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MARKING TIME: TEXTILES, CYCLICITY AND LITURGY (1250-1550)

A surprising multiplicity of objects could flow into a church, differently associated or contextualized on the basis of a real semantic 'code' that was dictated by the liturgy, or rather by liturgical time.¹

An essential rhythm was embodied in the liturgical colors, that of the copes worn by the celebrant and his acolytes, but also, in unison, those of the cloths that cover the altar and adorn the church. Removing (*mutare*) and alternating (*alternare*) the vestments and the liturgical colors were the operations that supported this chromatic rhythm.²

These quotations convey two different conceptions of the relationships between liturgical objects and time. In the first one, Paolo Piva asserts that the use of objects was “dictated” by liturgical time. There would therefore have a direct and explicit causal link between the two. In the second one, Jean-Claude Schmitt argues that what was meaningful in the medieval church did not rely on a semantic lecture, but on movements and rhythms. Whereas in the first quotation, objects are supposed to act like “signs” identifying liturgical time according to a “semantic code”, in the second one, they are analyzed ornamentally. In brief, a cognitive reading is opposed to a sensory perception of objects.

Liturgical time, that remained the basic reference for the entire Christian society, relied on complex calculations (the *computus*), as well as on verbal discourses³. It combined solar cycles (the liturgical year), weekly cycles (Sundays and *feriae*) and connections between solar, lunar and weekly cycles (Easter and other movable feasts)⁴. This complex cyclicity produced both anachronism and repetition in order to commemorate events related to the life of Christ or saints. But time was not only a theoretical and learned question for scholars. As social construction and far from being just a scientifically measurable reality, time in the Middle Ages required sensorial or physical indicators. For example, Giles Constable has shown that the past

¹ Paolo Piva, “Lo ‘spazio liturgico’: architettura, arredo, iconografia (secoli iv-xii),” in *L'arte medievale nel contesto 300-1300 Funzioni, iconografia, tecniche*, ed. Paolo Piva (Milan: Jaca Books, 2006), 141-180, 141: “*In una chiesa poteva confluire una molteplicità sorprendente di oggetti, diversamente associati o contestualizzati sulla base di un vero e proprio 'codice' semantico che era dettato dalla liturgia, o meglio dal tempo liturgico.*”

² Jean-Claude Schmitt, *Les rythmes au Moyen Âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 2016), 304: “*Un rythme essentiel s'incarne dans les couleurs liturgiques, celle des chapes portées par le célébrant et ses acolytes, mais aussi, à l'unisson, celles des linges qui recouvrent l'autel et ornent l'église. Changer (mutare) et alterner (alternare) les habits et les couleurs liturgiques sont les opérations qui soutiennent ce rythme chromatique.*”

³ Jacques Le Goff, “Au Moyen Âge: Temps de l'Église et temps du marchand,” *Annales ESC* (1960): 417-433 ; Jérôme Baschet, *La civilisation féodale, de l'an mil à la colonisation de l'Amérique* (Paris: Flammarion, 2006), 419-474 ; Jean-Claude Schmitt, “Le Temps: ‘Impensé’ de l'histoire ou double objet de l'historien ?,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale, X^e-XII^e siècles* 48 (2005, special issue: *La Médiévisique au XX^e siècle. Bilan et Perspectives*): 31-52.

⁴⁴ Aimé-Georges Martimort, *L'Eglise en prière*, vol. IV: *La liturgie et le temps* (Paris: Desclée, 1983).

could have been “lived” through sensory experiences, by the means of figures, *spolia* or disjunctions⁵.

In this paper, I will focus on the way the clergy shaped liturgical time by displaying textiles around the main altar, which was the sacral epicenter of the church where the ‘super sacrament’ of the Eucharist took place⁶. For feasibility reasons, I will focus on frontals and dossals. As flexible and movable materials, textiles were displayed around the altar so as to follow the *circulus anni*: for example, dossals and frontals were moved before feasts⁷. In this way, they constitute a perfect laboratory to examine the way objects could mark liturgical time.

In the first section, I will examine the first hypothesis given by Paolo Piva: textiles would function as codified devices, so that they would have formally been meant to identify the feast of the day in a semantic way. In the second part, I will try to demonstrate that liturgical time were in fact more expressed than signified by textiles surrounding the altar.

I. A semantic system identifying liturgical time?

Since the *Fashion System* of Roland Barthes, the sociological history generated a rich semantic analysis of garments⁸. As Gil Bartholeyns explained: the garment “become an expressive sign, it transformed into a fact of communication”⁹. While a global anthropological analysis of textiles has developed, the semantic analysis is still current in the (relatively young) research field of medieval textiles, as Kate Dimitrova and Margaret Goehring put it in the introduction of *Dressing the Part: Textiles as Propaganda in the Middle Ages*:

*While much of textile studies continues to focus on necessary foundational questions concerning dating, workshop processes, stylistic development, vocabulary, and other technical details, the scholarship offered in this volume also questions how medieval textiles were used and invoked in the construction and display of power by addressing their semiotic functions*¹⁰.

⁵ Giles Constable, “A living Past: the Historical Environment of the Middle Ages,” *Harvard Library Bulletin* 1, no. 3 (autumn 1990): 49–70.

⁶ Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the Eucharist in the Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1991).

⁷ This question is directly related to performance, see for example Laura Weigert, “Performance,” *Studies in Iconography* 33 (2012, special issue: *Medieval Art History Today*): 61–72.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Système de la mode* (Paris: Édition du Seuil, 1967).

⁹ Gil Bartholeyns, “Pour une histoire explicative du vêtement. L’historiographie, le XIII^e siècle social et le XVI^e siècle moral,” in *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe/Mode und Kleidung im Europa des späten Mittelalters*, ed Regula Schorta (Bâle and Riggisberg: Schwabe and Abegg-Stiftung, 2010), 209-230, 211.

¹⁰ Kate Dimitrova and Margaret Goehring, “Chapter 1: Introduction” in *Dressing the Part: Textiles as Propaganda in the Middle Ages*, ed. Kate Dimitrova and Margaret Goehring (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 7-10, 7.

The form of liturgical textiles, their shape, their color and their iconography are frequently analyzed as quasi-taxonomic or semantic elements¹¹. Concerning liturgical time, colors are mostly analyzed as a key semantic element identifying them.

I-A. Colors as signs ?

In the *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, Renate Kroos and Friedrich Kobler opened their article on liturgical colors in the catholic church by asserting that they should indicate or characterize liturgical times¹². To support this idea, they cite the name of the rubric relative to that question in the *De sacro altaris mysterio* of Lothar of Segni: “*De quatuor coloribus principalibus, quibus secundum proprietates dierum vestes sunt distinguendae*”. Nevertheless, in this title, it is colors that are qualified by times and there is no guarantee that the reverse is also true.

In a special issue of the *Maison-Dieu*, entitled ‘Quand la liturgie donne à voir’, Michel Pastoureau focused on the role of colors within the liturgy¹³. In 1999 and 2016, he re-asserted what he previously said in the 1980’s¹⁴. Focusing on the way the adjectives relating to colors became nouns, Michel Pastoureau asserted the existence of an ‘*ordo colorum*’ that would have regulated in the church the use of four predetermined and pure colors – white, red, green and black - since the end of the twelfth century. According to him, Lothar of Segni would have solved hesitations and confusions and provided a centralized structure¹⁵, that would have been extended from Rome to the western Europe, a century later, by Durandus of Mende. In this system, colors are distinguished according to allegorical readings: white is used for solemnities (such as Easter or Christmas), for the feasts of the Virgin and those of other virgins. Red refers to apostles, martyrs and evangelists. Black signals penitential time. At last, green is used for common days.

According to Michel Pastoureau: “as in heraldics, [the liturgical colors] are pure categories: they are abstract, conceptual colors, whose shades do not count”¹⁶. Moreover, just

¹¹ In the church, it is for example very well known that we can distinguish a priest from a deacon according to the shape of their garments (a chasuble or a dalmatic).

¹² Renate Kroos and Friedrich Kobler, “Liturgische Farbe in der katholische Kirche,” in *Reallexikon zur deutschen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 7 (Stuttgart and Munich, J. B. Metzler and in Komm: Bei der C. H. Beck’schen Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1981) col. 54-121.

¹³ Michel Pastoureau, “*Ordo colorum*, notes sur la naissance des couleurs liturgiques,” *La Maison-Dieu* 176, (1989): 54-66.

¹⁴ *Id.*, “Le temps mis en couleurs: des couleurs liturgiques aux modes vestimentaires (XII^e-XIII^e siècles),” *Bibliothèque de l’école des chartes* 157 (1999): 111-135 ; “Classer les couleurs au XII^e siècle, liturgie et héraldique,” *Comptes rendus des séances de l’Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 2, (2016): 845-864.

¹⁵ Lothar of Segni, *De sacro altaris mysterio*, PL217 (Petit-Montrouge: J.-P. Migne, 1855), col. 763-916, 799.

¹⁶ Pastoureau, “Le temps mis en couleurs...,” 113.

as heraldic, colors would be organized according to a determined grammar: liturgical colors are supposed to follow the “*ordo colorum*.” On this basis, the next step crossed by some art historians was to analyze colors as semantic signs, all the more efficient that they are seen as “abstract categories”. Rudolph Suntrup for examples compares these colors with sign language (“*Zeichensprache*”) as non-verbal form of the dialogical structure created by the ritual between God and mankind¹⁷.

Nevertheless, this hypothesis does not stand up to analysis of late-medieval sources. First, what is written in *expositiones missae* did not perfectly reflect the medieval ritual. Most of these commentaries on the mass were based on a learned “figural though”, according objects, places or celebrants were figures of another reality (most of time, a biblical reality). According the symbolic of numbers, the four colors had probably been chosen to refer to the four colors of the High Priest’s garments described in Exodus, as Lothar of Segni put it very explicitly: “*Quatuor autem sunt principales colores, quibus secundum proprietates dierum sacras vestes Ecclesia Romana distinguit, albus, rubeus, niger et viridis. Nam et in legalibus indumentis quatuor colores fuisse leguntur: byssus et purpura, hyacinthus et coccus*”¹⁸. That is probably why violet, which is sometimes considered as a full-blown color in other liturgical texts¹⁹, could not find its place within the quadrichromy of *expositiones missae*.

Moreover, colors were not abstract categories but they depended on their supports. Based on some texts of the 8th century, Renate Kroos included curtains or frontals in her wide calendar of medieval liturgical colors²⁰. Nevertheless, we must reassert that the *ordo colorum* concerned above all garments: curtains or carpets or even frontals were less implicated than other textiles by these distinctions²¹. The sacristan handbook of the cathedral of Mende endorsed several times a distinction between the colors of the clothes and that of the frontals. For the feast of

¹⁷ Rudolph Suntrup, “Liturgische farbenbedeutung im Mittelalter und die der frühen Neuzeit,” in *Symbole des Alltags, Alltag der Symbole, Festschrift für Harry Kühnel zum 65. Geburtstag*, ed. Gertrud Blaschitz, Helmut Hundsbichler, Gerhard Jaritz and Elisabeth Vavra (Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1992), 445-467.

¹⁸ Lothar of Segni, *De sacro altaris mysterio*, col. 799.

¹⁹ Latino Malabranca, *Liber quando episcopus cardinalis missarum sollempnia celebraturus est*, (ca. 1280), ed. Marc Dykmans, *Le Cérémonial papal de la fin du Moyen Âge à la Renaissance*, t. I: *Le Cérémonial papal du XIII^e siècle* (Bruxelles and Rome: Institut historique belge de Rome, 1977), 223: “*Circa quod sciendum est quod sancta Romana ecclesia quinque coloribus utitur in sacris vestibus, videlicet albo, rubeo, viridi, violaceo et nigro. Quidam tamen hos duos ultimos pro uno reputant.*”

²⁰ Kroos and Kobler, “Liturgische Farbe in der katholische Kirche”, col. 73.

²¹ In the second part of the 16th century, some clerics plaided to extend these colors to the antependia. Charles Borromeo, *Instructionum fabricae et supellectilis ecclesiasticae, libri II*, ed. Stephano della Torre and Massimo Marinelli (Vatican: Libreria Ed. Vaticana, Axios group, 2000), chap. V: *De convenientia indumentorum et ornamentorum*, 300-305. See also Pierre Milhard, *Le Manuel du divin service, contenant toutes les rubriques du bréviaire et cérémonies de la sainte messe* (Toulouse: [unlabeled], 1608).

Blaise, for example, the office was sung in red and the mass in purple, but the altar must be adorned with green if the feast fell during Septuagesima²².

Inventories of treasures also reveal a wide diversity of colors that cannot be integrated within the “quadrichromy”, like blue, silver, braun, orange, grey... Such colors were also declined in several shades. In 1419, within the “*ornamenta rubea*” of the Amiens cathedral, we find some expressions (“*violatum*”, “*rubeo sive sanguineo*”, “*rubeum obscurum*”, “*rubea trahentia magis ad colorem croceum*”²³) showing that the writer endeavored to describe the shades as precisely as possible. These numerous shades cannot be subsumed within larger and abstract categories. In the Mende cathedral again, the Christmas vigil must be sung in white common copes (“*capis albis communes*”), whereas for the matins of this solemnity, clerics wore whiter copes (“*cape albiores*”)²⁴. Nuances were thus used in an expressive way: the purest white meant the complete fulfillment of the feast. Here we see that we can’t analyze the colors of liturgical textiles in a heraldic way: there were not pure abstraction functioning as sign.

I-B. Images and inscriptions: simultaneity factors

Sometimes, a frontal or a dossal could have been adorned with an image directly related to the feast of the day²⁵: an angel saluting the Virgin for the Annunciation²⁶, Christ rising from the grave for Easter²⁷. The ordinary of the Speyer cathedral, written in German in the 15th century, provides some obvious examples: for Easter, the main altar should be adorned with a white weft-faced compound twill (“*samit*”) “*mit bilden do Ressurectio*”²⁸. On Epiphany, the frontal bore the image of the three kings visiting the Child²⁹. A red altarpiece with a cross was

²² Marie-Thérèse Gousset, “Le coutumier de la sacristie de la cathédrale de Mende et les arts liturgiques,” in *Guillaume Durand: évêque de Mende, vers 1230-1296, canoniste, liturgiste et homme politique* (Paris: Éd. du CNRS, 1992), 207-228, 222.

²³ Jacques Garnier, “Inventaires de la cathédrale d’Amiens,” *Mémoires de la Société des antiquaires de Picardie*, 10 (1950): 253-347, 322-330.

²⁴ Gousset, “Le coutumier de la sacristie de la cathédrale de Mende...,” 217.

²⁵ On the iconography of liturgical textiles, see *Iconography of Liturgical Textiles in the Middle Ages*, ed. Evelin Wetter (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung, 2010).

²⁶ Ulysee Chevalier, *Ordinaires de l’église cathédrale de Laon (XII^e et XIII^e siècle) suivis de deux mystères liturgiques* (Paris: A. Picard, 1897), 260: “*Tabule altaris non aperiuntur, sed paratur altare pannis sericis auro intextis, in quibus depictum est qualiter angelus salutatur beatam Virginem*”.

²⁷ Louis Deschamps de Pas, “Inventaire des ornements, reliquaires, etc. de l’église collégiale de Saint-Omer en 1557,” *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* (1886): 78-98, 87: “Ung drap de velours rouge, avec l’image de la Résurrection, lequel sert à mettre devant la table d’aultel et au tombeau es festes de Pasques.”

²⁸ Andreas Odenthal, Erwin Frauenknecht, *Der Liber Ordinarius des Speyerer Domes aus dem 15. Jahrhundert* (Münster: Aschendorff, 2012), fol. 24, 56: “*eyn wyß duch ruch samet duch mit bilden de Ressurectio*.”

²⁹ *Ibid.*, fol. 9, 29: “*Item in festo Epiphanie domini, wan man die erste vesper lydet, so thut man das heuylightum vff den altare und man thut eyn gryenes duch vor den altare mit den bylden der dryer kunige*”.

used for the Invention and Exaltation of the Cross³⁰. Lastly, a red frontal depicted with the images of the apostles covered the altar for the feasts of Andrew, Peter and Paul, Marc and Jacob³¹.

Some inscriptions borne by textiles also quoted prayers said on specific feast's mass. The treasury of the Xanten cathedral preserve a red frontal, dated 1521, adorned with the images of the Virgin, Victor and Helen (Fig. 1)³². On the top of the textile, an inscription is written on a false super-frontal: "*AVE MILES INVICTISSIME, AVE MARTYR SANCTISSIME, AVE PIE PROTECTOR SANCTE VICTOR*". These words are the incipit of the antiphon sung during the feast of Victor, patron saint of the cathedral.

From a semantic standpoint, we can hypothetically analyze those examples in two distinct ways³³:

- First, we might think that the liturgical action would "dictate" (as Paolo Piva puts it) the aspect of textiles: this way, images or inscriptions would have only illustrated or commented the action.
- Second, we might wonder if adornment would not impulse the liturgical action in a performative way: for examples, inscriptions, by being read, would then fulfill a "liturgical function" as Robert Favreau put it in a pioneer paper on epigraphy and liturgy³⁴.

But these two hypotheses seem too functionalist to be validated³⁵. Moreover, the conjunction between iconography and time was rare. That is why we must find another interpretative model to analysis the relationship between images or inscriptions and time. More recently, Vincent Debiais analyzed inscriptions visible in church according to an "iconographic function"³⁶. According to him, the letters displayed around the altar did not imply anything within the ritual, but it created an "amplified lecture" of the images or objects within the

³⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 64v, 142: "*Und man soll eyn Rodt duch ruch samet mit dem crucifixe machen fur den fronealtare*"; fol. 77r, 181, *idem*.

³¹ *Ibid.*, fol. 53v, 109, saint Andrew ; fol. 67, 150, saint Peter and saint Paul ; fol. 71, 139 saint Marc ; fol. 72, 165, saint Jacob.

³² Jacques Renate, *Die Stiftskirche des Hl. Viktor zu Xanten*, vol. 6, 4 : *Paramente der Stiftskirche* (Kevelaer, Butzon und Bercker, 1979-1987), 43-47, Taf. 60-61, fig. 35.

³³ Staale Sinding-Larsen, *Iconography and Ritual: a Study of Analytical Perspectives* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1984). The art historian defended the idea of a strong causal link between iconography and ritual.

³⁴ Robert Favreau, "L'épigraphie comme source pour la liturgie. Épigraphie et liturgie," in *Vom Quellenwert der Inschriften. Vorträge und Berichte der Fachtagung. Esslingen, 1990* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1992): 65-134.

³⁵ See for example Éric Palazzo, *Liturgie et société au Moyen Âge*, (Paris: Aubier, 2000).

³⁶ Vincent Debiais, "Au pied de la lettre. Une lecture ouverte et liturgique des relations texte/image dans la peinture murale romane catalane", *L'église, lieu de performances, in Locis competentibus*, ed Stéphanie-Diane Daussy (Paris: Picard, 2016), 71-84.

liturgical context. In the same way, we can also suppose that images or inscriptions bore by textiles would generate an “amplified lecture” of the feast of the day.

Let’s consider an example taken outside the main altar’s area. Concerning choir tapestries, Laura Weigert shows that in the late Middle Ages, donors made a point of controlling the time when the tapestry should be hung. In 1518, Jean Ruffault gave a choir tapestry depicting the life of Stephen to the collegiate church of Saint-Stephen in Lille. According to the deed of donation, the chapter had to display the tapestry on specified feast days: the Invention of his relics, the Assumption, the Dedication of the church, All Saints’ Day, Christmas, Easter, Pentecost and Corpus Christi. If Laura Weigert speaks in terms of “liturgical signification”³⁷, it evidently did not depend on a restricted and functionalist conjunction between iconography and liturgical time (only the feast of the Stephen’s relics and the Dedication could be somehow related to the images of the choir tapestry). Here, the point was in fact to establish a connection between the hung tapestries, the memory of the donor and the liturgical time. The more the time of hanging was restricted, the more this connection intensified.

It was probably the same with frontals or dossals. The images or the inscriptions were not aimed at elucidating or illustrating the events commemorated within the ritual. But, through simultaneity and time restriction, they could specify and particularize some of the highest feasts of the year. There was not a causal relationship between adornments and time, but a symbiotic one: images or inscriptions gave a visible form to the commemorated events. In return, they were “activated”, endorsed with additional meanings by the liturgical context.

II. Expressing time in an ornamental way

For the late Middle Ages, the semantic hypothesis cannot be upheld. Whereas it is clear that some textiles were chosen for their color or iconography, the search for a strict conjunction between the aspect of the textile and time was in fact very rare. Simply put, even if there were some codes given by liturgical comments or ordinaries, it was not a coherent system transforming textiles into signage, that one could decipher according to their aspect. The textiles’ contribution to the marking of liturgical time relied mostly on expressivity.

II-A. Textiles as temporal bridges

The liturgical sources provide several examples of discrepancies between the form of textiles and liturgical time. This cannot be clearer than in the sacristan handbook of Saint-Simon

³⁷ Laura Weigert, *Weaving Sacred Stories, French Choir Tapestries and the Performance of Clerical Identity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 80.

and Saint-Jude of Goslar, written in 1435. This text commands that a frontal adorned with the image of the Virgin should be displayed in front of the main altar on the Virgin's Nativity³⁸, on the feasts of Dorothea, Barbara or on the feasts commemorating the action of another holy woman: the conversion of Magdalene and the Invention of the Cross by Helen³⁹. For all these feasts, we might suppose that there was a metonymic link between these holy women and the Virgin, who could serve as a model. But the same frontal was more surprisingly used on the feasts of the bishop Valerius, Cosmas and Damian and the invention of Stephen's relics⁴⁰. Another frontal showing griffins and another image of the Virgin was displayed around the altar on the feasts of Ann, the king Oswald, but also the Transfiguration and the octave of All Saints⁴¹. Let's give a final example: a textile with the image of Jacob was not used for his feast, but for Barthelemy and Kathryn⁴².

All these examples invite us to rethink the links between iconography and time, as it is clear that clerics did not always favor simultaneity and correlation between the two. How can we understand these discrepancies? First, the choice of a textile was closely related to the specific devotions of a church. The sacristan handbook of Mende cathedral registered for example that the altar should be covered with a green or a red frontal for the feast of saint Andrew, because of the presence of relics⁴³. Even if the choice given between red or green is enigmatic, it is clear that having the relics played a role on the altar environment. In Saint-Martin-des-Champs in Paris, in 1342, the main altar was adorned with the image of Martin on horseback for the five feasts of the Virgin⁴⁴, which was probably a way to place metonymically the priory under the protection of the Virgin⁴⁵.

In more general terms, textiles built bridges between feasts in an ornamental way. The ordinary of the Metz cathedral prescribe to reuse the same textiles for Easter and Christmas but also for the Dedication: "*De altari dicimus quod debet sic parari: illud idem aurifrigium debet poni ante altare in Dedicacione quod apponitur in Natali et in Pascha*"⁴⁶. We find almost the

³⁸ Tillman Lohse, *Die Dauer der Stiftung, eine diachronisch vergleichende Geschichte des weltlichen Kollegiatstifts St. Simon und Judas in Goslar* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2011), 62.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10, 12, 26, 82.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 7, 50, 67.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 48, 51, 52, 75.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 57, 80.

⁴³ Gousset, "Le coutumier de la sacristie de la cathédrale de Mende", fol. 1.

⁴⁴ Paris, AN, L870, no. 59, Inventory of the treasury of Saint-Martin-des-Champs, Paris, 1342, fol. 739.

⁴⁵ The main oriental chapel of the church was dedicated to the Virgin. Philippe Plagnieux, "La Vierge à l'Enfant du prieuré parisien de Saint-Martin-des-Champs: son insertion dans le contexte architectural et liturgique," in *Vierges à l'Enfant médiévales de Catalogne: mise en perspective* (Perpignan: Presses universitaires de Perpignan, 2013), 117-129, 125.

⁴⁶ Jean-Baptiste Pelt, *Études sur la cathédrale de Metz. La liturgie*, vol. I: *V^e-XIII^e siècle* (Metz, Impr. du journal Le Lorrain, 1937), 412.

Glodt Julie
Workshop Implications of time

same notes for the Purification and the Assumption⁴⁷. In 1230 in the cathedral of Florence, altars were adorned with “*paschalibus ornamentis*” since Holy Saturday, but also for Christmas⁴⁸. These textiles were also displayed around the secondary altar of Marc on the local feast of Crescentius of Florence, because his relics were preserved under this altar⁴⁹. A similar principle was used at the end of our period, in the Holy-Chapel of Dijon, where the same ensemble of red textiles given by Philip III the Good were used for Christmas and for the feast of John the Evangelist, who was the patron saint of the church.

In the last two examples, by being used cyclically, the textiles displayed around the altar built bridges between the great solemnities of the year (Easter and Christmas for example) and certain local feasts (the Dedication, the feast of the patron saint for example). Thus, the shifting of textiles could redefine to a certain extent the highlights of the liturgical year at the local level. With a flexibility that the *computus* or ceremonials did not allow, textiles offer the possibility of establishing relationships between local festivals and universal solemnities insofar as they were not established explicitly (such image referring to a commemorated event), but in an ornamental way (the same object being used for two similar feasts). In the end, these relationships did not require a cognitive approach but were based on memory and diachrony.

II-B) A sense of contrasts

This expressivity was enriched by a strong sense of contrasts, based on increases or disruptions, which relied mostly on prestigious materials and various colors, even if they didn't follow the “*ordo colorum*”. These ornamental contrasts were not only played on a binary mode between feasts and fasts. They can also mark different degrees of importance between feasts, as shown by the customs of the benedictine abbey of Saint-Augustine of Canterbury, which was copied around 1330-1340. For double feasts, this text prescribes placing a “*pallio sive frontierio precioso*” in front of the altar. But the solemnities are explicitly marked by an “*augmentum pulcritudinis pallium sive frontierium deauratum*”⁵⁰. Hence also the complexity of certain

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 303: “*In Purificatione beate Marie debet poni illud idem aurifrigium quod positum ibi fuit in Natali Domini. Tres autem cruces debent poni retro altare, scilicet due minores et tertia maior*” ; 431: “*Altare debet esse paratum antequam Missa de vigilia cantetur ; debet autem parari sicut in Natali Domini, sicut in Purificatione, sicut in sabbato Pasche et in sancto sabbato Pentecosten. Item enim est ornatu aurifrigium ubique*”.

⁴⁸ Domenico Moreni, *Mores et consuetudines Ecclesiae Florentinae* (Florence: Typis Petri Allegrinii, 1794), 32: “*altaria quoque parentur paschalibus ornamentis.*”

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-47: “*Pro sancto Crescentio, cujus corpus habemus in altari sancti Marci*” ; 48 “*Item predicta die preparetur Altare S. Marci vestimentis Paschalibus, et mirtis et lauro et lampadibus circa ipsum.*”

⁵⁰ Edward Maunde Thompson, *Customary of the Benedictine Monasteries of Saint Augustin, Canterbury and Saint Peter, Westminster*, vol. 1: *Consuetudines monasterii Sancti Augustini Cantuariae* (Londres, Henry Bradshaw Society, 1902), 111.

ordinaries or sacristan guides whose purpose was to organize the ornamental hierarchies of liturgical time.

Conversely, after the increasing of the textile decorum for certain feasts, an ornamental deflation logically followed, which was more rarely expressed in texts. Although much earlier than the period studied, the ordinary of the Rheinau cathedral written at the beginning of the 12th century specifies that after Compline on the Thursday after Easter, the frontal of the altar must be replaced by a humbler one: “*Post completorium vel in crastino [...], principalis quoque altaris pallium cum alio humiliori mutatur*”⁵¹.

Moreover, the solemnity of certain occasions could be manifested in contrast with silver or golden antependium. In 1410, in Châlons cathedral, the main altar must be covered with a dossal and a frontal made of black cendal (a kind of tabby) during Advent and Lent⁵². However, on the solemnities, the main altar was stripped bare to reveal the golden *tabula*, adorned with gems and stones, which permanently enveloped its front face, while the two short sides of the altar were decorated with gilded and enameled copper⁵³. Here, the iconography mattered little (the inventory does not even describe it): the materials, colors and light effects had to be enough to demonstrate in a sensitive way the exceptional character of the feast. The clergy should also make great use of the movements of some textiles, covering or uncovering the altar, to punctuate liturgical time. We can easily imagine that the remotion of the black cendal led to a spectacular unveiling.

*

According to a common idea, the occasions of liturgical year should be above all identified by colors, playing the role of visual signs in the church. In this paper, I have shown that there was no semantic system associating textiles and liturgical time. It is essential to consider the marking of time by textiles in a dynamic and diachronic mode. In fact, the quality of time was less signified than expressed by textiles surrounding the altar. This expressivity was based on *ornamental* bridges and contrasting effects between certain occasions in the course of the *circulus anni*, which was very appropriate to translate the cyclicity of the liturgical

⁵¹ Anton Hänggi, *Der Rheinauer Liber ordinarius* (Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, Rh 80) (Fribourg: Éditions universitaires, 1957), 143.

⁵² Paul Pelicier and Alfred Darcel, “Inventaire des meubles et bijoux de la cathédrale de Châlons en 1410,” *Bulletin archéologique du Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques* 2 (1886): 135-188, 159, art. 138: “*Item, duo paramenta de sendallo nigro, furrata de tela crocea que ponuntur in Adventu et Quadragesima, unum ante tabulam et aliud ante dorsale majoris altaris.*”

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 155, art. 99: “*Item tabula majoris altaris que discoperitur in totis et tertiis duplicibus, cooperta auro cum ymaginibus elevatis, ornata gemmis et lapidibus pretiosis et aliis, et duo latera cooperta sunt de cupro deaurato esmailliato.*”

Glodt Julie
Workshop Implications of time

time. The precise color or iconography of some frontals was less important than the general idea of abundance which they widely contributed and that they recreated in the course of the year. They were definitely involved in the ‘chromatic rhythm’ suggested by Jean-Claude Schmitt⁵⁴, which was not supposed to be precisely analyzed but perceived as a whole⁵⁵.

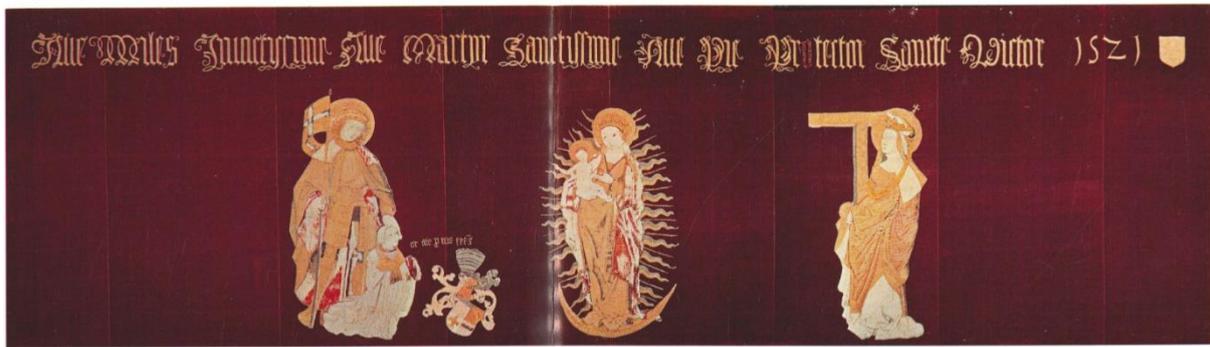


Figure 1 Xanten, collegiale church St. Victor, inv. NR I 40 ; frontal, 1521 (embroideries), 20th century (red velvet), Cologne (embroideries), 98×360 cm.

⁵⁴ J.-Cl. Schmitt, *Les rythmes au Moyen Âge*, 304.

⁵⁵ J.-Cl. Bonne, “Rituel de la couleur: fonctionnement et usage des images dans le Sacramentaire de Saint-Étienne de Limoges,” in *Image et signification. Rencontres de l'École du Louvre* (Paris: La documentation française, 1983), 129-139.