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Variations on the definition of sacred space from Eusebius of Caesarea to Balsamon

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In the *Journal of Early Christian Studies* in 1994, Robert Markus published an article entitled “How on earth Could Places Become Holy? Origins of the Christian Idea of Holy Places”¹. In this article, he refutes Mircea Eliades’s idea that all religions have sacred spaces. He points to the fact that in their wish to distance themselves from the notion shared by pagans and Jews concerning temples housing a deity, early Christian writers clearly stated that God needs no house². « What temple would I erect to Him, seeing that this entire universe, the work of His hands, cannot contain Him ? », writes Minucius Felix³. Early Christian writers clearly refused to identify the new Christian religion with previous cults and challenged the notion of sacred space for Christians. This very philosophical position did not last, however. Even before Peace was granted to Christian churches by emperor Constantine, a canonical-liturgical literature developed, setting rules of behavior inside churches, and de facto defining a space set apart for religious use, with regulations to separate it from ordinary domestic space, from public spaces and in a word, from the profane world. Because churches, like temples before them were defined as areas where behavior was under the control of specific rules, they became sacred spaces. All sorts of actions deemed improper and disrespectful were excluded from taking place in such a space, from having sex to eating or acting in a violent manner. These rules defined the space as different and as sacred.

The second process which created a Christian sacred space is a literary one, which compared the newly erected churches to the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem. This second process is set in motion by Eusebius of Caesarea who writes about the renewed church building in Tyre based on the biblical model of the temple of Jerusalem. Just after the end of the persecution, Paulinus, the bishop of Tyre rebuilds the church on a larger scale. The text makes a clear reference to sacred space: the precinct of the church is called a *hieron*

¹ Markus 1994.

² Acts of the Apostles, 17 : 24 : « The God who made the world and everything in it, being the Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in shrines made by man. »

³ *The Octavius of Minucius Felix*, 32, 1, transl. Clarke, 111.

peribolon: "He spread out a vast and lofty entrance-gate affording a full view of what lay inside even to those who stood far away from the sacred precinct⁴."

The model Eusebius had in mind was the Jewish Temple of Jerusalem, with its different courtyards and its most sacred areas reserved only to priests. This identification of churches with the Temple of Jerusalem led to identify different areas inside churches precincts, some for clerics only, others for laypersons.

In his description, Eusebius defines a space for each category of Christians: catechumens, baptized Christians and clerics. At Tyre, an atrium adorned with porticoes and fountains separated the outer entrance from the church: "This is the first halting-place for those who enter, affording both beauty and splendor to everyone, and serving as an appropriate station for those who as yet lack the first initiation⁵." It is unlikely that, in Tyre, catechumens remained in the atrium while the liturgy took place, but Eusebius imagines an ideal church, where each group has a proper and separate place.

When describing the new church at Tyre, Eusebius insisted on the notion of gradation of sacredness, from the less sacred, in the atrium to the most sacred in the sanctuary. Like in the Temple of Jerusalem, these different spaces were opened to different categories of Christians. The highest members of the clergy, bishops, priests and deacons, occupied the altar area, which was the most sacred location. On the altar, bread and wine offered by the faithful were transformed into Body and Blood of Christ. Eusebius emphasized the necessity to fence this area and restrict access to it: "He placed the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, in the center, and so that this too should be inaccessible to the multitude, he fenced it off with wooden lattices perfectly fashioned with artful workmanship - an admirable sight to the beholder⁶."

Inside many Late antique churches, chancel barriers were indeed added to mark the separate area of the sanctuary. Unlike later Byzantine or Russian iconostasis, they did not intend to block the view, but to delineate a threshold between two areas of different sacredness. Their sheer presence was enough to mark boundaries, create liminal spaces, and suggest the notion of a separate area, of the utmost sacredness.

⁴ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, X, 4, 38, transl. Mango 1986, 5.

⁵ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, X, 4, 40, Mango 1986, 5.

⁶ Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, X, 4, 45, Mango, 1986, 6

The right to access the different areas of a church complex differed based on clerical or lay status and on the sex. A restricted access is an indication of the area's level of sacredness and it also reveals status in the Christian community. Unlike entrance to the atrium, entrance to the church interior space was not granted indiscriminately to all. Members of the clergy, either the lowly doorkeepers or deacons controlled who came in, a necessary precaution in times of persecution. Altogether, it was important to let curious and interested non-Christians watch what was going on, but at the same time, in order to avoid protests or violence, it was necessary to allow only well-minded persons inside the building. Pagans, Jews, Christians of other faiths could hear the first part of the liturgy if they wished to. They probably remained at the back of the church, or possibly in the narthex, with the excommunicated members of the community. Listeners from other religions, catechumens and excommunicated persons had to leave before the Eucharistic celebration. The fourth century compilation of church orders known as *Apostolic Constitutions* records a common dismissal for those who are not believers and those who are "listeners" in the community⁷. Sacredness was defined spatially and temporally.

Church orders also insisted on making spatially visible another hierarchy among members of the Christian community: clerics, baptized Christians and non-baptized Christians had, ideally, different sitting or standing areas. The catechumens had not received baptism; thus, they could sing the prayers and hear readings and sermons, but they had to leave before the consecration of the Eucharistic elements. Their place was behind the faithful, and sometimes in the narthex.

The *Apostolic Constitutions* records a clerical wish to allocate a specific area of the church nave also to the different age groups and they insisted on separating the sexes: "In church, the young will sit separately if there is room, otherwise they shall remain standing; the elder shall sit at their rank, children shall stand and their fathers and mothers shall take care of them; the young girls will sit apart if there is room, otherwise they shall stand behind the women; the married women accompanied by children shall stand apart; virgins, widows and elderly women shall stand or sit in front of the other women⁸." In some regions, such as Syria, archaeology has revealed that separate entrances existed, possibly for men and

⁷ *Apostolic Constitutions* 8.6

⁸ *Apostolic Constitutions* 2. 57

women⁹. Doorkeepers or deacons could be in charge of allocating different sections for the faithful coming to the liturgy, based on rank, sex and age¹⁰.

This spatial organization for members of the community and visitors is mostly found in normative texts and we cannot be sure it was enforced everywhere. It represents an ideal spatialization of the community in the eyes of clerics. Archaeology confirms however that some spaces such as the sanctuary were delineated. The area of the main altar where the Eucharist was offered and where Christ himself resided in the bread and wine, remained the focal point of the sacred. The materiality of the chancel barriers around this focal space was the signal of a separate, restricted area, sometimes raised above the level of the nave and usually richly adorned¹¹. In Byzantium, between the fifth and the seventh centuries, canon law confirms and enforces the exclusion of laypeople from the sanctuary¹². Are also excluded members of the lower clergy, who are not deacons and priests. Another focal point of sanctity was the tomb of a saint or a reliquary, to which a more or less controlled access was granted and which could also be delineated by steps or chancels¹³.

Training and teaching were required to make sure the faithful understood the different levels of sanctity of church areas. As a consequence, once the sanctuary was identified as the most sacred area, it devalued somewhat the other areas of the church building or inside the sacred enclosure. In Late antique healing shrines, the sick and the disabled sometimes lived inside this enclosure, often in the atrium on which rooms sometimes opened. They could be accompanied by spouses, servants and for the wealthiest, by their own doctor. At night, they would be brought inside the church, as close as possible to the relics of a saint for the ritual incubation¹⁴. Somehow, these crowds gathering inside churches for festivals, these pilgrims coming for a few days, the sick and their companions, the begging poor, created a mixed crowd whose behavior was not up to the high standards expected from the most demanding clerics. We can follow their condemnation of disapproved behaviors in canon and civil law, and by contrast they reveal how to behave in a sacred space and define what is the extension of sacred space.

⁹ Sodini 2006, 232 ; Briquel Chatonnet 2013, 28 ; Koury & Riba 2013, 41-84 ; Lassus, 1947.

¹⁰ Caseau, 2005, 15-27

¹¹ Bogdanovic 2017; Sodini 2006, 235

¹² *Council in Trullo canon 69*

¹³ Yasin 2009; 2011, 5-17.

¹⁴ Pitarakis (ed.) 2018; Talbot 2002; Caseau 2008

In 691/692, the council in Trullo promotes 102 canons, some of which help define the proper behavior expected inside churches. Canon 97 condemns those who live with their wives inside churches:

“In the case of those who cohabit with their wives or otherwise heedlessly profane sacred places and conduct themselves contemptuously whilst dwelling in them, we command that they should be expelled even from the quarters of the catechumens in venerable churches. If anyone does not observe this, if he is a cleric, he shall be deposed, if a layman excommunicated.¹⁵”

This canon is found among other canons concerning lay people. The end of the canon, however, includes the possibility that members of the clergy be in that position of living with their wife inside the church. Many possibilities come to mind for clerics living on the premises, either they settled with their wife in one of the side rooms or in a building attached to the church. As for laypersons, we already mentioned that during the Late antique period and still in the Middle ages, healing sanctuaries allowed sick people to sleep inside churches, close to a reliquary or a saint’s tomb, in the hope of a miraculous cure, either receiving the visit of a saint and a therapeutic program in a dream, or simply waking up healed. Both possibilities account for the canon’s notion of people sleeping inside a church. The canon, however, does not condemn sleeping inside a church but behaving contemptuously whilst dwelling in them, and most of all sleeping with one’s wife. What is at stake here is the possibility of a sexual relation. Having sex was not allowed inside a church and the bishops gathered in 691 wanted to recall the rule. In their eyes, it amounts to a disrespectful reduction of the sacred space (*hieros topos*) to an ordinary profane space (*koinos*). The canon gives us a hint that the so called “quarters of the catechumens” could be used by some married clerics as their home. The bishops gathered at the council in Trullo decide that sacred space in churches extends to the “quarters of the catechumens”. This canon is particularly interesting because it shows a variation on the definition of sacred space. It concerns not only the sanctuary, or the nave of a church but other areas as well.

Where were these premises for catechumens? For Eusebius of Caesarea, at Tyre, the area for catechumens was the atrium, and it is very possible that in other church complexes, rooms opening on the courtyard or atrium, at one point a place for teaching, and perhaps

¹⁵ Canon 97, *The Council in Trullo*, transl. Featherstone 1995, 178-179.

accommodating catechumens during their baptismal preparation, were later also used to accommodate clerics and their families, when the baptism of children put an end to the teaching of adult catechumens. Following R. Taft, starting in the sixth century, another area of churches were called catechumena or catechoumeneia : the upper galleries of churches, where some women gathered during the liturgy¹⁶. As we shall see, it is difficult to assert where exactly were these “quarters of the catechumens”, and perhaps they were not the exact same area in all the churches or moved to different areas of the church enclosure through time. To answer this question and help us identify these quarters, can we rely on the commentaries of 12th century canonists on the canons of the council in Trullo?

Between the end of the 11th century and the middle of the 12th century, three authors commented the *nomocanon* as it was edited by Theodore Vestes in 1089/90. They commented the 102 canons of the council in Trullo. What did they understand was at stake in canon 97? How did this canon help them define sacred space and think about the relation between civil and canon law?

Before becoming a monk, John Zonaras had been the head of the imperial chancery (*protoasekretis*), and he had also presided over an important court of law, the hippodrome court. He knew civil law. Besides writing a book of history, theological and hagiographical writings, he has provided an interesting commentary of Byzantine canon law. Zonaras comments canon 97 of the council in Trullo in this manner:

“Here are called sacred places not the divine churches, but the buildings that surround them, which are the so-called spaces of the catechumens. No one would be foolhardy enough to live inside a church with his wife. Some would live in houses adjoining the churches and in rooms intended for catechesis in a manner that was perhaps indecent and contemptuous of holy places, living there without discernment, that is to say, without differentiating and separating the sacred from the profane. The canon orders that those who behave in this way should be expelled from the premises intended for catechumens. The canon deposes those who do not observe it, if they are clerics, and deprives them of communion, if they are lay people. The fact that the buildings adjoining the church are worthy of privilege is expressed in chapter 12, title 1, book 5, chapter 12 (of the *Basilica*),

¹⁶ R. Taft, *Women at Church in Byzantium: Where, When-And Why?*, DOP 52, 1998, p.27-87.

which contains the following : “That the refugees should be safe as far as the limits of the church towards the public market, and that they should use the baths, gardens, houses, porticoes and courtyards within this space, but that they should not be allowed to sleep and eat inside the church.¹⁷”

Zonaras clearly extends the notion of sacred space to buildings surrounding a church. He does not precisely define the premises intended for catechumens. Can they be identified with upper galleries in churches? He remains silent on this point. From the rest of his comments, however, and his citation of the *Basilica*, we can deduce that his definition of a space “worthy of privilege” includes spaces outside the church, such as the ones mentioned by Eusebius of Caesarea: courtyards and porticoes. He summons a civil law on asylum to explain how they apply not only to churches but to a large area around them¹⁸. On the one hand, he does not believe that people would have sex with their wife inside a church, in his time, on the other hand, he believes that some persons can live in houses close by, and even in areas for catechumens. He does not seem to disapprove of it. Recalling the fact that people can sleep and eat in these areas, if they are asylum seekers, he makes a distinction between the church building itself where it is forbidden to eat and sleep with a wife and these other buildings. Asylum seekers seldom came as couples, but they asked for protection as individuals and they did not stay long enough to organize a family life for themselves. So why call on this text? Did Zonaras intentionally misinterpret the canon in order to let persons live with their wife, as a family inside church precincts, as long as it was not inside the church? All buildings inside a sacred precinct benefit from a special status and require people to maintain decorum and proper behavior, but the restriction concerning sleeping and eating concerns only the church and buildings physically adjoining it.

Balsamon’s commentary is even longer and more informative on what defines a sacred space. We know more about Balsamon than about Zonaras. Balsamon lived in the 12th

¹⁷ Zonaras, commentary on canon 97 of the Council in Trullo, in Mesis 2020 : Ἱεροὺς τόπους οὐ τοὺς θείοις ναοὺς ἐνταῦθα καλεῖ, ἀλλὰ τὰς περὶ αὐτοὺς κατοικίας, οἷά εἰσι τὰ λεγόμενα κατηχούμενα. Οὐδεὶς γὰρ οὕτως ἂν εἴη τολμητίας ὡς ἐντὸς ναοῦ συνοικεῖν γαμετῆ. Ἐν οἰκίαις δὲ πάνυ συνημμέναις ναοῖς καὶ ἐν τοῖς κατηχουμένοις ὤκουν τινές, μὴ σεμνῶς ἴσως βιοῦντες, καὶ καταφρονητικῶς εἶχον περὶ τοὺς τόπους τοὺς ἱεροὺς, ἀδιακρίτως οἰκοῦντες ἐν αὐτοῖς, ἀντὶ τοῦ μὴ διαστέλλοντες μηδὲ διαχωρίζοντες μέσον ἁγίου καὶ βεβήλου. Τοὺς οὖν οὕτως ἔχοντας ἐξωθεῖσθαι τῶν κατηχουμένων ὁ κανὼν διατάττεται καὶ τοὺς μὴ φυλάττοντας αὐτόν, κληρικούς μὲν, καθαιρεῖ· λαϊκοὺς δέ, ἀφορίζει. Ὅτι δὲ καὶ τὰ συγκείμενα τοῖς θείοις ναοῖς προνομίῳ ἀξιοῦνται φησὶ τὸ δωδέκατον κεφάλαιον τοῦ α΄ τίτ. τοῦ ε΄ βιβλίου, περιέχον οὕτω· «Μέχρι τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς δημοσίας ἀγορᾶς τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὄρων τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ἐχέτωσαν οἱ προσφυγόντες, τοῖς ἐνδοτέροις λουτροῖς ἢ κήποις ἢ οἰκίμασιν ἢ στοαῖς ἢ ἀυλαῖς χρώμενοι καὶ κωλυέσθωσαν ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ ὑπνοῦν ἢ ἐσθίειν». (B V, 1, 11)

¹⁸ Macrides 1988.

century in Constantinople where he was deacon of the Hagia Sophia church, then nomophylax and chartophylax of the patriarch. He was also head of monasteries and eventually became patriarch of Antioch around 1185-90. He had hoped to become patriarch of Constantinople.

He comments canon 97 of the council in Trullo in those terms:

“Places consecrated to God that is divine churches, areas in front of churches (*pronaos*), areas for catechumens and related places are called sacred places. Do not say that every place attributed to a church is a sacred place, such as the buildings it rents and so on. Some people who had churches in their possession lived disrespectfully with women in the premises for catechumens and in other buildings around the churches without differentiating between the sacred and the profane. The Holy Fathers ordered that those who desecrated sacred places with contempt should be expelled not only from the churches (even if they had rights over them), but also from the premises intended for catechumens; it was for this reason that they did not legislate on the expulsion from the churches themselves, because they knew that this would go without saying. Since those who owned the churches wanted to own for themselves at least the premises for the training of catechumens, the Fathers said that they would be expelled not only from the churches but also from the premises for the catechumens. It is good that they did not refer to the churches but to the sacred places; cohabiting with a woman inside a church is a very ungodly thing and the Fathers did not even think that anyone would dare to commit such ungodliness. Sacred places are desecrated, when people live there with women, when they sing shameless and unseemly tunes, and when adjoining rooms, kitchens and other similar buildings are built. They order that the transgressors of the canon, if they are clerics, be deposed and if they are laymen, be deprived of communion. Read also chapter 12, title 1, of book 5, quoted in the commentary to canon 76; do not consider it a contradiction, when it states that the baths, gardens and porticoes are within the inclusive limits of the church and for this reason refugees cannot be removed from there; only in this respect are these parts considered as parts of the church, since the same chapter permits sleeping and eating there, which is forbidden inside the church. Chapter 21 of the same book and the same title decrees that murderers, adulterers and kidnappers are to be removed from the church and its boundaries; there is no place of refuge for these categories of criminals, for, he says, the laws help not those who commit injustice, but those who suffer it. Read also the novel 73 of

Emperor Kyr Leo the philosopher, who punishes in the same way those who believe they are allowed to live in the premises for catechumens.”

First, it seems clear that Balsamon builds on Zonaras commentary. He cites the same text from the *Basilica* but he also adds his own elements. For example, he cites a law written by Leo VI on the exact same topic: that no one should live with women in the *catèchoumena* (κατηχούμενα) of churches. By adding this other source, Balsamon shows his large knowledge of civil law¹⁹. Leo VI had been very willing to introduce the decisions of canon law into civil law. The Novella 73 represents the introduction in civil law of canon 97 forbidding couples from living in sacred places. Leo VI adds a useful detail: he explains that the *catèchoumena* are in fact the upper galleries in churches. Leo also tells a story from the recent past: when his father ascended the throne, it was not uncommon for people to live or at least sleep there and emperor Basil had given a *prostagma* to forbid it. Novella 73 also intends to stop this same practice, whether it concerns a priest living with his wife or laypeople sleeping inside churches. Leo VI also condemns clerics who allow such a practice, which is an indication that these living arrangements had the approval of local clerics and perhaps concerned some of them. Churches provided lodgings for clerics, and most since of them were married, these lodgings were family residences.

Aristenos is the only one of the three canonists, who proposes to exclude celibates from sleeping inside a church, the two other canonists only exclude couples, and so did Leo VI. They are concerned with sex, which they consider a pollution and a profanation of the church building. This idea that sex and the sacred cannot peacefully coexist is clearly visible in different rules around Eucharistic practices. Communion is forbidden to lay persons who had sex the night before. Consecrating the host is also forbidden to priests who had sex the night before. This notion that sex is polluting and creates an obstacle to a relation with God is so well entrenched that neither Zonaras nor Balsamon imagine that people would deliberately have sex inside a church. They could, however, use other buildings attached to a church, such as the *catèchoumeneia*, which are not considered as sacred.

Leo VI and Balsamon do not use the same word and they do not have the same definition of the area for catechumens. Leo VI, like Zonaras, mentions *catèchoumena*

¹⁹ Leo VI, Novella 73 ed. Noailles, Dain 1944, 260-263.

(κατηχούμενα) while Balsamon writes *catechoumeneia* (κατηχουμενεῖα). For Leo, *catèchoumena* are galleries inside a church, and perhaps also for Zonaras, while for Balsamon, they seem to be rooms located outside of the church. Although they refer to catechumens, they were most likely service rooms in the middle byzantine period.

Perhaps inspired by Zonaras, Balsamon's definition of sacred spaces is more inclusive than that of Eusebius of Caesarea. He includes not only the church building (*naos*) but also the narthex (*pronaos*) and the *catechoumeneia* (κατηχουμενεῖα), which I shall call secondary rooms. Like Zonaras, but in a clearer manner, he relies on civil law to extend rules of purity (no blood, no sex) to a large area outside the church itself. The exclusion of women corresponds to both requirements of ritual purity.

Yet, Balsamon makes a clear distinction between sacred space and ecclesiastical property. Buildings belonging to a church but not attached to it, like houses or shops in the city and farms and lands in the countryside are not considered sacred space. The location and a contact with the church itself matter. He considers sacred space any building attached to a church. It seems coherent with the notion of sacred by contact. A space in contact with the church benefits from the sacredness of the church. Sacredness radiates or diffuses in space. If so, where does it stop?

Both Zonaras and Balsamon build on canon 97 to extend sacred space to a larger area than the church itself. Being very learned, and perhaps again inspired by Zonaras, Balsamon knows that another legal tradition concerning asylum can be useful for this purpose to extend sacred spaces outside the church building. The laws on asylum define a perimeter outside the church where it is not legal to arrest refugees.

Asylum in a church is made a law in 419 by Honorius. A perimeter (fifty feet) around the church and the church itself are protected by law: it is now a sacrilege to arrest someone in this area. In this text, the right of asylum is stated as well as the sanctity of churches.²⁰ While for pagan temples, the sanctuary started with the temenos, for churches also, the sanctuary starts with the outer doors of the enclosure in the law of 431 signed by Theodosius and sent to Antioch²¹. In Syria and in Asia Minor, « *horoi* », boundary stones discovered

²⁰ Sirmond 13, « *Ex quo loco quisque tenuerit exeuntem, sacrilegi crimen incurrat* »

²¹ CTh. 9, 45, 4 in 431, c.966-968.

around sanctuaries were set up to mark the territory under protection.²² This extension of the area considered out of reach from armed soldiers came in part from the desire to prohibit refugees from sleeping and eating inside churches, while protecting them. The sanctity of churches which were now considered the temple of God- « *summi Dei templa* » or « *sanctissimum Dei templum* »-, meant that decent behavior and a sense of decorum should be maintained at all times inside the *naos*. No banquets, no sex should take place inside a church, no animals could be allowed in a sacred place. Members of the clergy should make sure that the refugees have a place to sleep and to eat outside the church itself. If the refugees refuse to comply, they should be expelled. The constitution also insists on the absence of arms inside the church enclosure. The refugees, as well as the soldiers, should not bring weapons inside the sanctuary. The refugees should trust in the power of religion, the soldiers should ask permission to enter the sacred enclosure to the bishop. The law of 431 became the reference for matters related to asylum in the Byzantine Empire. It is cited in the Acts of the council of Ephesus²³ and has been included in the *Codex Justinianus* and later in the *Basilica*.²⁴

The *Basilica* even extended the area under legal protection to include baths, gardens, houses, porticoes and courtyards, and also an area that goes from the church to the limit of the market. In these areas protected by law, one can be a refugee and live there, that is eat and sleep there. It is legally part of the church and sacred in the sense that committing violence in this area would be a crime.

Following this legal tradition Zonaras and Balsamon make a distinction between buildings attached to the church itself which are sacralized by this contact and other buildings inside a church precinct where the rules are not so strict and where one can eat and sleep. They however insist that even in these other buildings and in this extended area, it is still important to preserve ritual purity.

Commenting canon 97 served their goal but other canons of the council in Trullo also served their wish to control what happens inside church precincts. Two other canons of the council in Trullo, one dealing with merchants selling inside the church enclosure and the second forbidding banquets inside churches, serve their purpose of extending sacred space.

²² Feissel 2000, 103 ; Perrin 1999, 680.

²³ Acts of the Council of Ephesus, ed. Schwartz 1928, 61-65.

²⁴ C.J., 1, 12, 3, ed. P. Krueger 1906, 65-67.

Canon 74 forbids eating inside a church, following canon 28 of the council of Laodicea: “That no one is to hold so-called charity feasts in houses of the Lord or churches, nor to eat, nor to make up banqueting couches inside the <sacred> house. If any persons dare to do this, they shall cease, or they shall be excommunicated²⁵. While commenting this canon, the three canonists understand the word *kyriakon* differently. For Zonaras and Aristenos, *kyriakon* is another word for the church building, the House of the Lord. For Balsamon, *kyriakon* is a space dedicated to God. He explains that every place destined for the Lord is called a *kyriakon*, even if it is not a church, but the area in front of the church or another sacred place. For him, the canon commands that no feasting should take place in churches and related places inside the sacred enclosure. This canon serves his wish to extend once again sacred space from the church itself to an area around the church, even if this interpretation is in contraction with the asylum laws, unless one distinguishes between the solitary eating of asylum seekers and the feasting of a group. At the end of the 7th century, the bishops were concerned with meals organized after the celebration of liturgical feasts, a practice that ceased to take place during the Middle Ages. During Balsamon’s lifetime, however, the problem was a different one: feasting could be for example organized inside a sacred enclosure by aristocrats to whom a convent had been given in *charistike*²⁶. It is very possible that Balsamon has in mind the settlement of aristocrats, along with their lifestyle, inside monastic enclosures. Balsamon does not develop, so we cannot go much further in this direction, but it is a possible interpretation.

The second canon which helps him extend the notion of sacred space outside of the church building itself is canon 76 of the council in Trullo : “that no one can keep a tavern, nor display victuals, nor do commerce within sacred precincts”.

“[That] no one can keep a tavern, nor display victuals, nor transact any commerce within sacred precincts, thus preserving the reverence due to churches. For our God and Saviour, teaching us through his life in the flesh, instructed us to *Make not my Father’s house a marketplace (Jn 2: 16)*; and he poured out the changers money and drove away those who

²⁵ C. 74 : “Οτι ου δεῖ ἐν τοῖς κυριακοῖς ἢ ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τὰς λεγομένας ἀγάπας ποιεῖν καὶ ἔνδον ἐν τῷ οἴκῳ ἐσθίειν καὶ ἀκούβιτα στρωννύειν». Οἱ δὲ τοῦτο ποιεῖν τολμῶντες ἢ παυσάσθωσαν ἢ ἀφοριζέσθωσαν.

²⁶ . Darrouzès 1966, 150-165 ; Gautier 1975, 77-132 ; M. Angold 1995 ; Ahrweiler 1967, 1-27.

profaned the temple. If anyone is found to have committed the aforesaid transgression, he shall be excommunicated.”²⁷

Balsamon comments this canon in the following manner : “The divine Fathers, in order to preserve the honor due to the holy churches and the spaces around them, and not allowing the sacred places to become common places, ordered that no food should be offered for consumption, no cabaret should be opened, nor should anything be sold inside the sacred precincts; these spaces should be completely forbidden to merchants.” [...] Since many of the Most Holy Patriarchs ordered the money-changers, fish and fruit sellers and other traders to be driven out of the Augusteion square and the parts closest to the atrium of the Most Holy Great Church of God, some have said that the canon calls the atria of each church sacred enclosures and not the fountains and other parts that are dependent on the holy churches. This interpretation did not please the majority; they said that, since the canon does not speak of the church (the fact of opening a cabaret inside or in the atrium of a church, or of having a tavern or a gathering of merchants there, does not even cross the mind of a Christian, because it is something very unholy), but of the sacred precincts of a church, we must have serious doubts; they said that sacred enclosures are the places that are not abandoned to the trampling of animals or otherwise desecrated. Reading ch. 12, title 1, book 5, which says: “Those who have taken refuge there and use the indoor baths, gardens, houses, porticoes and courtyards are safe up to the limits of the church which give onto the public market; they are prevented from sleeping and eating in the church”, do not say that the baths, gardens and porticoes which are joined to the churches are sacred enclosures, so that the display of goods there is prohibited. These parts are considered as parts of the church, but they will not be called sacred enclosures; and as desacralized parts, they will not be worthy of the honour due to the sacred enclosures, but because of the privileges of the church, whoever removes a refugee from this space will be punished. Note that refugees are only prevented from eating and drinking inside the church. Note also the present canon for those who do business in the shops of the perfumers and barbers at the Most Holy Great Church, much more, for those who

²⁷ C. 76 “Ὅτι οὐ δεῖ ἔνδον ἱερῶν περιβόλων καπηλεῖον ἢ βρωμάτων εἶδη προτιθέναι ἢ ἐμπορεύεσθαι

“Ὅτι οὐ χρὴ ἔνδον τῶν ἱερῶν περιβόλων καπηλεῖον ἢ τὰ διὰ βρωμάτων εἶδη προτιθέναι ἢ ἑτέρας πράξεις ποιεῖσθαι τὸ σεβάσμιον τῆς ἐκκλησίας φυλάσσοντας· ὁ γὰρ σωτὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ θεὸς διὰ τῆς ἐν σαρκὶ πολιτείας παιδαγωγῶν ἡμᾶς μὴ ποιεῖν τὸν οἶκον τοῦ Πατρὸς αὐτοῦ ἐμπορίου οἶκον παρεκευλεύσατο· ὃς καὶ τῶν κολλυβιστῶν τὸ κέρμα ἐξέχεε καὶ τοὺς τὸ ἱερόν κοινοποιοῦντας ἀπήλασεν. Εἴ τις οὖν ἐπὶ τῷ προκειμένῳ ἀλῶ πλημμελήματι, ἀφοριζέσθω.

work inside. Also note this canon for those who go to the celebrations and festivities anywhere and who turn the worship of the celebrated saint into a business occasion; these are worthy of a heavy punishment. Basil the Great, in his Ascetics, rigorously prevents this. Read also the passage he wrote on commercial activities during the synods, which says in part: "No, certainly not, since others who have gone before have deviated from the habitual worship of the saints and instead of praying at the proper time and place, they make a market, an assembly and a trade"; and many others still."²⁸

In this text (slightly abridged here), Balsamon explains two contemporary attitudes in his time concerning the use of sacred precincts. One favors the use of church precincts as spaces where it is possible to buy and sell, or to find food and organize fairs during saint's festivals. The other attitude preserves the sanctity of the spaces outside churches and lets no such activities take place. It seems clear he is on the side of those who want to clear the complete area around churches of commercial activities and extend the notion of sacred space to these large areas defined for asylum seekers to include gardens and baths. In his time,

²⁸ Balsamon, commentaries on the council in Trullo, in Messis 2020 : Τὴν ἀνάλογον τιμὴν τῶν ἁγίων ἐκκλησιῶν καὶ τῶν περὶ αὐτὰς συντηροῦντες οἱ θεῖοι πατέρες καὶ μὴ ἀνεχόμενοι ὅλως κοινοῦσθαι παρὰ τινος τὰ ἱερά, διωρίσαντο μὴ προτίθεσθαι βρωματικά²⁸ εἶδη ἔνδον τῶν ἱερῶν περιβόλων μηδὲ καπηλεῖον γίνεσθαι ἐν αὐτοῖς μηδὲ ἀπλῶς πιπράσκεσθαι τι ἔνδον τούτων, ἀλλ' εἶναι ἀνεπικρινώδη παντελῶς τοῖς ἐμπορευομένοις [...]. Διαφόρων δὲ ἁγιωτάτων πατριαρχῶν προσταξάντων ἀπὸ τε τοῦ Αὐγουστεῶνος καὶ τῶν προσεχεστέρων μερῶν τῷ προνάῳ τῆς ἁγιωτάτης τοῦ Θεοῦ Μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας τοὺς τραπεζίτας διωχθῆναι καὶ τοὺς ὀψοπώλας²⁸ καὶ ὀπωροπώλας²⁸ καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἐμπόρους, εἰπόν τινες ὡς περιβόλους ἐκκλησιαστικούς ὁ κανὼν ὀνομάζει τοὺς προνάους ἐκάστου ναοῦ, οὐ μὴν τὰς φιάλας καὶ τὰ ἕτερα μέρη τῶν θείων ναῶν τὰ συνηνωμένα αὐτοῖς. Τοῖς πλείοσι δὲ τοῦτο οὐκ ἤρεσεν· εἶπον γὰρ ὡς, ἐπεὶ ὁ κανὼν ἐκκλησίας οὐκ ἐμνήσθη (τὸ γὰρ ἐν μεσονάῳ ἢ προνάῳ καπηλεῖον γενέσθαι ἢ ἀγορανόμων συνέδριον οὐδὲ εἰς ἐνθύμησιν τινος χριστιανοῦ ἔλθοι, ὡς ἀσεβέστατον), ἀλλ' ἱερῶν περιβόλων ναοῦ, ὀφείλομεν περὶ τούτων τὴν πᾶσαν εἰσαγεῖν ἀμφιβολίαν· πάντες δὲ ἐκείνου εἶναι ἱεροῦς περιβόλους εἶπον τοὺς μὴ ἀπολυθέντας εἰς ἀλόγων ζῶων καταπάτησιν καὶ ἀλλοτρόπως κοινωθέντας. Ἀπὸ μέντοι τοῦ ἱβ' κεφ. τοῦ α' τίτ. τοῦ ε' βιβλίου τοῦ λέγοντος· «Μέχρι τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς δημοσίας ἀγορᾶς τῆς ἐκκλησίας ὄρων τὸ ἀσφαλὲς ἐχέτωσαν οἱ προσφυγόντες τοῖς ἐνδοτέροις λουτροῖς ἢ κήποις ἢ οἰκίμασιν ἢ στοαῖς ἢ αὐλαῖς χρώμενοι καὶ κωλυέσθωσαν ἐντὸς τοῦ ναοῦ ὑπνοῦν ἢ ἐσθίειν»· μὴ εἴτης καὶ τὰ λουτρά καὶ τοὺς κήπους καὶ τὰς στοὰς τὰς συνηνωμένας ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἱεροῦς περιβόλους εἶναι, ὡς ἐντεῦθεν κωλύεσθαι καὶ τὸ προτίθεσθαι ὧν ἐπ' αὐτοῖς. Ταῦτα γὰρ μέρη μὲν τῆς ἐκκλησίας λογίζονται, ἱεροὶ δὲ περιβόλοι οὐ λεχθήσονται· καὶ ὡς κοινὰ μὲν τῆς τιμῆς τῶν ἱερῶν περιβόλων οὐκ ἀξιωθήσονται· διὰ δὲ τὸ τῆς ἐκκλησίας προνόμιον, ὁ ἐξ αὐτῶν ἀφαρπάσας πρόσφυγα κολασθήσεται. Σημείωσαι δὲ ὅτι ἐντὸς μόνου τοῦ ναοῦ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν τοὺς πρόσφυγας κεκώλυται. Σημείωσαι δὲ καὶ τὸν παρόντα κανόνα διὰ τοὺς πραγματευομένους εἰς τὰ μυρεψεῖα καὶ εἰς τὰ κουρσικαρεῖα τῆς ἁγιωτάτης Μεγάλης Ἐκκλησίας, πολλῶν δὲ πλέον εἰς τὰ ἐνδοτέρω ταύτης. Ὡσαύτως σημείωσαι τὸν αὐτὸν κανόνα καὶ διὰ τοὺς ἀπερχομένους εἰς τὰς γινομένας ἐορτὰς καὶ πανηγύρεις ὅπουδήποτε καὶ ποιουμένους ἀφορμὴν πραγματειῶν τὴν προσκύνησιν τοῦ τηνικαῦτα ἐορταζομένου ἁγίου· μεγάλης γὰρ κολάσεως εἰσιν οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἄξιοι. Καὶ ὁ μέγας δὲ Βασίλειος ἐν τοῖς ἀσκητικοῖς αὐτοῦ μεγάλως ταῦτα κωλύει. Καὶ ἀνάγνωθι τὸ χωρίον τὸ γράφον οὕτω περὶ τῶν ἐν ταῖς συνόδοις πραγματειῶν λέγον ἐν μέρει ταῦτα· «Οὐ μὴν ἐπειδὴ ἕτεροι προλαβόντες παρέφθειραν τὴν κερρατηκυῖαν ἐπὶ τῶν ἁγίων συνήθειαν καὶ ἀντὶ τοῦ προσεῦχεσθαι τὸν τε καιρὸν καὶ τὸν τόπον ποιοῦνται ἀγορὰν καὶ πανήγυριν καὶ ἐμπορίαν· καὶ ἕτερα οὐκ ὀλίγα.

however, shops were present around Hagia Sophia, and fairs were organized around churches or convents for saints festivals.

To conclude:

From the time of Eusebius of Caesarea to the time of Balsamon, the definition of sacred space was refined and degrees of sacredness were defined. They all agreed on the utter sanctity of the church altar and sanctuary. They somewhat disagreed on how other spaces inside and outside of the church buildings were to be used and how sacred they should be considered. During the early middle ages, churches became the focal points of small cities and trade developed in their shadow. During the middle byzantine period, the expansion of trade and fairs was such that it can explain the reaction of Balsamon. The Timarion gives us a glimpse of a fair organized during the feast of saint Demetrius in Thessalonica. Balsamon probably felt that this evolution desacralized churches and used his comments on past canons to reform the Church and curb practices that he disapproved. He had an austere and monastic viewpoint when it came to rules of behavior inside church enclosures. He was especially hostile to the presence of women, for fear menstrual blood would defile the places where they stood. In this extension of sacred spaces around churches and this insistence on applying almost the same rules of behavior inside churches and inside buildings close to churches, he wants to assert a form of rigorist clerical control.

In his commentary on canon 97, Balsamon is probably mostly concerned by privately owned churches. He wishes to have the same canonical rules apply to public churches and private ones, when private owners of these churches found convenient to manage their property as they saw fit and give rooms attached to the church as their living space to married members of the clergy. We find here a trace of the tensions between members of the higher clergy, mostly bishops who have a spiritual control over all churches and private landowners, who want to control their property and use the facilities as is convenient for them. In this battle, clerics loose, because they cannot control what goes on in private lands. Even in urban areas, when chapels were attached to other buildings, such as aristocratic mansions, it was probably very difficult to assert control over the use of secondary rooms.

The example of trade taking place around the Hagia Sophia also shows an evolution which made churches the focal point of some commercial activities. Shops were located near

churches and fairs were organized in their shadow. In order to reform these habits and regain ecclesiastical control over church precincts, he wrote these commentaries, extending the notion of sacred space to large areas outside churches. Balsamon wished that the areas around churches be more strictly under the control of clerics and to gain power over these areas, he declared them sacred space. He wanted ritual purity to be the rule around churches: no sex, no food, no ordinary living and no trade. Had he become patriarch of Constantinople, as was his desire, he may have tried to enforce his understanding of sacred space, but he only became patriarch of a city where he could not have an influence. In Constantinople, perfumers remained in the shadow of Hagia Sophia and continued to spread their fragrances around the most holy church of Byzantium.

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Summary

This article deals with the definition of sacred space and sacred enclosures from the time of Eusebius of Caesarea in the 4th century to the time of Balsamon in the 12th century. It presents the position of Late antique Church orders on the proper location for each group of Christians inside churches and the rules of behavior set in place by the council in Trullo, when it comes to sleeping and eating inside a church and doing business close to a church. Then it shows how Zonaras, Aristenos and Balsamon dealt with these same questions in their canonical commentaries, and explains their goal of extending the area considered sacred around churches, probably in reaction against the evolution of 12th century society.