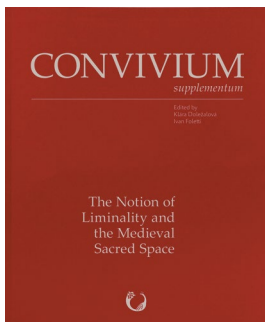


IVAN FOLETTI AND KLÁRA
DOLEŽALOVÁ (EDS.),
*THE NOTION OF LIMINALITY AND THE
MEDIEVAL SACRED SPACE*

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Reviewed by
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A special issue of the journal *Convivium*, this collection of six essays explores the concept of liminality in medieval art. It focuses on the material barriers and objects that served as thresholds to the holy. But it also recognizes and makes an important contribution to exploring the spatial dimension of liminality not only as static locus but also as a movement and passage of time. With one exception, all essays are purposefully co-authored; some pairing a senior scholar with a younger one. This promotion of young scholars is at the core of the educational mission of the center for medieval studies at Brno directed by Ivan Foletti: it enables students to work on the entire gamut of scholarly work from research and writing, to editing, and photography. These projects are always collaborative, and a youthful spirit and enthusiasm permeates many of the essays in this collection. The majority of the articles were first presented at a symposium organized at the Center in 2017.

The material spans Italian catacomb paintings to late sixteenth-century altarpieces in Bohemia, with medieval Italy receiving the strongest emphasis. The first essay by Ivan Foletti and Katarína Kravčíková oscillates between two sets of doors that visualize the economy of Salvation: the fifth-century ones at Santa Sabina in

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Rome and the twelfth-century carved and painted doors at the cathedral of Notre Dame du Puy. The Roman ones were opened on special occasions providing access to the nave. By contrast, the ones at Le Puy, while deceptively resembling side entrances to the church, only opened access to small chambers under the last bay of the nave (the nave is at the second story of this unusual building). While in reality a dead-end, these doors activated the imagination of a possibility of passage. Moreover, their accordion-panel-design and inscriptions in Arabic point to Auvergne's larger investment in the Reconquista of Spain. This dynamic of alterity or otherness at the center of Christian identity is a fascinating topic that deserves further study.

Sible de Blaauw and Klára Doležalová's essay addresses the role of curtains in the churches of Rome, drawing on the textual evidence of the *Liber Pontificalis* and then introducing the pictorial depictions of veils in medieval frescoes, mosaics, and miniatures. De Blaauw uncovers four realms enclosed by the curtain in a centripetal mode starting at the altar with its *tetravela*, to the curtains delimiting the presbytery, the hanging in the nave, and finally the curtain at the main gate. Interestingly, the number of veils in the nave of a Roman church was not determined by the number of intercolumniations but by the status of the foundation. In the future, the rich textual evidence assembled here will allow scholars to explore the role of these textile barriers in modifying the otherwise reverberant acoustics. Their deployment in the nave could create drier acoustic chambers better suited for recitation and sermons. Similarly, Hagia Sophia with its evidence of hooks still *in situ* in the vaults of the aisles can offer a new study the chance to explore how the textile hangings provided flexibility in the use of the ecclesiastical space. It is likely, for instance, that the curtains in the north aisle of Hagia Sophia cordoned off the easternmost bay, transforming it into a prothesis. This will serve as an important corrective to the dominant theory that identifies the skeuophylakion as a separate structure outside the perimeter of Hagia Sophia. Neil Moran has already voiced his reservations, but his argument needs to be systematically laid out. If curtains produced a prothesis inside Hagia Sophia, this will change our understanding of the liturgical use of this space and, more importantly, the ritual itinerary in the course of the celebration of the Eucharist.

Vlad Bedros and Elisabetta Scirocco lead us into the material barriers of sanctuary: the iconostasis in the Orthodox East and the choir screen of the Latin West. On the Byzantine side the essay traces the increasing trend towards obscuring and veiling the sanctuary in mystery, leading to a radical division between the visual access to the sacred by the congregation and the clergy. Paradoxically this process of concealment is accompanied by visual expressivity as icon configurations set on the side facing the faithful and modelling for them the process of prayer. Scirocco starts by tracing the templon barrier in churches in Rome such as Santa Maria Antiqua and San Clemente in order to situate the elaborate screen of Monreale in Norman Sicily. Like their Byzantine counterparts, the Latin screens also produce a heightened division: on the one hand limiting the congregation's visual access to the altar, and on the other a rich panoply of images project-

ing from the screen and facing the faithful. In a way the catechumen's exclusion from the nave but invitation to look at the rich imagery of the Santa Sabina doors is repeated in the later medieval rise of the templon screen, which inundates the eyes with highly articulate figural programs but keeps the laity out of the sanctuary. It is inspiring to see the digital reconstruction of this no-longer extant liturgical furnishing and trace its form to surviving examples. The reader would welcome a plan that shows the component parts of this structure and how they relate to each other. A frontal view would also be helpful.

Chiara Croci draws our attention to the little known but important fresco cycle depicting saints' lives in the transept of Santa Prassede in Rome dating to the period and patronage of Pope Paschal I (817–824); they were set at a high level. J. Wilpert first recorded these images and his hand-colored-photographs of 1916 offer the basis for these new explorations emerging after a restoration campaign in 2005. Croci argues that such visual programs were probably modelled on cycles in the transept of Old St. Peter's and those of Sts. Quiricius and Julitta at the Theodotus chapel of Santa Maria Antiqua. Seriality and repetition enable the reader to pick out the chief moments in these martyrdoms despite the crowded visual program, its high position, and the difficulty in accessing the *tituli*. In this respect, the use of repetition and its vertical alignment can be traced back to Roman examples such as the column of Trajan, as the work of Richard Brilliant has shown: there this visual strategy helps increase legibility and intelligibility. Brilliant's contribution is relevant to this medieval subject and should be included in the analysis. Croci argues further that the fresco program was enhanced by the liturgical commemoration of the saints and the reading of their passions on their respective feast days. It would be insightful to address further how this insistence on a figural program promoted the ninth-century papal image theory as it confronted the ripples of Byzantine iconoclasm. More specifically, what role do figural narratives play in eliciting desire and empathy, ideas at the core of iconophile defense in the ninth century? I would recommend including a plan of the transept with the area of the fresco clearly marked, and then following up with sections showing where on the wall these images are placed and how the overall narrative is laid out on the three walls. In their article in *Summa IX* (2017), pp. 64–101, Giulia Brodi, Carles Mancho, and Valeria Valentini have given some of this important supporting evidence: plan, sections, and drawings of the layout of the frescoes on the walls. Such visuals are necessary evidential foundation for any new analysis of the frescoes. And this is especially the case since the images are not accessible for the general public, hence many scholars would have no familiarity with the frescoes.

Jan Klípa and Eliška Poláčková's chapter is composed of two parts: the first focuses on the altarpiece in the late medieval period with a special attention to Bohemia and traces the divergencies of doctrinal positions between Catholic/Utraquist and Lutheran positions. The second part explores the role of textiles in the liturgical plays for Easter. The altarpiece is seen as a liminal zone between terrestrial and celestial, material and spiritual. And the argument is developed on

the basis of medieval image theory, especially the dogma of the Transubstantiation. The visual examples collected show how the altar area cordoned off by curtains becomes the space of incubation of visions that recuperate the species (figural appearance of Christ) in the Eucharist. In this section it will be helpful to substantiate these claims with medieval sources commenting on the role of the winged retable in inspiring the figural imagination. This interchangeability of substance and species is intensified in the inclusion of the monstrance or the Man of Sorrows at the core of Utraquist altarpieces in Bohemia. By contrast, altarpieces expressive of the Lutheran position strive to stress that Host and wine contain Christ, they are consubstantial with Him and are not essentially changed through the liturgy. The real presence of Christ occurs in the moment of communion. As a result, Lutheran altarpieces are not structured as veils to the metaphysical. The profane inhabits the sacred as patrons share in the sacred narrative of the pictorial field. The second part of this article turns to the liturgical drama as manifested in the *Officium ad visitandum sepulchrum*: here actual mini-architectural structures or transitory tents made of textiles stand in for the tomb of Christ and the clergy enacting the sacred narrative use of cloth both as concealment but also as revelation of Christ's Resurrection. Social strata had different access the liturgical drama with the ecclesiastic elite having the most direct communication. The fascinating conclusion draws attention to the temporal, dynamic character of revelation: "in covering and uncovering, elevating and lowering, the Truth was communicated in motion."

The last essay, by John Mitchell and Nicholas Pickwoad, addresses both the pictorial renditions of books in figural representations and the symbolic function of the book. The veristic representations of open codices in a range of media from frescoes in catacombs to mosaics in church interiors and miniatures communicate passage to everlasting life. The open book as a threshold to the afterlife is supported by Ambrosius Autpertus's writings on the Apocalypse and visually expressed in the frescoes of Christ and the Virgin holding open books in the so-called Crypt of Epiphanius at San Vincenzo at Volturno. As for the depiction of the closed codex, the latter operates in the same sphere of objects like the Cross and the Eucharist chalice and paten, and incense-burner as containers that serve as thresholds to the divine.

Looking towards the future, one area of further study that emerges from this collection of essays is that of the interrelationship between the material and imaginary: how the material space and objects in it are inflected by the process of hearing the performed word and conjuring up images in the imagination. It is this liminality between the material and imagined that holds a lot of potential. It would also be important to address the effect of excess and sensual saturation: with all the senses activated in the liturgy, this sensory overload is also a form of liminality and ecstasy. In a couple of cases a few more architectural drawings (cross-sections) showing the exact locations of the doors at Le Puy or the frescoes in the transept of Santa Prassede in Rome would have helped the reader to "see" where exactly these images were located and thus be in a better position to gauge the liminality of these spaces.