a series of twelve apostles stands out (Pls 9, 10). They are separated from the conch by a band of successive hexagons. Peter and Paul occupy the central positions of honour within this apostolic assembly. Their names are inscribed within their halos. Each of them is depicted within an archway supported by slender columns imitating marble and adorned with stylised Corinthian capitals. The arches, decorated with a Seljuk chain of hexagons, like the frieze that separates the two registers of the apse, appear to encircle the halos of the depicted figures. The spandrels between the arches are adorned with vermiculated motifs. The apostles are shown facing forward with their hands raised in a gesture of speech, each holding a book or scroll in his left hand.

1.1.3 The Summit of the Apse Arch

Under the small window, three medallions separate the two Old Testament episodes (Pls 11, 12). The largest one, positioned in the centre, on the same axis as the enthroned Christ in the apse, features the bust of 'Emmanuel' (Syriac inscription), wearing an ochre-yellow himation, against a backdrop of the same colour. The upper part of his face has been completely destroyed by attempts to expand the window. The border of this central medallion is adorned with precious stones. The medallion is flanked by two smaller ones, depicting personifications of the 'sun' (Syriac inscription) on the right and the 'moon' (Syriac inscription) on the left.

1.1.4 The Upper Part of the Apse Arch

'Abraham' (Syriac inscription), portrayed as an elderly figure with a halo, white hair and a white beard, is wearing an ochre-orange tunic and a red cloak (Pls 11, 13). The patriarch touches the head of his son with his left hand and holds a knife in his right hand. Isaac, his hands and feet bound with white cord, is also dressed in an ochre-orange robe. Abraham's gaze is drawn to the divine hand emerging from the starry orbit near the small window. The substitutionary ram, tethered to a tree with three branches, is on the vault behind Abraham (Pl. 14).

Symmetrically to Abraham, on the opposite side of the small window, Moses receives the Law from God's hand with both hands veiled under his cloak (Pls 11, 15). The hand emerges from the celestial segment situated next to the window. Moses is depicted as a youthful, beardless figure with a halo, wearing a red robe and a blue cloak. His bare feet, bent on a honeycombed ochre floor imitating marble, suggest an ascending movement, as if he is standing on a stepped hill featuring glimpses of vegetation.

1.1.5 The Middle Section of the Apse Arch

The central part of the apse arch is dedicated to the Annunciation. On the left, the Archangel Gabriel advances swiftly on a honeycombed ochre pavement imitating marble (Pl. 16). In his left hand he holds a sceptre topped with a small cross, while his right hand is extended towards Mary in a gesture of greeting. His hair is adorned with a white headband, and he wears a long dark blue robe and a red mantle.

On the right, the Virgin Mary, dressed in a red *maphorion* over a dark blue robe, inclines her head slightly to her right, holding a purple thread in her hand (Pls 17, 18). In front of an architectural representation, Mary is seated on an ochre throne with a cushion, draped with a cloth that bears a striking resemblance to that on the throne of Christ in the Theophany–Deesis. Her feet rest on a grid-patterned ochre cushion. The dove representing the Holy Spirit is depicted within Mary's halo.

1.1.6 The Responds of the Apse Arch

On the north respond the prophet Daniel is depicted with his hands raised in prayer between two lions (Pl. 19). He is shown as a young, clean-shaven figure, wearing a blue tunic with a richly ornamented red mantle. The lower part of this representation has been heavily damaged. The corresponding figure on the south respond is the protodeacon and first martyr Stephen, standing on a honeycombed ochre floor imitating marble (Pl. 20). He is depicted as a young man with a tonsured head, dressed in a decorated red sticharion. He bears

the usual attributes of a deacon: the orarion, a white stole embroidered with a cross at the end and adorned with pearls along the border, a thurible with three chains and a pyxis.

1.1.7 The Walls of the Nave

On the lower level of the northern wall, at the entrance to the sanctuary, the chapel's patron saint, St Theodore, is depicted riding a horse against a dark background adorned with star-like motifs (Pl. 21). He follows the prophet Daniel directly. Dressed as a soldier, the rider is crowned with a diadem adorned with pearls and precious stones. He has a beard and halo and is mounted on a red horse. St Theodore holds the reins with his left hand and uses a lance to pierce a serpent-like monster with a human head with his right (Pl. 22). Behind his back, there is an arched shield decorated with pearls and precious stones. In the upper eastern corner the divine hand emerges from the celestial segment, pointing to the holy rider (Pl. 23). Below the horse's head, there is a small figure of a kneeling supplicant, extending his arms in prayer towards St Theodore (Pls 24, 25). This figure is a bearded man wearing a sleeveless, dark-toned coat that reveals the tight-fitting sleeves of a white tunic beneath. A distinctive red stripe runs down his left shoulder, gradually widening toward the lower end. He also wears a black cap and white under-cap on his head.

On the south wall, facing St Theodore, St George is depicted (Pl. 26). He is portrayed as a young and beardless soldier, haloed and wearing a diadem adorned with pearls and precious stones. A richly decorated shield appears behind his back. A red eagle with outstretched wings adorns his red leggings. St George rides a white horse and holds a lance in his left hand; in his right he grips the reins and embraces a small child (Pl. 27), who is wearing a *sirwal* and is holding a cup and a ewer. A white *mandil* with red stripes is draped over one side of the child's chest and flows around his arm on the other side. Underneath the horse there are red fish swimming in blue water, as well as a small figure of a child without a halo (Pl. 28). This child figure is wearing a robe vertically divided into two colours: blue and red. The robe is cinched at the waist with a brown belt. He is standing with his hands raised in front of his chest in prayer, giving him the status of a supplicant. Rocky motifs can be seen behind the saintly soldier, with one appearing behind the horse, revealing glimpses of grass.

On the north, south and west walls of the nave, three brick-red crosses are painted. One is enclosed within a circle (Pl. 29), while the other two are set within square frames (Pls 30, 31). The cross on the south wall is a two-barred type adorned with floral motifs, flanked by two smaller Latin crosses, with

remnants of the Greek Christogram 'IC XC' still visible between its arms (Pl. 31). The remains of the cross on the western wall are surrounded by traces of rosette patterns and stylised fleurs-de-lis (Pl. 30).

1.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings of Behdidat clearly belong to local tradition, characterised by simple and schematic forms. Line work plays an essential role in the composition, with colours serving only to fill empty spaces. Any play of light and shadow is absent, except for a single green shadow that appears on the faces. The figures, lacking volume and depth, are depicted frontally, with stereotypical and strictly linear facial features. These paintings date to the second half of the 13th century.[2]

1.3 *Plates*



PLATE 1 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, north-west side

2 On the style and dating of these paintings, see Hélou 2016c, 221–222; Immerzeel 2009, 104–105; Zibawi 2009, 30–37; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 343. On the main characteristics of this stylistic tradition, see also Bacci 2006, 211.



PLATE 2 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, south-east side



PLATE 3 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, interior, eastern side



PLATE 4 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal conch, the Theophany–Deesis



PLATE 5 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the seraphim, the eagle and the lion



PLATE 6 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the cherub, the human figure and the bull



PLATE 7 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the Virgin, the seraph, the eagle and the lion



PLATE 8 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: St John the Baptist, the cherub, the human figure and the bull



PLATE 9 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal wall, the assembly of the apostles



PLATE 10 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, apsidal wall, detail of the assembly of the apostles: St Mark



PLATE 11 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the upper part of the apse arch



PLATE 12 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the summit of the apse arch, the medallions of Emmanuel, the moon and the sun



PLATE 13 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the upper part of the apse arch, the sacrifice of Isaac



PLATE 14 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the vault, detail of the sacrifice of Isaac: the substitutionary ram



PLATE 15 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the upper part of the apse arch, Moses receiving the Law from God's hand



PLATE 16 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the middle section of the apse arch, detail of the Annunciation: the Archangel Gabriel



PLATE 17 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the middle section of the apse arch, detail of the Annunciation: the enthroned Virgin



PLATE 18 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the middle section of the apse arch, detail of the Annunciation: the face of the Virgin and the dove of the Holy Spirit



PLATE 19 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the north respond of the apse arch, the prophet Daniel



PLATE 20 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the south respond of the apse arch, the protodeacon Stephen



PLATE 21 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, St Theodore piercing a serpent-like monster with a human head



PLATE 22 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, detail of St Theodore: the human head of the serpent-like monster



PLATE 23 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, detail of St Theodore: the hand of God



PLATE 24 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, detail of St Theodore: a male supplicant



PLATE 25 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, detail of St Theodore: the face of a male supplicant



PLATE 26 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the southern wall of the nave, St George saving the youth of Mytilene



PLATE 27 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the southern wall of the nave, detail of St George: the youth of Mytilene



PLATE 28 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the southern wall of the nave, detail of St George: a child supplicant



PLATE 29 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, consecration cross



PLATE 30 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, consecration cross



PLATE 31 Behdidat, Mar Tadros, the northern wall of the nave, consecration cross

2 Saydet el-Kharayeb in Kfar Helda

2.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

Dominating a small alluvial plain of the El-Jawz River, below the village of Douma in the Batrun district, the chapel of Kfar Helda is dedicated to Our Lady of Malkoun, but is now known as Saydet el-Kharayeb (Our Lady of the Ruins; Pl. 32).[3] This building was probably part of a now-ruined rural religious complex. Its restoration and later modifications do not allow us to grasp fully the original plan of the chapel. However, architectural studies suggest that there was once a double-aisled church, with its northern aisle now almost completely demolished. The two aisles communicated through a small door that opened to a shared wall – later transformed into a window – and through an arch located at the western end of these two aisles. Another door in the south wall has also been transformed into a window. The western wall, with its door, is a later construction to maintain the chapel after a long period of abandonment. The nave also extended further westwards.[4]

The chapel, constructed with cut stone and limestone rubble, currently features a single-aisle nave covered by a slightly broken barrel vault and terminates towards the east with a semicircular apse placed in a straight chevet. Above the cornice separating the apse vault from the wall, there is a small window in the centre. The eastern part of the chapel is adorned with paintings (Pl. 33).

2.1.1 The Apse Conch

The conch of the apse is occupied by a scene of the Theophany–Deesis, the lower part of which has been completely destroyed (Pl. 34). 'Jesus Christ' (inscription in Syriac written horizontally on both sides of his head) is depicted in a brownish-ochre chiton and a red himation, seated in the usual manner at the centre of the composition (Pl. 35). He makes a gesture of speech with his right hand in front of his chest, while holding a closed book on his knee with his other hand. The binding of the book is decorated with cabochons and pearls. Christ is seated on an elongated cushion placed on a throne that is adorned with decorative woodwork and enhanced with pearls, with a rectangular backrest covered by a veil. Of the four living creatures emerging from

3 On this church, see Hélou 2016b, 345–367; Immerzeel 2009, 99; Nordiguian 2015–2016a, 325–344; Nordiguian 2003, 187–192.

4 On the architecture of this chapel, see Nordiguian 2015–2016a, 325–344; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 436–439.

behind the throne, only the haloed eagle representing 'St John' (Greek inscription) holding a book and a Greek inscription identifying 'St Matthew' remain. On either side of the throne, two angelic creatures with six wings are depicted. The one to the north, with multiple eyes, is labelled 'many-eyed cherub' in a vertical Syriac inscription above its two upper wings (Pl. 36, 37), while the only partially preserved one to the south is referred to as a 'six-winged seraph' in a vertical Syriac inscription above its two upper wings (Pl. 38). The cherub and seraph both hold a banner with the word 'holy' repeated three times in Greek (Pl. 39). At the edge of the conch the Virgin and St John the Baptist stand facing three-quarters. The 'Mother of God' (Greek inscription) is depicted wearing a red *maphorion* (Pl. 40), while 'St John the Baptist, the Forerunner' (Greek inscription) wears a greenish-brown mantle (Pl. 41). Both figures lean towards Christ with outstretched hands. The composition that once adorned the apse wall has been completely destroyed.

2.1.2 The Northern Wall

On the northern wall adjoining the entrance of the apse, a barely visible fragment of a painting reveals a bishop wearing an *omophorion* around his neck and unrolling a phylactery (Pl. 42). Depicted in three-quarter view, bald with a broad forehead, hollow cheeks, prominent temples and a small beard formed by a few strands, this figure, identified as St John Chrysostom, is heading towards the sanctuary.

Further along on the same wall, the right part of 'St Domatius' remains standing (Greek inscription placed vertically to the left; Pl. 43). One can still see a portion of his halo, his tonsured head, his grey beard and his shoulder. To the right of Domatius, a portion of a halo, indicating the existence of another saintly figure, remains visible.

2.1.3 The Southern Wall

On the southern wall, directly across from the depiction of the two saintly figures, a Nativity scene against a blue background unfolds, only the upper part of which remains (Pls 44, 45, 46). The four angelic glorifying figures (Pl. 45), the celestial segment, the star and the rock of the cave with its dark opening are preserved. In front of it, one can discern the halo and a portion of the veiled head of the Mother of God and a portion of a vertical Syriac inscription. Further to the right, a fifth angel announces the good news to a young shepherd playing a flute, accompanied by two lambs (Pl. 46). The shepherd and lambs are portrayed against a landscape of hills with rounded peaks, dotted with flowers with green stems and leaves.

2.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings of Kfar Helda are characterised by a close association with the Byzantine tradition. The figures, modelled with great finesse and harmony, are depicted with intricate and delicate colour shading, enhanced by subtle whitish lines that impart a profound sense of spirituality and serenity to the figures. These distinctive features align with the artistic style prevalent in the first third of the 13th century.[5]

2.3 *Plates*



PLATE 32 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, exterior, north-east side

5 Hélou 2016b, 217–218.



PLATE 33 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, interior, eastern side



PLATE 34 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, the Theophany–Deesis



PLATE 35 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: Christ



PLATE 36 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: cherub



PLATE 37 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: Syriac inscription labelling the 'many-eyed cherub': a. current state, b. digital reconstruction



PLATE 38 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: seraph



PLATE 39 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the standard with the Greek *Trisagion* held by the cherub



PLATE 40 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the Virgin



PLATE 41 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: St John the Baptist



PLATE 42 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, the northern wall of the nave, the officiating bishop



PLATE 43 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, the northern wall of the nave, St Domatius



PLATE 44 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, the southern wall of the nave, the Nativity



PLATE 45 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, the southern wall of the nave, detail of the Nativity: the glorifying angels



PLATE 46 Kfar Helda, Saydet el-Kharayeb, the southern wall of the nave, detail of the Nativity: the announcement to the shepherd

3 Saydet Naya in Kfar Shleiman

3.1 *The Hermitage and Its Paintings*

The hermitage of Saydet Naya (Our Lady of Naya) in Kfar Shleiman in the Batrun district is a rectangular chapel entirely carved into the rock, with very limited dimensions (2.75 × 1.48 m).[6] It was originally a cistern, possibly dating back to the Roman era, and the opening in its ceiling was later closed off with stone slabs.[7] Currently, it is accessed through a small door on the northern side (Pl. 47). The chapel's ceiling and all its rock walls were adorned with paintings.

3.1.1 The Ceiling

The eastern ceiling features a Theophany (Christ in Majesty) against a blue background. Christ holds a closed codex in his left hand and makes a gesture of speech with his right hand in front of his chest (Pls 48, 49). He is seated on a wide-backed throne that occupies almost the entire width of the ceiling. The backrest is adorned with large red stars, and the ochre frame is embellished with pearls. The seat, with a large cushion, is supported by two angelic creatures, although the one on the right has been lost (Pl. 50). Of the four living creatures emerging from the throne, only the face of the angel on the upper right side is visible, while the lion depicted at the lower left side holds a book between its paws (Pl. 50). Christ's bare feet rest on a white cushion adorned with a pattern of red stars, with its ochre border embellished with pearls. On either side of the head of Christ, who is wearing a white tunic and a red mantle, two discs present the sun and the moon (Pl. 48). The section of the ceiling to the right of the entrance door is filled with eight-pointed stars in varying colours of red, yellow and blue (Pl. 57).

3.1.2 The Eastern Wall

Against a blue background, Christ is depicted in a bust form, holding a closed book and gesturing as if he were speaking above the high altar (Pls 51, 52, 53). The holy table, consisting of two stacked stone blocks, was attached to the

6 On this chapel and its paintings, see Hélou 2010a, 369–410; Hélou 2007, 42–47; Hélou 1999b, 23; Zibawi 2009, 48; Immerzeel 2009, 112–114; Immerzeel 2000, n. 9; Peers 2007, 48–51; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 17, 32, 38, 43, 56, 70, 74, 87, 96, 306–314; Nordiguian and Voisin 2009, 213–214, 282, 306–307, 351, 392–393; Sader 1997, 135–140; Nordiguian 1995, 97–111; Lammens 1913, I: 88; Renan 1864, 251–252.

7 Nordiguian, 1995, 99; Hélou 2010a, 369–370.

eastern wall.[8] The yellow colour of the cruciform halo, adorned with gemstones, has turned into a brick red colour due to oxidation.[9] Scroll motifs resembling the decoration of a metallic sheathing or gessoed relief on icons can be seen on the halo. Christ is wearing a white tunic and a red himation and is flanked by two figures in bust form, turned three quarters and in a prayerful position. The figure on his right, identified by a Greek inscription, is the 'Mother of God'. Only a part of her halo and her hands outstretched towards her divine Son are still visible. The figure on his left side is more damaged, with only the hands and fragments of the halo and mantle discernible. According to custom, this figure is likely to represent St John the Baptist.

In the lower register, two figures flanking the main altar under the Virgin and St John the Baptist have been severely damaged, and each of them is placed within a red band frame (Pl. 51). Slightly turned towards the altar, these two characters are wearing white tunics. The figure on the left, which is better preserved, swings an ochre-coloured thurible with three chains towards the altar in his right hand, while holding a heavily damaged pyxis in his left (Pl. 54). A thin reddish stole descends below his belt on the left side. These figures represent two deacons.

3.1.3 The Northern Wall

On the northern wall, to the left of the Deesis, there is a depiction of the Galaktotrophousa, the Virgin, seated on a throne, nursing the Child (Pls 53, 55). Unfortunately, her head, much of the left and right sides of her body and part of her seat have been destroyed. The Child, dressed in a white tunic, is shown breastfeeding from his Mother. The Theotokos is depicted wearing a blue robe and a red *maphorion*. With her left hand, she holds her Son and with her right she offers her breast to him. Her throne, intricately decorated, has a cushion with a red-striped cloth. This composition is situated to the left of the entrance.

To the right of the entrance, there is a halo-less archer chasing a deer or ibex (Pl. 56). He is dressed in a short red robe. A Latin cross, standing as tall as the hunter, accompanied by the Greek inscription 'IC XC NI KA', separates the archer from his prey.

8 Long before the restoration of the paintings, the altar was detached from the wall.

9 According to Livia Alberti, the restorer of the Kfar Shleiman paintings.

3.1.4 The Southern Wall

On the southern wall, facing the Galaktotrophousa, there is an image that has been almost entirely lost, revealing only tiny fragments of colour. A small figure on the right side of the composition remains truly unidentifiable; only the white garment and outstretched hands are visible. To the right of the composition, the rough surface is covered with stars (Pl. 57). Next to it, there is an image of a saint, of which only a fragment of the halo and white garments are visible.

3.1.5 The Western Wall

A heavily damaged saint on horseback stands on the back wall (Pls 58, 59). The soldier, young and clean-shaven, is riding a white horse. The aureole surrounding the saint's curly hair is adorned with a scroll motif, similar to the one around the image of Christ on the eastern wall. A shield, shaped like an arc and adorned with pearls, appears behind his back. Traces of bushes and vegetation can be seen on the ground, and a red star is depicted in the upper right-hand corner.

3.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings of Kfar Shleiman, which differ significantly from those in the Byzantine style, feature a graphic and schematic manner. The figures are depicted in a flat way, lacking volume and modelling. Simple, wide lines are used to outline silhouettes and define details. However, the faces exhibit expressive features and are distinguished by a sharp gaze, particularly in the figures of Christ in the Theophany–Deesis and the Christ in Majesty. These stylistic features are associated with a local style, widespread during the 13th century.[10] The composition of the archer stands out notably from the other paintings, with a distinct 'Latin' style. The archer's cheeks, accented with red, are a distinctive characteristic, as well as the thickening of the hair behind his neck.

10 Hélou 2010a, 398–401; Immerzeel 2009, 114; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 96.

3.3 *Plates*



PLATE 47 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, exterior, northern side



PLATE 48 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern ceiling, Christ in Majesty



PLATE 49 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, eastern ceiling, detail of Christ in Majesty: Christ



PLATE 50 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern ceiling, detail of Christ in Majesty: a six-winged angel and the lion



PLATE 51 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern wall, the Theophany–Deesis and the figures of two deacons



PLATE 52 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern wall, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the bust of Christ



PLATE 53 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the north-east corner with part of the Theophany–Deesis on the eastern wall and the Galaktotrophousa on the northern wall



PLATE 54 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern wall, the deacon standing to the left of the altar



PLATE 55 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the eastern side of the northern wall: the Galaktotrophousa



PLATE 56 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the western side of the northern wall, the archer



PLATE 57 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the south-west corner, part of the holy rider on the western wall, the remnants of a holy figure on the south wall, the surface covered with stars on the ceiling



PLATE 58 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the western wall, the holy rider



PLATE 59 Kfar Shleiman, Saydet Naya, the western wall, detail of the holy rider

4 Mar Semaan in Saqiet el-Kheit

4.1 *The Hermitage and Its Paintings*

The hermitage of Mar Semaan (St Simeon) in Saqiet el-Kheit is a small cave perched on the cliffside of a valley located above Amchit (Pls 60, 61).[11] Only its southern wall is built with roughly cut stones, while the rest is nestled into the rock. The hermitage is accessed by a ladder that ascends about 15 m above the ground. The very irregular walls of this cave feature heavily damaged fragments of paintings. Its poor state of preservation is the result of the ravages of time, as well as vandalism in the form of graffiti (Pl. 62), written primarily in Syriac, Arabic and Latin characters. These graffiti, ranging from the medieval period to the present day, mostly consist of names, prayers and dates.

The eastern wall, meant to serve as an apse, is straight and preceded by an altar table (Pl. 63). Only minimal traces of colour remain, along with a fragment of a throne and a portion of the lower-level ochre floor adorned with honeycomb patterns imitating marble. Adjacent to the 'apse', on the northern wall there is a six-winged angel swinging a censer (Pl. 64). To the left of this angel, there is a silhouette of the Virgin Mary, dressed in a blue tunic and a red *maphorion* (Pl. 65). Turned three-quarters and standing, she extends her arms towards the figure that once occupied the eastern wall: Christ. Unfortunately, Mary's face has been completely destroyed. On the right side of the composition, which was meant to represent John the Baptist, only fragments of his garments are visible. This composition depicts a Theophany–Deesis.

On the northern wall, behind Mary, there is an elderly and bearded figure with a halo (Pl. 65). He is seated on a stool, resting his head on his left hand, and his pensive gaze is directed upwards, opposite from the Theophany–Deesis. This is the customary portrayal of Joseph in Nativity scenes. Positioned to his left are the remnants of a female figure, likely one of the midwives who attended to the bathing of the newborn. In the top corner of the wall, to the north-west, the figures of adoring angels can still be discerned (Pl. 66). Clearly, these characters were involved in the Nativity.

On the ceiling, adjacent to the Nativity, a depiction of the Dormition of the Virgin can be seen. The face of Christ, surrounded by a cruciform halo, is visible, with his right hand gesturing as if he were speaking (Pl. 67). To the south, there

11 On this hermitage, see Immerzeel 2009, 114–115; Hélou 2007, 28; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 362–372; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 410–411; Rousseau 1998, 28.

are two faintly visible haloed figures standing side by side, although they are not aligned. One figure is adorned with the *omophorion* of a bishop, while the other holds a closed book (Pl. 62). Scattered across the walls are fragments of faces with halos and unidentified figures, along with a few star-shaped flowers.

On the southern wall, to the left of the entrance, there was once a bust of a saintly monk on a column, possibly representing St Simeon, the patron of the hermitage (Pl. 68). Near his haloed head, there is an illegible Greek inscription.

4.2 *Style and Dating*

The local style of the paintings in Saqiet el-Kheit is characterised by flat and stereotyped figures, devoid of volume and depth, with a predominant use of linear rhythm and flattened drawing. These paintings bear a striking resemblance to those found in Mar Tadros in Behdidat, to such an extent that they can be attributed not only to the same workshop, but also to the same artist. These works of art date back to the second half of the 13th century.[12]

12 Immerzeel 2009, 114–115; Hélou 2007, 28.

4.3 *Plates*



PLATE 60 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, exterior



PLATE 61 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, interior



PLATE 62 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, ceiling, details of the Dormition: a bishop and an apostle



PLATE 63 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, eastern side



PLATE 64 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, northern wall, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: a six-winged angel holding a censer



PLATE 65 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, northern wall, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: a six-winged angel with the figure of the Virgin; and detail of the Nativity: St Joseph



PLATE 66 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, northern wall, detail of the Nativity: the glorifying angels



PLATE 67 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, ceiling, detail of the Dormition: Christ



PLATE 68 Saqiet el-Kheit, Mar Semaan, southern wall: a stylite saint

5 Mar Mitr in Kusba

5.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

The monastery church of Mar Mitr (St Demetrios) in Kusba, located in the Koura district of northern Lebanon, features two aisles and a narthex (Pl. 69).[13] The two aisles, separated by a wall with two connecting doors, share a similar architectural style, while showcasing distinct and simple designs. Both are covered by slightly curved barrel vaults. The northern wall of the northern aisle is adorned with two narrow windows. Each aisle concludes with a semicircular apse. In the southern chapel, the surviving paintings embellish the apse and its arch (Pl. 70).

An awe-inspiring scene of the Theophany–Deesis unfolds in the apse (Pl. 71). Christ, depicted in a light blue chiton and a red-brown himation, sits in regal splendour on a wide, low throne with lavish decorations. The throne features two thick cushions in red and green, covered with white fabric. With his right hand raised towards his chest, he assumes a gesture of speech. In his left hand, he holds a codex embellished with cabochons. His bare feet, slightly apart, rest on a diamond-patterned cushion akin to the ones at the base of the throne. Surrounding the throne are the two full-length figures of the Virgin Mary and St John the Baptist. Both figures, depicted in three-quarter view, extend their arms and adopt a supplicating pose towards Christ. Two four-winged angels with multiple eyes stand between the supplicants and the throne (Pls 71, 72). Each angel carries a banner inscribed with the word 'holy' in Greek, repeated three times (Pl. 73). A green band against a dark blue backdrop covers the lower section of the composition, extending up to the height of the throne cushions. Due to a thick layer of grime, the Forerunner's garments are difficult to discern, possibly an ochre tunic and dark greenish-blue mantle, while the Virgin Mary is depicted wearing a blue tunic and a red *maphorion*.

In the lower section of the apse, a series of nine standing saints is depicted, each gesturing with their right hand and holding a book in their left (Pl. 74). This group includes bishops, monks and other revered saints. On the south respond of the apsidal arch, a figure of a stylite saint displaying a book has been partially destroyed (Pl. 75).

13 On this church, see Immerzeel 2009, 93; Zibawi 2009, 59; Hélou 2008, 21; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 51, 94; Hélou 1998, 38–39.

The apsidal arch was adorned with medallions, of which only two remain, depicting busts in three-quarter view turned toward the apse's conch (Pl. 76). These figures gesture with their right hand and hold an unfurled scroll in their left. According to custom, they are associated with prophets.

5.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings in Kusba are part of a local tradition that drew heavily on Byzantine artistic models. The emphasis on graphic elements, effectively delineating facial features and intricate clothing details, reflects this local tradition. However, the portrayal of slender figures, tapered hands, oval faces with aquiline noses and the skilful use of light and shadow closely resemble the Byzantine technique of the early 12th century. The paintings of Kusba have been dated to the same period.[14]

5.3 *Plates*



PLATE 69 Kusba, Mar Mitr, exterior

14 Immerzeel 2009, 93; Hélou 2008, 22; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 94.



PLATE 70 Kusba, Mar Mitr, apse



PLATE 71 Kusba, Mar Mitr, apsidal conch, the Theophany–Deesis



PLATE 72 Kusba, Mar Mitr, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: a four-winged angel



PLATE 73 Kusba, Mar Mitr, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the standard marked by the term 'holy', inscribed three times in Greek



PLATE 74 Kusba, Mar Mitr, apsidal wall, the assembly of bishops, monks and saints



PLATE 75 Kusba, Mar Mitr, south respond of the apsidal arch: a stylite saint



PLATE 76 Kusba, Mar Mitr, south side of the apsidal arch: prophets

6 Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Kaftun

6.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

Mar Sarkis and Bakhos (Sts Sergius and Bacchus) is a conventual church that belongs to the monastery of Saydet Kaftun (Pl. 77).[15] Situated in the El-Jawz River Valley in Koura, this religious edifice follows a modest basilica plan. The central nave is covered by a slightly arched barrel vault and culminates in a semicircular apse projecting on the exterior. The central nave is elevated above its flanking aisles, which are covered with ribbed vaults. To the east, the side aisles terminate with a straight wall with a niche. Two rows of spacious arches supported by pillars separate the three aisles, with engaged pilasters adorning the western and eastern sides. The northern aisle, once destroyed, has recently been reconstructed based on the design of its southern counterpart.

A ribbed vault narthex, extending from the central nave, serves as the entrance to the church. The apse accommodates a narrow window opening, while the centre of the western façade is adorned with an oculus flanked by two arched windows, reminiscent of the architectural style seen in crusader religious structures.[16] The scarcity of openings bathes the interior in subdued light, creating an austere and ascetic ambiance in harmony with the monastic architecture of the Middle Ages. The basilica's characteristics and intricate details draw inspiration from Romanesque art, showcasing the profound impact that crusader art, prevalent at that time, had on local rural religious architecture.[17]

The church's interior was originally intended to be embellished with paintings. However, only the apse and the central nave still preserve fragments of their original iconographic programme (Pl. 78).

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15 On this church, see El Khoury 2023, 42–44; Chmielewski *et al.* 2013, 291–322; Hélou 2009a, 7–32; Chmielewski and Waliszewski 2007, 279–325; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Hélou and Immerzeel 2005, 453–458; Chmielewski and Waliszewski 2005, 447–452.

16 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 217.

17 Hélou 2009a, 9; Bacci 2006, 210. In parallel to rural architecture, there are basilica-type churches in Lebanon and the Holy Land that are exclusively affiliated with crusader orders, such as the churches of St John of Jbeil, St John of Beirut and Our Lady of Tartus in Syria. These churches are distinguished by their significant size and meticulously planned layout, showcasing a consistent use of stone (Folda 1995, 69–74). On the other hand, rural monuments, such as Mar Sarkis and Bakhos in Kaftun, Mar Girgis in Rashkida, Mar Sharbel al-Qadim in Maad and Mar Saba in Edde el-Batrun, stand out for their modest dimensions, irregular floor plans, the heaviness of their structure and the coarse and uneven size of the stones used (Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 [2009], 116, 160–162, 164, 169; Hélou 2003, 398–399).

6.1.1 The Conch of the Apse and the Apsidal Arch

The apse is dedicated to a Theophany–Deesis (Pl. 79). 'Jesus Christ' (Greek inscription) is depicted seated on a throne with a cushion covered by a barely visible drape (Pl. 80). He wears a blue himation and a red-brown chiton. His gesture of speech in front of his bust follows the usual formula. On his left side he holds an open book on his knee, although the verse, from John 8:12, 'I am the light of the world […]' (Greek inscription), is in a poor state of preservation. The protomes of the four living creatures that should emerge from the throne have been completely destroyed or may never have existed. To the right of the throne a six-winged angel holds a banner that once featured the triple holy inscription in Greek (Pl. 81). The angelic creature that should be its counterpart on the left side has been completely destroyed. Adding to this central composition are two full-length figures of the 'Mother of God' (Greek inscription) and 'St John the Baptist' (Greek inscription) with their hands extended towards Christ (Pls 82, 83). The Virgin, on the left, is depicted wearing a blue tunic and a red *maphorion*, while the Forerunner, on the right, wears a brown mantle.

The upper part of the apse arch depicts a scene of the Annunciation (Pl. 79). On the left side the Archangel 'Gabriel' (Greek inscription) takes a swift step towards Mary, who stands opposite him on the other side of the arch. He extends his right arm in a gesture of greeting (Pl. 84). Gabriel is dressed in a white tunic adorned with a rose-coloured shawl. With a halo encircling his head, the archangel's hair is bound by a white band. On the right side the 'Mother of God' (Greek inscription) sits on a cushioned seat, grasping a purple thread between her hands (Pl. 85). Only a small fragment of the seat is visible. Mary is clothed in a red *maphorion* over a blue robe, her head slightly inclined towards her right, and she is set against an architectural background.

6.1.2 The Central Aisle

On either side of the apse a depiction of the Communion of the Apostles unfolds on the northern and southern walls of the central aisle (Pls 86, 87). Christ, represented here twice, is shown offering communion behind a kind of balustrade. On the northern wall the apostolic procession is led by Peter (Pl. 86), who receives the bread. Facing him on the southern wall, Paul prepares to receive the chalice (Pl. 87). Behind Christ on the southern wall, one can discern the ciborium, though its pendant on the opposite wall is no longer extant. It is composed of a canopy in the form of a dome supported by four columns. The names of the apostles are written in Syriac above their heads, while the abbreviation for Jesus Christ, 'IC XC', is inscribed in Greek.

The painting extends further on the northern wall, where a medallion is still visible. It depicts the bust of an archangel (Pl. 88), along with traces of another

figure, whose halo and three letters of his name in Greek are partially preserved: *ΔO*[...]*E* (Pl. 89). These letters potentially belong to the name 'Domatius'.

A consecration inscription, written in black Arabic letters on a white background, runs along the cornice that delineates the transition between the vault and the walls. It follows the perimeter of the central aisle and continues along the cornice beneath the conch of the apse, as confirmed by the remaining letters and partially preserved words. The best-preserved portion of the inscription (Pl. 89) is located above the Communion of the Apostles, on the northern wall of the central aisle, and reads: '[...]kiyya wa-sā'ir al-Mashriq, wa-kāna dhālika fī yawm [...]' ('[...]kiyya and all the East; and this took place on the day of [...]'). In accordance with standard epigraphic formulas, the inscription may have originally begun with: 'The Patriarch of Antioch and all the East'.[18]

An archdeacon, named as 'Lawrence' (Greek inscription), is partially preserved and occupies the spandrel of the arch on the northern wall, at the entrance of the apse (Pl. 90). There is no trace of the figure that should be opposite him on the other side. Behind Lawrence stands a three-quarter figure of an angel with hands outstretched and veiled. The angel is facing Lawrence and the apse.

Four figures of elderly individuals with long beards are arranged in pairs on each of the two embedded pillars on the eastern side, facing the worshippers (Pl. 91). Standing upright, each of them holds an elongated scroll without any inscription: these have either been erased or never existed. Their clothing and distinguishing features identify them as monks. On the left Arsenios can still be faintly recognised, based on a barely legible inscription. On the opposite pillar St Sabas is identifiable, depicted in a distinctively typical iconography as one of the founders of Eastern monasticism.

Four soldier saints stand on the arch undersides of the four pillars in the arcade: Theodore (Pl. 92) and George (Pl. 93) face the apse, while St Sergius (Pl. 94) and St Bacchus (Pl. 95), the patron saints of the church, stand facing the entrance. These diadem-crowned warrior saints each hold a lance and a shield, vertically positioned and resting on the ground, respectively.

6.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings in Kaftun feature two distinct styles. The scene of the Communion of the Apostles, the archangel in the medallion and Lawrence are characterised by a highly Byzantine manner. In this style, the figures are portrayed with three-dimensionality, delicate shading and drapery rendered in

18 Regarding this Arabic inscription and the possible identity of the patriarch, see Hélou 2019; see also Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315, 317; Hélou 2009a, 13; Immerzeel 2009, 97.

chiaroscuro. The faces are meticulously painted with fine details. A subtle interplay of light and shadow, accentuated by delicate white hatching, lends the figures a remarkable sense of plasticity. This evokes Byzantine models from the second or third quarter of the 13th century. On the other hand, the second group of paintings, featuring the Theophany–Deesis, the Annunciation, the monks and the holy soldiers, features a predominantly local style, albeit one strongly imbued with Byzantine art. In this style, the figures are depicted with a greater sense of monumentality, while emphasising a more graphic treatment of forms.[19]

6.3 *Plates*



PLATE 77 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, exterior, north-west side

19 For the question of style and dating, see in particular Hélou 2009a, 17–28; Hélou 2006a, 53–72; Hélou and Immerzeel 2007, 315–317; Hélou and Immerzeel 2005, 453–458.



PLATE 78 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, interior



PLATE 79 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, the apsidal conch and its arch

PLATE 80 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: Christ

PLATE 81 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: a six-winged angel



PLATE 82 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the Virgin



PLATE 83 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal conch, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: St John the Baptist



PLATE 84 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal arch, detail of the Annunciation: the Archangel Gabriel



PLATE 85 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, apsidal arch, detail of the Annunciation: the Virgin



PLATE 86 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, north wall of the central aisle, the Communion of the Apostles



PLATE 87 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, south wall of the central aisle, the Communion of the Apostles



PLATE 88 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, north wall of the central aisle, the medallion of an archangel



PLATE 89 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, north wall of the central aisle, the medallion of an archangel and an Arabic inscription



PLATE 90 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, north wall of the central aisle, spandrel of the eastern arch, Lawrence and the Communion of the Apostles



PLATE 91 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, central aisle, eastern pillar, north side, two monks



PLATE 92 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, central aisle, intrados of the western arch facing the apse, St Theodore



PLATE 93 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, central aisle, intrados of the western arch facing the apse, St George



PLATE 94 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, central aisle, intrados of the western arch facing the entrance, St Sergius



PLATE 95 Kaftun, Mar Sarkis and Bakhos, central aisle, intrados of the western arch facing the entrance, St Bacchus

7 Saydet el-Rih in Enfeh

7.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

Located on the shores of the Mediterranean, the church of Saydet el-Rih (Our Lady of the Wind) in Enfeh, in present-day Lebanon, was built between the second half of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th on a network of cisterns dating from the Iron Age.[20] The church is composed of a single nave oriented to the east with a low protruding apse (Pls 96, 97). In the 13th century the barrel-vaulted and windowless nave was extended to the west by a kind of rectangular narthex, covered by a groin vault. This narthex, which clearly deviates to the north from the main axis of the building, serves as an entrance hall. It has two doors, one on the south wall and the other on the west wall. Outside, the remains of a rectangular structure, leaning against the north wall, date back to the same period. All the walls and the ceiling of Saydet el-Rih were once fully painted (Pl. 98).[21]

7.1.1 The First Layer of Painted Plaster

The conch of the low and small apse seems to feature, just above the level of the altar, an image of the Theophany–Deesis (Pl. 99). The bust of the haloed figure of Christ can still be seen at the centre of the composition. Dressed in a red tunic and blue mantle, he probably held the book in his left hand and made the usual gesture of speech with his right. Of the two supplicants, only a few scattered and heavily eroded traces of red remain on the left side, probably indicating the conventional *maphorion* belonging to Mary. The hand stretched out in prayer at the far right of the scene most likely belongs to the Precursor.

The north and south walls of the nave have lost the overwhelming majority of their painted decoration. Only a few tiny fragments of painted plaster can be seen – two of which reveal the existence of images of holy soldiers (Pl. 100). The composition adorning the western end of the south wall of the nave, showing a holy horseman, belongs to an outer layer of painted plaster.

The first pictorial composition, adorning the eastern end of the north side of the barrel vault, shows remnants of a figure dressed in a blue tunic and green cloak. He appears to be leaning towards the right, his right arm stretched out in the same direction, while he turns his head to the left (Pl. 101). He looks

20 On this church, see Nasr 2022b, 287–298; Nasr 2022a, 235–266; Panayot-Haroun *et al.* 2016, 241–280; Panayot-Haroun 2016, 190–200.

21 Nasr 2022a, 262–264; Nasr 2022b, 287–288; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 226; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 381–382; Immerzeel 2009, 87–88; Hélou 2008, 45.

at an angel placed in a celestial segment of the scene's upper left-hand corner. The angel, dressed in red, is depicted as a bust. He reaches his hand out towards the figure in question. Below the celestial segment where the angel is located, there are two red flames over a mountain. This is the sacrifice of Isaac by Abraham, where the angel intervenes to stop the patriarch's sacrificial gesture. The figure of Isaac, which should be placed in front of the figure of Abraham, is completely destroyed.

The composition adjacent to the scene of the sacrifice of Isaac on the north side of the barrel vault appears to show an alignment of saints standing in an arcade supported by slender columns with capitals (Pl. 101). One can hardly see the lower part of their bodies. Only the first figure, in the immediate vicinity of the sacrifice, remains fully visible under the arch. This figure, carrying a scroll, is depicted with a blue tunic and red cloak. The second saint, from the eastern side, seems to be accompanied by a small figure. It is undoubtedly a lay supplicant. The alignment of holy figures standing in an arcade generally suggests the apostles, often accompanied by prophets and prelates. A figure in episcopal attire stands next to this line of saints on the west side, without being shown under an arch supported by columns (Pl. 102). The bishop clearly wears the *omophorion*, *epitrachelion* and *epigonation*. It is likely that an identical composition of standing saints stood symmetrically on the south side of the vault, but what remains of the mortar shows only minute traces of colour.

The last two figures, closing out the paintings on both sides of the western ends of the barrel vault, open the scene of the Judgement that unfolds in the narthex. Two standing angels, each on their own side, are rolling the firmament of heaven (Pl. 103). The angel depicted on the north side of the barrel vault is barely discernible.

The Judgement scene seems to have filled the entire narthex of Saydet el-Rih, but only the groin vault and the southern wall and its supports retain some of their decoration. Four standing angels adorn the top of the groin vault, while the apostolic tribunal adorns its barrels (Pls 104, 105). Disciples are divided into groups of two on each side of the north, west and south intrados. They are shown enthroned, holding a book in their left hands and gesturing with their right. They appear to be dressed in blue tunics and mantels, sometimes yellow and sometimes red.

The centre of the lunette on the south wall shows two angels turning away from each other and blowing into their trumpets (Pls 104, 106). The angel on the west side seems to hold a cup, as shown in the archaeographical drawing (Pl. 106). These two trumpeting angels are dressed in blue tunics and pink mantels. Below them there are personifications of the sea (left) and the earth (right). Crowned with a headdress, the allegory of the earth sits on an animal

and holds a snake. As for the allegory of the sea, it is shown emerging from the water, filled with fish and sea creatures (Pls 104, 107). It holds aloft a sailboat in its right hand and perhaps a sea creature in its left. The door in the south wall provides the separation between the terrestrial and maritime worlds dominated by the personifications of the earth and the sea, respectively. The entire lower part of the painting is almost completely destroyed.

The west side of the south-eastern support of the narthex shows the upper part of a haloed figure dressed in green (Pl. 108). The upper part of the east side of the south-western support shows a black compartment that appears to contain an inscription, of which only fragments remain. The upper part of the north side of the same support shows a black compartment filled with stylised skulls (Pls 104, 109).

7.1.2 The Second Layer of Painted Plaster

In some places on the northern and southern walls of the nave, as well as the southern wall of the narthex, we can see a superposition of two or three fragments of painted plaster. This is the case, for example, with a clearly visible fragment on the top of the personification of the sea, which retains only a red band on a blue background (Pl. 104). Likewise, a large painted panel adheres to the first layer of painted plaster on the western end of the south wall of the nave. It represents a holy rider on a red horse, carrying a lance in his right hand and a shield in his left (Pl. 110). Contrary to the then current tradition, the equestrian saint is not oriented to the east towards the apse, but to the west, towards a female figure wearing a bliaut without a veil. The divine hand emerging from the celestial segment is shown in the upper western corner of the scene. The entire lower part of the image is missing. The female figure, with her hands clasped in prayer, could represent a lay supplicant. Of the Greek inscription identifying the soldier in Enfeh, only the Greek letter ε remains. The iconographic and epigraphic elements do not make it possible for us to establish the identity of the rider of Enfeh. It could be Theodore or any of the other holy soldiers venerated in Enfeh who are usually represented on a red horse.

7.2 *Style and Dating*

The paintings in Enfeh exhibit two distinct styles, indicating different periods of creation. The first layer of painted plaster shows figures with complex modelling, involving the layering of various shades of colours and white hatching, following Byzantine stylistic methods. Some faces still retain the green colour of the *proplasmos*. These characteristics suggest a Byzantine technique. It should be noted that the church of Enfeh fell into ruin and was abandoned after the crusaders left in 1289. The archaeological evidence, including the

addition of a narthex in the 13th century, supports the dating of the paintings to the 13th century. Thus, the first layer of paintings likely belongs to the 13th century. The upper layer, which includes a scene of a holy rider accompanied by a female, is also attributed to the 13th century due to the church's subsequent abandonment. This layer shows a different style, characterised by schematisation and linearity, aligning with the local tradition of the second half of the 13th century. Therefore, it is proposed that the lower layer of paintings belongs to the first half of the 13th century, while the upper layer belongs to the second half of the same century.[22]

7.3 *Plates*



PLATE 96 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, exterior, south-east corner

22 Nasr 2022b, 295–297; Nasr 2022a, 262–264.



PLATE 97 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, exterior, north-western corner



PLATE 98 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, interior



PLATE 99 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, apse, the Theophany–Deesis: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 100 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, north wall, remnants of a holy soldier



PLATE 101 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the eastern end of the north side of the barrel vault, the sacrifice of Isaac and a theory of saints: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing

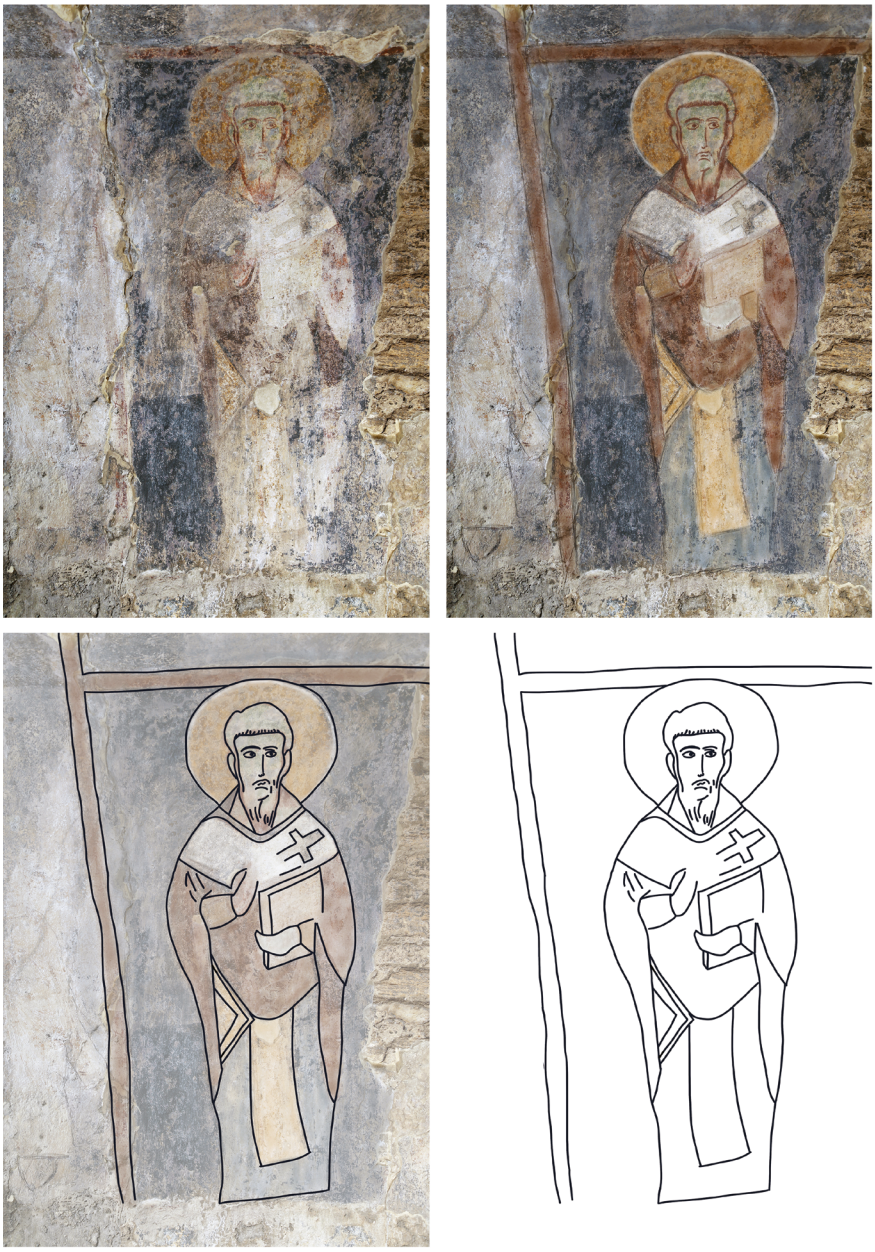

PLATE 102 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the western end of the north side of the barrel vault, a bishop: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 103 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the western end of the south side of the barrel vault, an angel rolling the firmament of heaven: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 104 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, southern side of the narthex: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 105 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the eastern side of the south barrels of the groin vault, two enthroned apostles: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 106 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the lunette on the south wall: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 107 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the lunette on the south wall, the water filled with fish and sea creatures: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction



PLATE 108 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the west side of the south-eastern support of the narthex, a haloed figure: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing



PLATE 109 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the north side of the south-western support of the narthex, stylised skulls: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction

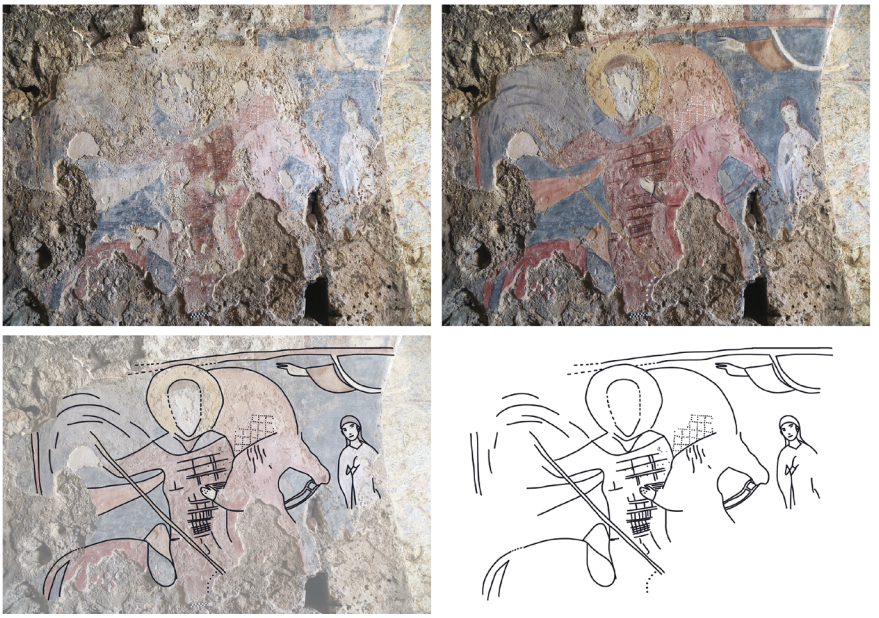

PLATE 110 Enfeh, Saydet el-Rih, the western end of the south wall of the nave, the holy rider with a female figure: a. current state, b. digital reconstruction, c. graphic drawing, d. graphic drawing

8 The Chapel Attached to Mar Girgis in Rashkida: Sts Peter and Paul (?)

8.1 *The Paintings and Their Architectural Context*

The church of Mar Girgis (St George) in Rashkida is an architecturally unique and rustic structure with a deviated plan (Pl. 111).[23] It takes the form of a basilica-style church, with a porch situated on its western side. The porch, composed of two bays covered with groin vaults, opens with two arches on the façade and a third on the north side. Inside the church there are two rows of rounded arches that separate the space into three vaulted aisles. These arches rest on either irregular and roughly crafted rectangular pillars or columns with non-identical capitals, suggesting the reuse of materials from older structures (Pl. 112). The arches of the eastern section were later sealed off. The central aisle culminates in a semicircular apse slightly protruding on the exterior. The building features windows set high along its walls. The opening above the western entrance is distinctive, designed in the form of an eight-pointed star, while the remaining windows are modest, narrow and rectangular in shape.

On the eastern side of the northern and southern aisles, on both sides of the apse, there are two narrow doors. These doors, executed somewhat clumsily, lead to another chapel that is attached to the chevet wall. Extending towards the south, this chapel has an irregular plan and, together with the basilica and the entrance porch, forms an inverted 'L' (Pl. 113). A third door, later transformed into a window, was located on the western wall, continuing southward along the same axis as the other two doors. This indicates that this chapel, originally attached to the basilica, had its own entrance, and the two doors that directly connected the basilica to the chapel were added later. The chapel, covered with irregular penetrating groin vaults, terminates towards the east with two semicircular apses that project from the exterior (Pl. 114).

All these deviations and irregularities in the plan and structure of this architectural complex were most likely dictated by the rocky terrain and the availability of construction materials. It appears that the builders utilised what was easily accessible on the site. This could be attributed to a need to expedite work or to a lack of sufficient funding. In fact, numerous churches in the Lebanese mountains feature a similar simplicity in their construction.

While the church in Rashkida shares certain elements with Romanesque crusader buildings, such as its basilican form, limited openings and substantial, thick walls, its rustic and austere architecture is deeply rooted in the local rural cultural context, characterised by its small dimensions, its irregular

23 For the architecture of this church, see El Khoury 2023, 45–48; Nasr 2019, 260–262; Nordiguian 2019; Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 406–407. On the excavations at this church, see Makowski *et al.* 2019.

plan, the heaviness of its structure and the rough, uneven size of the stones employed. Conversely, the so-called crusader churches scattered along the Lebanese coast are distinguished by their large size, regular plans, harmonious forms and precise stonework, which are noticeably absent in Rashkida.[24]

Some walls of the basilica and the annexed chapel still preserve remnants of their medieval pictorial decoration. In the basilica only a few traces of colour remain in the north-eastern bay, while fragments of heavily damaged paintings depicting various scenes can be found on the northern wall. Of these, part of a saint carrying a lamb before him can possibly be identified with St Mamas (Pl. 115). He is often depicted riding a lion and carrying a lamb in front of him, as seen in the case of Mar Saba of Edde el-Batrun, not far from Rashkida.[25] The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem can also be identified, in which the partially destroyed face of Christ with his cruciform halo and the faces of children can be discerned through palm branches (Pl. 116). Moreover, a mounted saint on a white horse is depicted heading east. This soldier saint is possibly St George, the patron saint of the church, who is often depicted riding a white horse, although there is no other conclusive evidence to confirm this. Adjacent to the presumed figure of St George, the halo of another saint can be distinguished, accompanied by a kind of domed architectural structure.

The paintings in the annexed chapel are covered with a thick layer of calcite, sometimes completely obscuring the images. Recent restoration work has uncovered a significant portion of these images, allowing for further analysis. The upper part of an archangel's face, with ribboned hair and a halo, remains on the northern wall (Pl. 117). The northern apse features an image of the Virgin Enthroned between two saints (Pl. 118), while the southern apse portrays a Theophany–Deesis scene (Pl. 119). A large Crucifixion scene is inserted on the spandrel that separates the two apses (Pl. 120). The northern part of the arch of the south apse features the sacrifice of Isaac (Pl. 121). A small fragment from the cross of consecration remains on the southern wall, along with a portion from its Greek acronym, 'xc'; the surviving lines suggest that the cross was originally two-barred (Pl. 122). On the western pier leaning against the outer wall of the basilica-style church's apse, visible from the annexed chapel, traces of a red-painted Arabic inscription can be seen (Pl. 123). Although written in cursive script and extending across at least two lines, the text is too damaged to be fully decipherable. It appears, however, to have been left by a pilgrim (or pilgrims) who wished to record their visit to the site (zāra hāḍā al-makān) and asked to be remembered (udhkurūnā).[26] Further cleaning of the chapel walls

24 See p. 307, n. 17 herein. Folda 1995, 69–74; Hélou 2009a, 9; Hélou 2003, 397–434.

25 Nordiguian and Voisin 1999 (2009), 162–163; Immerzeel 2009, 108–111; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 21–22; Hélou 2003, 397–434.

26 Nordiguian 2019, 271.

will not only enhance the readability of these scenes, but will likely uncover additional compositions.[27]

8.1.1 The North Apse

This relatively low apse contains, within its semicircular space, a composition that begins directly above the level of the altar (no longer extant): the Virgin enthroned with the Child between two saints (Pl. 118). The 'Mother of God' (Greek inscription) is seated on a throne adorned with a red cushion embellished with golden and white dotted motifs (Pl. 124). The cushion is draped with a voluminous white veil striped with red lines and featuring red dotted patterns. The throne, with its woodwork embellished with cabochons and pearls, has a backrest covered with white fabric adorned with circular red motifs. The slightly curved throne supports resemble lyres. The Virgin, facing forward, is clothed in a blue tunic and purple *maphorion*. In front of her, in line with her body, she holds the Child. The Theotokos clasps the arm of her Son with her left hand and presses against his leg with her right. The Child, facing forward, wears a white tunic covered by a red mantle. He extends both arms almost horizontally. In his left hand the Child holds a scroll, while his right hand makes a gesture of speech.

Two full-length figures stand on either side of the Theotokos: Peter and Paul. 'St Peter' (Greek inscription), with white hair, wears a white tunic with red accents and a red mantle with pink and white highlights (Pl. 125). He stands to the left of the throne, holding a scroll in his right hand and extending his left hand towards Christ in a gesture of speech. Paul, standing on the left of the throne, also holds a scroll in his left hand and points towards the Child with a gesture of speech with his right (Pl. 126). The features of his face have been badly damaged and are difficult to discern. Paul wears a dark blue tunic with light blue and white highlights and a red mantle with pink and white accents.

8.1.2 The Southern Apse and Its Arch

The relatively low apse is occupied by a Theophany–Deesis (Pls 119, 127). It unfolds almost at the level of the altar (no longer extant). The entire composition of the Theophany–Deesis is dominated by an iconic and central image of 'Jesus Christ' (Greek inscription) wearing an ochre tunic and a purple mantle (Pl. 128). He is seated on a throne, the lower part of which has been completely destroyed. This throne is adorned with a red cushion decorated with dotted motifs and covered with a white fabric with red stripes, similar to the one in the northern apse with the Theotokos. The backrest of the throne is covered with green fabric featuring circular red motifs (?).

27 On this church and its paintings, see Nasr 2019, 259–278; Immerzeel 2009, 111–112; Hélou 2006b, 37–40; Cruikshank Dodd 2004, 22–23, 272–279.

The two intercessors, in their usual prayerful posture, flank the central composition on the edges of the conch. The Virgin, wearing a blue tunic and a red *maphorion*, is positioned on Christ's right (Pl. 129), while John the Baptist is on his left (Pl. 130). Two four-winged angels are interspersed between the two supplicants and the throne.

The painting on the right side of the apse arch is entirely obscured; however, the sacrifice of Isaac can be seen on the opposite side. The patriarch Abraham, dressed in a green tunic and an ochre mantle, leans towards his bound son, Isaac (Pls 119, 121). The child's gaze is directed upwards. The substitutionary ram stands beneath Abraham's feet.

8.1.3 The Spandrel between the Two Apses

A Crucifixion scene occupies the spandrel between the two apses (Pl. 120). 'Jesus Christ' (Greek inscription) on the cross, with arms stretched horizontally, tilts his head towards his Mother, who stands to his right and gazes at him. The Virgin holds a white handkerchief striped with red lines against her cheek. She also wears a red *maphorion*. Behind her, the silhouette of a holy woman can be seen. The figures mirroring the Virgin and the holy woman on the opposite side are St John and, behind him, the centurion Longinus. The two discs of the sun and the moon can be seen above the cross.

8.2 *Style and Dating*

The legible and cleaned images from Rashkida allow us to observe the coexistence of different styles, possibly from the same period. It appears that multiple artists collaborated, each contributing their own distinct style. The scene depicting Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac adopts graphic and schematic forms with well-defined outlines. The interplay of light and shadow is absent, except for simple green shading that emphasises certain facial features. These characteristics align with the local artistic trend of the 13th century.

However, the images of the Virgin with Child and the Crucifixion display a more pronounced Byzantine style. The creator of the former demonstrated great skill in the use of colour, applying brushstrokes with confidence. The artist did not focus on intricate contours, but imbued the forms with energy. On the other hand, the Crucifixion is executed with greater finesse, featuring delicately modelled forms and subtle highlights on the faces, which instil the figures with both volume and profound spirituality. All of these elements evoke the artistic sensibilities of the 13th century, specifically its second quarter, a period marked by artistic diversity and extensive creative exchange.[28]

28 Hélou 2023, 475; Nasr 2019, 262.

8.3 *Plates*



PLATE 111 Rashkida, Mar Girgis, exterior, north-western side



PLATE 112 Rashkida, Mar Girgis, interior



PLATE 113 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, exterior, south-western side



PLATE 114 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, interior



PLATE 115 Rashkida, Mar Girgis, northern wall of the northern aisle, St Mamas (?)



PLATE 116 Rashkida, Mar Girgis, northern wall of the northern aisle, the Entry into Jerusalem



PLATE 117 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, northern wall, the face of an archangel



PLATE 118 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, northern apse, the enthroned Virgin and Child with Sts Peter and Paul



PLATE 119 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern apse and its arch, the Theophany–Deesis on the apsidal conch and the sacrifice of Isaac in the apsidal arch



PLATE 120 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, the spandrel between the two apses, the Crucifixion

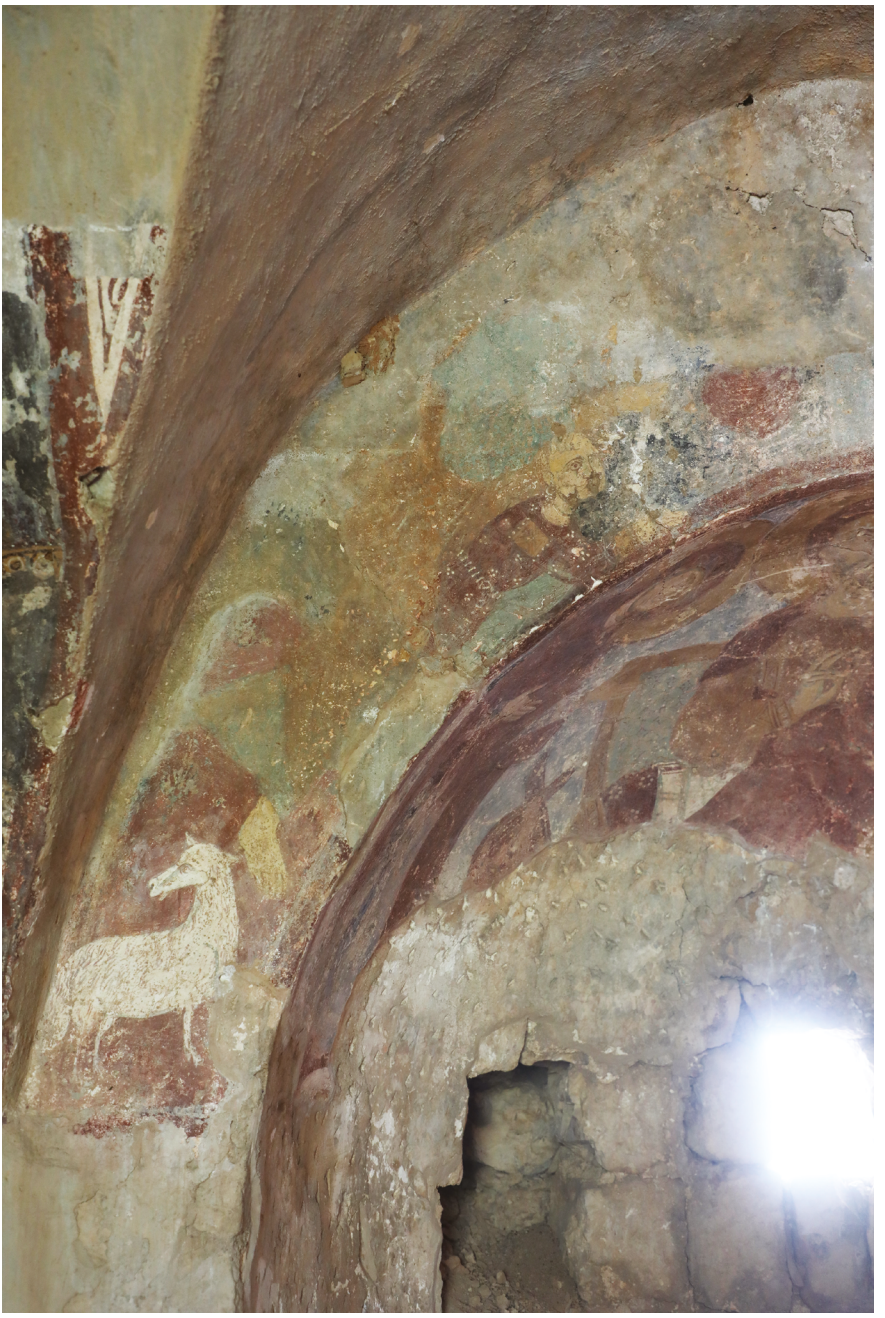

PLATE 121 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, left side of the southern apse arch, the sacrifice of Isaac



PLATE 122 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern wall, portion of the consecration cross and its Greek acronym



PLATE 123 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, western pier leaning against the outer wall of the basilica-style church's apse, an Arabic inscription



PLATE 124 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, northern apse, the enthroned Virgin and Child



PLATE 125 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, northern apse, St Peter



PLATE 126 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, northern apse, St Paul



PLATE 127 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern apse, the Theophany–Deesis



PLATE 128 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern apse, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: Christ



PLATE 129 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern apse, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: the Virgin



PLATE 130 Rashkida, the chapel annexed to Mar Girgis, southern apse, detail of the Theophany–Deesis: St John the Baptist

Bibliography

Abbreviations

ArtBull	*Art Bulletin*
BAAL	*Bulletin d'Archéologie et d'Architecture libanaises*
BurlM	*Burlington Magazine*
Byz	*Byzantion*
BZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CArch	*Cahiers archéologiques : Fin de l'Antiquité et Moyen Âge*
CCM	*Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*
CRAI	*Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
ΔΧΑΕ	*Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρίας*
ECA	*Eastern Christian Art*
ECACME	*Essays on Christian Art and Culture in the Middle East*
EO	*Échos d'Orient*
IreV	*Images re-Vues. Histoire, Anthropologie et théorie de l'Art*
JÖB	*Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*
MUSJ	*Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*
OC	*Oriens christianus*
PAM	*Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*
ParOr	*Parole de l'Orient*
PG	*Patrologiae cursus completus, Series graeca*
PL	*Patrologiae cursus completus, Series latina*
REB	*Revue des études byzantines*
RSR	*Revue des Sciences religieuses*
SC	*Sources chrétiennes*
SI	*Studies in Iconography*
SOCC	*Studia Orientalia Christiana Collectanea*
TM	*Travaux et mémoires*

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MEDITERRANEAN ART HISTORIES

This book explores the liturgical significance of Theophany and Theophany–Deesis imagery in Eastern Christian sanctuaries, with a special focus on medieval Lebanese examples. It reveals how these sacred apsidal images visually enriched the eucharistic liturgy, bringing Christ, angels and saints into the heart of worship. Drawing on rare unpublished evidence, this study illustrates how these depictions bridge earthly and heavenly liturgies, transforming the spiritual experience and theological understanding of both clergy and the faithful. By challenging traditional views, the book also highlights the vibrant cultural interactions between East and West that shaped the religious and artistic traditions of the medieval Mediterranean world.

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