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Experiencing the Sacred

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► **To cite this version:**

Béatrice Caseau. Experiencing the Sacred. Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Newcastle and Durham, April 2011, dir. Cl. Nesbitt, M. Jackson, Farnham, 2013, p. 59-77., 2013. hal-03864753

HAL Id: hal-03864753

<https://hal.sorbonne-universite.fr/hal-03864753>

Submitted on 22 Nov 2022

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4. Experiencing the Sacred

Béatrice Caseau

12 Experiencing Byzantium naturally included participating in religious rituals 12
13 and, for the majority of the population, in Christian liturgical ceremonies.¹ 13
14 On a regular basis, Christians entered churches, taking in the interior 14
15 decor and division of space, smelling the odour inside, hearing clerics and 15
16 singers, sometimes responding, lighting lamps and tapers, approaching and 16
17 touching sacred objects or elements of the church. Whether in a small chapel 17
18 in Cappadocia, in a monastery in Syria or in the Hagia Sophia cathedral in 18
19 Constantinople, church going and ritual participation involved the senses: 19
20 viewing and hearing, but also smelling, touching and tasting. While many 20
21 scholars have commented on the importance of sight and the role of icons and 21
22 other images in focusing the attention of the faithful present inside churches, 22
23 few scholars have devoted their time to studying the other senses, especially 23
24 touch.² Among the senses, touch was not the favourite of the philosophers, 24
25 who tended to prefer the visual or the auditory sense.³ Touch is an overlooked 25
26 sense in many accounts of Byzantine culture, yet it was an extremely 26
27 important one in most religious rituals. Let us try to recapture some of the 27
28 sensory experiences of Byzantine Christians, focusing specifically on touch, 28
29

30 ¹ On the importance of liturgical ritual, see P.F. Bradshaw, *Essays on Early Eastern* 30
31 *Eucharistic Prayers* (Collegeville, MN, 1997); for a history of the liturgy of Saint John 31
32 Chrysostom, R. Taft, *The Great Entrance: A History of the Transfer of Gifts and Other Preanaphoral* 32
33 *Rites of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 200 (Rome, 1975); J.F. 33
34 Baldwin, *The Urban Character of Christian Worship: The Origins, Development, and Meaning of* 34
35 *Stational Liturgy*, *Orientalia Christiana Analecta* 228 (Rome, 1987); H.J. Schulz, *The Byzantine* 35
36 *Liturgy: Symbolic Structure and Faith Expression* (New York, 1986). 36

37 ² H. Belting, *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago, 37
38 IL, 1994); L. James, *Light and Colour in Byzantine Art* (Oxford, 1996); R.S. Nelson (ed.), *Visibility* 38
39 *Before and Beyond the Renaissance: Seeing as Others Saw* (Cambridge, 2000); S. Ashbrook Harvey, 39
40 *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination* (Berkeley, CA, 2006). 40

41 ³ G.E.R. Lloyd and G.E.L. Owen (eds), *Aristotle on Mind and the Senses: Proceedings of* 41
42 *the Seventh Symposium Aristotelicum*, Cambridge, 1975 (Cambridge, 1978); on the denigration 42
43 of touch in Western culture, see D. Howes, *Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the* 43
44 *Anthropology of the Senses* (Toronto, 1971). 44

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1 and taking examples from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries, mostly in the 1
2 Eastern Mediterranean. 2

3 Naturally, recapturing the sensations the Byzantines could have felt when 3
4 entering a church is difficult because this varied depending on the individual, 4
5 the time of day and the type of church. However, it is possible to attempt a 5
6 history of the sensory experiences by paying attention both to texts that have 6
7 been previously studied from a different angle, and to interior architecture 7
8 and images. 'When you enter the church', writes Choricus of Gaza, 'you will 8
9 be staggered by the variety of the spectacle.'⁴ In a similar vein, writing about 9
10 the Hagia Sophia cathedral in Constantinople, Paul the Silentiary writes, 10
11 'everything fills the eye with wonder'.⁵ 11

12 Wealthy churches were awe-inspiring buildings, decorated to impress the 12
13 visitor. However, experiencing the liturgical offices taking place inside these 13
14 splendid churches was certainly different depending on whether one stood in 14
15 the sanctuary, in the nave, in the galleries or in the narthex. 15

16 The Byzantines are known for their obsession with *taxis*. Everyone has 16
17 a proper place in society and should also occupy his or her proper place 17
18 in church. While we have the middle-Byzantine *taktika* to understand how 18
19 the *taxis* worked for the aristocracy, invited to dine at the imperial palace, 19
20 we need to go back in time to find texts pointing to the ideal proper place 20
21 for each category of Christians inside a church. Early Christian normative 21
22 literature spelled out rules to distribute each group depending on sex, age, 22
23 sanctity of lifestyle or place in the ecclesiastical hierarchy. Each category of 23
24 Christians was bound by a set of rules, which included restrictions of access, 24
25 either temporally or spatially, to areas of the church building. As early as 25
26 the third century,⁶ and certainly up to the time of Symeon of Thessalonika 26
27 in the fifteenth century, sources reveal the desire to allocate a particular 27
28 space to the different social groups, taking into consideration whether they 28
29 were clerics, consecrated persons, or laypeople, and distinguishing men and 29
30 women, the young and the elderly.⁷ It remains difficult to assert that these 30
31 rules were enforced at all times in all churches, but they certainly indicate 31
32 how the Byzantines imagined the hierarchical value of different spaces inside 32
33 33

34
35 ⁴ Choricus of Gaza, *Laudatio Marciani* (I, 17), translated in C. Mango, *The Art of the* 35
36 *Byzantine Empire* (Toronto and London, 1986), p. 61; R. Penella (ed.), *Rhetorical Exercises* 36
37 *from Late Antiquity: A Translation of Choricus of Gaza's Preliminary Talks and Declamations* 37
38 (Cambridge, 2009). 38

39 ⁵ Paul Silentiarios, *Description of the Church of Saint-Sophia*, translated in Mango, *The Art* 39
40 *of the Byzantine Empire*, p. 89. 40

41 ⁶ P. Bradshaw, M.E. Johnson and L.E. Phillips, *The Apostolic Tradition* (Minneapolis, 41
42 MN, 2002). 42

43 ⁷ J. Darrouzès, 'Sainte-Sophie de Thessalonique d'après un rituel', *Revue des études byzantines* 43
44 34 (1976), pp. 45–78; X. Werner, 'L'espace liturgique d'après S. Siméon de Thessalonique', in C. 44
45 Braga (ed.), *L'espace liturgique. Ses éléments constitutifs et leur sens* (Rome, 2006), pp. 107–37. 45

1 their churches. Being ushered to the proper area in church was most probably 1
2 a common experience for many Byzantines. 2

3 The *Didascalia apostolorum* is one of the first texts discussing the proper 3
4 place for each group of Christians. Dating to the third century, it belongs 4
5 to a time when Christians were a minority and most converts were adults. 5
6 Naturally, the main distinction at that time was between catechumens and 6
7 baptised Christians. While the latter were standing or sitting inside the nave 7
8 and allowed to remain throughout the liturgy, the former, located either in the 8
9 narthex or close to the doors of the church, had to leave after the sermon. They 9
10 were not completely initiated and had no access to the Eucharistic table. Their 10
11 location inside the church showed that they were members of the Christian 11
12 community, but not yet full members. They were sometimes called hearers, 12
13 because they were allowed to hear the readings and the sermon, but not to see, 13
14 hear or taste what came after. A special prayer was said for the catechumens 14
15 before they were invited to leave the church. It seems that deacons were 15
16 responsible for supervising their departure. 16

17 This distinction between catechumens and baptised Christians remained 17
18 throughout the Byzantine middle ages, but when most of the population was 18
19 born Christian and baptised during childhood, often the only catechumens 19
20 were babies, who could hardly leave the church on their own. They were 20
21 nevertheless often placed with their mother (or care-giver) in the same area 21
22 occupied by the adult catechumens: close to the doors, or in the narthex. 22
23 Besides their status as catechumens, one practical reason for that location was 23
24 also the possible noise coming from babies, or very young children. Keeping 24
25 them far away from the sanctuary, where the liturgical action took place, was 25
26 intentional. Being close to the narthex meant that little children, unable to 26
27 stay still, could run in the courtyard. At the end of Late Antiquity and during 27
28 the middle ages, unless they came from non-Christian backgrounds, older 28
29 children were often baptised Christians and could stay after the sermon for the 29
30 Eucharistic liturgy. Children were usually supervised by one parent: young 30
31 boys with their father, and girls with their mother, which is an indication of 31
32 the separation of sexes inside the churches. Older boys were isolated under the 32
33 supervision of a deacon. Likewise consecrated virgins were grouped together. 33

34 The separation of men and women inside church buildings seems to have 34
35 been a common feature.⁸ In some churches, men and women used different 35
36 entrance doors.⁹ In large churches, where deacons were numerous enough to 36
37 stand at the entrance, they could direct people where to stand or sit. 37
38

39
40 ⁸ J.-P. Sodini, 'Archéologie des églises et organisation spatiale de la liturgie', in F. 39
41 Cassingéna-Trévedy and I. Jurasz (eds), *Les liturgies syriaques* (Paris, 2006), pp. 229–66, esp. 40
42 233; W. Mayer and P. Allen, *The Churches of Syrian Antioch (300–638 CE)* (Leuven, 2012), p. 212. 41
43 ⁹ The apocryphal *Cave of Treasures* imagines Noah's Arch, which symbolises the church, 42
44 with two doors, one for females and one for males. A. Su-Min Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors. Les* 43
44 *deux recensions syriaques*, *Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium* 486, *Scriptores Syri*. 44

1 Three models coexisted in the early Byzantine world for this separation of 1
 2 the sexes: the first model had women standing on the left side of the church 2
 3 and men standing on the right (the 'better side'); in a second model, women 3
 4 would stand closer to the doors, behind the men, who stood closer to the 4
 5 sanctuary; and in a third possibility, where upper galleries existed, women 5
 6 could stand in the galleries. The first two models established a hierarchical 6
 7 distinction between men and women. The third model was meant to protect 7
 8 women from the gaze of men. In the Hagia Sophia church, this gallery was at 8
 9 the disposal of high-ranked women, the empress and the aristocrats.¹⁰ 9

10 This use of the galleries for upper-class women reveals another division 10
 11 inside the church, that between rich and poor, aristocrats and ordinary 11
 12 laywomen, who probably stood on the lower floor of the Hagia Sophia, on 12
 13 the left side of the church. In spite of a discourse of equality in front of God, 13
 14 the social divisions were reproduced in the spatial allocation of the different 14
 15 social groups, at least in that special church where the court was welcomed for 15
 16 important religious festivals. 16

17 Finally, there was a special area for a category of women, whose lifestyle 17
 18 was praised and close to members of the clergy: the deaconesses. In the fourth 18
 19 century, they played an important role during baptismal ceremonies: they 19
 20 anointed the body of women with oil during the period when it was common 20
 21 to anoint the whole body. They also had a mission of conversion and religious 21
 22 education for women. However, their liturgical role vanished when it became 22
 23 common to baptise young children. Some deaconesses remained on the clerical 23
 24 roll and they could stand in a special area in the left part of the nave. This 24
 25 particular area, quite close to the sanctuary, reflected their respected status in 25
 26 the community, as celibate women living for God. Being on the payroll of the 26
 27 church, they were given some privileges; however, as women, they were not 27
 28 allowed to enter the sanctuary, except for their own ordination. They did not 28
 29 touch the sacred vessel, nor distribute communion, but supervised the women 29
 30 standing in the left part of the nave. They also had door-keeping duties.¹¹ 30

31 The area of the sanctuary and the ambo were reserved for the clergy and 31
 32 access to the sanctuary came to be forbidden to the laity. There were some 32
 33 exceptions to this rule: male children were carried around the altar when 33
 34 34

35 207 (Louvain, 1987), p. 52. I wish to thank F. Briquel-Châtonnet for this reference; A. Su-Min 35
 36 Ri, *Commentaire de la Caverne des Trésors. Etude sur l'histoire du texte et de ses sources* (Louvain, 36
 37 2000), p. 242. In the 16–17 November 2012 conference on Syriac churches, Les églises en 37
 38 monde syriaque (Xe Table-ronde de la Société d'études syriaques), Elif Keser Kayaalp pointed 38
 39 out architectural examples (forthcoming in 2013, to appear within a volume of the collection 39
 40 *Etudes syriaques*). 40

41 ¹⁰ R. Taft, 'Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When – and Why?', *Dumbarton* 41
 42 *Oaks Papers* 52 (1998), pp. 27–87, esp. 31; testimony of Paul Silentiarios at p. 34. 42

43 ¹¹ A. Karras, 'Female Deacons in the Byzantine Church', *Church History* 73.2 (2004), pp. 43
 44 272–316; A. Karras, *Women in the Byzantine Liturgy* (Oxford, 2005). 44

1 presented at church.¹² Also, when he attended church, at the start of the liturgy, 1
 2 the emperor entered into the sanctuary. The sanctuary was once accessible 2
 3 to the imperial family for the communion, but during the fifth century, that 3
 4 ceased to be the case.¹³ Imperial women had to take communion outside the 4
 5 chancel barrier. Finally, a canon of the Council in Trullo (691–692) stated that 5
 6 no layperson should be allowed inside the sanctuary.¹⁴ An exception was 6
 7 granted to the emperor, who could enter to deposit gifts and cense the altar, 7
 8 but he too had to remain outside to take communion. 8

9 Altogether, the location of each group followed the gradient of sacredness 9
 10 of the church, progressing from the narthex to the sanctuary, and reflected 10
 11 the hierarchical difference between clerics and laypersons, and between men 11
 12 and women. Age was also a factor: when sitting is mentioned, young people 12
 13 must stand while older people sit.¹⁵ Sitting was not frequently possible and 13
 14 during festivals the laity had to stand. The visual experience of the liturgical 14
 15 ceremonies was certainly quite different for those at the back of the church to 15
 16 that of those standing in front or in the galleries. Women placed at the back of 16
 17 the church, or even in the narthex, in the case of menstruating women, could 17
 18 hardly see anything taking place in or around the sanctuary. In a church as big 18
 19 as the Hagia Sophia, one wonders if they could even see and hear what was 19
 20 said on the ambo, when a crowd was standing in front of them.¹⁶ In smaller 20
 21 churches, and less crowded ones, their experience might have been different. 21
 22 For men and women at the back of the church, processions, such as the great 22
 23 entrance, were moments of particular importance, where liturgical activity 23
 24 joined them where they stood. 24

25 Clergymen were aware of the fact that it was more difficult to follow the 25
 26 liturgy when one could not see what was going on, or hear very clearly prayers 26
 27 and sermons. In canonical–liturgical sources, older boys were placed in the 27
 28 nave ideally, very close to the sanctuary, in the hope that some of them would 28
 29 become familiar with the liturgy and enter the clergy. Miracle stories mention 29
 30

31 _____ 31
 32 ¹² M. Arranz, *EÉvolution des rites d'incorporation et de réadmission dans l'Église selon* 32
 33 *l'Euchole byzantin, Gestes et paroles dans les diverses familles liturgiques* (Rome, 1978), pp. 31– 33
 34 75; M. Arranz, *Admission dans l'Église des enfants des familles chrétiennes*, *Orientalia Christiana* 34
 35 *Periodica* 49 (Rome, 1983), pp. 284–302. 35

36 ¹³ R. Taft, 'The Byzantine Imperial Communion Ritual', in P. Armstrong (ed.), *Ritual* 36
 37 *and Art: Byzantine Essays for Christopher Walter* (London, 2006), pp. 1–27. 37

38 ¹⁴ Canon 69; see G. Nedungatt and M. Featherstone (eds), *The Council in Trullo Revisited* 38
 39 (Rome, 1995), p. 151. 39

40 ¹⁵ *Constitutions Apostoliques* (II, 57, 12), ed. and tr. M. Metzger, *Les Constitutions* 40
 41 *apostoliques* (Paris, 1985), pp. 316–17; more examples in B. Caseau, 'La place des enfants 41
 42 dans les églises d'Orient (3^e–10^e siècles)', in M. Aurell and Th. Deswarte (eds), *Famille, violence* 42
 43 *et christianisation au Moyen Âge. Mélanges offerts à Michel Rouche* (Paris, 2005), pp. 15–27. 42

44 ¹⁶ R. Mainstone, *Hagia Sophia: Architecture, Structure and Liturgy of Justinian's Great* 43
 44 *Church* (New York, 1988), p. 231. 44

1 boys learning the prayers said by the priest during the consecration of the 1
 2 host (something said in a low voice) and being able to repeat them, word for 2
 3 word.¹⁷ They were placed in such a manner as to be able to follow the rituals, 3
 4 while their sisters were with their mother, either on the left side of the nave 4
 5 or at the back of the church. As a group, these young boys, no longer with 5
 6 their fathers, were under the supervision of a deacon, who had the sometimes 6
 7 arduous task of making them pay attention and keep silent. 7

8 Sight and hearing may not have been the most important of the senses 8
 9 involved in participating in the liturgy. They certainly played a role, but not 9
 10 to the same extent for everybody present in a very large church such as the 10
 11 Hagia Sophia. For most laypeople, an active participation in church rituals and 11
 12 liturgy involved touching. 12

13 Pushing a door or a door curtain was probably the first active gesture, 13
 14 besides walking (Fig. 4.1a and Fig. 4.1b). Mosaics, such as those in the apse 14
 15 of the Eufrasiana church in Poreč, or of the Saint Vitale church in Ravenna, 15
 16 depict this gesture. Entrance doors were adorned with curtains, even in village 16
 17 churches, as the fifth- to sixth-century papyrus P. Grenf. II.111 proves: it lists 17
 18 six door curtains (plus an old one) in the inventory made by the archdeacon for 18
 19 the priest of a church in the village of Ibion. The number of curtains indicates 19
 20 that the church had three doors.¹⁸ 20

21 Curtains were especially important to mark the threshold, when the doors 21
 22 were opened. They created a visible boundary between outside and inside, or 22
 23 between two spaces inside a building. Curtain hooks are still visible in some 23
 24 churches, such as the Hagia Sophia church in Constantinople, the Eufrasiana 24
 25 in Poreč or the basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe. In these churches of the 25
 26 Justinianic period, cast bronze hooks in the shapes of fingers were set between 26
 27 the cornices and lintels above the doors.¹⁹ Original finger hooks are still in 27
 28 place, for example, at Parentium (Poreč) and above the south and central doors 28
 29 leading to the inner narthex at the Hagia Sophia church (Fig. 4.2). 29
 30 30
 31 31
 32 32

33 ¹⁷ Antony of Choziba, *The Miracles of the Mother of God* (5), ed. C. House, 'Miracula 33
 34 beatae virginis Mariae in Choziba', *Analecta Bollandiana* 8, (1888), pp. 366–7; translated in 34
 35 T. Vivian and A.N. Athanassakis, *The Life of Saint George of Choziba and the Miracles of the* 35
 36 *Most Holy Mother of God at Choziba* (San Francisco, CA, and London, 1994), p. 101–102; John 36
 37 Moschus, *The Spiritual Meadow* (196), *Patrologia Graeca* 87, c.3081, translated in J. Wortley, 37
 38 *John Moschus: The Spiritual Meadow* (Kalamazoo, 1992), pp. 172–4. 38

39 ¹⁸ P. Grenf. II, 111, ed. and transl. A. S. Hunt, C. C. Edgar, *Select Papyri I: Non-Literary* 39
 40 *(Private Affairs)*, London, 1970, pp. 423–234; B. Caseau, 'Objects in Churches: The Testimony 40
 41 of Inventories', in L. Lavan (ed.), *Late Antique Archaeology: Objects in Use* (Leiden, 2008), pp. 41
 42 551–79; E. Wipszycka, 'Church Treasures in Byzantine Egypt', *The Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 42
 43 34 (2004), pp. 127–39.

44 ¹⁹ A. Terry and H. Maguire, *Dynamic Splendor: The Wall Mosaics in the Cathedral of* 43
 44 *Eufrasius at Porec*, (University Park, PA, 2007), p. 60. 44

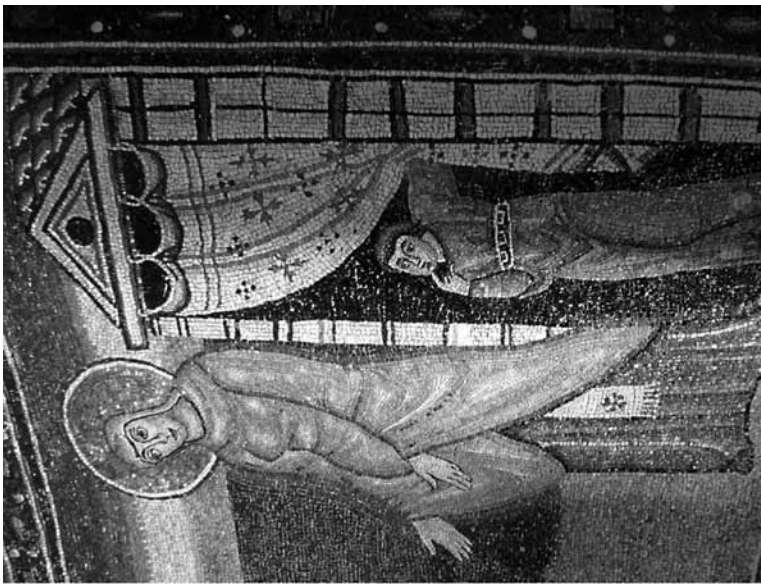


Figure 4.1a Curtain pushed by the hand, Mosaic of the Visitation, Basilica Euphrasiana, Poreč (author's photograph)

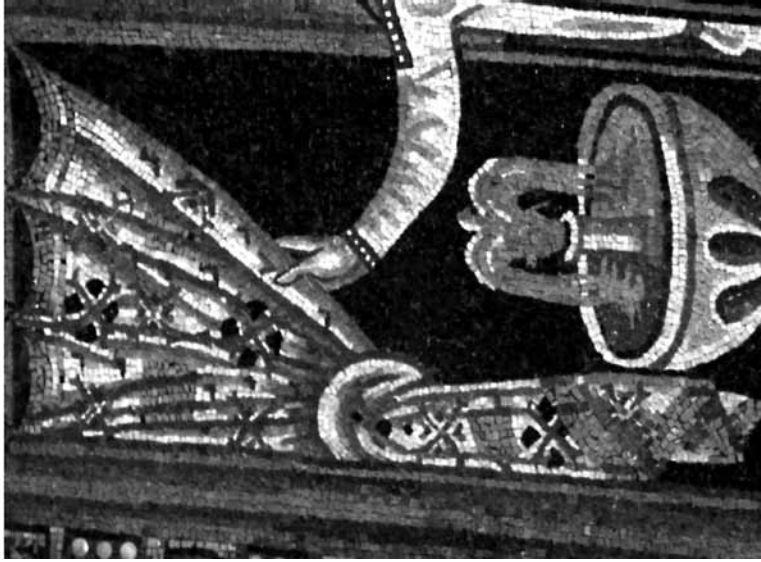


Figure 4.1b Curtain pushed by the hand, at San Vitale, Ravenna (author's photograph)



Figure 4.2 Curtain hook in situ at the Basilica Euphrasiana, Poreč (author's photograph)

Because churches adopted many features of domestic architecture, curtains must have been used very early on in entrance doors. They certainly started to become an element of decor in Late Antique basilicas. As in houses, curtains were used to keep insects and birds out of the building. They protected the privacy of the inner space from uninvited eyes. In areas where sunlight could be very bright, they provided a screen barrier. Most of all, however, their role was to adorn an important area and indicate a change of space: between narthex and nave, and between nave and sanctuary. Thus, curtains acted as a visual signal of the differentiated sanctity of the two spaces they demarcated.

Besides these practical roles, and their symbolic meaning, they added warmth and colours to the church.²⁰ In Byzantine churches, curtains added their touch to the 'passion for colour, complex variation, effects of light, contrast, and the interaction of media as essential elements in the formation of beauty', which defines Byzantine aesthetics inside churches.²¹ Although, in poorer churches,

²⁰ G. Ripoll, 'Los tejidos en la arquitectura de la antigüedad tardia. Una primera aproximación a su uso y función', *Antiquité Tardive* 12 (2004), pp. 169–82.

²¹ E.S. Bolman, 'Painted Skins: The Illusions and Realities of Architectural Polychromy, Sinai and Egypt', in S.E.J. Gerstel and R. Nelson (eds), *Approaching the Holy Mountain: Art and Liturgy at St Catherine's Monastery in the Sinai* (Turnhout, 2010), pp. 119–40, esp. 123.

1 they were probably very simple and perhaps off-white, in wealthier churches, 1
 2 they were embroidered with religious scenes or figures, or intricate designs.²² In 2
 3 the fourth century, not everyone accepted door curtains embroidered with holy 3
 4 figures. Epiphanius of Salamis tore down a village church curtain on which 4
 5 the image of Christ had been embroidered, because he felt it was improper to 5
 6 let just any hand touch such a holy figure in the mundane gesture of pushing 6
 7 the curtain to enter the building.²³ Many of the curtains depicted on mosaics 7
 8 have geometrical patterns rather than figurative embroideries, which may be 8
 9 an indication that Epiphanius' feelings were shared. 9

10 The gift of curtains and an altar cloth became an imperial tradition. The 10
 11 Byzantine emperors offered precious curtains to adorn churches, starting in 11
 12 the fourth century. According to the *Chronicon Paschale*, Emperor Constantius 12
 13 offered splendid golden door curtains for the dedication of the Hagia Sophia²⁴ 13
 14 (Fig. 4.3). In Constantinople, Empress Irene and her son gave veils and curtains 14
 15 of gold thread to the church of Pege, as well as precious liturgical vessels. 15
 16 She had herself and her son depicted in the act of offering these gifts.²⁵ The 16
 17 recording of gifts of curtains in the *Liber Pontificalis ecclesiae romanae* testifies 17
 18 that they were valued presents.²⁶ Above the magnificent doors of Saint Sabine, 18
 19 traces of the hooks holding the curtains can still be seen. Roman basilicas 19
 20 had different sets of curtains, which changed with the liturgical period and 20
 21 adorned doors, canopies and walls for certain feasts. 21

22 The presence of textiles certainly modified the acoustics of a church 22
 23 and avoided some of the reverberation created by marble surfaces. Textiles 23
 24 were also sometimes present on walls or in between columns. The mosaics 24
 25 of Sant'Apollinare in Classe reveal how curtains were tied around columns 25
 26 (Fig. 4.4). There is also archaeological evidence for the presence of curtains in 26
 27 between columns. In the churches of Pella, holes were drilled in the columns 27

28
 29
 30 ²² S. Schrenk, *Textilien des Mittelmeerraumes aus spätantiker bis frühislamischer Zeit* 30
 31 (Riggisberg, 2004); M.-C. Bruwier, *Egyptiennes. Etoffes coptes du Nil, Mariémont* (Morlanwelz, 31
 32 1997); Y. Bourgon-Amir, *Les Tapisseries coptes du musée historique des tissus, Lyon* (Montpellier, 32
 33 1993); M. Flury-Lemberg, *Textile Conservation and Research* (Bern, 1988), pp. 396–405; M. 33
 34 Martiniani-Reber, *Lyon, musée historique des tissus. Soieries sassanides, coptes et byzantines V^e–XI^e* 34
 35 *siècles* (Paris, 1986). 35

36 ²³ Letter to the emperor Theodosius and letter to John bishop of Jerusalem, translated 36
 37 in Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine Empire*, pp. 41–3. 37

38 ²⁴ *Chronicon Paschale* (I), ed. B.G. Niebuhr, *Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae* 38
 39 (Bonn, 1832), p. 544, tr. M. and M. Whitby, *Chronicon Paschale 284–628 AD* (Liverpool, 1989), 39
 40 p. 35.

41 ²⁵ *De sacris aedibus Deiparae ad Fontem*, translated in Mango, *The Art of the Byzantine* 40
 42 *Empire*, p. 156, also translated in A.-M. Talbot and S. Fitzgerald Johnson, *Miracle Tales from* 41
 42 *Byzantium* (Cambridge, MA, 2012). 42

43 ²⁶ M. Martiniani-Reber, 'Tentures et textiles des églises romaines au Haut Moyen Âge 43
 44 d'après le *Liber Pontificalis*', *Mélanges Ecole Française de Rome* 111 (1999), pp. 289–305. 44



Figure 4.3 Doorway of the narthex at Hagia Sophia, Istanbul (author's photograph)

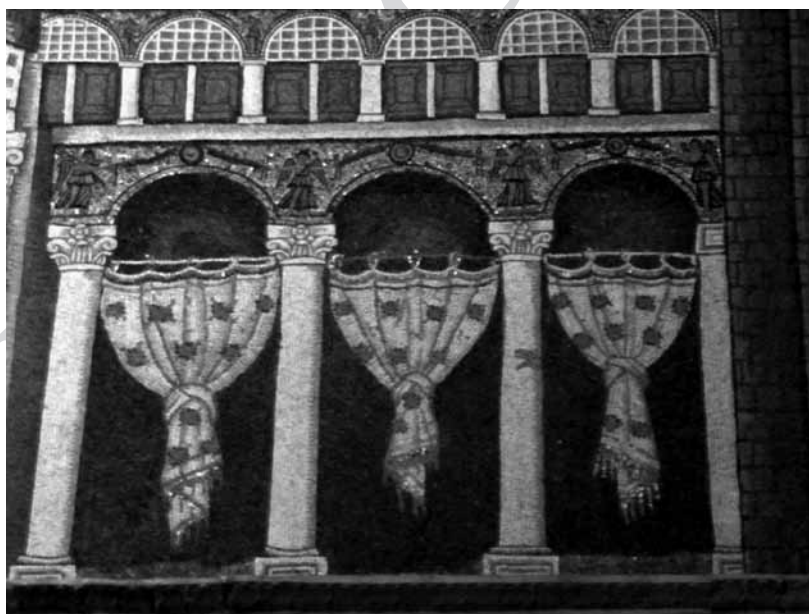


Figure 4.4 Curtains shown in the mosaic panel at Sant' Apollinare in Classe (author's photograph)

1 to fix rods and hang curtains, either to separate a space for women or simply 1
 2 to adorn the nave with hangings that could be tied up between the columns.²⁷ 2
 3 In any case, textiles, whether in the form of hangings or sometimes carpets, 3
 4 contrasted with the smooth marble slabs that adorned the lower parts of 4
 5 the walls and often the floors; they brought warmth to the cold marble and 5
 6 absorbed sounds. They modified the sensory experience of church-goers. This 6
 7 contrast between textile and marble or mosaic floor was certainly striking. 7

8 After pushing the curtain, the second gesture of a worshipper was very 8
 9 probably touching the floor in a gesture of respect for God's presence inside 9
 10 the church. Marble was frequently used on church floors, in churches built 10
 11 with significant funding. A visitor entering such a church could feel the cold 11
 12 marble when performing a *proskynesis* or when simply touching the floor in a 12
 13 gesture of humility. Touch was also involved in gestures of devotion, such as 13
 14 kissing columns, doors and icons, not to mention touching the reliquaries and 14
 15 the lamps above them. John Chrysostom mentions the habit of kissing the door 15
 16 of the church in a sermon preached at Antioch: 'Do you not see how many of 16
 17 you kiss even the porch of this temple, some stooping down, some grasping it 17
 18 with their hand and putting their hand to their mouth'.²⁸ The tradition of kisses 18
 19 and prostrations also existed in the West. Paulinus of Nola depicts the gestures 19
 20 of a peasant coming to petition Saint Felix: 'he prostrated himself at the doors, 20
 21 planted kisses on the doorposts'. Peter Brown, who has gathered some of the 21
 22 evidence in an article published in 1998, interprets a passage of Augustine's 22
 23 sermon, which mentions Christians who adore columns in churches, as 23
 24 referring to this practice of kissing elements of the church building.²⁹ 24

25 Late Antique and Byzantine Christians enjoyed contact with sacred objects 25
 26 or places, which they believed to be filled with the power to protect them and 26
 27 sometimes even cure them. They came to church in order to approach and 27
 28 touch the sacred.³⁰ Kissing icons or reliquaries achieved that goal. The power 28
 29 of relics was accessed by touching, even if through a reliquary. Gregory of 29
 30 Nyssa describes the deportment of pilgrims worshipping relics: 'those who 30
 31 behold them embrace, as it were, the living body in full flower: they bring 31
 32 eye, mouth, ear, all senses into play, and then shedding tears of reverence and 32
 33 passion, they address to the martyr their prayers of intercession as though they 33
 34
 35

36
 37 ²⁷ R. Houston Smith and L. Preston Day, *Pella of the Decapolis*, vol. 2: *Final Report on the*
 38 *College of Wooster Excavations in Area IX, The Civic Complex, 1979–1985* (Wooster, OH, 1989), p. 45.

39 ²⁸ John Chrysostom, *Sermon on the Second Letter to the Corinthians* (30, 1–2), *Patrologia*
 40 *Fathers* 12 (Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), p. 418.

41 ²⁹ P. Brown, 'Augustine and a Practice of the Imperiti: *Qui adorant columnas in ecclesia*
 42 (S. Dolbeau 26.10. 232, Mayence 62)', in G. Madec (ed.), *Augustin prédicateur (395–411)* (Paris,
 43 1998), pp. 367–75.

44 ³⁰ G. Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington DC, 2010).

1 were present'.³¹ The number of *enkolpia*, used to hold fragments of the saints' 1
 2 relics or a morsel of the Eucharist, is clearly linked to this desire to touch the 2
 3 sacred, or to have the sacred touch one's body, and through it protect one's 3
 4 soul.³² Through touch, holiness and even divine life could be transmitted. The 4
 5 devotion given to objects known to have been held by the saints, such as the 5
 6 belt of a holy woman,³³ or even better the veil or belt of the Theotokos,³⁴ shows 6
 7 how much contact mattered. 7

8 In the case of Christ, it was not possible to have a body to divide as was 8
 9 done with so many of the saints' bodies, but the objects he held as a child 9
 10 and the instruments used to torture him were all considered very precious.³⁵ 10
 11 The proof of their belonging to Christ was their ability to cure.³⁶ Among these, 11
 12 the favourite was undoubtedly the cross. Discovered in the fourth century, 12
 13 fragments of it were quickly dispersed: Macrina (d.380), the sister of Basil of 13
 14 Caesarea and Gregory of Nyssa, wore a piece of the cross around her neck, so 14
 15 that it touched her heart.³⁷ After Heraclius' victory over the Sassanians, part of 15
 16 the holy cross was brought to the imperial palace in Constantinople and kept 16
 17 in a *staurothek*. Each year, it was brought to the Hagia Sophia to be kissed and 17
 18 venerated by the Byzantine court and by the Constantinopolitans. For three 18
 19 days, from Thursday to Saturday, during the Holy Week before Easter, the 19
 20 cross was taken out of its reliquary and presented to be kissed first by the men 20
 21 led by the emperor, then by the empress leading the women, and finally by 21
 22 members of the clergy. Arculf, a Gallic bishop who travelled to the East on a 22
 23 pilgrimage in the 680s, told abbot Adomnan of Iona that wonderfully fragrant 23
 24 _____ 24
 25 _____ 25
 26 _____ 26

27 ³¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *Encomium on Saint Theodore*, *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 740B, translated 27
 28 in P. Brown, *The Cult of the Saints* (Chicago, IL, 1981), p. 11; G. Vikan, 'Pilgrims in Magi's 28
 29 Clothing: The Impact of Mimesis on Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art', in G. Vikan (ed.), *Sacred* 29
 30 *Images and Sacred Power in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2003). 30

31 ³² B. Pitarakis, *Les croix-reliquaires pectorales byzantines en bronze* (Paris, 2006). 31

32 ³³ *Life of Melania the younger* (61), Greek text, introduction and notes in D. Gorce, *Vie de* 32
 33 *Sainte Mélanie* (Paris, 1962), pp. 248–50. 33

34 ³⁴ J. Wortley, 'The Marian Relics at Constantinople', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 34
 35 45 (2005), pp. 171–87; M.B. Cunningham, *Wider than Heaven: Eighth-century Homilies on the* 35
 36 *Mother of God* (New York, 2008); L. Brubaker and M.B. Cunningham, *The Cult of the Mother of* 36
 37 *God in Byzantium: Texts and Images* (Farnham, 2011). 37

38 ³⁵ J. Durand and B. Flusin, *Byzance et les reliques du Christ* (Paris, 2004). 38

39 ³⁶ P. Maraval, *Lieux saints et pèlerinage d'Orient* (Paris, 2004). 39

40 ³⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* (30), ed. and French tr. in P. Maraval, *Vie de Sainte* 40
 41 *Macrine [par] Grégoire de Nyse. Introduction, texte critique, traduction, notes et index* (Paris, 1971), 41
 42 pp. 238–40; on the discovery attributed to Helena, the mother of Constantine, J.W. Drijvers, 42
 43 *Helena Augusta: The Mother of Constantine the Great and the Legend of Her Finding of the True* 43
 44 *Cross* (Leiden, 1992); J.W. Drijvers, 'Helena Augusta, the Cross and the Myth: Some New 44
 Reflections', *Millennium* 8 (2011), pp. 125–74.

1 oil, able to cure all illnesses, oozes from the wood of the cross.³⁸ Another relic 1
 2 of Christ played an important role in Constantinople: the *Mandyllion*, a piece 2
 3 of cloth, which had reputedly touched the face of Jesus.³⁹ This relic was kept 3
 4 in the city of Edessa, until it was brought to Constantinople in 944.⁴⁰ The 4
 5 twelfth-century manuscript illustrating the *Chronicle* of John Skylitzes contains 5
 6 the image of the emperor welcoming the *Mandyllion*. The face of the emperor 6
 7 meets the face of Jesus imprinted on the piece of cloth. The image reveals that 7
 8 personal contact and touch was central in the gesture of devotion.⁴¹ 8

9 Byzantine pilgrimage sanctuaries provided visitors with opportunities to 9
 10 touch holiness. This could be in the form of oil burning in front of the tomb, 10
 11 *hnana*, 'holy dust' from the tomb, or *kerote*, a mixture of wax, oil and dust. 11
 12 At healing shrines, the sick, hoping for a cure, would anoint themselves with 12
 13 these sanctified medicines. Visitors would bring some oil home in little flasks, 13
 14 often called *ampullae*. Miracle stories emphasised the healing power of these 14
 15 products. The writer of saints Kosmas and Damian's miracles recalls stories 15
 16 of sick persons cured with *kerote*.⁴² Reading those texts, one could assume that 16
 17 access to the lamps was easy, but clerical mediation appeared to be in place 17
 18 in most sanctuaries.⁴³ Members of the clergy would welcome the sick and 18
 19 organise the distribution of oil and of *kerote*.⁴⁴ Some saints, called myroblites, 19
 20 specialised in giving perfumed oil with curative properties. Gregory of Tours 20
 21 mentions the oil given by Saint Andrew at Patras, as if it was full of spices.⁴⁵ 21
 22 For the saint's feast, it flowed out of the tomb and reached the middle of 22
 23 the church. Potions and unguents were made out of it. Cyprus had many 23
 24 _____ 24

25 ³⁸ Adomnan, *The Holy Places* (Bk. 3, 3, 5–12), translated in J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem* 25
 26 *Pilgrims before the Crusades* (Warminster, 1977), p. 202. 26

27 ³⁹ H.J.W. Drijvers, 'The Abgar Legend', in W. Schneemelcher (ed.), *New Testament* 27
 28 *Apocrypha, Vol. 1: Gospels and Related Writings* (London, 1991), pp. 492–500. 28

29 ⁴⁰ *Histoire de Yahya ibn-Saïd al-Antaki, Continueur de Saïd ibn-Bitriq*, ed. and tr. I. 29
 30 Kratchovskiy and A. Vasiliev, *I. Patrologia Orientalis* 18 (Paris, 1924), pp. 730–31; E. Patlagean, 30
 31 'L'entrée de la Sainte Face d'Edesse à Constantinople en 944', in A. Vauchez (ed.), *La religion* 31
 32 *civique à l'époque médiévale et moderne (Chrétienté et Islam)* (Rome, 1995), pp. 21–35; A.M. 32
 33 Dubarle, 'L'homélie de Grégoire le référendaire pour la réception de l'image d'Edesse', 33
 34 *Revue des études byzantines* 55 (1997), pp. 5–51; S.G. Engberg, 'Romanos Lekapenos and the 34
 35 Mandilion of Edessa', in Durand and Flusin (eds), *Byzance et les reliques du Christ*, pp. 123–42. 35

36 ⁴¹ See Manuscript Codex Bibliotheca Nacional de España Mss Graecus Vitr. 26-2 folio 36
 37 131r. 37

38 ⁴² L. Deubner, *Kosmas und Damian* (Leipzig, 1907), p. 232. 38

39 ⁴³ N.F. Marcos, *Los Thaumata di Sofronio* (Madrid, 1975). 39

40 ⁴⁴ B. Caseau, 'Parfum et guérison dans le christianisme ancien et byzantin: des huiles 39
 40 parfumées au *myron* des saints byzantins', in V. Boudon-Millot, B. Pouderon and Y.M. 40
 41 Blanchard (eds), *Les Pères de l'Eglise face à la science médicale de leur temps* (Paris, 2005), pp. 41
 42 141–91. 42

43 ⁴⁵ Gregory of Tours, *Liber in Gloria Martyrum* (30), ed. B. Krusch, *Monumenta Germaniae* 43
 44 *Historica* (Hannover, 1885), pp. 505–6. 44

1 myroblite saints. John the Almsgiver, patriarch of Alexandria buried in his 1
 2 native city of Amathonte, gave perfumed oil, bringing incorruptibility and 2
 3 eternal life to 'his children like a loving father'.⁴⁶ Many such miracles took 3
 4 place during the Arabic invasion of the island, as a testimony that the saints 4
 5 had not abandoned the faithful. Starting in the ninth and tenth centuries, two 5
 6 saints, Nicholas of Myra and Demetrius, were renowned for their gift of *myron*. 6
 7 After Thessalonika was taken in 904 and the church of Saint-Demetrius was 7
 8 partially destroyed, the cult was reorganised and the *myron* started to flow. 8
 9 John Staurakios, *chartophylax* of the church in the thirteenth century, mentions 9
 10 how the oil flowed out of the reliquary through tubes to reach the faithful.⁴⁷ 10
 11 In the miracles stories of Saint Eugenios of Trebizond, a monk recalls how he 11
 12 saw people take some of this holy perfumed oil, rub it on themselves, and take 12
 13 some home.⁴⁸ 13

14 In other churches, water was the means to convey the healing powers of the 14
 15 saints. Before the *myron* replaced it, the cult of Saint Demetrius included holy 15
 16 water.⁴⁹ Holy fountains were also frequent in sanctuaries of the Theotokos. 16
 17 The *hagiasma* of the Theotokos of Blachernai, which was a major church in 17
 18 the capital, attracted many people; and even when the church was destroyed, 18
 19 the fountain remained. Holy waters endured through the centuries and were 19
 20 frequented by Christians and Muslims. Close to Constantinople, however, the 20
 21 most famous sanctuary for healing waters was the monastery of the Theotokos 21
 22 of Pege.⁵⁰ The waters of a spring reputedly blessed by the Mother of God 22
 23 flowed inside the church, dated to the sixth century. Two compilations of 23
 24 miracles performed by the Theotokos of Pege, one dating to the tenth century 24
 25 and a second dating to the fourteenth century, have recently been studied.⁵¹ 25
 26 As is usual in miracle stories, it matters to the writer or compiler to underline 26
 27 _____ 27

28 ⁴⁶ Leontios of Neapolis, *Life of John the Almsgiver*, §60, ed. A.J. Festugière, with the 28
 29 collaboration of L. Ryden, *Léontios de Néapolis, Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, 29
 30 *édition commentée* (Paris, 1974), p. 409. 30

31 ⁴⁷ J. Staurakios, *Analecta de unguento*, in *S. Demetrii Martyris Acta*, J.-P. Migne, *Patrologia* 31
 32 *Graeca* 116, col. 1421 (1864); A. Grabar, 'Quelques reliquaires de saint Démétrios et le 32
 33 martyrium du saint à Salonique', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 5 (1950), pp. 3–28. 33

34 ⁴⁸ J.O. Rosenqvist, *The Hagiographic Dossier of St Eugenios of Trebizond in Codex Athous* 34
 35 *Dionysiou 154* (Uppsala, 1996), p. 45. 35

36 ⁴⁹ A. Mentzos, *Τό προσκύνημα τοῦ Ἁγίου Δημητρίου Θεσσαλονίκης στά βυζαντινά* 36
 37 *χρόνια. Εταιρεία τῶν φίλων τοῦ λαοῦ. Κέντρον ἐρεῦνης βυζαντιοῦ* (Athens, 1994), pp. 37
 38 120–65. 38

39 ⁵⁰ R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*. 1, *Le siège de Constantinople et* 39
 40 *le patriarcat œcuménique*. 3, *Les églises et les monastères* (Paris, 1969), pp. 223–8. 40

41 ⁵¹ S. Efthymiadis, 'Le monastère de la source à Constantinople et ses deux recueils de 41
 42 miracles. Entre hagiographie et patriographie', *Revue des Etudes Byzantines* 64–65 (2006–2007), 42
 43 pp. 283–309; A.-M. Talbot, 'The Anonymous *Miracula* of the Pege Shrine in Constantinople', 43
 44 *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002), pp. 222–8; A.-M. Talbot, 'Two Accounts of Miracles at the Pege Shrine 44
 in Constantinople', *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron, Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (Paris, 2002), pp. 605–15. 44

1 the wide influence of the sanctuary and how its fame reached all social groups 1
 2 from the humblest to that of the imperial family. In this case, however, a high 2
 3 percentage of miracles involved the aristocracy or the imperial family. Two 3
 4 types of healing methods took place near that *hagiasma*. First, mud could be 4
 5 made with the holy water and rubbed on the sick part of the body, following 5
 6 a method quite similar to miracles performed by Christ himself. Second, the 6
 7 water could be consumed to bring about good health. The miracle stories 7
 8 concern important members of the imperial family throughout Byzantine 8
 9 history, including the sister of Justinian's spouse Theodora, who was cured 9
 10 with mud; Empress Irene, healed of a haemorrhage after drinking the holy 10
 11 water; Zoe Karbonopsina, who was no longer sterile after benefiting from both 11
 12 water and mud; and later, in 1330, the sick Andronic III, who recovered after 12
 13 drinking the water. Some of the water was also used to bathe his forehead. The 13
 14 Russian pilgrims Ignatius of Smolensk and Zosimus saw the church, but in 14
 15 1547, when Pierre Gilles came to Constantinople, it was no longer standing.⁵² 15
 16 From the fourteenth century, the church was known by the name of Zoodochos 16
 17 Pege.⁵³ The numerous icons of the Theotokos Zoodochos depicting Mary in 17
 18 the middle of a beautiful fountain, and sick or possessed people healed and 18
 19 freed by tasting the water, are a proof of its enduring popularity.⁵⁴ The church 19
 20 was destroyed, but the reputation of the waters blessed by the Theotokos and 20
 21 infused with her healing powers remained. 21

22 As we can see from this example, experiencing the sacred was not only 22
 23 about touch but also about taste. Touch, smell and taste were combined in the 23
 24 case of holy oil used in potions, or that of 'edible icons', wax or clay images 24
 25 of the saints believed to have curative powers.⁵⁵ Naturally, tasting bread and 25
 26 wine was the most frequent experience in church, at least for members of the 26
 27 clergy, and took place at least once for all baptised Christians. Late Antique 27
 28 preachers invited the faithful to touch and taste the Eucharist.⁵⁶ Not unlike 28
 29 _____ 29
 30 _____ 30

31 ⁵² P. Gilles, *Itinéraires byzantins. Introduction, traduction du latin et notes de Jean-Pierre* 31
 32 *Grégois* (Paris, 2007), p. 440. 32

33 ⁵³ A.-M. Talbot, 'Epigrams of Manuel Philes on the Theotokos tes Peges and its Art', 33
 34 *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 48 (1994), pp. 135–65, esp. 136; Talbot, 'Two Accounts of Miracles', p. 34
 35 609. 35

36 ⁵⁴ N. Teteriatnikov, 'The Image of the Virgin Zoodochos Pege: Two Questions 36
 37 Concerning its Origin', in M. Vassilaki (ed.), *Images of the Mother of God: Perceptions of the* 37
 38 *Theotokos in Byzantium* (Aldershot, 2005), pp. 225–38. 38

39 ⁵⁵ G. Vikan, 'Ruminations on Edible Icons: Originals and Copies in the Art of 39
 40 Byzantium', *Studies in the History of Art* 20 (1989), pp. 47–59, reprinted in Vikan (ed.), *Sacred* 40
 41 *Images*. 41

42 ⁵⁶ Preachers had to address the question of the taste of the Eucharist: it still tasted 42
 43 like bread and wine – see G. Frank, 'L'eucharistie et la mémoire sensorielle selon Jean 42
 44 Chrysostome', in N. Bériou, B. Caseau and D. Rigaux (eds), *Pratiques de l'eucharistie dans les* 43
 44 *EÉglises d'Orient et d'Occident (Antiquité et Moyen AÂge)* (Paris, 2009), pp. 765–78. 44

1 putting one's hands on the reliquary, but with even greater awe, touching the 1
 2 consecrated bread amounted to touching the body of Christ. Cyril of Jerusalem 2
 3 recommended that Christians appreciate the contact of their hands with the 3
 4 consecrated parcel holding Christ. He also told them to extend the benefit of 4
 5 this contact to the other senses, the eyes in particular.⁵⁷ The Church Fathers of 5
 6 this period emphasised this personal contact and this proximity with Christ 6
 7 that communion allowed. Theodore of Mopsuestia (d.428), Narsai (fifth 7
 8 century) and Cyrus of Edessa (sixth century) advised the faithful to kiss the 8
 9 Eucharistic bread before eating it.⁵⁸ Kissing the bread while acknowledging 9
 10 the presence of Christ in one's hands was both a gesture of devotion and 10
 11 one of purification of the mouth. Many of the Byzantines did not dare take 11
 12 communion with too many sins tarnishing their souls. They considered it risky 12
 13 for their salvation, so instead, they preferred to take blessed bread.⁵⁹ Clerical 13
 14 mediation transformed gifts of food into a sacrificial offering. In the fourth- 14
 15 century compilation known as the *Apostolic Constitutions*, Christians were 15
 16 encouraged to give first fruits of wheat, wine, oil and fruits, and they were 16
 17 told that God would bless their fields and bring prosperity to their families.⁶⁰ 17
 18 We hear of cheese, olives and wine brought to churches in the early centuries 18
 19 of the Byzantine Empire, but the most commonly offered food was bread. In 19
 20 cities such as Alexandria or Aphrodito, the wealthy had flour sent to bakers 20
 21 with orders to deliver bread to churches.⁶¹ Only a small amount of this bread 21
 22 was consecrated on the altar. Eventually only bread prepared by clerical hands 22
 23 or under clerical supervision was taken for consecration. Yet all the bread 23
 24 brought by the faithful was redistributed, mostly to members of the clergy, 24
 25 to the poor registered as beneficiaries, and as *antidoron*, blessed bread offered 25
 26 at the end of the liturgy. The eulogia breads were often marked with crosses 26
 27 _____ 27
 28 _____ 28
 29 ⁵⁷ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Mystagogical Catecheses* (5.22), translated in L.P. McCauley and A. 29
 30 Stephenson, *The Works of Saint Cyril of Jerusalem* (Washington DC, 1970). 30
 31 ⁵⁸ Theodore of Mopsuestia, *IIe homélie sur la messe* (27–28), *Les Homélie catéchétiques* 31
 32 *de Théodore de Mopsueste. Reproduction phototypique du Ms. Mingana Syr. 561*, translation, 32
 33 introduction and index by R. Tonneau, in collaboration with R. Devreesse (Vatican City, 33
 34 1949), pp. 577–9; Narsai, homily 17, tr. J. Armitage Robinson, *The Liturgical Homilies of* 34
 35 *Narsai* (Cambridge, 1909), p. 29; *Six Explanations of the Liturgical Feasts by Cyrus of Edessa,* 35
 36 *An East Syrian Theologian of the Mid Sixth Century*, tr. W.F. Macomber, *Corpus Scriptorum* 36
 37 *Christianorum Orientalium* 356, Scr. Syri 156 (Louvain, 1974), p. 18. 37
 38 ⁵⁹ B. Caseau, 'Sancta sanctis. Normes et gestes de la communion entre Antiquité et 38
 39 haut-Moyen Âge', in Bériou, Caseau and Rigaux (eds), *Pratiques de l'eucharistie*, pp. 371–420. 39
 40 ⁶⁰ *Apostolic Constitutions* (II, 34, 5) ed. and tr. Metzger, *Les Constitutions apostoliques*, pp. 40
 41 256–7. 41
 42 ⁶¹ A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides.* 42
 43 *L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris, 2001), p. 168; E. Wipszycka, *Les* 43
 44 *ressources et les activités économiques des églises en Égypte du IV^e au VIII^e siècle* (Brussels, 1972), 44
 pp. 7–9.



Figure 4.5 A bread stamp showing a cross and a blessing for a family reading: 'Eulogia eu ef hmas ke epi ta tekna hmvn' and 'Eulogia ku ef hmas ke epi ta tekna hmwn' (author's photograph)

or with religious scenes⁶² (Fig. 4.5). They had religious value as blessed bread, conveying some form of communion with Christ and calling on God's blessing

Sanctification by contact was an extremely important part of the early Byzantine religious experience. It remained an important feature of later Byzantine culture, but underwent significant changes. The communion experience changed at the end of Late Antiquity. The Byzantines did not feel that their hands were pure enough to hold the body of Christ any longer and they replaced communion in the hand by communion with a spoon.⁶³ The sensory participation of the faithful in the whole Eucharistic ritual diminished: the eventual building of an iconostasis deprived them of seeing what was taking place on the altar, while contact with the body of Christ was reduced with the abandonment of hand communion. They could still hear the invitation 'Ta Hagia tois hagiois' (the holy things for the holy people), but no longer the prayers of consecration.⁶⁴ Participation in the communion ritual became quite

⁶² G. Galavaris, *Bread and the Liturgy: The Symbolism of Early Christian and Byzantine Bread Stamps* (Madison, WI, 1970).

⁶³ B. Caseau, 'L'abandon de la communion dans la main (IV^e-XII^e s.)', *Mélanges Gilbert Dagron, Travaux et Mémoires* 14 (Paris, 2002), pp. 79-94.

⁶⁴ R.F. Taft, "'Holy Things for the Saints': The Ancient Call to Communion and its Response', in G. Austen (ed.), *Fountain of Life: In Memory of Niels K. Rasmussen, O.P.*, NPM Studies in Church Music and Liturgy (Washington DC, 1991), pp. 87-102; B. Caseau, 44

1 rare for most laypeople.⁶⁵ Many Christians related to the Eucharist offering in 1
 2 another way, by giving of bread and wine and by seeing, with eyes of faith, 2
 3 the transformation of the elements on the altar (or *prosphora*) into the Body and 3
 4 Blood of Christ, at least when, during the high middle ages, chancel barriers 4
 5 around the altar area did not block the view.⁶⁶ Afterwards, when the iconostasis 5
 6 isolated the sanctuary from the nave, their attention was often more centred on 6
 7 the procession of the gifts, before the consecration.⁶⁷ 7

8 Other forms of participation in the liturgical rituals or acknowledgement 8
 9 of the church as a sacred space also took precedence. Touching and kissing the 9
 10 icons or the reliquaries became common gestures of sanctification.⁶⁸ The horos 10
 11 of the Council of Nicaea II in 787, decided that it was proper and good to give 11
 12 icons kisses and *proskynesis*.⁶⁹ After 843, icons were granted a specific function 12
 13 in church ritual: they were offered to the faithful for veneration and kissed 13
 14 both by the priest and by the worshippers.⁷⁰ Portable icons were changed in 14
 15 accordance with the church calendar and became part of the liturgy. Touching 15
 16 and kissing icons became a mark of the Byzantine religious culture. Pilgrimages 16
 17 and visits to churches included gestures of veneration towards icons and 17
 18 relics. Ignatius of Smolensk recalls his moves while visiting the Hagia Sophia 18
 19 in 1389: 'We kissed the table on which the Relics of the Passion of Christ are 19
 20 placed, and the [the body of] St. Arsenius the Patriarch and the table at which 20
 21 Abraham welcomed Christ manifest in Trinity, as well as the iron pallet on 21
 22 which Christ's martyrs were burned'.⁷¹ 22

23 To these personal gestures of devotion towards objects, one should add 23
 24 ritual kisses given to people. The kiss of peace was important in the early 24
 25 church to create a family bond between the full members of the community.⁷² 25
 26 26

27 _____ 27
 28 'L'Eucharistie au centre de la vie religieuse des communautés chrétiennes (fin 4^e s. – 10^e s.)', 28
 29 in P. Brouard (ed.), *Eucharistia* (Paris, 2002), pp. 125–43. 29

30 ⁶⁵ R. Taft, 'The Decline of Communion in Byzantium and the Distancing of the 30
 31 Congregation from the Liturgical Action: Cause, Effect, or Neither?', in S.E.J. Gerstel (ed.), 31
 32 *Thresholds of the Sacred: Architectural, Art Historical, Liturgical and Theological Perspectives on* 32
 33 *Religious Screens, East and West*, Dumbarton Oaks Studies (Washington DC, 2006), pp. 27–50. 33

34 ⁶⁶ Taft, 'The Decline of Communion in Byzantium', p. 38; also S.E.J. Gerstel, 'An 34
 35 Alternate View of the Late Byzantine Sanctuary Screen', in Gerstel, *Thresholds of the Sacred*, 35
 36 pp. 135–161, at p. 135. 36

37 ⁶⁷ C. Walter, 'The Origins of the Iconostasis', *Eastern Church Review* 3 (1971), pp. 251–67. 37

38 ⁶⁸ L. Gougaud, 'Baiser', *Dictionnaire de spiritualité, ascétique et mystique*, vol. 1 (Paris, 38
 1937), pp. 1203–4. 38

39 ⁶⁹ D.J. Sahas, *Icon and Logos: Sources in Eighth-century Iconoclasm* (Toronto, 1986/88). 39

40 ⁷⁰ Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, p. 172. 40

41 ⁷¹ G. Majeska, *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries* 41
 42 (Washington DC, 1984), p. 92 42

43 ⁷² M. Penn, 'Performing Family: Ritual Kissing and the Construction of Early Christian 43
 44 Kinship', *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.2 (2002), pp. 151–74. 44

1 The *Apostolic Constitutions* recall the order given by the deacon: ‘Greet one 1
 2 another with a holy kiss’ – and the members of the clergy kiss the bishop, the 2
 3 laymen kiss the laymen, and the laywomen kiss the laywomen.⁷³ The Byzantine 3
 4 tradition, explains R. Taft, was to exchange the peace among members of the 4
 5 same rank. It seems that the kiss of peace stopped being exchanged between 5
 6 laypeople at some point during the middle ages, after the eleventh century. 6
 7 By the time of Philotheos Kokkinos, patriarch of Constantinople during 1353– 7
 8 54 and from 1364 to 1376, only members of the clergy exchanged the kiss of 8
 9 peace.⁷⁴ The *Book of Ceremonies* lists the objects kissed by the emperor when he 9
 10 came to church and mentions that a kiss was exchanged by the patriarch and 10
 11 the emperor before the liturgy, or at different moments, such as after lunch. For 11
 12 the emperor, the kiss of peace was extremely ritualised. Here again the *Book of* 12
 13 *Ceremonies* mentions the ideal order that should be followed: ‘The sovereigns, 13
 14 standing outside the chancel, give the kiss first of all to the patriarch, then 14
 15 after him to the synkellos, all the metropolitans and archbishops, and to the 15
 16 protopope of the Great Church, and to the dignitaries of the patriarch ... then 16
 17 to all those of the senate, all of whom the master of ceremonies leads by the 17
 18 hand’.⁷⁵ This tradition is no longer mentioned by the *De Officiis* of Pseudo- 18
 19 Kodinos in the fourteenth century. Kissing the hand of the priest (bishop or 19
 20 patriarch) was such an important gesture that it is depicted on late medieval 20
 21 paintings of the communion of the Apostles. The apostle kisses Jesus’ hand, at 21
 22 the time he receives the bread from him.⁷⁶ Also, kissing objects increased both 22
 23 during the liturgy and as a form of personal devotion. 23

24 These are just a few examples of the importance of touch in Byzantine 24
 25 religious rituals. The Late Antique and Byzantine Christians wished to establish 25
 26 a personal contact with the building and its objects, as well as with the people. 26
 27 These numerous examples of gestures of devotion call for a revision of our 27
 28 too-often audio or visual-centred understanding of the religious experience of 28
 29 Byzantine worshippers. Instead of focusing on the gaze or on the sounds and 29
 30 perfumes, this paper has attempted to draw attention to two of the senses that 30
 31 are often neglected in the accounts of Byzantine aesthetics, but that played an 31
 32 important role in experiencing liturgies and devotions: touch and taste. 32

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 36 ⁷³ *Apostolic Constitutions* (VIII, 1, 7), ed. and tr. Metzger, *Les Constitutions apostoliques*,
 37 pp. 174–5.

38 ⁷⁴ Taft, *The Great Entrance*, pp. 395–6.

39 ⁷⁵ Constantin Porphyrogénète, *Le Livre des cérémonies* (I, 1), ed. and tr. A. Vogt (Paris,
 40 1967), p. 13; translated in R. Taft, *Through their Own Eyes: Liturgy as the Byzantines Saw it*
 41 (Berkeley, CA, 2006), p. 88.

42 ⁷⁶ K.Ch. Felmy, ‘Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion in the Eastern
 43 Orthodox Churches’, in Ch. Caspers, G. Lukken and G. Rouwhorst (eds), *Bread of Heaven.*
 44 *Customs and Practices Surrounding Holy Communion: Essays in the History of Liturgy and Culture*
 (Kampen, 1995), pp. 41–59.

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