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Medieval Meaning Makers: Addressing Historical Challenges and Rejuvenating Ritual through Allegorical Interpretation of the Liturgy

Ayelet Even-Ezra

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem, Israel
Email: ayeletee@gmail.com

Abstract

This article studies the act of suggesting symbolic meanings for Christian divine office in medieval Europe. Twentieth-century anthropology placed great emphasis on the anthropologist as an interpreter of symbolic meanings of ritual, but while using indigenous explanations, it did not address explication as a social practice. The phenomenon of systematic symbolical explanation in medieval Europe, I propose, invites a shift in research questions from "what does ritual signify?" to "who proposes symbolic values for ritual, from which position, to whom, when, and why?" The first part of the article analyzes the ninth-century pioneering work of Amalar of Metz, while the second part turns to the heyday of the allegorical enterprise in the twelfth century, in the work of authors such as Rupert of Deutz and Honorius Augustudinensis. Applied to liturgy, the allegorical practice is shown to function as a sophisticated tool to address diversity and historical change, and as a contemplative means to rejuvenate ritual and afford delight in light of contemporary challenges.

Keywords: Symbolical Anthropology; Allegory; Liturgy; Twelfth Century

The left shoelace of the bishop's sandals signifies the Law; the right signifies the Prophets. Tied together, they symbolize the unsolved mystery of the incarnation. One thing a scholar can do when reading texts in which such affirmations abound is to use them to decipher the meaning of ritual elements. This article, however, studies the very act of suggesting meaning. It thus shifts the object of research from "what did x signify?" to "who in this society explains the symbolic value of myriad details of ritual, by what means, when, and why?" and places the systematic proposal of symbolic meanings into its historical and social contexts. It does so by analyzing a phenomenon that flourished from the ninth to the thirteenth century: the composition and copying of expositions of Christian liturgy—explanations of divine office that contain a significant allegorical element.

Medieval reasons for ritual practice fall into one of three major categories. The first is "authoritative" or "historical," namely, "because this or that pope/council determined so." The second category is "practical": the priest raises his right hand because his left one is otherwise occupied. The third one, predominant in the texts to be discussed in this article, is known as "allegorical" or "spiritual." It explains ceremonial elements, gestures, clothes, roles of participants and more, as intended to signify something else: a person, object, or scene from the Old or New Testament, Christian doctrine, or the interior life of the soul. Among those who engaged in this discourse were an ambitious Carolingian bishop, erudite twelfth-century monks, an illustrious pope-to-be, thirteenth-century university theologians and jurists, and hundreds of abbreviators, compilers, and scribes. The first part of this article will examine the context of the emergence of this tradition in the ninth century, the second of its twelfth-century heyday.

Allegorical readings of ritual can take place in diverse historical settings. As this article attempts to contextualize one specific expression of this kind of reading—systematic and dictionary-like—it will set aside formulaic statements that take place during the rites themselves. In the Middle Ages, assorted manuals, such as sacramentaries, ordines, or missals, were composed for leaders and participants of divine office. These codices contained prayers, formulae, and instructions for nonverbal elements of rite. Sometimes the formulae to be recited during an act include an explicit reference to the symbolic significance of the act they accompany, such as, "By cleansing this vessel I am cleansing your sins." Such recitations are an integral part of the rite and render the symbolic meaning explicit both to the performer and the audience, thereby transforming their experience. They are familiar from anthropological reports from different cultures. Anthropologist Raymond Firth, for instance, wrote about the revelation he had when he recognized the oiling of the wood of a certain temple as a symbol, which happened when he heard the priest murmuring that he washes the god's body with power.[1]

The exegetical expressions of current interest, however, are different. They are not articulated while performing rite or in practical manuals, but in separate liturgical commentaries proposing meanings and reasons for ritual elements, in the form of long catalogues. How should we approach these intriguing texts? As reliable repositories of medieval meaning—convenient dictionaries to search for the medieval symbolic values of "red," "oil," or "shoelaces"? Or, alternatively, as fictive rationalizations, good for nothing but documenting liturgical practice? Earlier scholars favored the latter approach, without disguising a disdain for what has been considered absurd explanations.[2] Later scholars have explored philological aspects, literary influences, or theological aspects of these texts,[3] while liturgists, art historians, or musicologists have mined them for meanings of particular details but never attempted to explain the phenomenon

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[1]Raymond Firth, *Symbols: Public and Private* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 26.

[2]For summaries of this approach, see Rudolf Suntrup, *Die Bedeutung der liturgischen Gebärden und Bewegungen in lateinischen und deutschen Auslegungen des 9. Bis 13. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, Germany: Fink, 1978), Introduction; Timothy M. Thibodeau, "*Enigmata figurarum*: Biblical Exegesis and Liturgical Exposition in Durand's 'Rationale,'" *The Harvard Theological Review* 86 (1993): 65–79, here 66–69; Christopher A. Jones, *A Lost Work by Amalarius of Metz* (London: Boydell, 2005), 6–7.

[3]For a general study, see Suntrup, *Die Bedeutung*; for each of the texts, see introductions to the critical editions cited below and the bibliographies cited there.

itself. Following these studies, this essay investigates the systematic production of symbolic meanings as a practice taking place under specific historical conditions, responding to specific challenges, and carried out by specific agents and mechanisms of distribution. It demonstrates that the different elements of medieval ecclesiastical rituals did not automatically signify things for participants and audience alike. Signification depended on bishops and monks who invented meanings to support liturgical customs with a flexible, "soft" reasoning, who responded to contemporary challenges of local and temporal diversity, and who offered readers a subtle way to revitalize and sweeten their experience of ritual.

In 1998, the historian Éric Palazzo wrote that scholars of liturgy ". . . have failed to appreciate the richness that their studies on the books and the practices of the Christian cult could bring to the historian of worldviews and the anthropologist."[4] The phenomenon examined here presents, I believe, such a rich case to the anthropology of ritual symbolism. The interpretation of ritual symbolism was a central part of symbolic or interpretive anthropological inquiry in the 1960s and 1970s.[5] In *The Forest of Symbols*, the classical representative of this approach, Victor Turner described his aim as the full description and classification of the Ndembu's symbols. The description of symbols, in his view, should synthesize analysis of what informants say (for example, that "the milk tree" represents the ancestral mother), observation of what participants do, and the anthropologist's own suggestion of meanings.[6]

While Turner's approach was highly influential, even canonic, the Sanskritist Frits Staal rejected the emphasis on the interpretation of symbolic meanings in the investigation of ritual. In his work on the Indian rite of Agnicayana, he argued that ritual has no meaning at all.[7] Unlike Turner's informants, Staal's informants were entirely focused on their actions. Questions such as, "Why are you doing that?" received answers such as, "Our ancestors used to do it" or silence. Staal thus concluded that, "A widespread but erroneous assumption about ritual is that it consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else. . . ."[8] Staal's approach has been embraced by recent scholars of ritual, who admitted, "People certainly can fill ritual with meanings," but that essentially "ritual . . . is about doing more than about saying something." Meanings are "read into the ritual" and play a role outside it.[9] Yet, despite the lively interest in the meaning (or the lack thereof) of rituals, little attention has been paid by both sides to the affordance of meaning as a social activity in its own right, to careful analyses of emic conversations about meanings: where they

[4]Éric Palazzo, *A History of Liturgical Books: From the Beginning to the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998), xxvii.

[5]Janet Hoskins, "Symbolism in Anthropology," *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd ed., ed. James D. Wright, (Oxford, UK: Elsevier, 2015), Vol. 23, 860–865.

[6]Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 19–47. Cf. Mathieu Deflem, "Ritual, Anti-Structure, and Religion: A Discussion of Victor Turner's Processual Symbolic Analysis," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (1991): 1–25.

[7]Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 26, no. 1 (1979): 2–22. These ideas were further elaborated in Frits Staal, *Rules without Meaning: Rituals, Mantras and the Human Sciences* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989).

[8]Staal, "The Meaninglessness," 4.

[9]Adam B. Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

are taking place and what role they have.[10] Critics of symbolical anthropology neglected this aspect as well.[11]

In his *The Dangers of Ritual*, Buc showed the difficulties and dangers in employing universalizing anthropological models of ritual to the analysis of medieval rituals.[12] But following Palazzo's remark, church history should not only apply (or not) anthropological and sociological theories to particular case studies; it can take active part in the theoretical discourse itself by introducing new questions that arise from its sources and by offering examples of possible answers to these questions. The salience of the medieval conversation—that puzzling phenomenon of popular, long, technical texts suggesting numerous symbolic explanations of ritual elements—prompts one to shift the focus to such conversations and thus rethink the larger question of ritual symbolism.

This is the point of departure of this article. Rather than searching these vast dictionaries for the meaning of medieval Christian ritual details, I propose to examine their writing as acts of meaning-production of agents working under specific historical circumstances with traceable motivations. I first describe the historical and individual conditions that led to the first major work of this kind in the ninth century, including the peculiar balance of power, authority, and reason, and the perception of ritual as text and as a historically changing object. I argue that a systematic allegorical approach to liturgy was born not as a natural continuation of the spiritual reading of the Bible and therefore in need of another explanation. It was applied by Amalar of Metz in unique conditions of power, authority, and lack thereof, and its special elastic and individual nature served to respond to the Carolingian challenges of balancing unity and diversity of ritual. While stressing the individualistic nature of his act, I discuss the distribution

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[10]Clifford Geertz, for instance, mentioned an explanation offered by an Oglala sage about the cosmic meaning of the circle in the universe and time, which ended with the statement, "For these reasons, the Oglala make their tipis in the shape of a circle." Geertz noted, "The reasoned articulateness of this statement is atypical: for most Oglala, the circle . . . is but an unexamined luminous symbol whose meaning is intuitively sensed, not consciously interpreted," but did not follow further the implication of such examination and non-examination. Clifford Geertz, "Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 128, relying on Paul Radin, *Primitive Man as Philosopher* (New York & London: Appleton and co., 1927), who cites James Walker's papers). Turner too argued that no one participant can possess a complete awareness of the meaning of each symbol and specified symbols for which his informants had no explanation, analyzing them as taboos. His focus, however, was on uncovering answers rather than in the social structures of asking and raising awareness, or in indigenous acts of meaning-giving. James Fernandez and Gananath Obeyesekere richly discussed how symbols and metaphors enact emotional and transformative experience, but they did not address emic conversations about meaning. Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Work of Culture: Symbolic Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); James Fernandez, "The Performance of Ritual Metaphors," in *The Social Use of Metaphor: Essays on the Anthropology of Rhetoric*, eds. J. D. Sapir and J. C. Crocker (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 100–131, and later works.

[11]Bourdieu argued that the creation of a "field of religion" pushes its specialists to create elaborate symbolic systems, but he left aside the explication of such symbols as a practice of power or resistance (Hoskins, "Symbolism," 864). Talal Asad proposed studying "the conditions that explain how symbols come to be constructed, and how some of them are established as natural or authoritative as opposed to others." But he did not consider explicit interpretations as part of these processes. Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 31; Hoskins, "Symbolism," 863.

[12]Philippe Buc, *The Dangers of Ritual: Between Early Medieval Texts and Social Scientific Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006).

mechanisms of such interpretations in public and their impact on the experience of ritual.[13] In the second part of the article, I investigate this tradition in the twelfth century, claiming that writing such texts should be understood in light of contemporary tensions regarding the material and historical nature of rites. Providing meanings justified the controversial materiality and modernity of ritual while maintaining respect for the past and the values of poverty. Transforming ritual into potential means for contemplation and delight, it revitalized rites internally without changing practice. Thus, the symbolism of ecclesiastical ritual is historicized. Rather than dismissed as foolish, it is shown as a powerful means to respond to the challenges of local and temporal transformation, and at the same time one that can be activated individually, creatively, or not at all by both participants and audience.

Beginnings: Reason and Power, Ritual as Text, Diversity

By late antiquity, liturgical elements were already receiving allegorical interpretation, albeit on a small scale, in the East.[14] The first text devoted to this effort in the Latin West has survived in a single manuscript from the first half of the ninth century, now in Autun. The text comprises two short epistles, erroneously attributed to Germanus, bishop of Paris (d. 576), dated to around 780.[15] Both expositions explain selected liturgical elements, either by tracing their beginning in the biblical age (*hinc traxit exordium*) or by identifying them as representing or made after the likeness (*in specie*, *in figura*, *instar*) of scenes from the history of salvation. Mostly the clergy represent biblical persons who sing or cry, but occasionally also nonhuman elements, such as the three ages of history. Some of these associations can be traced back to homiletic literature or Gregory the Great, while others seem to be the author's own inventions.[16]

The significations of single, successive elements do not constitute a larger symbolic coherence, and alternative options are often suggested. The clergy sings the *Sanctus*, for instance, in the image of the saints who sang the glory when Christ returned from hell or in the image of the singing elders of the *Apocalypse*, throwing their crowns in front of the lamb.[17] The presence of multiple signifieds will be a mark of this tradition in the centuries to come and may already raise questions of its purported application. Suppose the manuscript is indeed a collection of works to instruct Carolingian clergy, and we are the clergy, aware now of liturgical symbolism.[18] Which alternative should readers opt to "feel like"? Indeed, are they supposed to feel like saints or elders, or is the analysis a purely theoretical one, unintended to impact performance and experience? The brevity and lack of any reflections of the author, as well as its anonymity,

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[13]For an influential modern discussion, see Graham Hughes, *Worship as Meaning: A Liturgical Theology for Late Modernity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[14]Matthieu Smyth, "Le première lettre du Pseudo-Germain de Paris et la mystagogie," *Miscellània litúrgica catalana* 9 (1999): 51–57.

[15]Ps. Germanus Parisiensis episcopus, *Epistolae de ordine sacrae oblationis et de diversis charismatibus Ecclesiae*, ed. Philippe Bernard, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis (CCCM) 187 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007). For the complex problem of dating, see chapter II, esp. 59. For a discussion of allegory, see 198–210.

[16]Consider Bernard's heroic search for the source of associating oil with mercy (*oleum misericordiae*), ibid., 137.

[17]Ps. Germanus, *Epistolae de ordine*, 343.

[18]Bernard, Introduction to Ps. Germanus, *Epistolae de ordine*, 37

makes further contextualization of this text difficult. But the first person to produce an extensive work of this kind, Amalar of Metz, presents a much richer case. It is to him that we now turn.

Amalar of Metz was born around 775. He was close to imperial circles, though it is uncertain if he attended the court school, and filled high clerical positions in Gaul throughout his life: an archbishop in Trier, Charlemagne's ambassador to Constantinople in 813, a supporter of Louis the Pious, and finally a bishop in Lyon, where he encountered hostile clergy who rejected his authority and attempted reforms, and finally accused him of heresy.[19] Throughout his career, Amalar wrote continuously, and almost exclusively, on liturgical matters. In this he was far from alone, as the first half of the ninth century was characterized by a distinctively vibrant intellectual and practical activity around liturgy and a strong secular, political interest and involvement. The Carolingian imperial interest in reform was marked by the challenge of balancing centralization and uniformity on the one hand and allowing and encouraging local diversity on the other—imposing a certain order on a variety of customs but at the same time granting a degree of independence to local bishops.[20]

His project of monumental symbolical exposition of liturgy, however, is acknowledged as highly original, but no convincing explanation of its emergence has yet been suggested.[21] In his early letters, as well as in the prologues and introduction to the *Liber officialis* (first version around 822, a revised one in 835), Amalar presents his motivation to explain ritual with three key terms: *desire*, *reason*, and *diversity*. Desires guided both exterior and interior motivations for the production of meaning. Secular desires for involvement and change were evident, as Charlemagne posed to his scholars highly detailed questions on rites. Why do catechumens receive salt? Why are the nostrils touched? Why does one wear white garments?[22] By virtue of these questions, the emperor placed Amalar and his colleagues in a powerful position of explaining, satisfying a desire to know, and himself as the voice of reason rather than that of blind power. This conversation about meaning between Amalar, fellow clergymen, and imperial power (first Charlemagne, then the dedicatee of the final version of the *Liber*, Louis the Pious) is presented as taking place between individuals. Avoiding authoritative teachers, Amalar searches for the best spiritual mind of his age, that of the emperor, who is *sapientia sine praeiudicio*.[23]

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[19]Scholarly literature on Amalar is immense. See Amalar of Metz, *On the Liturgy*, ed. and trans. Eric Knibbs, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014), Introduction; Jones, *A Lost Work*, 140–174; Wolfgang Steck, *Der liturgiker Amalarius: Eine quellenkritische Untersuchung zu Leben und Werk eines Theologen der Karolingerzeit* (Munich, Germany: ESO, 2000) and the works cited by them.

[20]Yitzhak Hen, "Liturgy and the Propagation of Faith in the Early Medieval West," *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 21 (2016): 194–205; Yitzhak Hen, *The Royal Patronage of Liturgy in Frankish Gaul to the Death of Charles the Bald (877)* (New York: Boydell, 2001).

[21]Aside from attempts to identify Eastern or local theological influences.

[22]Amalar of Metz, "Epistula ad Petrum abbatem Nonantulanum," in *Amalarii opera liturgica omnia*, ed. J. M. Hanssens, 3 vols. (Vatican, Biblioteca apostolica vaticana,1948–1950), vol.1, p. 230 See also Glenn C. J. Byer, *Charlemagne and Baptism: A Study of Responses to the Circular Letter of 811/812* (Lanham, MD: International Scholars, 1999).

[23]Earlier versions had a more didactic tone, addressing "nostris consimilibus puerulis" and featuring rhetorical questions and addresses in the second person. Yet, as Jones remarks, the author's perspective fluctuates between being above the *pueruli* to being among them, while other sentences address the pope or the *preceptor* of the office. Jones, *A Lost Work*, 33, 40–45.

Imperial desires met the personal, avid desire of Amalar (*desiderium*) to understand. Writing on ritual, modern anthropologist Smith has noted that it defines and encloses a sacred part of reality deserving of special attention. Ritual is, therefore, "an exercise in the strategy of choice"—what to include, what to hear as a message and see as a sign.[24] Amalar, in the *Liber officialis*, chose to include in his analysis more liturgical details than were ever before imagined, "thinking to myself that nothing has been established in the church, neither among the ancient fathers nor among the more recent ones, that lacks reason" (*reputans apud me nihil statutum esse in ecclesia, neque apud anticos patres neque apud recentiores, quod ratione careat*).[25]

The maximalist conviction that *nothing* lacks reason in divine office was novel, and the emphasis on the historical element ("neither among the ancient fathers nor among the more recent ones") is crucial. Unlike scriptures, a text with divine origin, divine office was an unstable and non-uniform set of practices—the combined result of multiple papal decisions and local customs that had developed over the course of centuries. Amalar expresses an acute awareness of that, working to further construct ritual as text and drawing the attention of his readers to the diversity of customs he encountered during his travels to Rome and other places, as well as the variation between current customs and those of the early church.[26] Witnessing this temporal and local variety and living in a political climate that tied together reason and power in a new way, Amalar aimed to provide suitable reasons. Allegory was the ideal tool for this specific challenge.

Allegorical Reading of Ritual: Text, Symbol, and Subjectivity

Those who disparaged the medieval allegorical approach to liturgy as fictive absurdities were countered by scholars who argued that while highly original, it was a natural application of scriptural techniques to a similar subject matter.[27] Patristic biblical exegesis certainly provided a model, a stock of metaphors, and reflections about spiritual reading. Yet precisely because it would have been easy to argue for such a continuity, it is surprising that Amalar himself justifies the allegorical mode differently. In an early letter to the abbot Peter of Nontard, just after declaring his intention to clarify his thoughts on the meaning of ritualistic gestures, he offers a non-Christian example, taken from Isidore of Seville's discussion of games. If the gentiles, he argues, have found hidden meanings in dice games, saying that their three dimensions signify present, past, and future and their six faces the stages of life, Christian worship might all the more so be subject to such meaningfulness.[28]

Moreover, we know what a transfer of approach from one field to another looks like, and even then, it was not presented as a natural step. Some three centuries after Amalar,

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[24]Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," *History of Religions* 20, nos. 1–2 (1980): 116.

[25]Amalar of Metz, "Epistula ad Petrum abbatem Nonantulanum," 1:230.

[26]He shares his experience with different liturgical customs in Constantinople and elsewhere in the *De ordine antiphonarii* as well. Graeme Ward, "The Order of History: Liturgical Time and the Rhythms of the Past in Amalarius of Metz's *De Ordine Antiphonarii*," in *Writing the Early Medieval West*, eds. Elina Screen and Charles West (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 98–112, here 99, on diversity as a challenge to which the antiphoner answered, see 103.

[27]Thibodeau, 65–79. Cf. Bernard, arguing against those who claim "un fâcheux penchant 'médiéval' pour les 'fantaisies.'" Ps. Germanus, *Epistolae*, 205–207.

[28]Amalar of Metz, "Epistula ad Petrum abbatem Nonantulanum," 1:230. Cf. Isidore of Seville 18.64, ed. Migne *Patrologia Latina* (Henceforth: PL), 82:661.

the bishop Bruno of Segni (c. 1045–1123) penned a short treatise on the mysteries of liturgy. He and a friend, he relates, were reading in the Old Testament about the ceremonies of the ancient Tabernacle. Suddenly, they noticed the striking similarity between these and their own ceremonies, *despite* the historical changes that had occurred since,[29] and wondered whether their ceremonies contain similar spiritual meanings. Bruno's rhetoric strengthens the impression that it was not obvious to consider current ritual in an allegorical fashion.

Amalar was harshly criticized by his colleagues, who accused him of heresy. Alongside his doctrine, his technique came under heavy fire, clarifying the unobvious nature of allegorizing ritual. His bitter rival, Florus of Lyon, dotted his copy of the *Liber officialis* with marginal notes of "insane,"[30] and I cannot repeat here all his sensational and colorful remarks. The most important point, however, is the gap that he delineates between past and present, simple "texts" and special ones, arguing that current practice is not a figure or sign for anything. For Florus, the time for figures and mysteries had ended, yielding to the time for truth. In the ceremonies, garments, and vessels one should see the honor of religion, reverence of divine cult, and joy of devotion rather than vain symbols.[31] Furthermore, Florus argued, in perceiving contemporary ritual as signifying past events, Amalar reversed the direction of history. History moves from the signs of the Old Testament to the truth of Christ; signs are earlier than their signifiers. Amalar's interpretations are, therefore, monstrous antipodes.[32]

Agobard of Lyon, another opponent of Amalar, directed his main ire at doctrinal issues, but he too was taken aback at the making of a hymn—a humanly authored changing object—into a mystery. "Human beings," he wrote, composed a chant from the words of scriptures as they saw fit, "in different regions and different modes," and there came Amalar who interpreted its four verses as an enigma for the human body of Christ being composed of the four elements.[33] Agobard, it seems, did not believe that human authors could implant such riddles in their creations. Strabo, writing a few years after Amalar, did not dismiss the project, but chose a clear opposite approach, looking for the historical roots of customs and rites.[34]

Amalar's innovative choice of maximalist allegorical interpretation of liturgical elements hence applied the techniques of scriptural spiritual exegesis, but this application cannot be viewed as natural. Ritual had to be constructed as a text to be "read," with sophisticated authors who intended to symbolize, and as a historical entity. By the time Amalar worked, ritual had already been textualized in the form of *ordines*. The *ordo romanus*, the manual of Roman usage, was essential for his work. In earlier treatises, he commented upon one lemma after another, and traces of such a mode of working were identified by Jones in earlier versions of the *Liber officialis*. But he also extended this perception by appealing repeatedly to authorial intention. The premise that nothing lacks reason sent Amalar to seek the reason in the mind of those who

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[29]Bruno of Segni, *De sacramentis ecclesiae mysteriis atque ecclesiasticis ritibus*, PL 165:1089–1110, here 1090.

[30]Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, NAL 329.

[31]Florus Lugdunensis, *Opera polemica*, eds. K. Zechiel-Eckes and E. Frauenknecht, CCCM 260 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2014), 87.

[32]Ibid., 53–54.

[33]Agobardus Lugdunensis, *Opera omnia*, ed. L. Van Acker, CCCM 52 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1981), 39.

[34]Alice Harting-Corrêa, *Walahfrid Strabo's Libellus de exordiis et incrementis quarundam in observationibus ecclesiasticis rerum* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2021).

established liturgical customs, that is, in the intentions of the *Priores auctores*, and eventually in his own mind. Construing rite as a text, Amalar tried to uncover what the *auctor officii* or *praeceptor officii* meant, wishing to get to the core of their minds. The text is dotted with phrases such as "Perhaps the *dictator septuagesimae* knew our sins, . . . and converted the seventy years with seventy days" (1.1.6); "*The praeceptor officii nostri* knew Augustine's words . . ." (1.1.18); "This is what seems to us that the *praeceptor officii* wanted" (1.1.23).

According to Catherine Bell, the perception of ritual as text has similarly guided the "reading" of rite in modern symbolical anthropology,[35] and perhaps a reflection on this perception can help us to better understand Amalar and his project. The popularity of ritual as a theoretical focus, Marcus and Fisher argued, is based on how readily a public performance can be read like a text. According to Jameson, such textualization is "a methodological hypothesis whereby the objects of study of the human sciences . . . are considered to constitute . . . texts which we decipher and interpret."[36] This, he continues, is not because rites are intrinsically like texts, but because anthropologists seek meanings and found in the model of reading a freer and more fluid form of research than that which was afforded by the positivistic and objective ethos. I suspect that Amalar textualized ritual for similar reasons: to achieve subjectivity and fluidity, especially through the notion of intention. Paul Ricoeur has discussed the textualization of rituals and other entities, emphasizing the notion of intention. In live conversation, he observed, "The subjective intention of the speaking subject and the meaning of the discourse overlap." In written discourse, however, "The author's intention and the meaning of the text cease to coincide," creating a gap.[37] Amalar's stress on authorial intention emphasizes this gap and invites him to bridge it.

As Amalar confessed openly in the prologue, proving that what he assumes as the authors' intentions was indeed "what they had in mind" is next to impossible. The project had therefore to resort to blatantly individual inspiration: "This past summer," Amalar writes in his prologue, "I found myself as if in a crypt, when a ray of light concerning the matter that I desired shone through a window as far as my small person. Eager with non-lasting hunger, I did not allow fear of any teacher to rein me in . . . and wrote what I thought (*scripsi quod sensi*)."[38] Amalar's personal associations thus merged with the supposed intentions of former popes, understood as intentions to represent and to signify.

The explicit reliance on one's inner mind, and the dismissal of authoritative or documentary support, appear in later works as well. Rupert of Deutz explains it thus in the prologue to his *Liber de divinis officiis* (1111): "We are not withdrawing here in a way from the authority of the ancients, that is, of Amalar and others, if they might have written something about such thing, for it was allowed, and will always be allowed for each person to say *salva fide* what he understands (*quod senserit*)."[39] Sicard of Cremona

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[35]Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009), 44–46.

[36]G. E. Marcus and M. M. J. Ficher, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (1986), and Frederick Jameson, "The Ideology of the Text" (1975), quoted in Bell, *Ritual Theory*, 45.

[37]Paul Ricoeur, "The Model of the Text: Meaningful Action Considered as a Text," *Social Research* 38, no. 3 (1971): 534.

[38]Amalar of Metz, "Liber officialis, proemium," in *Amalarii opera liturgica omnia*, ed. Hannsens, vol. 2 p. 19

[39]Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ed. Hrabanus Haacke, CCCM 7 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1967), 6. "Neque enim auctoritati ueterum quidquam detrahimus, Amalarii scilicet et aliorum, si qui forte scripserunt de huiusmodi. Sed licuit semperque licebit cuique dicere salua fide, quos senserit."

(c. 1205) expresses a similar mix of maximalism leading to frustration at his inability to uncover authorial intention, and concluding at the conviction that diverging from it is both unavoidable and insignificant, as long as the product is edifying:

> We intend not only to present, but also to explain to a nicety [*ad unguem*, "to a fingernail"] the institutions and the added causes of these institutions. But in the accompanying causes I might perhaps divert from the minds of the authors. No hasty pedant would argue that I have written dangerously, however. . . . Since, therefore, I am not the *consiliarius* of the authors of office, nor of their minds, . . . I am allowed to divert from them, for it is good to wander through the field as long as this excursus is useful for *caritas*.[40]

Lothar of Segni, the future Pope Innocent III, exemplified in his *De missarum mysteriis* the freedom of allegorical argumentation as opposed to historical investigation. "I heard from some people a reason for this," he writes, "which was not allegorical but historical. Since I have never been able to find it in an authentic document, I believe it is better to say nothing rather than affirm it hastily. Yet although it is not possible to give a reason for all things that were introduced by the fathers, I still think that there are profound mysteries there. . . ."[41] He then proposes a rich explanation that explains the stages of this ceremony as signifying certain parts of the evangelical narrative. Clearly, Lothar assumes that historical reasoning requires authentic documentation, while *mysteria* require nothing but an apt analogy appearing in one's mind.

Reasoning and Diversitas

The spiritual mode of interpreting the Bible was applied because it afforded freedoms and justification simultaneously. When suggesting a spiritual sense for scriptures, late antique scholars could be inspired by a common biblical or patristic metaphor but need not *rely* on it. It was also free regarding the modular division into meaningful coherent units: one segment of the same biblical story could be interpreted as parallel for the working of the human soul, while the next verse or scene could prefigure the incarnation. This suited the modular nature of divine office.

The personal nature of symbolic reasoning, the search for authorial intention construed as representational, the extension potential of metaphor—all these features enabled Amalar to address the challenge of explaining diverse and historically changing practice. In the *liber officialis*, Amalar informs his readers that the understanding of diversity or variety is a major motivating force behind seeking reasons and presenting them: "I was once moved by a desire to know the *ratio* behind the order of the Mass, . . . and especially by the current *diversitas* in it, that is, that sometimes one epistle is read, sometimes two, and other such matters, and the same regarding other *officia*."[42] He

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[40]Sicard of Cremona, *Mitralis de officiis*, eds. Gábor Sarbak and Lorenz Weinrich, CCCM 228 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2008), 4. "Que non solum ponere, sed etiam intendimus ad unguem exponere, institutiones singulorum et causas adicientes institutionum. Se in causis prosquendis fortassis auctorum mentes excedam, non tamen ob hoc uelox et aemulus calumpniator arguat me perniciose scripsisse, . . . Cum ergo auctorum officii consiliarius non extiterim, nec eorum mentes liberum est ulterius indagari, licet excedere, libet in his etiam peragrari, dum tamen excursus edificande sit utilis caritati."

[41]Lothar of Segni, *De missraum mysteriis*, PL 217:911.

[42]Amalar of Metz, *Liber officialis*, ed. Hanssens, 2:19; Knibbs, 1:19; cf. book 3, ed. Hanssens, 2:257; Knibbs, 2:3.

shows constant awareness to the multiple elements of ritual and differences between communities.

The timing of Mass presents a telling example of the power and flexibility of symbolic reasoning. Amalar informs his readers that Pope Telesphoros established that "no one should presume to celebrate Masses before the third hour, when our Lord ascended the cross." He does not present this ruling "because our fathers have done so," but rather with the accompanying reason. Immediately, we learn that this reason affords agency and flexibility. "While the third, the sixth and the ninth hours are more suitable for Mass," he remarks, "this is not to say that those who must offer their sacrifice to God before or after act against the apostolic statutes as long as they have *ratio* and *caritas*." Since this custom depends on reason rather than on blind obedience, it may, in principle, be subject to modification, as long as such change conforms to *ratio*. It would be ideal, however, to combine both authority and reason. Amalar relates that he observed Pope Leo holding Mass at dawn, against the times determined by Telesphoros. He does not know whether Leo did this for a reason or just because he could, relying on power alone (*sola potestate*). He decides, therefore, to adhere to Telesphoros and stick to what he read in the *Deeds of the Bishops*, "for power is resplendent when decorated by reason (*Fulget enim potestas ratione decorata*), and the aforementioned Telesphoros provides a reason for the hour of the Mass. Because of this we willingly (*sponte*) bow ourselves to his authority."[43]

Reason enhances power and adds a voluntary taste to obedience, an affirmation that hints at Amalar's own motivations as a meaning-giver. From his moderately high and unstable position of ecclesiastical power and intellectual esteem, he provides reasons for the reformed liturgy he promotes in order to facilitate its voluntary acceptance. Justifying custom by explaining its symbolic meanings enables him to encourage others to embrace what might seem not strictly obligatory. Others do it differently; even the early Christians did it differently.

Endowing ritual with hidden meanings enables one not only to "decorate" authoritative decisions, but also to uphold customs unsupported by any apparent authority. Consider the following case. There is a certain booklet, Amalar reports, according to which some consecrate a bishop, which says that two bishops must hold the Gospel above the candidate's head. "Nothing supports this custom," he declares, "neither old authority, nor apostolic tradition, nor canonical authority (*neque vetus auctoritas . . ., neque apostolica traditio, neque canonica auctoritas*).[44] A reason can be drawn, however, from the infinite well of imagining authorial intention. By this gesture, Amalar proposes, the authors of the booklet wanted to implant the Gospel in the heart of the candidate, or to remind him that now he is under its yoke. This does not mean, however, that this custom is mandatory. Since the goal is to "remind" the candidate of the yoke of the Gospel, it can also be achieved otherwise, or not at all. Such an explanation—convincing yet not exclusive in the way legal, logical, or historical reasonings can be by limiting truth value—suited Amalar's position well. As a bishop facing diverse liturgical customs, he had a certain amount of freedom to invent his own antiphoners and customs without excluding others; at the same time, his power to enforce these customs upon grumbling inferiors and the broader audience was limited.

The adaptability of representational reasoning is evident in the works of later authors as well. Consider the next case discussed by Rupert of Deutz, concerning the number of

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[43]Ibid. 3.42, ed. Hanssens, 2:379–380; Knibbs, 2:251-253.
[44]Ibid. 2.15, ed. Hanssens 2:235; Knibbs, 1:454.

readings at a certain period of the liturgical year. Rupert draws an analogy between that office and the history of apostolic preaching. The multitude of readings signifies the multitude of preachers who were sent to the world in great number in the time of grace. The paucity of readings represents the paucity of those who preached the Word of the Lord when the apostles were few and silent, due to their fear of being heard by the Jews. Afterward, however, the apostles, filled with the Holy Spirit, grew in number and power. This impetus had achieved such a force of reason (*vim rationis*), Rupert remarks, that the authoritative Roman *ordo* ordered not to have more than three readings during the night of Easter.

There is an exception, however. "Those who keep the full and solemn number of readings during these nights," Rupert continues, "attending to the dignity and solemnity of the office, are not less close to *ratio*. That, because even if the Apostles were silent [at this time], the angels and the very visit of the Lord himself were a sort of solemn preaching."[45] The analogical *ratio* provides, therefore, an explanatory framework that is rich enough in potential elements (apostles, angels) to accommodate different practices and lend a harmonious unity to them all.

The extendibility of metaphors is seen also in Sicard of Cremona's list of the significations of the thurible. The thurible, he says, paraphrasing Honorius, signifies either preaching or the Lord's flesh. Then he presents several options, extending the metaphor by relating each possible variation to an equivalent aspect:

> If it is golden, it co-signifies wisdom, . . . If it is silver, it co-signifies that his flesh was pure of any fault . . . If it is copper – that this flesh was fragile and mortal; if iron – the power of the resurrected one. If it has four lines, it demonstrates that his flesh was constituted of the four elements, or that it was decorated by the four virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. . . . If, however, it has three lines, it figures the flesh, the soul and the Word that convened in one person. . . .[46]

Earlier, I raised the question of how symbolic meanings suggested by an individual are encoded and disseminated to a broader community. As Messner has shown, the principal purpose of Amalar's imagined authors of ritual was to recall different themes into memory, creating, as Ward has shown, new ways to connect liturgy and history,[47] a different sort of relation to history than the one suggested by Strabo. The words *recordatio* and *memoria* recur, as do expressions such as *recolimus ad mentem*. Ritual is designed to stimulate mental responses, a recall of events from salvation history, or one's individual development and emotions. Since Amalar admits that it was an effort for him to discover these hidden meanings, it follows that he believed these are not obvious and cannot be operated without awareness. Revealing them to others is the vehicle by which their potential is realized. Explication impacts readers' experience by creating new associative routes between what they sense during ceremonies and stories, ideas, values, and emotions.

The source of these additional meanings was a priest's associations. The mechanism of their encoding and distribution was the material manuscript. The mechanism of their reception was readers' literacy, and its activation was dependent on readers' attention

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[45]Rupert of Deutz, *De divinis officiis*, ed. Haacke, 11–12.

[46]Sicard of Cremona, *Mitralis de officiis*, ed. Sarbak and Weinrich, 57–58.

[47]Reinhard Messner, "Zur Hermeneutik allegorischer Liturgieerklärung in Ost und West," *Zeitschrift Für Katholische Theologie* 115, no. 3 (1993): 284–319; Ward, "The Order of History."

and will. Amalar composed a separate work and made a considerable effort to distribute copies. Florus grudgingly mentions that Amalar had an especially ornate volume brought to the palace and that his books were everywhere.[48] As a bishop in charge of a busy scriptorium, Amalar was well-positioned to turn his private symbols into public ones.[49]

Dissemination could have taken other forms. Consider, for example, the known contemporary legend about how the Frankish singers accepted the Roman chant.[50] Charlemagne celebrated Easter at Rome, as Adémar of Chabannes related the story, when a dispute arose between the singers of Metz and Rome. The Romans supported their claim by the authority of Gregory the Great, and finally the parties asked Charlemagne to adjudicate. After he decided for Rome, an orderly mechanism of correction was established: two Roman singers were sent to Metz and Soissons to instruct the community there, and masters from all over the region were ordered to come to these centers with their antiphoners and correct them. The dissemination mechanisms of allegorical interpretations were nothing like that. No one was required to decide between opposing interpretations; no one turned to an authority such as Gregory the Great to support their claims; no centralization is identified.

Unlike public singing, the mind of another is inherently private. Amalar may have, as it was argued, perceived the mass and other rituals as drama, since in his interpretations, the participants represent Christ, his disciples, values, or the New Testament.[51] But the ceremony turns into such a drama only for those who were exposed to the text, or through sermons or conversations, and individually choose to see it as such. No one, as far as the sources tell us, declared, "I am the Old Testament." There were no signs on a bell indicating that one part signified the preacher's mouth and another his tongue, while the rope represented the Holy Scriptures. The drama occurred in the mind of those who knew, and only if they wore over their mental eyes the layered-reality glasses with which the codex provided them.

Imagine the transformation taking place in the mind of a cleric who discovered that every napkin, subdeacon, and window signifies something—a language he can only now understand. How long does it take to internalize that idea and read the ceremony this way? And now, imagine a cleric who has not made this discovery. Florus of Lyon noticed that point. One who dares to celebrate ritual as usual, he argued, will be considered as a sinner diverging from the right path of mystery. Spiritual interpretation seems to him a status strategy of a new kind. In this scheme, Amalar would be the "spiritual" person while others would be called carnal and animal[52]—a prophet while the simple celebrant would be considered a transgressor of Amalar's *mysteria*.[53] Florus thus expresses an elementary principle of the sociology of symbolics well known from the Christian approach to the "carnal" Jews regarding the Scriptures: those who know are distinguished from those who do not. In addition to the knowledge of

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[48]Florus Lugdunensis, *Opera polemica*, eds. Zechiel-Eckes and Frauenknecht, 50.

[49]For the importance of scriptoria in effective implementation of liturgical change, see H. E. J. Cowdrey, "Pope Gregory VII (1073–85) and the Liturgy," *The Journal of Theological Studies* 55 (2004): 58.

[50]For a translation and analysis of this section in Adémar of Chabannes, its authenticity, and implications, see James Grier, "Adémar de Chabannes, Carolingian Musical Practices, and *Nota Romana*," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 56, no. 1 (2003): 43–98.

[51]For the different opinions about the dramatic aspects of the mass in the early Middle Ages, see John F. Romano, *Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome* (London: Routledge, 2014), 335.

[52]Florus Lugdunensis, *Opera polemica*, 52.

[53]Ibid., 53.

Latin and the celebration of ritual that formed the usual border separating priests and laity, who watch and understand little, another border is set between those who know the mysterious reasons and those who do not.

In fact, however, Amalar nowhere forces Florus or others to "remember" all his meanings while performing or watching liturgical acts. He had insufficient power to do so, and this is why suggesting symbolical meanings served him and later others so well. Allegory is not an obligatory, necessary truth; it is an option for experiencing ritual in a different intellectual and emotional mode. As far as we know, users could ignore symbolism altogether, excavate the text just for practical customs, or use only those parts that accorded with their own usage. They could also write their own texts, inspired by the technique. The degree to which such meanings were embedded in practice itself is an open question.[54] In any case, the experience of Christian ritual as symbolical or not during the following centuries hinged on the distribution of texts and manuscripts. The question of who recognized x as a symbol of y depended on individual decisions to quote, copy, abridge, omit, extend, add, or replace. If you had a manuscript in your monastery that stated that the rope of the bell signified scriptures, the rope signified scriptures; if you did not have such a text, it did not.

The Twelfth Century: Historical Burden, Attention, and Delight

Similar acts echo and function differently in different historical settings, serving other agents and purposes. The second part of the article analyzes the act of suggesting symbolic interpretations for ritual in the twelfth century, the heyday of this enterprise. The first half of the century saw the composition of two original large-scale pieces of monastic origins: Rupert of Deutz's *Liber de divinis officiis* and Honorius Augustodunensis's *Gemma animae*. These were followed in the second half of the century by the Victorine *Speculum ecclesiae*, and by short monastic treatises that elaborated a limited theme, such as the *libellus de canone mystici libaminis* attributed to Richard the Praemonstratensian and Isaac of Stella's *Epistola ad Ioannem episcopum pictaviensem de officio missae*, all from monastic environments. John Beleth, a student of Gilbertus Porretanus, also wrote in these years (around 1160), but we know too little about him to contextualize his work. While these authors entertained no connections with the papal or imperial court, toward the end of the century we return to high office prelates. Lothar of Segni, soon-to-be Pope Innocent III, wrote the *De missarum mysteriis* (1190s) followed by the encyclopedic compilation of his legate Sicard of Cremona's (d. 1215) the *Mitralis de officio* (written between 1191 and 1208).

Authors borrowed heavily from their predecessors, adding, omitting, extending, extracting, and reorganizing. Their inner revelations and recastings of past images were welcomed enthusiastically and spread through hundreds of manuscripts to monasteries and chapters across Europe. Today alone, there are 99 manuscripts of Rupert's *De divinis officiis* (complete and incomplete); perhaps more than 200 of Honorius's *Gemma animae*; 110 of the *Speculum ecclesie*; 99 manuscripts of Jean Beleth's *summa*; and 241 of Lothar's *De missarum*. The thirteenth-century *Rationale* by Guillaume Durand, who reproduced much of the materials of these texts, survived in about 200 manuscripts as well as printed editions and a vernacular French

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[54]For an interesting suggestion of how art and music could engage with the spiritual understanding of a ceremonial situation, see Margot E. Fassler, "Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres," *The Art Bulletin* 75, no. 3 (1993): 499–520.

adaptation.[55] I argued above that the ability to extend metaphors and map new elements within them served to contain diversity. It also enabled creative adaptations and extensions by later compilers and at the same time allowed for easy condensation by abbreviators. Later authors, for instance, could extend the metaphor of "the physical church is a spiritual church" by mapping meanings for every corner, the composition of the cement, the different sizes of stones in the wall, the windows, and so on; preachers, abbreviators, or adaptors like the anonymous authors of the *spiritus sancti gratia inspirante*[56] or the *Liber quare*[57] could easily fold it back, selecting only a few senses.

What sense is there in writing such symbolic dictionaries of ritual in the monastic world of the early twelfth century? Rupert does not disclose any particular interest in reforming liturgy, nor is he responding to the questions of curious emperors. He did not travel and shows little interest in the local diversity of Western liturgy. He had different motivations. Rupert is known for his unique autobiographical account of his visionary experiences—visions that expanded his understanding of scriptures and granted him the authority to write and publicize his ideas despite criticisms.[58] In a letter to his patron Abbot Kuno, he describes the hostility of his opponents, who argued that there was no need to write new texts that have no *auctoritas* but that stem "from one's mind" (*de corde suo*).[59] Like Amalar, he compared himself in his prologue to scholars who relied on past authorities and teachers while he, although learned, relied on divine gifts and individual talent. As the *liber de divinis officiis* was his first work, he may have found in the theme and the clear subjective nature of the technique a way to express his authorial sense of individuality and creativity.

Rupert shows more awareness than Amalar of the social implications of symbolic literacy, distinguishing "those who know" from "those who do not." Those who celebrate the rites without knowing their hidden meanings are like people who speak a language they themselves do not understand. The liturgical year requires attentive, erudite, and avid students, and the mysteries and secrets are for their eyes alone.[60] Nevertheless, even those observers who do not understand the signs or the reasons behind ritual enjoy the fruits of symbolism, just as the non-seeing members of the body benefit from the operation of the seeing eye.[61]

The most intriguing part of Rupert's approach, however, is his perception of the historical development of ritual as an ongoing project of beautification. Already in his prologue he describes ritual as a beautiful garment put on the nakedness of Christian truth

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[55]Numbers are based on IRHT-CNRS, "Notice de Gemma animae, Honorius Augustodunensis (1080?-1154?)", in Pascale Bourgain, Francesco Siri, Dominique Stutzmann, *FAMA : Œuvres latines médiévales à succès*, 2015 (http://fama.irht.cnrs.fr/oeuvre/271625, Retrieved 11.8.2023), and the introductions to all critical editions cited above; Olivier Hanne, *De Lothaire à Innocent III: l'ascension d'un clerc au xiie siècle* (Aix-en-Provence, France: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2014), 30; Andrea Pistoia has kindly shared with me his list of manuscripts of the *Speculum ecclesiae*.

[56]Printed in PL 147:199-212. For manuscripts see Paris, France, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Lat. 3832, pp. 150-171; St. Omer, France, Bibliothèque Municipale, MS 92, fol. 158ra-165v.

[57]*Liber quare*, ed. Georg P. Götz, CCCM 60 (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1983).

[58]Rupert of Deutz, *De gloria et honore filli hominis super Matthaeum*, ed. Hrabanus Haacke, CCCM 29 (Turnout, Belgium: Brepols, 1979), 382–385. On this account and Rupert's changing approach toward inspiration and schooling, see Jay Diehl, "The Grace of Learning: Visions, Education and Rupert of Deutz's View of Twelfth-Century Intellectual Culture," *Journal of Medieval History* 39, no. 1 (2013): 20–47.

[59]Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ed. Haacke, 2.

[60]Ibid.

[61]Ibid., 6.

of the humiliated man-God. He, like Honorius and Lothar of Segni, acknowledges the major changes that took place in ecclesiastical history, up to their own days, and nevertheless seeks to interpret them. Lothar is perhaps the most explicit of the three, recounting the evolution of mass from Christ to the present, only to declare that he does not intend to explain past ritual but the current office of the Apostolic See.[62]

This historical awareness already posed a glaring challenge of legitimation for Amalar. If the simple mass was sufficient in the early times of the apostle, he writes, one should find a reason for all the fuss of the present, "the cantors or lectors or the other things that we do during Mass."[63] How could this excess be justified? Awareness of the gap between the early church and the present one was thus not new. But it became a burning issue in the twelfth century. Cluniac monasteries boasted elaborate rituals that exceeded earlier generations, and the growing wealth of the period found its way to architecture, clothes, and vessels. At the same time, new winds were blowing in the church and outside it, hailing the values of poverty and simplicity, and seeking their legitimization in the far past. In the imaginary dialogue Orderic Vitalis composed in the 1120s between the first Cistercians who left Molesme to establish Cîteaux and those who remained there, the latter presented their comfortable customs as the result of centuries-long adaptation to time and place. The reformers, however, relied on a literal reading of an ancient text, the Benedictine Rule.[64] Whether attempting to return to genuine monasticism or to the days of the *ecclesia primitiva*, the ideal of return to origins, purified of centuries of tradition and additions, gained traction. Liturgy was central in this discourse of materiality and spirituality, as seen in the Cluny-Cîteaux controversy epitomized in Bernard of Clairvaux's *Apologia* (1125).[65] Analysis of the liturgy reflected in Rupert's text indicates that it was associated with the Cluniac movement, as the work contained some customs unique to Cluny.[66] When he wrote his first version in 1111, the Cistercians were an insignificant group struggling to survive. In 1123, the time of the second version, they were on the road to becoming a sensation.[67] He, Honorius, Lothar, and others were acutely aware of these tensions.

As allegorical reasoning helped to contain local diversity, it also helped to deal with the changing times. Consider this story, told by Honorius Augustudinensis, about episcopal rings. According to Pliny, Prometheus was said to have been the first to wear a ring, a link of his chains that was set with a piece of the rock to which he was chained. Later generations, however, changed the materials to gold and gems.[68] In the chapter on episcopal rings in the *Gemma animae*, Honorius retells this history. Prometheus crafted the first ring out of iron and set in it an adamant stone, yet not as a reminder of his punishment, but as a symbol of love. He used iron, which is stronger than all other

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[62]Lothar de Segni, *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217:774. "Consuetudinem autem apostolicae sedis, non illam quam *olim* legitur habuisse, sed eam quam *nunc* habere dignoscitur prosequendam proposui."

[63]Amalar of Metz, *Liber officialis*, ed. Hanssens 2:257; Knibbs 2:3.

[64]Orderic Vitalis, *Historia ecclesiastica* 3.8.25, ed. and trans. Marjorie Chibnall (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), vol. 4, p. 310-334, .

[65]Bernard of Clairvaux, *Apologia ad Guillelmum, Opera ad fidem codicum recensuerunt*, eds. J. Leclercq et al., vol. 3 (Rome: Editiones Cistercienses, 1963).

[66]Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ed. Haacke, xvii.

[67]On the early history of the Cistercian order, see Constance H. Berman, *The Cistercian Evolution: The Invention of a Religious Order in Twelfth Century Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000).

[68]Pliny, *Historia naturalis* 33.4 and 37.1.

elements, to represent love, which conquers all, and the unbreakable adamant to represent its unbroken nature. Later, however, people replaced iron rings with golden ones and adamant with gems. But despite this change in the signifier, the new objects maintained a meaning close to the original ones: as gold surpasses all other metals, thus *dilectio* surpasses all good things; and as gold is decorated with a gem, *dilectio* is decorated with *caritas*. Historical change of materials does not, therefore, change meaningfulness or the general, eternal meaning itself, but only nuances. This anecdote, I suggest, represents the way Rupert, Honorius, and their fellow authors wished ecclesiastical history to be understood. In their views, things had changed radically since the apostles' days of simplicity and poverty. The "iron" ritual had become splendidly rich in golden vessels, colorful garments, and excessive liturgy. But this transformation altered neither its meaningfulness nor its meanings. The basic Christian truths remained the same as they were in the days of the apostles. Their signifiers were just prettier.[69]

 "Once (*olim*)," Rupert explains this history of increasing beauty before listing each pope's modifications to the Mass, "the solemnities of the Masses were not celebrated with such an apparatus of exterior beauty." Over time, and little by little, the popes perfected the attractiveness (*venustatem*) of this salutary office:

> Just as David and Salomon, by the aid of the clergy and the Levites, amplified more splendidly the wonderful rite given by the Lord through Moses of the old sacrifice, with groups of singers, dance, glory of the temple and altar . . ., so did the holy Church carefully keep the rite of the new, wonderful sacrifice that was given by the Lord through the first apostles, cherished it and decorated it with a diligent apparatus.[70]

The contemporary church, therefore, amplifies primitive simplicity. Like Old Testament ritual, Christian ritual progresses, moving further from its origin. Ritual, Rupert concludes, "is not holier now than it was before, when it was consecrated only to the words of the Lord and the Lord's prayer," but it is better decorated.[71] Those decorations are not necessary, but they are nevertheless justified, for they are meaningful. As Sicard put it regarding the difference between Old Testament ritual and Christian worship, "Although the use of matter changes, we inquire after the treasure of the spirit that persists and vivifies."[72]

 Earlier, I noted the difficulty of perceiving one's current ritual as a mystery, since it embeds a certain perception of history. A dominant narrative was that the time of riddles and figures, that of the Old Law, had transformed into the time of liberating truth beginning with the arrival of Christ. Rupert is aware of that narrative and offers an alternative one, in which figures and mysteries have been *increasing* over time. True, he says, "the *auctor* of figurated promises, old and new, has changed the sacraments by fulfilling the promised things. . . . He ended prophecies because the one whose coming was predicted had already come."[73] Nevertheless, evangelical teaching added moral figures: in words and deeds the Gospel is *prettier* than the law, and Christ uses parables

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[69]Honorius Ausgustudinensis, *Gemma animae*, PL 172:216.

[70]Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis* 2.21, ed. Haacke, 50.

[71]Ibid., 50–52. "Non quidem sanctius hinc est quam erat prius, cum ad sola uerba Domini solamque dominicam orationem consecrabatur."

[72]Sicard of Cremona, *Mitralis de officiis*, eds. Sarbak and Weinrich, 55.

[73]Rupert of Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis* 2.23, ed. Haacke, 58

and allegories more frequently than the prophets. The church has been following his teaching, therefore, by possessing visible things and real things that imitate the invisible.[74]

Spiritual meanings could thus justify material ornaments without necessitating them or requiring them to be rooted in the past. Lothar of Segni remarked that the codices of the Gospel were not unjustly (*non iniuste*) adorned with gold, silver, and gems. In them shine the gold of celestial wisdom, the silver of eloquent belief, and the gems of Christ's miracles. These, in turn, remind us of his heavenly glory.[75]

Offering Symbolical Meaning as a Pedagogical, Delightful Gesture

In his prologue, Honorius declares his aim to answer the spiritual and moral needs of his fellow monks, and indeed, it has been suggested that the allegorical interpretation of liturgy should be understood as a means of spiritual growth and moral teaching, encouraging monks and canons to reflect on their inner lives.[76] But why make liturgy, specifically, such a means, and why encourage contemplation through allegory? According to Kinsle, this was a soft, peer-oriented form of learning, making the architecture of the church—and, one might add, many other aspects of ritual—"a partner in the learning process." Once more, the flexibility of metaphor made it effective: users could extend the metaphors, collapse them, choose from multiple options, forget them, or activate them in their minds individually on their own terms. As Kinsle has argued, "The flexibility of the architectural symbolism implies that Honorius did not intend to create an uncompromising, rigid system but one that responded to the educational and liturgical context of the reader and student".[77] Keyes argued similarly, "The Victorine *Speculum ecclesiae* gives a roadmap for utilizing the Church's mysterious gifts to the end of personal and ecclesial growth, maturity, and spiritual delight."[78] Roadmaps granted individual movement and agency. The multiplicity of options made ritual an open invitation to meditate on one's own terms, a framework to play with, and a systematic training in analogical thinking that could spice up daily ritual. The modern distinction of private and public symbols receives here a twist. By explicitly writing these meanings on parchment, they became public. By being written, their mental mode of activation enabled the shading of public ritual with private hues.

The writing and reading of such dictionaries thus revitalized ritual for communities of monks and clergymen by offering them tools to transform their inner experiences with novel meanings while keeping external practices intact. This function of mental refreshment may be hinted to in MS Paris, Bnf Lat. 3832, dated to the early twelfth century. Immediately following the *Spiritus sancti gratia inspirante*, pages 171–172 feature a short note on the problem of "thoughts that occur during sacrifice" (*De cogitationibus que occurunt tempore sacrificii*). Understandably, performers of a daily ritual might succumb to boredom. This note explains how the devil seizes the opportunity and puts

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[74]Ibid.

[75]Lothar of Segni, *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217:54.

[76]Thibodeau, "Enigmata figurarum," 68–69.

[77]Karl Patrick Kinsella, "Teaching through Architecture: Honorius Augustodinensis and the Medieval Church," in *Horizontal Learning in the High Middle Ages: Peer-to-Peer Knowledge Transfer in Religious Communities*, eds. Micol Long, Tjamke Snijders, and Steven Vanderputten (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019), 142–146.

[78]Samuel N. Keyes, *Here for Medicine, There for Delight: The Ecclesial Mysteries of the Victorine Speculum* (PhD diss., Boston College, 2018), 1.

ugly, impure thoughts into the minds of the clergy during the celebration of mass. The juxtaposition of this note with one of our texts may suggest that the symbolic glasses could function as a suitable solution for bored participants, guiding their wandering minds. Memory is one thing, attention quite another.

Irwing drew attention to Amalar's unusual emphasis on desire and appetite in his little preface, describing the mind as a stomach.[79] This mental stomach desires diverse thoughts in it to process, just as the corporeal one needs *diversos cibos*. The mental appetite and desire are both satisfied and restrained by *ratio*. Suggesting symbolical reasonings provides for this hunger, spicing up the daily routine, described by him as *grossa res* known almost to every peasant, and directs intellectual desire for lofty, tastier analogies to chew.

But perhaps the most poetic expression of the attentive effect of spinning novel spiritual significance for worn-out routine opens Isaac of Stella's *Epistle on the Office of Mass*:

> There is nothing more evasive than the human heart, nothing more curious. This is why it is also often difficult to keep it on one thing and concentrate on one and the same thing in the same form, and that is because of the vice of *curiositas*. Divine grace, therefore, mindful of our weakness, floods the ancient chapters with a complete novelty of senses, that when they suddenly shine, we are filled with admiration beyond human manner, as they so suddenly emerge from their hiding place. By this admiration the heart expands . . . and with this expansion it is filled with devotion, love and delight . . . seen in light with further clarity, their novelty tastes sweeter than honey . . .[80]

This inner experience of novelty generates delight. The addressees of the anonymous author of the *Speculum ecclesiae* wished him to discuss church sacraments and explain their mysterious sweetness. Thus, he furnished to their *intelligentia* the desired book, flowing with an inner nectar as a honeycomb.[81] Similar expressions appear also in Lothar's prologue, where the fullness and infinity of possible senses of the divine office abound with celestial sweetness.[82] The perception of interpretation as further spiritual experience for both the author and his readers appears also in the work of the busy cardinal of Segni. The unusual lack of dedication, the scope of the work, and the epilogue indicate that writing about symbolic meanings of ritual was driven by profound personal need.[83] In his epilogue, he notes the difficulty of writing while running from one mission to another, having no quiet moment, not only to dictate his words but

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[79] Andrew Irving, "Memory, Morals and the Ratio of Liturgy in Amalar of Metz," in *Erinneren und Vergessen: Remembering and Forgetting. Festschrift für Hans-Martin Kirn*, eda. Markus Matthias, Riemer Roukema, and Gert van Klinken (Leipzig, Germany: Evangelische Verlagsantalt, 2020), 51–56, here 54.

[80] Isaac of Stella, Epistola de officio missae, PL 194:1889. "Nihil humano corde fugacius, nihil curiosius, quare et id tam morose in uno tenere nimis arduum, et in unum uniformiter saepe intendere, sed hoc ex vitio curiositatis. Unde consulens infirmitati nostrae gratia divina, antiqua capitula, tota sensuum novitate saepe perfundit, qui cum subito effulserint, supra omnem humanum modum miramur, ubi nunc latitaverunt, unde tam subito emerserint. Ex ipsa vero admiratione dilatatur cor, sicut scriptum est, et ob ipsam dilatationem adimpletur devotione, dilectione, delectatione."

[81] *Speculum ecclesiae*, PL 177:335. On the sweetness of signs in the *Speculum*, see also Keyes, *Here for Medicine*, passim.

[82] Lothar of Segni, *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217:774.

[83] Hanne, *De Lothaire à Innocent III*, 37.

even to catch his flying thoughts. While he hopes the work to be useful for others, he perceives it also as a spiritual, individual pursuit: "God, the merciful judge, knows perfectly my heart's intentions as I composed this treatise, that it may be useful, if not for many then to few, or even only to me alone."[84] The sense of infinite abundance, an inherent character of symbolic interpretation, recurs. Lothar declares that so many other mysteries have yet remained, that he himself was unable to enter the dining room, but rather sat outside in the hallway.

Conclusions

The systematic proposal of symbolic value for ritual elements is not exclusive to late-twentieth-century anthropologists. Nor is it universal. The appearance, presence, and proliferation of such a discourse in a community depends, as shown above, on structures of power, knowledge, and authority; on approaches to rationality, materiality, and history; and on access to mechanisms of distribution, such as literacy and manuscript/print production and their public or private nature.

The first large-scale, comprehensive project of imparting symbolic meaning to Western medieval ritual took place in the Carolingian period. It was not dictated or ordered then by agents in the highest positions of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but was, and was explicitly construed as, an individual endeavor. This effort emerged in a vibrant imperial-ecclesiastical climate interested in liturgical practice and in the power of reason to legitimize policy; a challenge of balancing diversity and unity of customs in the face of clergy who are allowed to a degree to their innovative ideas but provided with few means to enforce them; and an available model in the close, yet not identical, field of biblical exegesis. Combined with the prior textualization of ritual, the features of the biblical hermeneutic model—flexibility, individuality, modularity, and loose attitude to authority—facilitated Amalar's ambitions at maximalist reasoning: to justify but not obligate, to encourage and "decorate" voluntary obedience to power and, at the same time, to embrace unauthorized local customs.

The twelfth century saw new actors who took it upon themselves to provide their communities with multiple meanings for ritualist elements with increased vigor. The influential first generation were learned monks at a remove from the portals of power. Only later were they joined by high bishops and canonists. Reading symbols into ritual proliferated in the face of a manifestly acute historical gap between contemporary ritual and that of the early church. A parallel tension was that between extravagant materiality and the strengthening evaluation of poverty and simplicity, and the elastic nature of allegory enabled writers to contain the acute conflict between past and present, poverty and exuberance. At the same time, this reading offered a way to transform the inner experience of ritual and rejuvenate daily life with sweetness.

Influenced by earlier sources and generated in their own minds, the medieval symbolic explanations were disseminated widely among Latin readers. The mechanisms chosen for their distribution were writing, copying, adapting, and reading, all of which were dependent upon the possibilities and limitations of Latin literacy and manuscript culture. They were neither inserted into public formulae in the ceremonies themselves nor embedded in practice in any manifest manner. The choice of when and which symbolic glasses to wear, and thereby change one's subjective experience, remained a private one.

[84]Lothar of Segni, *De missarum mysteriis*, PL 217:914.

I believe the dialogue between church history and anthropology bears fruits here for both sides—not as an imposition of the models of the latter on the former, but in terms of opening new venues for questions and answers. A major strand here is, in a way, the mirror image of Staal's early arguments. Staal was attracted to the resilience of mantras and meaningless gestures, claiming that lack of meaning is necessary to conserve rites unchanged for thousands of years. Yet if it is necessary for perseverance of ritual against the wind of history and change for thousands of years, I would argue, then proposing meaning to one's community is an act of enabling, acknowledging, and containing local and temporal changes. Ideas of public and private symbols inspired other arguments here as well, though less directly, and may open new ways to consider the interaction between private and public symbols.

Seeing that church history is not only about applying or criticizing theories but also an active player in the theoretical field, I hope the medieval case would encourage anthropologists of ritual to set new inquiries about emic practices of supplying and consuming symbolical meanings to rituals, turning their gaze to those who ask and those who answer, their motives and social identity. If one accepts Asad's claim that symbolic systems are inextricably linked to their surrounding social practices and conditions, the history of practices of literacy and of explication should be taken into account in this regard. The peculiar phenomenon of medieval allegorical explanations of liturgy invites us to turn our gaze to the general gesture of explanation itself as an independent object of study. Like Lothar of Segni, we stand only in the corridor, with new questions, and, hopefully, sweet answers.

Dr. Ayelet Even-Ezra teaches medieval cultural, intellectual, and cognitive history. Her first book, *Ecstasy in the Classroom: Trance, Self, and the Academic Profession in Medieval Paris* (Fordham UP, 2019), explored theologians' perceptions of knowledge in the first half of the thirteenth century. Her second book, *Lines of Thought: Branching Diagrams and the Medieval Mind*, portrayed the medieval scholastic habit of drawing tree diagrams. Her current project studies medieval analogical and allegorical reasoning in its social contexts.