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► **To cite this version:**

Vincent Debiais. Echoes and Silences of Liturgy: Liturgical Inscriptions and the Temporality of Medieval Rituals. Bissera V. Pentcheva. Icons of Sound. Voice, Architecture, and Imagination in Medieval Art, Routledge, pp.116-134, 2020, Music and Visual Culture, 9780367440879. halshs-03135038

**HAL Id: halshs-03135038**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-03135038>**

Submitted on 7 Dec 2023

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## Echoes and Silences of Liturgy:

### Liturgical Inscriptions and the Temporality of Medieval Rituals

#### Vincent Debiais

On the portal of the western facade of the Saint Peter church in Usson-du-Poitou, a short distance south of Poitiers, France, one reads a very short inscription engraved in irregular capital letters under the torso of a lion passant, roughly carved in high relief (Fig. 1).<sup>1</sup> The inscription is a single word, the Latin verb *LETARE* (for *laetare*) in the imperative, “Rejoice!” Placed on the west door and dated to the eleventh century, the lion and its inscription and a griffin are among the few sculpted elements of this building. The medieval church was renovated in the fourteenth century.

These two Romanesque figures on the west facade—the lion and the griffin—are associated with Christ, expressing his divinely human nature and his Resurrection. The lion is frequently an image in portals of contemporary eleventh- and twelfth-century buildings in the west of France, where it is sometimes accompanied by an inscription. In the basilica of Saint-Seurin in Bordeaux (twelfth century), the lion carved on a capital at the south side of the porch shows the word *leo* on its back.<sup>2</sup> In the church of Saint-Porchaire in Poitiers (twelfth century), one of the capitals on the north side of the portal of the porch tower shows two lions rampant facing each other on either side of the inscription *leones*.<sup>3</sup>

The text in Usson-du-Poitou, however, differs from these examples because it does not identify the figure. This is all the more surprising, because the inscribed lions in Poitiers and Bordeaux are far more recognizable than the one in Usson. In any case, if *laetare* should be considered as an identification, it is neither through the use of a name nor thanks to a word

giving an immediate sense of what has been carved and, therefore, the text-image combination operates on a different modality than designation.<sup>4</sup>

The verb *laetare* translates an emotion, that of joy and relief.<sup>5</sup> The word conveys the kind of emotion expressed in the book of Zephaniah 3:14–15: “Sing, O daughter of Zion; shout, O Israel; be glad and rejoice with all the heart, O daughter of Jerusalem. The Lord, hath taken away thy judgments, he hath cast out thine enemy: the king of Israel, even the Lord, is in the midst of thee: thou shalt not see evil anymore.”<sup>6</sup> These lines reveal Israel’s happiness for the presence of God among his people and echo the astride figures of the lion and the griffin carved on the facades of the churches from Usson-du-Poitou, Bordeaux, and Poitiers, for the lion and the griffin identify Christ’s Resurrection.<sup>7</sup> Christ, dead and alive, man and God, now stands risen among his own. One finds the same idea in the conclusion to the book of Isaiah 66:10–11: “Rejoice with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all you that love her: rejoice for joy with her, all you that mourn for her: that you may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations; that you may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.” Both texts from the Old Testament inspire the introit, the chant sung during the entrance procession of the priest and his assistants at the beginning of the Mass of the fourth Sunday of Lent. The text for this chant reads: “Rejoice, Jerusalem. Might all who like him gather. Rejoice with happiness, who you were sad. You can jump up with joy and get satisfied with the milk of consolation given to you.”<sup>8</sup> The content of the readings, psalm, and chants of the liturgy of this day marks a suspension in the Easter penitential preparation and already announces Christ’s Resurrection, moving from the dark, deep announcement of his death towards a bright and hopeful anticipation of His new life.<sup>9</sup>

The word *laetare* therefore responds perfectly to both the lion sculpture and to its location on the access door to the church; here the introit—this brief chant of praise sung at the beginning of the Mass by the choir—*Laetare* was performed during the entrance rite.<sup>10</sup>

The transitional aspect of the procession and the fleeting nature of the liturgical chant merge with the stability and permanence of epigraphic writing. The lion, this figure of the Resurrection, now resonates with the liturgical *jubilatio* and is transformed into an image of sound. Far from explaining anything about the animal that is represented here, the inscription enriches the meaning of the sculpture and instills it with an imagined chanting voice.

In Usson-du-Poitou, the abbreviation of the introit to just its incipit *LAETARE* invites the faithful who enter the temple to recall the performance of the liturgical chant, to summon its content, meaning, and effect. The incised word impels the viewer to supply the rest of the text chanted in this specific Lenten introit and thus to perceive the sculpture through the aural lens of the introit. The inscription therefore functions simultaneously as a trace of the song, as a memory device to help the visitor recall the complete introit of the feast and its prototypes in the Old Testament, and finally as a guide to the proclamation of the Easter mystery. The encounter between text and image encapsulates the liturgical voice aimed at dilating time. The short “laetare” becomes an evocation and a turning-point leading to a spiritual insight.<sup>11</sup>

This essay proposes to analyze the role of epigraphy in medieval churches, focusing on the example at Usson-du-Poitou. Using only a few letters, an inscription can activate the images and the record of the liturgical rite. The analysis will first reveal the links between medieval inscriptions and ritual texts, and will then consider the effects of these inscriptions in sustaining the permanence of the liturgy in the memory of a voice, a song, and the silence of the church.

### **Inscriptions and Liturgy**

The links between epigraphic practices and liturgy have been emphasized in two main directions: 1) the content of the texts revealed as epigraphic quotations from liturgical texts in funerary or dedicatory inscriptions; and 2) the liturgical contexts revealed in inscriptions on

liturgical objects and buildings.<sup>12</sup> This co-textual / contextual presentation does not, however, transform the document into a liturgical inscription because the epigraphic gestures leading to the installation of an inscribed stone are never mentioned in the regulation of rituals. Some inscriptions could possibly be considered “liturgical” if they are to be understood as monumental, fixed expressions of ephemeral liturgical gestures. This is the case in tracing the Latin and Greek alphabets on sand or ashes during the ceremony of dedication of the church;<sup>13</sup> or the inscription of a prayer in the incipit *Ave Maria*, for example, on an episcopal staff kept in the museum of Angoulême;<sup>14</sup> or the specification of the required number of candles for the liturgical celebration inscribed in Cheffes;<sup>15</sup> or the list of dates in the Easter calendar written on the side of one of the altars of Saint-Étienne in Périgueux.<sup>16</sup> The inscriptions on these objects and spaces refer to “something liturgical,” but they are certainly not endowed with any sacramental role. Nevertheless, this fact does not mean that they do not have agency or that they could not participate in the staging of a ritual.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the nature and conditions of this activation do not rely only on the content or context of “liturgical” inscriptions. In Usson-du-Poitou, for example, the image, location, inscription, and antiphon interact and conjure the memory of the performance of introit and with it, the symbolism of Lenten liturgy.

Not all monumental epigrams function in this way. One should distinguish the liturgical type at Usson-du-Poitou from the many funeral epitaphs. The latter certainly evoke words or sentences pronounced during the funeral mass or the anniversary celebration, and they ask for prayers for the salvation of the soul of the deceased, but they do not seek to fix the liturgy in its duration within the inscribed object.<sup>18</sup>

Quotations from the ritual of dedication of churches offer another example; they represent a relatively frequent type of inscription.<sup>19</sup> They demonstrate graphically the transformation of the building made of stones into God’s house. They thus produce a local

and alphabetical imprint of the gestures but especially the words pronounced during this ceremony. They are less part of the sacramental effect of the rite than its trace and memory. They emphasize the material and spiritual changes brought about by the dedication rite, and translate, through the use of sensible signs, the newly inaugurated sacredness into the structure of the building.<sup>20</sup>

In this panorama of liturgical inscriptions, two constants must be remembered. First is the fact that the emphasis placed in epigraphic texts on liturgical voice, whether spoken by the priest, recited by the cantor, or chanted by the choir. By the choice of words and their material display, epigraphic actions produce in stone or metal a sonorous echo of the ceremony. The inscription contains the entire textual and sensible load of this vocal performance.<sup>21</sup> Second, the vocal experiences are paired with the images on the objects both inside and outside the building. The voice is thus embodied in a *figura* and participates in the agency of the liturgical object.

### **The Angel and the Trope**

Images and texts act in a liturgical context according to what one might call a hyperbolic operation, where both media elaborate on each other's content and produce an expanded presence and meaning of signs. This is the very principle of liturgy; its aim is to reiterate mysteries in the human time-space framework.<sup>22</sup> Such a conception discards all phenomena of redundancy or non-essentials. Visual signs, sounds, and movements merge within the ritual, and each of these actions gives the others an exponential value and meaning.<sup>23</sup> In the act of consecration during the Mass, for example, Christ's words repeated by the priest do not only accompany the actions of breaking the bread or lifting the host; they shape the gestures as much as the gestures shape the words. The gathering on the altar of voices and movements of

the priest and of Christ ensure both the commemoration of the Eucharistic sacrifice and the hyper-actuality of the sacrament.<sup>24</sup>

A capital in the sanctuary of the canon church of Chauvigny (Vienne) can serve as an example of such a “hyperbolic” object. Known as the “Announcement to the Shepherds” capital, this stone carving has a complex composition that mixes several themes.<sup>25</sup> On the side facing the ambulatory, we see the Archangel Michael weighing souls by means of a balance scale (Fig. 2). To his left, the devil, identified as “*Diabolus*,” pulls down on one of the trays of the scale. He is followed by seated figure, a prophet mourning the fate of Babylon (Fig. 3). The inscription behind him further emphasizes his lament, for it reads “*Babilonia deserta*,” “the deserted Babylon.” By turning back to the Archangel and continuing around the other side of the capital, the cause for this evil is revealed: it is the prostitute of Babylon (Fig. 4). She allures sinners with her long hair, a billowing dress, and elegant, flowing sleeves. She further seduces the viewer by proffering a drinking cup and a perfume vial, both both of which represent the luxuries that Christians encountered in the pleasure palaces of the Islamic Taifa kings of the Iberian Peninsula during the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>26</sup> An inscription above identifies her as “*Magna Meretrix Babilonia*,” “the great prostitute of Babylon.” To her left stands a shepherd, with the inscription “*pastor bonus*,” “good shepherd.” His figure leads the viewer around the capital, back to the good and divine. Here the Archangel Gabriel, with raised hands and spread-open wings, greets the viewer with the Latin inscription “*Dixit gloria in excelsis deo*,” “[he] said ‘Glory to God in the highest’” (Luke 2:14) (Fig. 5). Gabriel is flanked on his left by another shepherd, who is identified with a text above him as “*pastores*,” “shepherds.”

Narrative themes overlap from one capital face to another, either by the interstitial position of the figures in the corners or through the accompanying inscriptions. These images can be read as expressing the tension between good and evil. The side of the capital that faces

the sanctuary could be inserted into the cycle of Christ's childhood, between the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the presentation of Jesus in the temple, which are represented on another capital further to the east.<sup>27</sup> The words "*dixit Gloria in excelsis Deo*" (Luke 2:14) thus become narrative and make the Annunciation to the Shepherds resound with the archangel's words after Christ's birth. Although none of these explanations contradict the Chauvigny display, would they in fact reveal the complexity of the textual and visual composition? This capital presents images of good and evil: the angel and the shepherd oppose the prostitute and the devil. But other figures do not entirely fit with such a contrast: In which camp should we place the mourning prophet and the praying soul? Moreover, the arrangement of these themes on a single capital remains difficult to understand, unless we consider it part of a complex system where—according to the hyperbolic process of meaning—images, inscriptions, and their references to liturgical texts and biblical narratives merge and elaborate on each other's content.

In this capital, the association of the themes does not seem to be the product of a translation into images of a particular and identifiable text that would mingle the Old Testament and the apocalyptic figure of Babylon, the Good Shepherd, the weighing of souls, and the Annunciation to the Shepherds. To get a glimpse of the meaning of this capital, one should focus on the sentence engraved in this last scene, the one that faces the sanctuary: "*Dixit gloria in excelsis Deo.*" This particular combination of text and image is new. The inscription does not simply quote the Gospel text but prefaces it with the narrator's voice *dixit* or "said." It quotes the *Gloria* sung at the beginning of Mass, which however does not use the verb *dixit*.<sup>28</sup> The Latin verb *dicere* is used in the present tense in the text of the sacramentary to describe the words and gestures of the officiant. Similarly, the same gestures are pictorialized in the figure of the angel, especially his extended arms, which mirror the gesture of the priest. Why did the patron, the designer, or the artist who carved this inscription choose



the past tense in Chauvigny? The angel obviously “said” the *Gloria incipit* in the Annunciation to the Shepherds, but it does not explain why the word has been copied onto the capital. In medieval images, speech acts and sentences have no introductory words but are instead expressed in present tense in order to emphasize the actuality of the sound performed within the image. The capital in Chauvigny, therefore, displays an upheaval of time in this scene where the narrative sequence is broken. The inscription “*pastor bonus*” isolates one of the shepherds and transforms him into a figure of Christ attending the announcement of His own birth. Babylon is at the same moment *meretrix* and *deserta*, “whore” and “abandoned.” The announcements occurring on the capital are at the same time both present and past. Each element of the composition brings new meanings to the general composition, creating an expanded network of significations and references which allows, in a back-and-forth process, a new understanding of all the individual features on the capital.

This upheaval of the events represented here reflects on the text of the *Gloria*, which combines two gospel quotations, Luke 2:14 and Luke 19:38, into a new praise.<sup>29</sup> By choosing the hymn that condenses the text of the announcement to the shepherds and the acclamations of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the inscription transforms the image: it does not only show a joyful announcement of Christ’s birth but already evokes the dramatic announcement of His sacrifice, repeated by the priest on the altar, where he faces the angel. There is thus no simple typological relationship between the different images that seem, on the contrary, woven into a complex network of references and meanings around the angelic voice.

As a result, the possible echoes between the capital and the Eucharistic liturgy are neither direct nor literal. In its engagement with the ongoing liturgy and its own temporality, actors, and ritual indications, this polyphonic sculpture is a visual and sonorous agent of Chauvigny liturgical display more than a mere translation of the ritual into sculpture.<sup>30</sup> As Bissera Pentcheva has shown, inscriptions on icons and objects in the orthodox tradition

elaborate the meaning of the ceremony and embed the viewer in the memory of the sensorial experience of the liturgical moment. These inscriptions do not refer explicitly to a specific chant by the choir or to a gesture made by a priest, but to a system of images and references built throughout the active participation in the ritual and its sensorial display.<sup>31</sup> In that sense, the inscription does not quote the liturgical text verbatim. Instead, it elaborates upon it; intertwining images and liturgy to produce a global experience of the ritual where visual signs expand on what is heard and seen in the sanctuary.

The capital in Chauvigny thus shares this method of composition with liturgical poetry, and especially with the tropes for the *Gloria*. Tropes are new poetic and musical compositions that expand the envelope of the traditional Latin chants. Tropes proceed, follow, or appear in between the traditional chants, just as the images and inscriptions do on the capital.<sup>32</sup> The coexistence of the text of the *Gloria* and its poetic elaboration within the trope constitutes the liturgical milieu for original thematic associations relating the main sentences of the hymn with theological or poetic evocations on the Incarnation, the Eucharist, or the Passion.<sup>33</sup> This is exactly what happens on the capital, where the combination of texts and images goes far beyond bilateral typology and linear narrativity.<sup>34</sup> Moreover, tropes often use temporal offsets, as seen in Chauvigny, to link the sentences of the *Gloria* to the past (to the prophets' announcement of the Messiah or Old Testament prefigurations of Christ's Glory) or to the future (the Last Judgment or the Adoration of the Lamb, for example). Because they gather all these textual elements within a single chant, the tropes of the *Gloria* act as a sonorous synthesis of the entire liturgical display.

With this analogy, I do not mean to suggest that the choice of scenes, figures, and inscriptions in Chauvigny results from a particular poetic piece. Such a phenomenon has not been attested, apart from the explicit quotation of hymns in epigraphic documents.<sup>35</sup> It does mean, however, that similar mechanisms of association and composition can be found both in

complex images and in some tropes of the *Gloria*.<sup>36</sup> The trope *Christe salus mundi* for Easter Sunday evokes for example the pastor keeping his sheep close by.<sup>37</sup> The trope *Rerum creator*, for the same feast combines, the figures of the lamb, the shepherd, and the choir of archangels.<sup>38</sup> The trope *Pax sempiterna* for Christmas celebrates the choir of angels and the announcement of Christ's birth, and also refers to Mary's virginal maternity.<sup>39</sup> We can link this material to another capital above the altar. The text inscribed at the top of the capital does not seek to record the liturgical performance but rather to trigger, either in its creator or its viewer, a visual configuration of what the liturgical choice and chant produce at the moment the ritual unfolds. The acclamation *Gloria in excelsis Deo* is not that of the angel but belongs instead to liturgical experience itself, at the same time both fleeting and perennial.

Such a conception of liturgical inscriptions does not eliminate a possible narrative dimension of the scenes of Christ's childhood, nor the formal opposition between good and evil. The epigraphic choice, however, enriches the composition with a sonorous and active dimension, which inserts the object in the prolonged effects of sacramentality. This voice is there constantly, and the praise never stops. It becomes incarnate during the ritual in the bodies of the priest and the choir, while the capital continues to exist as a sonorous and acting icon.

### **In the Presence of the Image**

At Chauvigny, as in Usson-de-Poitou, the liturgical voice and its overtones are rooted in a visual environment. The images of the lion and the angel mediate the text and voice from the antiphon and the hymn in a tension between the actual moment of performance, the permanent trace left in the stone, and its persistent actuality in every instance of the corresponding liturgical gestures and actions.<sup>40</sup>

The baptismal font of Liège, dated to the early twelfth century, presents a synthesis of these three timeframes (Fig. 6).<sup>41</sup> The baptismal font performs its liturgical function in the administration of the sacrament of baptism and counts among the material and immaterial elements operating the sacramental actions of purification and incorporation into the Christian community. The complex meaning of baptism is stressed in two inscriptions, located on the upper and lower rims of the tank, which associate the object with the fountain of life and the rite with receiving of the Holy Spirit. The inscription on the upper edge consists of four segments that read: 1. “John’s doctrine prepares the people’s heart for the Lord.” 2. “He purifies them, and then shows how he takes away the crimes of the world.” 3. “The Father’s voice says: ‘Here He is.’ A man purifies Him, and the Spirit fills Him.” 4. “Here is the fountain of faith; Peter purifies these, John purifies those.”<sup>42</sup> On the lower edge, another inscription identifies the ox-shaped supports of the font with the “shepherds” performing the baptismal rite: “The condition of the shepherds is signified by the twelve oxen. Their apostolic life, full of grace, and their high charge recommend what they are. Through their ministry, citizens are purified, and the flow of this river rejoices the Holy city.”<sup>43</sup> The upper inscription is divided into four sequences that correspond to the four episodes figured on the tank: John the Baptist’s preaching; a first baptismal rite; Christ’s baptism; and the baptisms of Cornelius and Crato. The four texts quote words and formulae from the Gospels, but they seem to be inspired by liturgical pieces, especially the inscription above the scene of Christ’s baptism: *Vox patris hic ait est lavat hunc homo spiritus implet* (“The Father’s voice says: ‘Here He is.’ A man purifies Him, and the Spirit fills Him”). The construction of the *titulus* is complex due to the metric sequence and the translation is not easy. Intermingling *hic*, *ait*, and *est* creates an ambiguity. I would suggest about what *est hic* is in the image. However, it seems possible to link this *titulus* to the response of the Epiphany Mass *Hodie in Jordano*: “Today, after the Lord’s baptism in the Jordan, [the] Heavens have opened and, like a dove,

the Spirit remained over Him, and the Father's voice resounded: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am pleased'."<sup>44</sup> In this scene, the image of Christ's baptism corresponds to the biblical narrative, but the visual elements are much more in relation with the text of the response, as it is only evoked in the upper inscription. In that sense, the epigraphic display is used on a path towards new images brought into the visual discourse, thanks to the elaboration of poetry and liturgical chant.

In the composition of *tituli* commenting on medieval images, the phenomena of exact quotations are generally very rare, as is also the case for antiphons and responsories. On the baptismal font of Liège, for example, inscriptions quoting the Bible are written in the core of the images and are integrated into the narrative, without any theological or liturgical distance in relation to the content of the scenes. All the texts incised on this tank designate the human figures with their names, either individually or collectively. They also materialize elements of dialogues between the characters, fixing the "narrative voices" that are superimposed both on the "liturgical voices" evoked in the inscriptions on the edges and on the actual liturgical voices performed during the administration of the sacrament of baptism. In the scene of Christ's baptism, one can thus both hear and see John the Baptist's voice ("I need to be baptized by you, and you come to me"<sup>45</sup>) and the Father's voice, coming from Heaven ("This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased").<sup>46</sup> The epigraphic indication above John the Baptist, "*Johannes Baptista Domini*," not only functions as a label identifying the figure but also as the dative form *Domini*, "to the Lord," already contains and anticipates the sound dimension of the encounter between Christ and John. The word *Domini* ("to the Lord") takes shape as a liturgical gesture at the center of the image (John gives baptism "to the Lord"). On the font, the image figuring Christ's baptism is at the crossroad of several speech acts. It first displays the human and divine words of the biblical narrative. It also participates in the sonorous effect of the chant invoked by the inscription on the font's upper edge. Finally, it

echoes the words of the baptismal ritual that the priest pronounces over the font during the ceremony. Therefore this liturgical object articulates a complex network of words displayed in diverse media that elaborate on the meaning and effect of the baptismal rite.

Two scenes in the Liège font present the voice sounding in the baptismal liturgy. The first scene shows John the Baptist at the River Jordan with an inscription between him and Christ (“I baptize you with water, but He is coming, the One who is stronger than I am”), quoting different passages of the synoptic gospels.<sup>47</sup> The second scene represents John the Evangelist baptizing Craton with an epigraphic text quoting verbatim the sacramental words pronounced by the priest during the ceremony above the font: “I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.”<sup>48</sup> This scene shows an institutionalized ceremony, “ritualized” from the founding event of Christ’s baptism. John’s words are no longer pieces of a dialogue but a regulated formula producing a sacramental effect. This is why the text has been inscribed not only on the tank but also on the visual device of the book, held open in the hands of the officiant (Fig. 7). In the scene immediately adjacent, showing Cornelius’s baptism, the visual display of writing is completely different. The text pronounced by Peter, who asked for Cornelius’s baptism, does not form part of the ritual. It is written on an open scroll held by Peter and placed before Cornelius (Fig. 8). Peter’s hands are not in contact with the man being baptized. His clothes, unlike John’s, show no ornament, which might be interpreted as the visual sign for a liturgical role. The scroll and the book are two different devices that stage the voice in two different situations. Moreover, if all the sound elements on the font refer to the biblical foundations of the sacrament of baptism, the text presented by John the Evangelist refers to the timeless repetition of historic events in the liturgy. Epigraphic texts on the tank’s upper edge echo the limited performance of liturgical chants within the church. As a third modality of representation, the baptismal font—merging images and texts in the material—proposes the fixation of this liturgical moment in a

monumental object allowing a sensory experience of the divine through viewing the scenes, reading the texts, and imagining their meaning.

The context, texts, and images of the Liège baptismal font thus offer different modalities of the voice: the biblical voices of the narratives; the sung voice of the liturgical chants; and the priest's sacramental voice. Such a "polyphony" in the baptismal font of Liège, by merging within the same object voices of different nature, content, and temporality, produces a permanence to the liturgy and makes it accessible through the senses. In a general way, the will to establish the permanence of liturgy through the display of visual signs concerns all the aspects of ritual and sacramental activities in the church, due to the very nature of the building. The church owns its proper temporality, both as an echo of Solomon's Temple and as an anticipation of the heavenly Jerusalem. The current home of the Christian community, moreover, enhances the gestures, words, and sounds of the liturgy and fixes them into signs.

### **Décor as Installation**

The ritual content of some of the inscriptions and its interaction with the images (the lion at Usson-du-Poitou), or with other liturgical objects (the codex and scroll on the baptismal font of Liège), and with ritual "theaters" (the sanctuary in Chauvigny) are examples of the link between written records and the particular time-space conditions of the liturgy. The agency of these inscribed objects, their ability to generate meanings or to produce effects on their environment, can be considered from the point of view of "performance."<sup>49</sup> The active perception of texts and images would invite the viewer to implement a series of responses in the form of gestures, words, or prayers. In other words, what stands in the church or in the cloister would eventually trigger a new action.<sup>50</sup>

Recent historiographical trends have been promoting the study of senses, emotions, body, and uses of social interaction. In this context, the very principle of “performance” is a reading grid for the sensory manifestations of art. Viewers and receptors are considered the full-fledged actors of what effects art might produce.<sup>51</sup> It has led to emphasize the principle of activation, be it human or not, of some objects.<sup>52</sup> This is the case, for example, of medieval bell inscriptions that make the objects “speak.”<sup>53</sup> These inscriptions vary in their form and content as they evolve over time. But two constants emerge. In epigraphic documentation, bells are first designated as “voices” (*vox Domini*), that act to repel the elements of nature (thunder, wind, lightning, rain). The sound waves emanating from the struck bell propagates and counteracts the effects of other aural energies. Thus, bells are understood, designed, and used in accordance with the acoustic performance they contain and activate. As a second constant, inscriptions on bells often quote liturgical formulas used for the “baptism” of new bells or in the hymnology of certain patron saints. The sounding bell spreads the voice of liturgy in a two-fold way: sonically and ephemerally as an instrument of the voice, and visually and permanently in the fixed material trace of the inscription. Ringing the bell sets the body in motion and produces a sonic energy that is linked to blessing. One could make these same types of remarks for liturgical texts inscribed on objects handled during the ritual, for which the priest’s body also acts as an interface between the material and its movement and use.

For many other cases, however, it might be useful to replace the notion of “performance” with the concept of “installation.” Installation, like the word “performance,” suffers from an *a priori* contemporary meaning that does not seem applicable to the Middle Ages. This word does have the advantage, however, that it does not reduce the work of art, especially in liturgical contexts, merely to its activation. On the other hand, the concept of “installation” rests on the inner completeness of the meaning of the work of art when it is



located and used in the context for which it has been conceived and materialized.<sup>54</sup>

Installation is already used to describe the arrangement, be it temporary or permanent, of movable elements in the celebration of ceremonies, but the sonorous dimension is rarely taken into account, despite its frequently fundamental role.<sup>55</sup>

In the twelfth-century frescoes in the church of St. Theudère in Saint-Chef-en-Dauphiné, east of Lyon, for example, writing and sounds were integrated in the *majestas Domini* and in the angels' choir for this liturgical display of images (Fig. 9).<sup>56</sup> The painting of Christ in majesty above the altar is the monumental echo of the illuminations of the *majestas Domini* in liturgical books. There is no direct source or illustration relationship between the priest's voice and the images of majesty, but they both present the visible species of the images conjured by the Eucharistic celebration. The *Sanctus* chant is inscribed as the triple repetition of the word on the banners carried by the seraphim.<sup>57</sup> This song is often alluded to in the images in the apses of Catalonian churches, but it is often limited to the repetition of the three letters, S C S, which makes it impossible to determine whether the paintings evoke the acclamation of the vision of Isaiah, or the execution of the ritual.<sup>58</sup> In Saint-Chef, the ambiguity is clarified in the south wall with the open scroll quoting the continuation of the text for this chant: "Heaven and Earth are full [of your glory]."<sup>59</sup>

The "installation" goes further in Saint-Chef. In spite of the poor state of conservation of the paintings, other scrolls carried by angels intone the beginning of the *Gloria*, the same chant evoked in the Chauvigny capital. Sung at the beginning of the mass, the *Gloria* is separated in time from the *Sanctus* during the celebration of the Mass. There is, however, no contradiction in the simultaneous presence of both texts if we exclude first that the liturgy provides the exact "source" of the image, and second that it reflects or invites any "performance," be it sonorous or otherwise. In the composition at Saint-Chef, the image is in

itself a complete installation of the liturgy in process on the altar located exactly underneath the *Majestas Domini*.

### **The Silent Voice**

For the objects discussed and illustrated in this short essay, it would be a mistake to oppose performance and installation. Doing so would amount to denying the different dimensions of the ritual place, sometimes animated, sometimes quiet, sometimes sonorous, sometimes silent. The sacred quality of the church does not disappear outside the liturgy and its effects endure, incarnate, propagate, and dilate space and time on the scale of God's plan. Seeing the angels singing in Saint-Chef, approaching the Easter joy in Usson, and reading the acclamation to the shepherds in Chauvigny ultimately establishes the principle of a liturgical voice that endures in the silence of the church rather than considering silence as the normative interruption of the ritual. Medieval thought perceives silence as a constant state of the liturgy, the "sap of the ritual," the link between the various actors of the celebration, their gestures, words, and movements.<sup>60</sup> In memories of the voice and triggers of the chant, it is in the silence of the church that these images become icons of sound.

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#### **Author's Biographical Sketch:**

Based on: <[crh.ehess.fr/index.php?6059](http://crh.ehess.fr/index.php?6059)>

**Vincent Debiais** is a research fellow at the CNRS (Le Centre national de la recherche scientifique) in Paris. He earned a doctorate in Medieval History at the Center for Higher Studies of Medieval Civilization, University of Poitiers (2004); and has directed research in the history of medieval art at the University of Poitiers (2015). His research focuses on the encounter between written culture and visual culture in the Middle Ages, mainly in the domain of monuments and objects. His current works questions the representation of silence

in medieval images, between theology and iconography, and the notion of abstraction in the artistic practices throughout the Middle Ages.

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## Notes

1. See Robert Favreau and Jean Michaud, eds., *Corpus des inscriptions de la France médiévale* vol. 1:2 (Poitiers: Centre d'Etudes Supérieures de Civilisation Médiévale; Paris: Editions du Centre National de la recherche scientifique, 1975), 143, no. 87, fig. 135; henceforth *CIFM*.
2. See Philippe Araguas, "Saint-Seurin de Bordeaux: les grandes étapes de l'évolution de l'église canoniale du XIe au XIXe siècle," in *Autour de Saint-Seurin. Lieu, mémoire, pouvoir: des premiers temps chrétiens à la fin du Moyen Âge. Actes du colloque de Bordeaux (12–14 octobre 2006)*, ed. Patrick Henriot and Isabelle Cartron (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2009), 177–96.
3. The inscription in Bordeaux has not been edited in the *CIFM*; the presence of the three letters on the lion was discovered during the last restoration of the porch in 2012. On the inscription in Poitiers, see *CIFM* 1, 9–93, no. 77, fig. 64.
4. The bibliography on the relationships between texts and images in medieval art is long and uneven. For a general survey on this topic, see Nibert H. Ott, "Word and Image as a Field of Research: Sound Methodologies or just a Fashionable Trend? A Polemic from a European Perspective," in *Visual Culture and the German Middle Ages*, ed. Kathryn Starkey and Horst Wenzel (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 15–32. See also the following collected essays: *Texte et image. Actes du colloque international de Chantilly, 13–15 octobre 1982* (Paris: Les Belles-Lettres, 1984); *L'image. Fonctions et usages des images dans l'Occident médiéval. Actes du 6ème International Workshop on Medieval Societies, Erice, Sicile, 17–23 octobre 1992*, ed. Jérôme Baschet and Jean-Claude Schmitt (Paris: Le Léopard d'or, 1996); *Testo e immagine nell'alto medioevo, 15–21 aprile 1993*, in the series *Testi, studi, strumenti /*

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Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 41 (Spoleto: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo, 1994); and *Épigraphie et iconographie: Actes du colloque tenu à Poitiers les 5–8 Octobre 1995*, ed. Robert Favreau (Poitiers: Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 1996). On the epigraphic domain, see, among other titles, Jacqueline Leclercq-Marx, "Les œuvres romanes accompagnées d'une inscription: Le cas particulier des monstres," *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 40, no. 157 (1997): 91–102; Ilene H. Forsyth, "Word-Play in the Cloister at Moissac," in *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century: Essays in Honor of Walter Cahn*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton: Index of Christian Art, Dept. of Art and Archeology, Princeton University; University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2008), 154–78; and Vincent Debais, *La croisée des signes: L'écriture et les images médiévales (800–1200)* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2017).

5. See *Thesaurus linguae Latinae*, vol. 7:2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1972), 874–79.

6. All the biblical references in English in this essay are taken from the King James Version (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

7. See Robert Favreau, "Le thème iconographique du lion dans les inscriptions médiévales," *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 135, no. 3 (1991): 613–36.

8. See René-Jean Hesbert, ed., *Antiphonale missarum sextuplex. d'après le Graduel de Monza et les Antiphonaires de Rheinau, du Montblandin, de Compiègne, de Corbie et de Senlis* (Rome: Herder, 1985), no. 60, Introitus: "*Laetare Jerusalem et conventum facite omnes qui diligitis eam gaudete cum laetitia qui in tristitia fuistis ut exsultetis et satiemini ab uberibus consolationis vestrae.*"

9. See Antoine Chavasse, "La structure du Carême et les lectures des messes quadragésimales dans la liturgie romaine," *La Maison-Dieu* 31 (1952): 76–119.

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10. On the use and content of antiphons, see Gunilla Iversen, *Chanter avec les anges: poésie dans la messe médiévale, interprétations et commentaires* (Paris: Editions du Cerf, 2001); and David Hiley, *Western Plainchant: A Handbook* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 88–99.
11. Brevity and economy of language is a main feature of epigraphic displays during the Middle Ages. See Estelle Ingrand-Varenne, “La brièveté des inscriptions médiévales: d’une contrainte à une esthétique,” *Medievalia: Revista d’Estudis Medievals* 16 (2013): 213–34.
12. On the links between epigraphy and liturgy, see Robert Favreau, *Épigraphie médiévale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 211–45, 275–85; Robert Favreau, “Poitiers: L’épigraphie comme source pour la liturgie,” in *Vom Quellenwert der Inschriften: Vorträge und Berichte der Fachtagung Esslingen 1990*, ed. Renate Neumüllers-Klauser (Heidelberg: C. Winter Universitätsverlag, 1992), 65–137; Jean Michaud, “Epigrafía y liturgia. El ejemplo de las dedicaciones y consagraciones de iglesias y altares,” *Estudios Humanísticos: Geografía, Historia, Arte* 18 (1996): 183–207; and Vincent Debiais and Elisa Pallotini. “Épigraphie et liturgie, entre écriture, parole et geste,” *Quaestiones Medii Aevi Novae* 20 (2015): 285–302.
13. See Cécile Treffort, “*Opus litterarum*: L’inscription alphabétique et le rite de consécration de l’église (IXe-XIIe siècle),” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 53 (2010): 153–80.
14. *CIFM* 1-3, 26–27, no. C18, figs. 15–16.
15. *CIFM* 24, 121–24, no. 109.
16. *CIFM* 5, 28–30, no. 18, fig. 13.
17. On the agency of medieval inscriptions, see Vincent Debiais, “Mostrar, significar, desvelar. El acto de representar según las inscripciones medievales,” *Codex Aquilarensis* 29 (2013): 169–86. For an overview of the notion of “agency,” see Alfred Gell, *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
18. On funerary inscriptions, see Cécile Treffort *Mémoires carolingiennes. L’építaphe entre célébration mémorielle, genre littéraire et manifeste politique, milieu VIIIe–début XIe siècle*

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(Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007), although not all of the implications of liturgy have been taken into account in this study.

19. During the last few years, inscriptions of consecration have been the objects of important studies. Among others, see Cécile Treffort, “Une consécration ‘à la lettre’. Place, rôle et autorité des textes inscrits dans la sacralisation de l’église,” in *Mises en scène et mémoires de la consécration de l’église dans l’Occident médiéval*, ed. Didier Méhu (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008), 219–51; Robert Favreau “Inscriptions de dédicace d’églises et de consécration d’autels à Rome, XIe-XIIIe siècles,” *Arte d’Occidente. Temi e metodi. Studi in onore di Angiola Maria Romanini*, vol. 3, ed. Antonio Cadei (Rome: Edizioni Sintesi informazione, 1999): 947–56; Annick Gagné, “L’écriture et la matière dans la construction de l’*ecclesia* (France, XIe–XIIIe siècle),” *Bulletin du centre d’études médiévales d’Auxerre* 15 (2011): 425–37; Didier Méhu, “‘*Historiae*’ et ‘*imagines*’ de la consécration de l’église au Moyen Âge,” in Méhu, *Mises en scène et mémoires*, 15–48.

20. See Vincent Debiais, “Templo, tiempo, tempo en la iglesia románica,” *Codex Aquilarensis* 32 (2016): 111–34.

21. Paul Zumthor already pointed out the importance of noting the sonorous implications of each and every word in the analysis of medieval texts. See Paul Zumthor, *La lettre et la voix. De la “littérature” médiévale* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1987), 17–18.

22. On the time-space implications of medieval liturgy, see Eric Palazzo, *L’invention chrétienne des cinq sens dans la liturgie et l’art au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2014); and Philippe Bernard, “Les temps de la liturgie,” *Histoire du christianisme des origines à nos jours*, vol. 3, *Les Eglises d’Orient et d’Occident*, ed. Luce Piétri (Paris: Desclée, 1998), 1015–51.

23. Such a reading is based on the analysis of the priest’s words during the consecration as presented by Enrico Mazza, *The Celebration of the Eucharist: The Origin of the Rite and the*

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*Development of Its Interpretation*, trans. Matthew J. O'Connell (London: Pueblo Books, 1999), 206–22.

24. See Michel Henry, *Incarnation: Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2000); and Irène Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace: signe, rituel, sacré* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004).

25. *CIFM* vol. 2, 22–24, no. 17, figs. 21–24.

26. I thank Bissera Pentcheva for this comment on the *Babylonia* figure and the references. On the Islamic symposium or *majlis al'ūns* in the pleasure palaces of the Taifa kings, see Cynthia Robinson, “In Praise of Song: the Making of Courtly Culture in Al-Andalus and Provence, 1005–1134 A.D.” in *Culture politique des Plantagenêt: 1154–1224; actes du colloque tenu à Poitiers du 2 au 5 mai 2002*, in the series *Civilisation médiévale* 14, ed. Martin Aurell (Poitiers: Université de Poitiers, Centre national de la recherche scientifique, Centre d'études supérieures de civilisation médiévale, 2003), 89–123; Robinson, *In Praise of Song: The Making of Courtly Culture in al-Andalus and Provence, 1005–1134 A.D.* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 1–25, 29–40, 141–235; and Robinson, “Seeing Paradise: Metaphor and Vision in Taifa Palace Architecture,” *Gesta* 36, no. 2 (1997): 145–55.

27. *CIFM* vol. 2, 25–26, no. 18, figs. 25–27.

28. On the Gloria, see Joseph-André Jungmann. *Missarum sollemnia: Explication génétique de la Messe romaine*, vol. 2 (Paris: Aubier, 1952), 103–18.

29. In Luke 2:14, *Gloria in altissimis Deo*; Luke 19:38, “*Pax in caelo et gloria in excelsis.*”

30. Eric Palazzo's work in recent years has pointed out the necessity of avoiding the notions of “source” and “illustration” in the relation between text and object in the liturgy. For a general survey, see Eric Palazzo, “Art et liturgie au Moyen Âge. Nouvelles approches anthropologique et épistémologique,” *Anales de Historia del Arte* 2 (2010): 31–74.

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31. See Bissera V. Pentcheva, “Cross, Tunic, Body: Liturgy, Materiality, and the Phenomenology of Salvation,” in *La stauroteca di Bessarione fra Costantinopoli e Venezia, Atti delle giornate internazionali di studio La stauroteca di Bessarione*, ed. Holger A. Klein, Valeria Poletto, and Peter Schreiner (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere e arti, 2017), 260.
32. See Gunilla Iversen, *Laus angelica: Poetry in the Medieval Mass*, ed. Jane Flynn (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010).
33. On the trope of the *Gloria*, see Iversen, *Chanter avec les anges*, 103–43.
34. Margot Fassler has shown that this type of interaction between liturgy and liturgical poetry, especially Christmas tropes, could be at the source of the iconography of portals in Chartres. See Margot Fassler, “Liturgy and Sacred History in the Twelfth-Century Tympana at Chartres,” *Art Bulletin* 75, no. 3 (1993): 499–520.
35. Some evidence of direct quotations has been referenced in Robert Favreau, “L’inscription de saint Christophe à Pernes-les-Fontaines : Un apport à l’histoire du sentiment religieux,” *Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques* 12 / 13A (1976 / 77): 33–39.
36. See Gunilla Iversen, “Biblical Interpretation in Tropes and Sequences,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 17 (2007): 210–25.
37. See *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* 47, ed. Clemens Blume, Henry Marriott Bannister (Leipzig: O. R. Reisland, 1905), no. 178.
38. See *Analecta hymnica medii aevi* 47, no. 169b.
39. For the Latin text, translation, and comments, see Iversen, *Chanter avec les anges*, 119–26.
40. On these temporal aspects, see François Cassingena-Trevedy, *La liturgie: Art et métier* (Geneva: Ad Solem 2007).



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41. The last study of this unique object can be found in two compiled volume: Geneviève Xhayet and Robert Halleux, eds., *Études sur les fonts baptismaux de Saint-Barthélemy à Liège*, (Liège: Éditions du Céfal, 2006); and Pierre Colman and Berthe Lhoist-Colman, *Les fonts-baptismaux de Saint-Barthélemy à Liège: chef-d'œuvre sans pareil et nœud de controverses* (Brussels: Académie royale de Belgique, 2002), 299–302.
42. The original Latin inscription reads: “*Corda parat plebis Domino doctrina Johannis. Hos lavat; hinc monstrat quis mundi crimina tollat. Vox Patris: hic ait est. Lavat hunc homo, Spiritus implet. Hic fidei fons est: Petrus hos lavat hosque Iohannes.*” See Clemens Bayer, “Les fonts baptismaux de Liège: qui les bœufs soutenant la cuve figurent-ils? Étude historique et épigraphique,” in *Études sur les fonts baptismaux de Saint-Barthélemy à Liège*, 54–103, esp. 59–60.
43. In the Latin text: “*Bissenis bobus pastorum forma notatur quos et apostolice commendat gratia vite officioque gradus quo fluminis impetus hujus letificat sanctam purgatis civibus urbem,*” in Bayer, “Les fonts baptismaux de Liège,” 60.
44. In the Latin text: “*Hodie in Jordane baptizato domino aperti sunt caeli et sicut columba super eum spiritus mansit et vox patris intonuit hic est filius meus dilectus in quo mihi complacui.*” See René-Jean Hesbert. ed., *Corpus antiphonalium officii 3. Invitatoria et antiphonae* (Rome: Herder, 1968), no. 6849.
45. Matthew 3:14: “*Ego a te debeo baptizari et tu venis ad me.*”
46. Matthew 3:17: “*Hic est filius meus, dilectus, in quo michi complacui.*”
47. Composite section compiles portions of Matthew 3:11; Luke 3:16; Mark 1:7: “*Ego vos baptizo in aqua veniet autem fortior me post me.*”
48. In the Latin text, “*Ego te baptizo in nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti amen.*”

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49. On the notion of “performance,” see Bissera V. Pentcheva, *Hagia Sophia: Sound, Space, and Spirit in Byzantium* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2017); and Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” *Art Bulletin* 88, no. 4 (2006): 631–55.
50. This is what appears in the important article by Elizabeth Valdez del Álamo, “Hearing the Image at Santo Domingo de Silos,” in *Resounding Images: Medieval Intersections of Art, Music, and Sound*, ed. Susan Boynton and Diane J. Reilly (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015), 71–90.
51. On the notion of “performance,” see Bruno Péquignot, “De la performance dans les arts. Limites et réussites d'une contestation,” *Communications* 92, no. 1 (2013): 9–20; and Pentcheva, “The Performative Icon,” 631–55.
52. See Eric Palazzo, *L'invention chrétienne des cinq sens*, 301–50.
53. See Robert Favreau, “*Mentem sanctam, spontaneam, honorem, Deo et patriae liberationem: Épigraphe et mentalités*,” in *Clio et son regard. Mélanges d'histoire, d'histoire de l'art et d'archéologie offerts à Jacques Stiennon à l'occasion de ses vingt-cinq ans d'enseignement à l'Université de Liège*, ed. Rita Lejeune and Joseph Deckers (Liege: P. Margada, 1982), 235–44.
54. On the general concept of “installation,” see Nicolas De Oliveira, introduction, in *Installations: l'art en situation* (Paris: Thames & Hudson, 1997). For its application to medieval art and images, see Bissera V. Pentcheva, “Glittering Eyes: Animation in the Byzantine ‘Eikōn’ and the Western ‘Imago’,” *Codex Aquilarensis* 32 (2016): 209–26.
55. On this topic for medieval art, see among other works by the same author, Eduardo Carrero Santamaría, “Crucificados, imaginería y liturgia pascual. La interacción entre el rito y su expresión material,” in *Los Crucificados: Religiosidad, Cofradías y Arte: actas del Simposium 3/6-IX-2010*, in the series Colección Instituto Escorialense de Investigaciones Históricas y Artísticas 31, ed. Francisco Javier Campos (San Lorenzo del Escorial, Madrid: R.C.U. Escorial-M<sup>a</sup> Cristina, Servicio de Publicaciones D.L., 2010), 75–92, which discusses

the construction and installation of “fake” Holy Sepulchers within the churches for Easter celebrations; see also Bissera V. Pentcheva, “In-Spiriting in the Byzantine Consecration (Kathierōsis) Rite,” *Codex Aquilarensis* 30 (2014): 37–66.

56. *CIFM*, vol. 17, 50–51, no. I22, figs. 33–36.

57. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, 37–47; Iversen, *Chanter avec les anges*, 191–226.

58. See Marcelo Angheben, “Théophanies absidales et liturgie eucharistique. L'exemple des peintures romanes de Catalogne et du Nord des Pyrénées comportant un séraphin et un chérubin,” in *Les fonts de la pintura romànica*, ed. Imma Lorés Otzet, Milagros Guardia, and Carles Mancho (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 2008), 57–96.

59. The words incised on the scroll are: “*Pleni sunt celi et terra.*”

60. See Cassingena-Trevedy, *La liturgie*, 102–03.

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