

# Theological Elaboration, Portable Altars and their Ritualised use on Maundy Easter Days



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*This article focuses on the medieval ritualistic use of portable altars during the three days preceding Easter Sunday. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, following the Maundy Thursday evening service, the priest removed the liturgical objects and the linen tablecloth from the altar. After being stripped, the altar structure was left uncovered for three days. On these days, the ritual was elaborated in a different way than it was for the rest of the liturgical year. The mass on the Maundy days served to commemorate the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ through a medieval allegorical interpretation. Scholars have shown that the staging and usage of liturgical artifacts in the Easter observances were understood as emblems of Christ's life. This specific theological elaboration influences the conceptualisation, perception, and use of the liturgical object. The purpose of this investigation is to examine the extent to which the use of portable altars relates to this reasoning. After assessing their use inside the church, the intended meaning of their distinctive features throughout medieval liturgical commentaries will be analysed. To close, this article turns to the meaning of portable altars as emblems of the Universal Church as promoted by the papacy.*

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A portable altar from the twelfth century is preserved in the church of St. Maria im Kapitol in Cologne.<sup>1</sup> Due to a lack of supporting documentation, it is impossible to know the church for which it was originally commissioned.<sup>2</sup> Studies conducted on the rectangular-shaped liturgical object have already examined its iconographic program and inscriptions.<sup>3</sup> This research acknowledged two iconographic characteristics germane to the Cologne goldsmith tradition of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The four evangelists placed around the stone on the upper side of the liturgical object constitute the first feature. Michael Budde refers to the four figures as the *Majestas Group*, which was placed next to the central stone because of the latter's association with Christ.<sup>4</sup> The second iconographic feature shows the apostles and prophets on the four lateral sides of the liturgical object.

Despite the iconography of the Cologne portable altar sharing common features with local medieval goldsmith production, the portrayal of the prophet

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<sup>1</sup> Portable Altar, Cologne, Germany, St. Maria im Kapitol, 1160-1180, green porphyry, oak core, pit enamel, copper, stamped and gilded, brown varnish. The Portable Altar was on loan at the Museum Schnütgen for a long time, yet has been returned to St. Maria im Kapitol. High resolution images of this liturgical object can be found in Rheinische Bildarchiv, <<https://www.kulturelles-erbe-koeln.de/documents/obj/05070724>> [accessed 12 October 2022].

<sup>2</sup> Michael Budde, *Altare portatile, Kompendium der Tragaltäre des Mittelalters (600-1600)*, 3 vols (published doctoral thesis, Münster, 1999), iii, pp. 44–51.

<sup>3</sup> The main publications on portable altars include, Joseph Braun, *Der Christliche Altar in seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, 2 vols (Munich: Alte Meister Guenther Koch & Co, 1924); Budde, *Altare portatile*; Robert Favreau, 'Les autels portatifs et leurs inscriptions', *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale*, 46, 2003, 327–52; Eric Palazzo, *L'Espace rituel et le sacré dans le christianisme: La liturgie de l'autel portatif dans l'Antiquité et au Moyen Âge* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2008); Cynthia Hahn, 'Portable Altars (and their Rationale): Liturgical Objects and Personal Devotion', in *Image and Altar 800–1300*, ed. by Poul Grønder-Hansen (Copenhagen: National Museum of Denmark, 2014), pp. 45–64; Sarah Luginbill, 'The Medieval Portable Altar Database' <<https://medievalportablealtars.com>> [accessed 19 January 2023].

<sup>4</sup> Budde, *Altare portatile*, iii, pp. 45–56.

Jonah on the lateral edge is unique and demands special attention.<sup>5</sup> He is represented bald and almost completely naked. Dietrich Kötzsche claims that this iconography alludes to the moment Jonah emerged from the whale.<sup>6</sup> According to the Bible, the prophet was swallowed by a whale, languishing three days and three nights within the creature, praying for help. God finally listened to his prayer and made the whale regurgitate the prophet. In addition to considering Jonah as a symbol of Jesus, Christian theologians interpreted the narrative as a story of rebirth and redemption. The reemerging from the whale was associated with the return of the Messiah on the third day after his death, with the swallowing being linked to his crucifixion. The rebirth of Christ was envisioned in the story of Jonah and served as a reference to the rite of baptism. On the Cologne portable altar, the prophet Jonah is depicted in poor condition as a reference to the three days he spent inside the whale. The specific iconography used on the portable altar of Cologne alludes to the theme of virtuous devotion.<sup>7</sup> Theologians compared the spiritual renewal of Jonah to the condition of the neophytes, who were undressed and immersed in the baptismal basin during the rite. When emerging from the holy water, they would be given a linen garment like the one Jonah wears on the portable altar of Cologne.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Depicted on the small lateral side of the portable altar facing the King Solomon. For the detail see Budde, *Altare portatile*, iii, IMG. AP061ABB/2.

<sup>6</sup> Dietrich Kötzsche, *Fragmente eines romanischen Emailwerkes*, in *Intuition und Kunstwissenschaft, Festschrift für Hanns Swarzenski*, ed. by Peter Bloch and others (Berlin, 1973), pp. 151–70.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> 'Adam und Eva', in *Lexikon der Christlichen Ikonographie*, ed. by Engelbert Kirschbaum, 8 vols (Rome, Freiburg, Basel, Wien: Herder, 1994), i, pp. 43–4.

Full of religious significance, linen fabrics were used in rites throughout the liturgical year. Perceived as a reference to the vestment used to wrap the corpse of Christ in his burial, linen was also used to dress the priest and to drape sacred objects inside churches. However, during the liturgical year, the use of linen was not constant, especially on altars.<sup>9</sup> A linen tablecloth was placed on the altar during most of the liturgical year to cover the part where the chalice and paten stand during Mass, except for the time between Maundy Thursday until Maundy Saturday night. The linen cloth was removed from the altar after the Maundy Thursday night service, and the stone underneath washed and blessed by the priest with holy water and oil, recalling the consecration rite of the altar. The three days before Easter honor eternal life by recalling the agony, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Therefore, no transubstantiation happens on those days, and so the altar is not covered. The uncovered altar appears as the theological elaboration of the three Maundy days, commemorating through its visual staging the awaiting time between the death of Christ and his second coming.

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<sup>9</sup> Marcel Metzger, 'La place des liturges à l'autel', *Revue des Sciences Religieuses*, 45 (1971), 113–45; Alain Rauwel, 'L'autel chrétien médiéval III (compte rendu)', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre*, 10 (2006) <<http://journals.openedition.org/cem/778>> [Accessed 03 October 2022]; Alain Rauwel, 'Les espaces de la liturgie au Moyen Âge Latin', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre*, Hors-série n. 2 (2008) <<https://doi.org/10.4000/cem.4392>> [Accessed 13 October 2022]; Jerome Baschet, *L'iconographie médiévale* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008); Paolo Piva, *Art médiéval: les voies de l'espace liturgique* (Paris: Picard, 2010); Marcello Angheben, 'Les reliquaires mosans et l'exaltation des fonctions dévotionnelles et eucharistiques de l'autel', *Codex aquilarensis: Cuadernos de investigación del Monasterio de Santa María la Real*, 32 (2016), 171–208 <<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02376306>> [Accessed 13 October 2022].

On Maundy Thursday, liturgical items<sup>10</sup> mentioned in the inscription on the Cologne portable altar were removed:<sup>11</sup> 'The altar symbolises the cross, the chalice the grave, the paten the gravestone, the white linen the burial cloths'<sup>12</sup>. This inscription, together with a second which discloses the ontological ambiguity of the portable altar, gives promising insight regarding the use and perception of liturgical objects in the rite: 'Everything that is touched on the spiritual altar [of the heart] is completed on the material altar'<sup>13</sup>. The omission of transubstantiation and the removal of liturgical objects for the three days leading up to Easter Sunday have strong Christological associations. Liturgy is performed in the name of the resurrected Christ, and the inscriptions enhance this theological fact by associating the portable altar and all the objects it bears with the Passion and Resurrection. The liturgical implications of the Cologne portable altar and of the objects placed on it for the rite – the cross, chalice, paten, and linen cloth create a functional and theological relation between altars and portable altars. The form of the object and the content of

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<sup>10</sup> On the use of cult-images in the West, see Hans Belting, *Bild und Kult: Eine Geschichte des Bildes vor dem Zeitalter der Kunst* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1990); Frank Fehrenbach, *Die goldene Madonna im Essner Münster – Der Körper der Königin* (Ostfildern: KunstOrt Ruhrgebiet, 1996); Beate Fricke, *Ecce fides: Die Statue von Conques, Götzendienst und Bildkultur im Westen* (Munich, 2007). For a more liturgical-objects oriented approach, see Cynthia Hahn, *Strange Beauty: Issues in the Making and Meaning of Reliquaries, 400-circa 1204* (Pennsylvania: Penn State University Press, 2012); Philippe Cordez, *Schatz, Gedächtnis, Wunder: die Objekte der Kirchen im Mittelalter* (Regensburg: Schnell + Steiner, 2015), p. 121.

<sup>11</sup> Selected publications on the staging and liturgical involvement of relics and reliquaries include Peter Brown, *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1938), pp. 222–50; Edina Bozóky, *La politique des reliques de Constantin à Saint-Louis: protection collective et 211egitimation du pouvoir* (Paris: Beauchesne Ed., 2006); Cynthia Hahn, 'What Do Reliquaries Do for Relics?', *Numen*, 57 (2010), 284–316; Thomas Lentjes, 'Ereignis und Repräsentation. Ein Diskussionsbeitrag zum Verhältnis von Liturgie und Bild im Mittelalter', in *Die Bildlichkeit Symbolischer Akte*, ed. by Barbara Stollberg-Rilinger and Thomas Weißbrich (Münster: Rhema, 2010), pp. 155–84.

<sup>12</sup> Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, pp. 44–51. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: 'ara crvcis · tvmvli-q(ve) calix | apidisq(ve) pate | na:sindonis-officivm-candida | bissvs habet'.

<sup>13</sup> Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, pp. 44–51. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: 'qvicqvíd in altari pvnct | atvr spiritvali | illvd in altari comple | tvr materiali'.

the inscription show that the Eucharist was celebrated on both types of altars.<sup>14</sup> In fact, and according to the ecumenical canons, both liturgical objects share the same consecration rite, with the consequent deposition of relics, as well as their role during the celebrations. One notable distinction between portable and permanent altars is that the first type allows the celebration of the Eucharist both inside and outside the church.<sup>15</sup>

While previous research has been conducted on permanent altars, this contribution focuses for the first time on the ritualistic involvement of portable altars during the three days before Easter Sunday. According to anthropological and sociological studies published since the late 1990s, rituals are a source of social meaning.<sup>16</sup> Environmental stimuli, individual and collective behaviors, the staging and use of objects with all their properties, have an impact on the social perception of rituals. Working from this perspective, this article investigates how the ritual on the three days before Easter Sunday was conceived to suggest an emerging awareness of the divine presence on portable altars. Aside from the diverse portable altar conceptions, the symbolic value of their components will be explored through medieval allegorical interpretations of Easter rituals and their theological

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<sup>14</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 731–2.

<sup>15</sup> On the custom of veiling and unveiling, see *Weaving, Veiling, and Dressing, Textile and their Metaphors in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by K.M. Rudy and Barbara Baert (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007); Nadège Bavoux, 'Sacralité, pouvoir, identité: Une histoire du vêtement d'autel (XIIIe - XVIe siècles)' (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Université de Grenoble, 2012); Vincent Debiais, Eric Palazzo, and Lucien-Jean Bord, *Le rideau, le voile et le dévoilement du Proche-Orient ancien à l'Occident médiéval* (Paris: Geuthner, 2019).

<sup>16</sup> Celene Reynolds and Emily Erikson, 'Agency, Identity, and the Emergence of Ritual Experience', *Socius*, 3 (2017). For the perceptual experience, see Meyer Schapiro, *Romanesque Art: Selected Papers* (New York: George Braziller, 1977), pp. 1–27; Alain Rauwel, 'Théologie de l'Eucharistie et valorisation de l'autel à l'âge roman', *Hortus Artium Medievalium*, 11 (2005), 177–82.

elaboration. This contribution aims to apply a phenomenologically oriented approach to these liturgical objects and to consider portable altars both as a medium for the sacramental effects of the liturgy and as an object of remembrance enhancing the symbolism of the Easter rite.

## PORTABLE ALTARS

Since the seventh century, in Christian tradition, liturgical celebrations have taken place both inside and outside of churches.<sup>17</sup> The Roman Church only canonised the practice of celebrating the liturgy outside in the ninth century. However, since the times of the early church, portable altars have been used for final benedictions, military and missionary campaigns, and crusades.<sup>18</sup> It must be kept in mind that portable altars were never used exclusively outside, they could also be used for liturgical celebration within a church in combination with or in substitution of a consecrated, permanent altar.<sup>19</sup> Textual evidence points out shared and simultaneous uses of both portable and permanent altars, which raises questions regarding the nature of their dissimilarities.

Philological research conducted by Joseph Braun on the terms used to define permanent and portable altars draws attention to their ambiguity in the

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<sup>17</sup> Charles Rohault De Fleury, *La Messe: études archéologiques sur ses monuments*, 7 vols (Paris: Ve A. Morel et Cie, 1883) i, p. 164; Jules Corblet, *Histoire Dogmatique, Liturgique et Archéologique Du Sacrement de l'Eucharistie*, 2 vols (Paris: 1885), i, p. 78; Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*; Budde, *Altare portatile*; Sarah Luginbill, 'The Medieval Portable Altar Database'.

<sup>18</sup> Daniel Rock, *The Church of Our Fathers as Seen in St. Osmund's Rite for the Cathedral of Salisbury*, 3 vols (London: C. Dolman, 1849), i, p. 249.

<sup>19</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 20–30.

nomenclature. In sources, portable altars are commonly referred to as *tabulae*; permanent altars are more rarely termed as such. *Tabula altaris*, *tabula consecrate*, *tabula fabrefacta*, *tabula itineraria*, and *tabula portatilis* are other expressions used for portable altars.<sup>20</sup> Braun hypothesises that these variations may have been employed to stress the portability of the liturgical object as well as to distinguish them from the *tabula*, a term that usually designates the stone centrally positioned on the upper side of permanent altars.

An illustration of how portable altars would have been staged inside the church in medieval liturgy is documented for the Lateran Basilica in the *Decreta* of Bonizo of Sutri, dated 1088. According to the source, a combined Eucharistic use of a portable and a permanent altar was frequent for that time in Roman churches.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore assumed that portable altars were positioned on top of the central stone (the *tabula*) of permanent altars when used together in the liturgy. This location may explain why the term *tabula* was adopted as a term for portable altars. Although portable altars enabled the celebration of the Eucharist both inside and outside the ecclesiastical building, the Church encouraged the rite to be administered inside, to avoid immorality or the attendance of non-believers. Eric Palazzo assumed that the use of permanent altars was promoted by the Church since ecclesiastical sources tend to mention permanent, not portable altars.<sup>22</sup> This tendency, however, might also attest to the medieval inclination to identify portable with permanent altars; an

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup> The source is mentioned in Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, p. 57.

<sup>22</sup> Palazzo, *L'espace*, chapter 4.



aspect which would also explain the above-mentioned sources that highlight the possibility of using the same nomenclature (*tabula*) for both liturgical objects.<sup>23</sup>

From the seventh to the ninth century, canonical restrictions alternatively authorised and forbade celebrating the liturgy outside. However, even if such was temporarily forbidden, there is no mention that transubstantiation performed outside was dogmatically different from the one happening inside the church. This similarity allowed the canons of the Council of Mainz, from the late ninth century, to ultimately standardise the outside use of portable altars. Although the text also stipulates that outdoor rites must be held in tents, there is no mention of a variation either in the liturgical use or in the staging of portable altars.<sup>24</sup> Magnificent box-shaped portable altars are then created, with extensive visual programs of images and inscriptions, as is the case with the remarkable portable altar from Cologne.<sup>25</sup> As a result, and regardless of the medieval limitations of the Eucharistic celebration, portable altars acted as a medium for the sacramental effect of the liturgy.

The context of celebration (inside/outside) does not seem to modify the understanding of the theological conceptions regarding portable altars, and

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<sup>23</sup> Rock, *The Church*, p. 249; *Missale Romanum*, V, pp. 35–6 <<http://textosparalaliturgia.blogspot.com/2014/03/missale-romanum-ad-missam-vespertinam.html>> [accessed 03 October 2022]; *Pontificale Romanum Clementis VIII. et Urbani PP. VIII*, (Brussels: Typis Georgii Fricx, 1735), viii. Rupert of Deutz' allegorical writings on the liturgy are summarised in Helmut Deutz and Ilse Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis: lateinisch/deutsch. Auf der Textgrundlage der Ed. von Hrabanus Haacke*, 4 vols (Freiburg im Breisgau, Wien: Herder, 1999), i, pp. 58–124.

<sup>24</sup> Giovanni Vignoli, *Liber pontificalis seu de gestis Romanorum pontificum*, 1. 1. (Rome: Bernabo, 1724); Paolo Maria Paciaudi, *De cultu S. Johannis Baptistae antiquitates christianae accedit in veterem ejusdem ordinis liturgiam commentarius* (Roma: Frates Palearini, 1829). The staging without linen seems to be acknowledged in Palazzo, *L'espace*, chapter 4 and Hahn, 'Portable altars', pp. 45–54.

<sup>25</sup> Reference is made to two publications dealing with the medieval contextualisation of ecclesiastical space: Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, p. 419 and Dominique Iogna-Prat, *La Maison Dieu. Une histoire monumentale de l'Église au Moyen Âge (v. 800-v. 1200)* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2006).

significant sources attest to their staging and use outside the church. According to Hincmar of Reims (806–82), in his *Miracula S. Dionysii*, the Monks of St. Denis celebrated the daily office on a portable altar while accompanying Charles the Bald (823–77) on a military expedition. To celebrate properly on the portable altar, they used to light a candle. Tragically, the source records that one day the candle slipped and started to burn the wooden parts of the portable altar and the covering linen.<sup>26</sup> Although there is no legislation mandating the use of linen cloth on portable altars, this source seems to attest to this practice. The use of linen as covering cloth was made mandatory on permanent altars by Pope Bonifacius in the seventh century, and Hincmar's text shows that this practice extended to portable altars.<sup>27</sup> The alleged use of linen cloth on portable altars might also be confirmed in the above-mentioned inscription on the portable altar of Cologne, where together with the chalice and the paten, linen is mentioned as an object of the rite.

Although textual sources document the use of linen on portable altars, no medieval image is known confirming this practice. The earliest depiction is found in a fresco by Raphael of the coronation of Charlemagne in the year 800.<sup>28</sup> On the left side of the painting, one sees a permanent altar with several candlesticks and a tablecloth. The viewer might also see an oblong object beneath the linen tablecloth,

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<sup>26</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, p. 424.

<sup>27</sup> Thomas M Izbicki, 'Lineamenta Altaria: The Care of Altar Linens in the Medieval Church', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles*, 12 (2016), 41–60.

<sup>28</sup> Rock, *The Church*, pp. 249–50. The Coronation of Charlemagne, Raphael, 1517, Raphael Rooms, Musei Vaticani, Rome. The fresco can be seen on the website of the Musei Vaticani <<https://www.museivaticani.va/content/museivaticani/en/collezioni/musei/stanze-di-raffaello/stanza-dell-incendio-di-borgo/incoronazione-di-carlo-magno.html>> [accessed 19 January 2022]

which, according to Rock, was the silver portable altar given by Charlemagne to the Lateran Basilica on the day of his coronation.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, the fresco by Raphael, although of a later date, might attest to the medieval ceremonial staging of portable altars. If covered by a linen cloth, portable altars would not be discernible from permanent altars, and this might explain the almost complete lack of these liturgical objects in medieval representations. For the eleventh and twelfth centuries, only two images of such are known. One is painted on folio 16<sup>v</sup> of the Bernward Gospel, and the other is incised on the upper slab of the Paderborn portable altar given by Henry II.<sup>30</sup> Both images represent the consecration of a portable altar; altars in general were covered only after the rite, so the images would depict a moment earlier in the ceremony.

## THEOLOGICAL ELABORATION

The written sources state that linen cloth was used to cover portable altars for almost the entire liturgical year. Consequently, like permanent altars, portable altars would be uncovered on Maundy Thursday and be visible until Easter Sunday. While scholars have studied the habits of Easter week and their relation to the symbolism of permanent altars, comparable studies on portable altars are lacking. The liturgical

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<sup>29</sup> Alfred Darcel, *Trésor de l'Église de Conques, dessiné et décrit* (Paris: Librairie Archéologique de Victor Didron, 1861) pp. 1–13.

<sup>30</sup> The Bernward Gospel is held at the Hildesheim Dom Museum, Domschatz 18, Bernward Gospel, dedication opening, fol. 16<sup>v</sup>. The miniature can be seen in Jennifer P. Kingsley, 'Picturing the Treasury: The Power of Objects and the Art of Memory in the Bernward Gospels', *Gesta*, 50 (2011), 19–39 (p. 20). The niello on the upper side of Henry II's portable altar can be found in Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, p. 212.

elaboration of portable altars, their use, and staging, on the three days before Easter Sunday, must now be addressed.

Easter is the most significant set of Christian celebrations and has received relevant theological commentary and consideration since the Early Church.<sup>31</sup> At each Mass, the priest celebrates the Eucharist as the commemoration of the last supper and a metaphor of devotional unity. On Maundy Thursday, the Eucharist is held to reconcile the relationship between the earthly church and God. On this day only, the transubstantiation is performed twice, and it will not take place on the following two days. This suspension recalls and refers to the awaiting for Christ's resurrection. Therefore, the transubstantiation is not performed on Maundy Friday; on this day, the consecrated hosts from Maundy Thursday are distributed. No ritual at all is performed on Maundy Saturday as a symbol of the agony of damnation. Finally, the full service is held again on Easter Sunday.

The various parts of the medieval Maundy Thursday celebration refer to the Last Supper, the *Tenebrae* service, and the unveiling of the altar.<sup>32</sup> Since the ninth century, the three-day liturgical display preceding Easter Sunday has begun with the *Tenebrae* celebration during *Matines* and *Lauds*, when Christ's passion and death are emphasised.<sup>33</sup> In a completely dark church, fourteen candles are lit, along with a central one indicating Christ, all are then gradually extinguished following the

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<sup>31</sup> *Missale Romanum*, V, *Cena Domini*; and Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, 33.2.

<sup>32</sup> Giulio Cesare Paribeni, 'Ufficio delle Tènebre', in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Roma: Treccani, 1937) <<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/ufficio-delle-tenebre>> [accessed 03 October 2022].

<sup>33</sup> *Missale Romanum*, V, *Cena Domini*; and Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, 33.2.

communal reading of the life of Jesus from the Gospel of John. In the final, profoundly evocative state of darkness, an abrupt noise was produced as an allusion to the earthquake that took place as Christ died. To emphasise the significance of the moment, the *Tenebrae* observances were conceived to end at the time of Jesus' death.<sup>34</sup> Liturgical objects, such as a chalice, paten, and linen cloth, were then removed from the altar. Rupert of Deutz provides a descriptive illustration of the Maundy Thursday evening ceremony in his fifth book of the *Liber De Divinis Officiis*<sup>35</sup>: 'Therefore, since the altar symbolically represents Christ, it is rightly deprived of all His clothing and adornment because of the memory of the same'.<sup>36</sup> Rupert of Deutz describes the uncovering ceremony and names the liturgical objects which are mentioned in the inscriptions on the Cologne portable altar.<sup>37</sup> The elaborated ritual of the obscuring darkness of the church, and the act of unveiling the altar, were meant to symbolise the passion of Christ, his humiliation, death, rising from the dead, as well as the announcement of his second coming.<sup>38</sup>

Truth, belief, and justification are three epistemological conditions necessary to understanding the conceptualisation of the liturgical staging of portable altars as medium of the sacramental effect and memory. Interpretations of time as defining

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<sup>34</sup> Sylvia Elizabeth Mullins, *Myroblytes: Miraculous Oil In Medieval Europe* (unpublished doctoral thesis, Georgetown University, 2016), pp. 110–14.

<sup>35</sup> Deutz & Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, i, pp. 24–5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 10, 30 with translation at pp. 766–7. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: 'Cum ergo altare Christum significet, recte ob commemorationem horum vestitu et ornatu suo spoliatum est'.

<sup>37</sup> Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, pp. 44–51. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: 'ara crvcis · tvmvli-q(ve) calix | apidisq(ve) pate | na·sindonis-officivm·candida | bissvs habet'.

<sup>38</sup> Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, 5.24–5; *Missale Romanum*, V, *Cena Domini*; Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, 33.2.

memory and commemoration are ubiquitous to medieval Church thought. Scriptures delineate the beginning and the end of times, and in the liturgy, allusion is made to past events which were ritualised, to reinforce their memory and dogmatic unity, but every rite is conceived and performed with consideration given to earthly time and its cyclicity. The physical involvement in the rite, and a theological understanding of it, allow the believer to at once participate in earthly cyclical time and be elevated towards the celestial one. The perception of the sacrament was enhanced in the daily liturgy, as well as in celebrations throughout the ecclesiastical year, which were intended to foster the awareness of the divine presence in this earthly time. The conception of liturgical objects such as portable altars and their dedicated use and staging are essential to mediating this conjunction of times during the rite.

Scholars have already studied the impact of all the components of portable altars on their perception.<sup>39</sup> The formulation and use of these liturgical objects were meant to visualise the divine through the enhancement of their liturgical function and theological conceptions. The medieval Easter tradition of unveiling the altar renews its consecration and establishes the promise of true belief. Uncovered from linen, the altar stone was washed and anointed with sanctified oil to recall the

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<sup>39</sup> Anouk Cohen and Damien Mottier, 'Pour une anthropologie des matérialités religieuses', *Archives de sciences sociales des religions*, 174 (2016), 349–68 (p. 350); Song of Songs 5:14; Hebrews 4:15; Matthew 21:12; Hahn, *Strange Beauty*, chapters 2 and 3.

consecration rite.<sup>40</sup> Comparably, portable altars were uncovered, washed, oiled, and left visible for three days. This aspect invites the investigation of the conception and perception of portable altars in the specific context of Easter ceremonies.<sup>41</sup>

The Cologne portable altar inscriptions, enclosed in proximity to the four quadrangular-shaped enamels depicting the evangelical animals, trace the differentiation between the physical-literal and spiritual-figurative altar.<sup>42</sup> Christ is metaphorically present in many parts of the rite, such as in the chants, sacraments, holy readings, inscriptions, and in the iconographic cycles. Yet, his presence is real in the consecrated bread and wine. The inscription on the Cologne portable altar refers to both presences, and by doing so, the ontological ambiguity of the liturgical object is revealed. The divine, existing independently from space and time, is envisioned in the materials, inscriptions, and figurative cycles which are, for most of the year imagined only, for it is obscured by a linen cloth.<sup>43</sup> The divine presence is then enhanced during the transubstantiation and found in the chalice and paten positioned on the central stone of portable altars. The unveiling and its theological meaning are described by Rupert of Deutz when referring to the symbolism of the

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<sup>40</sup> Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, p. 681. Reference is made to the implication of the holy week as the week of creation, where the salvation of mankind is seen.

<sup>41</sup> Pamela Nourrigeon, 'Voiler l'autel De l'usage Du Rideau Au Canon de La Messe', in *Le Rideau, Le Voile et Le Dévoilement. Du Proche-Orient Ancien à l'Occident Médiéval*, ed. by Vincent Debais, Eric Palazzo, and Lucien-Jean Bord (Paris: Geuthner, 2019), pp. 91–100 (p. 93).

<sup>42</sup> Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, pp. 44–51. Translated from German by the author: 'Everything that is touched on the spiritual altar [of the heart] is completed on the material altar'. Latin original: 'qvicquid in altari pvnct | atvr spiritvali | illvd in altari comple | tvr materiali'.

<sup>43</sup> Gerardo Boto Varela, 'Vélu Lapideo, Lapidés Veligera Dans Des Cloîtres Romains Castillans Révéler l'invisibilité de Dieu', in *Le Rideau, Le Voile et Le Dévoilement. Du Proche-Orient Ancien à l'Occident Médiéval*, ed. by Vincent Debais, Eric Palazzo, and Lucien-Jean Bord (Geuthner, 2019), pp. 233–68.

Easter ritual. In the absence of the linen cloth and other liturgical materials, the meaning of the object is linked only, allegorically, to a stone, described as follows:

Of new fires | Due to the absence of fire, which is extinguished at Matutin (sc. Lauds), as has been said, on these three days we resort to a stone, either to elicit the hidden fire from its hidden veins by striking a stone, or, in clear skies, to hold out a clear crystal stone to the sun and, with the help of this small crystal disc, to capture the ray thrown down by it in the tinder placed under it in a way that is wonderful to behold.<sup>44</sup>

Because of described fire that develops between scratches and burns, stones mentioned in the Easter rite are identified as knowledge keepers. These can be simple or crystal stones. While a literal interpretation might deduce that the text refers to a fire being lit with stones, the conception of the celebration might clarify its emblematic meaning.

The Council of Epaone (517) mandated that every portable altar should have a stone slab, either crystal or marble, on the upper side.<sup>45</sup> Canons state that the chalice and paten must be placed on this stone for the Eucharist. Christ is represented through these stone slabs upon portable altars, and the uncovering

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<sup>44</sup> For the translation see Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, pp. 754–5. Latin original: 'De novo igne | Amisso igne, qui ad matutinos, ut dictum est, exstinguitur, ad lapidem per eosdem tres dies confugimus, ut vel lapidem percutientes ex abstrusis eius venis ignem occultum eliciamus vel liquidum crystalli lapidem sereno caelo soli obicientes radium eius traiectum per eiusdem crystalli orbiculum spectabili miraculo in subiectam suscipiamus escam'.

<sup>45</sup> Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, 5.25-30.



would allow his visualisation.<sup>46</sup> The passage quoted above adds interpretations regarding the stone: 'The lights you show us, the ones that come out of the rock, these we look for',<sup>47</sup> and: 'That man may know, that the hope of light is founded for him, in the strong body of Christ, which has been called a solid stone, from which came the battle of our weak fire'.<sup>48</sup> The text identifies Christ in Easter stones in the same manner in which all portable altars stone slabs have already been defined. Therefore, one could consider that central stones on uncovered portable altars were perceived as the Easter stones mentioned by Rupert of Deutz. The distinct grains of the stone on the upper side of portable altars outline darker and lighter sections and remind one of the cracklings and swirling of the fire, which can also be noticed on the portable altar of Cologne. The perception of the portable altar changes with a crystal stone due to its transparent nature. Rupert specifies that knowledge emerges from below the crystal stones through the refraction of sunlight, bringing the object a celestial dimension. A crystal stone is placed on top of the Stavelot portable altar (Liège, Belgium, 1160–70).<sup>49</sup> The parchment located and made visible underneath the crystal shows three contracted versions of *Sanctus* (SCS, SCS, SCS) associated with

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<sup>46</sup> Palazzo, *L'espace*, chapter 2.

<sup>47</sup> Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, ii, pp. 7545. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: '[...] lumina no stamen, Monstras saxigeno semine quaerere'.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, ii, pp. 754–6. Translated from German by the author. Latin original: 'Ne nesciret homo spem sibi luminis, In Christi solido corpore conditam, Qui dici stabilem se voluit petram, Nostris igniculis unde genus venit'.

<sup>49</sup> Stavelot Portable Altar, Art And History Museum (Bruxelles), 1590, Meuse region (Stablo?), 1140-1165, rock crystal; wood core, pit enamel; copper, stamped and gilded; brass, cast, chased and gilded; brown varnish; Parchment, height 10 cm, width 17 cm, depth 27.5 cm, altar form; Budde, *Altare portatile*, ii, 1998, pp. 127–43.

liturgical chants for the Eucharist.<sup>50</sup>

On Maundy Thursday, the uncovering, washing, and oiling of the central stone took place on both permanent and portable altars. The ceremony shifts the attention from the liturgical objects to the stone, and that is the reason why the text from Rupert of Deutz describes only the stone. Central stones of portable altars are noted as being easily liftable, an aspect that would facilitate the association between stones and the divine and celestial dimension. Rupert's text continues by quoting the 2 Corinthians 4:6, 'For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness" made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ'. This quote's presence beside the description of central stones makes obvious that the metaphorical light emanating from the stone and made visible during the Easter rite is linked to the presence of Christ.<sup>51</sup> The ceremony of washing and oiling the stone not only renews the rite of consecration but also enhanced Christ's presence, the symbolic light of Easter stones. Certainly, there would have been no miraculously rising fire, yet it would be perceived as such in the allegorical understanding of the rite. Similarly, Christ did not reveal himself in the Eucharist suspended before Easter Sunday, but he was envisioned in the stone underneath the linen cloth. The removal of the piece of fabric is the theological

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<sup>50</sup> Susanne Wittekind, *Altar-Reliquiar-Retabel. Kunst und Liturgie bei Wibald von Stablo* (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 2003); Hahn, 'Portable Altars'; Patrick Henriët, 'Relire l'autel portatif de stavelot', in *Orfèvrerie septentrionale (xiie et xiiie siècle)*, ed. Nigel Morgan (Liège: Trésor de la Cathédrale, 2016) pp. 179–208; Didier Mehu, 'L'évidement de l'image ou la figuration de l'invisible corps du Christ (IX-XI siècle)', *Images Re-vues*, 11 (2013) <<https://journals.openedition.org/imagesrevues/3384>> [accessed 13 October 2022].

<sup>51</sup> Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de Divinis Officiis*, 5.31–3.

elaboration allowing the perception of the divine.

As mentioned earlier, Easter festivities, through the remembrance of the death of Christ, celebrate the salvation of humankind. Redemption is conceded to everyone belonging to the Christian religion, conferred through the rite of baptism, and reiterated via recurrent allusions. The Maundy Thursday rite serves as an illustration of this, the washing and anointing of the central stones recalling not just the consecration rite, but also the baptismal ceremony. On the portal altar from Cologne, the image of the prophet Jonah in his linen vestment is a further allusion to the ceremony of baptism, and of the inexorability of spiritual renewal. As a result, stones on portable altars can be considered as conceived for both their ceremonial use throughout the ecclesiastical year, when covered by linen, and for the specificity of Easter rite, when their involvement, as described by Rupert of Deutz, concentrates on the theological idea of belonging and redemption, which are conceptually part of the rite. This then raises the question as to whether there is a distinction between the Easter staging of permanent and portable altars.

## **PORTABLE ALTARS AS THE ARK OF THE BODY OF CHRIST**

On Maundy Thursday, after the second ceremony, all the candles were blown out, submerging the church into darkness while the altar was uncovered. An exception was made for the light was used to relocate the host into a shrine that served as a

tabernacle.<sup>52</sup> Here it was safely kept until Easter Sunday.<sup>53</sup> In Rome, after the Maundy Thursday evening mass, pilgrims were led to the seven pilgrim churches of San Giovanni in Laterano, San Pietro in Vaticano, San Paolo Fuori le Mura, Santa Maria Maggiore, San Lorenzo Fuori le Mura, Santa Croce in Gerusalemme, and San Sebastiano Fuori le Mura.<sup>54</sup> As a practice that emphasises the unity and centrality of the Church of Rome, this ritual dates at least from the Carolingian era when it takes place throughout the empire.<sup>55</sup> To serve as the focal point of the devotion, altars were set up inside the seven churches. These altars were identified as tabernacles for their function of the safekeeping of the consecrated host.<sup>56</sup> This practice is documented in the writings of Bonzio for the Lateran Basilica. According to the citation provided by Braun, he reports:

On Maundy Thursday, he says, the priests remove the mensa from the altar after the end of the Mass and the Pope consecrates the holy oil and chrism in the hollow of the altar (...) In the altar there was a box which was considered to be the Old Testament Ark of the Covenant, and on this, not on the ordinary mensa of the altar, the Pope celebrated Mass on Holy Thursday, that is, as it were, within the main altar.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Christophe Vuillaume and D. Hurst, *SC 475 Le Tabernacle de Bède le Vénérable, collection sources chrétiennes* (Paris: Les éditions du cerf, 2003); Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, 5.24-5.

<sup>53</sup> 'Tabernacle (Christian)', in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. F. L. Cross and E.A. Livingstone, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 1065, 1330 and 1394.

<sup>54</sup> Francesco Fornari, 'Repositorio', in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Treccani, 1936) <<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/repositorio>> [accessed 03 October 2022].

<sup>55</sup> Reynolds and Erikson, 'Agency'.

<sup>56</sup> Exodus 25: 10-40; Deutz and Deutz, *Liber de divinis officiis*, 5.25-30; Fornari, 'Repositorio'.

<sup>57</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, p. 58. Translated from German by the author. Original: 'In dem Altar befand sich ein Kasten, der als die alttestamentliche Bundeslade galt, und auf diesem, nicht auf der

Braun claims that Bonzio misunderstood the meaning of the procedure, and by quoting the *Ordo Romano*, he clarifies that the so-called Ark of the Covenant is the portable wooden altar that was documented in the Lateran Basilica from at least the eleventh century.<sup>58</sup> The celebrations were performed on it during the three Maundy days, and the host was kept therein, as if it were a tabernacle. This rite was conceived as an allusion to the Old Testament practice during which the high priest entered the Holy of Holies alone to perform the reconciliation between God and his people.<sup>59</sup> The practice is not far, in its conception at least, from the washing and oiling of the altar stones as a reminder of dogmatic unity with the divine. The wooden portable altar of the Lateran Basilica was, at some point, permanently integrated into the main altar, where Braun still observed its presence in the nineteenth century, as a way to preserve the practice for all time. Similar findings have been observed in other churches, like the Hildesheim portable altar integrated into the main altar of the Cathedral.<sup>60</sup>

The medieval etymology of tabernacle refers to the 'living place' of the Ark of

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gewöhnlichen Mensa des Altares, feierte der Papst am Gründonnerstag die Messe, also gleichsam innerhalb des Hauptaltars'.

<sup>58</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 57–8.

<sup>59</sup> Bernard of Porto, *Bernhardi Cardinalis et Lateranensis Ecclesiae Prioris Ordo Officiorum Ecclesiae Lateranensis*, ed. Ludwig Fischer (Munich: Datterer, 1916), pp. 157 (301), Ordo 10.

<sup>60</sup> Michael Brandt, 'Tragaltäre im Hochaltar. Ein Reliquienfund im Hildesheimer Dom', in *Ars et Ecclesia* ed. by Hans-Walter Stork, Christoph Gerhardt, and Alois Thomas (Trier: Veröffentlichungen des Bistumsarchivs, 1989) pp. 69–77

the Covenant.<sup>61</sup> According to sources from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the term refers to the 'portable sanctuary brought by the Israelites in the desert'.<sup>62</sup> In the New Testament, the tabernacle-Ark of the Covenant is described as the shrine for the body of Christ, as well as a synonym for the regenerated Church of Israel, therefore, for the Universal Church.<sup>63</sup> However, the same term has been documented to be used to refer to an object used in the military campaigns of Constantine as follows:

Whenever they went to war, they were in the habit of carrying around a tabernacle built in the likeness of a church, so that even being in the wilderness, both he and his army lacked the Sacred Temple, in which they could praise God, pour out prayers and perceive the sacred mysteries. For they followed the priests and deacons seated at the tabernacle, who, according to the rite of the Church, were to perform such services.<sup>64</sup>

Scholars have identified the described object, reported as having been used in military campaigns to celebrate mass, as a portable altar.<sup>65</sup> Any additional consecrated host was presumably stored inside of the portable altar, and so the term tabernacle was chosen so as to refer to this use. However, on the three days before

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<sup>61</sup> Exodus 19–40.

<sup>62</sup> Such reference to the use of reliquaries is found in in Henriët, 'Relire l'autel', p. 208 and Exodus 25: the Ark of the Covenant.

<sup>63</sup> Honorius Augustodunensis, *de Gemma Animae*, in *Documenta Catholica Omnia*, ed. J. P. Migne, 1080-1137, chapter 161.

<sup>64</sup> The text is translated by the author from Thomas Jerome Welsh, *The use of portable altars; a historical synopsis and commentary* (Washington D.C.: Unpublished PhD Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1950) p. 7 based on the original from: Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, lib. I, cap. 8, LXVII, 880: 'Quoties ad bellum proficisceretur tabernaculum ad Ecclesiae similitudinem fabricatum circumferre consueverant, ita ut ne quidem in solitudine constitutus tam Ipse, quam Exercitus ejus Sacra Aede carret in qua Deum laudare, ac preces fundere, et Sacra Mysteria percipere possent. Sequebant enim Sacerdotes et Diaconi tabernaculo assidentes, qui juxta Ecclesiae ritum ejusmodi officia obirent'.

<sup>65</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 71–91; ii, pp. 419–517.

Easter Sunday, why should portable altars be named as tabernacle-Ark of the Covenant? The additional consecrated host of Maundy Thursday permitted the celebration of the Eucharist on Maundy Friday and, as a result, proved the divine presence despite the uncovering of the altar. As already mentioned, after removing the linen and liturgical objects from the altar, new receptacles for the sacramental bread needed to be provided. These are described in the rite of the Roman Maundy Thursday, as well as in Exodus 16:4–31 in the distribution of the Manna to Aaron, where the shrines used are referred to as the Ark of Covenant.<sup>66</sup>

On the exquisite altar of Klosterneuburg (Austria),<sup>67</sup> originally made up of forty-five pieces of *champlevés*, placed in three horizontal rows of seventeen pieces each, the relevant story is depicted.<sup>68</sup> Aaron is shown introducing the manna into the Ark of the Covenant, which figuratively is rendered as the altar shown inside the last *champlevé* of the ninth column. The inscription, running laterally along the trilobed edge of the enamel, states: 'The manna in the golden urn / the manna means you, Christ, hidden in a dark model'.<sup>69</sup> The inscription implies that the manna is a metaphor for the host and that its placement inside the Ark of Covenant recalls the inserting of the host into the tabernacle. The image of Aaron inserting the manna

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<sup>66</sup> See also Hebrews 7:11–19.

<sup>67</sup> Verduner Altar (originally Ambo) Leopold Chappelle, abbey of Klosterneuburg, Nicholas of Verdun, 45 enamels, completed 1181, with adding's from 1330. On the transition from ambo to altar, see Heike Schlie, 'Vom Ambone zum Retabel. Das Klosterneuburger Goldschmiedewerk von Nikolaus von Verdun', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 80 (2017), 247–72.

<sup>68</sup> Otto Demus, 'Neue Funde an den Emails des Nikolaus von Verdun in Klosterneuburg', *Osterreichische Zeitschrift für Denkmalpflege*, 5 (1951), 13–22; Ernst Kitzinger, *The Art of Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Helmut Buschhausen, 'The Klosterneuburg Altar of Nicholas of Verdun: Art, Theology and Politics', in *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 37 (1974), 1–32.

<sup>69</sup> Buschhausen, 'The Klosterneuburg Altar', pp. 1–32.

into the Ark of Covenant on the ambo of Klosterneuburg is related to the similar depiction of both the ceremony and of the altar whereon Melchizedek celebrates the Mass. These associations have been identified as *figura* following the definition of the concept by Erich Auerbach, as celebrating models in the Augustinian understanding of time.<sup>70</sup> The Old Testament figures depicted on the ambo would operate as a point of reference for the viewer, signalling that the use of the liturgical objects was intended to serve as a prefiguration of the rite and the priest. Furthermore, the liturgical objects used on the altar during the rite would not serve alone as symbols of those mentioned in the holy writings, but would be augmented by the iconography on the ambo. Their staging and liturgical involvement invest them with the aspect of the divine model, the *figura*. Therefore, such a complex correlation of objects through time invites us to understand the Easter usage of portable altars as *figura* of the Ark of the Covenant and, therefore, of the Universal Church.

Most portable altars from the eleventh and twelfth centuries depict illustrations of Old Testament figures celebrating on altars.<sup>71</sup> As an example, ten figurative enamelled plates were originally located around the central stone on the upper side of the Cologne portable altar. Only six remain showing the four evangelic animals, Melchizedek, and Abel. According to Psalm 115, associated with the conception of the whole iconographic program, they serve as archetypes of

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<sup>70</sup> Heike Schlie, 'Der Klosterneuburger Ambo des Nikolaus von Verdun. Das Kunstwerk als *figura* zwischen Inkarnation und Wiederkunft des Logos', in *Figura. Dynamiken der Zeichen und Zeiten im Mittelalter (Philologie der Kultur)*, ed. by Christian Kiening und Katharina Mertens Fleury (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2013) pp. 205–47. The inscription states: 'Man in urna aurea / Man notat obscura clausum te xpe figura'. Translated by the Author.

<sup>71</sup> Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 462–76.



righteous priests.<sup>72</sup> On the Cologne portable altar, as on the ambo of Klosterneuburg, the priests celebrating the Eucharist would be able to perceive themselves as, and be perceived as, descendants of those represented in the images of the portable altar.

Another iconographic detail is worth mentioning: the presence of cherubins and the four evangelic animals in the representation of the Ark of Covenant (Exodus 25: 10–40).<sup>73</sup> The Ark of the Covenant is depicted as a rectangular object with two bars for transportation in the ninth-century oratory in Germigny-des-Prés (France).<sup>74</sup> The Ark is surmounted by two cherubs and flanked by two archangels, with the hand of God in the upper part of the mosaic. The cherubins, like the four creatures, are commonly represented on medieval portable altars, such as the one from Cologne.<sup>75</sup> The shared iconographic elements suggest that tabernacles and portable altars might have been perceived in a similar way or followed a model. This argument is supported by the Arnulf Ciborium, which has been documented to have served as an altar and a tabernacle.<sup>76</sup> Host has been found inside box-shaped portable altars from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.<sup>77</sup> The convenient opening of

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<sup>72</sup> Psalm 115:1–18.

<sup>73</sup> Ricciotti Giuseppe, 'Arca dell'Alleanza', in *Enciclopedia Italiana* (Roma: Treccani, 1929) <[https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arca-dell-alleanza\\_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/arca-dell-alleanza_%28Enciclopedia-Italiana%29)> [Accessed 12 April 2022].

<sup>74</sup> A photo of the mosaic is found in Anne-Orange Poilpré, 'Le décor intérieur de l'oratoire de Germigny-des-Prés et son iconographie', *Bulletin du centre d'études médiévales d'Auxerre* Hors-série n. 11 (2019) <<http://journals.openedition.org/cem/16158>> [accessed 14 January 2023].

<sup>75</sup> Budde, *Altare Portatile*, ii, p. 33.

<sup>76</sup> Tragaltar mit Ziborium, so-called Arnulf-Ziborium, Munich (D), Schatzkammer der Residenz, inv. 5, West Frankish, Metz or Reims, around 870, gran porphyry, lime wood, gold plate, copper, gilded, chased, cellular enamel, 59x 31x24 cm. This object is accessible via the website of the Deutsche Digitale Bibliothek. <<https://www.deutsche-digitale-bibliothek.de/item/6VE2WSASTOF5UGS3ALJYHMBVAQYHBDVE>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>77</sup> Henriot, 'Relire l'autel', p. 208.

box-shaped portable altars would have permitted worshippers to shelter the hosts beneath the central stone of the portable altar on Maundy Thursday.<sup>78</sup>

Furthermore, comparable to the bars depicted on the Ark of Germigny-des-Prés, various box-shaped portable altars, such as the Berlin K4183, feature four rings on their base. It is plausible that they were needed for transportation of the liturgical object with a bar passing through the rings, as described in Exodus 25:10–40.<sup>79</sup> Wooden boxes, like those listed in the Guelph treasure, were used to transport portable altars outside the church. Therefore, it is possible that the rings on portable altars were used to move the liturgical objects within the basilica during the three days prior to Easter Sunday.<sup>80</sup> A portable altar holding the consecrated body of Christ could have been handled safely using removable bars.<sup>81</sup>

Ultimately, portable altars were able to foster a communitarian sense of unity. This was evoked through their very conceptualisation. However, as this study of their ritual use in the three days preceding Easter Sunday has demonstrated, they were also conceived so as to manifest this unity in their liturgical involvement.

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Wangsgaard Jürgensen, 'In the Sphere of Sacrosanctity: Altars as Generators of Space in the Late Middle Ages, in *Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual*, ed. by Gita Dharampal-Frick, Robert Langer, and Nils Holger Petersen (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), pp. 324–37.

<sup>79</sup> Portable Altar Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin - Preußischer Kulturbesitz, K4183, 1170-1180, Pit enamel on copper gilded; silver stamped and gilded; bronze cast and chased; green porphyry; oak wood core, object size: 15,4 x 29,9 x 21,5 cm. This portable altar, as all the other ones from the Welfenschatz are digitised and accessible from the homepage of the Stiftung Preußischer Kulturbesitz. <<https://recherche.smb.museum/detail/896174/tragaltar-mit-engeln-und-cherubim>> [accessed 20 January 2023].

<sup>80</sup> Otto von Falke, Robert Schmidt and Georg Swarzenski, *Der Welfenschatz. Der Reliquienschatz des Braunschweiger Domes aus dem Besitze des herzoglichen Hauses Braunschweig-Lüneburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Frankfurter Verlagsanstalt, 1930) Table 40.

<sup>81</sup> Wooden box Guelph treasure, twelfth century. Braun, *Der Christliche Altar*, i, pp. 42–100.

## SUMMARY, FINAL POINTS, AND CONCLUSION

Although portable altars have been used outside churches since the early times, this study focused on their medieval involvement during the three days prior to Easter Sunday inside the church. Medieval theological elaborations on the practices for the Maundy days affected the liturgical display, and the Maundy Thursday uncovering of the altar, for example, changed the perception of the object as it suspended the celebration of the transubstantiation. The allegorical description Rupert of Deutz makes of the Easter ritual enables us to comprehend the religious degrees of significance of medieval portable altars. They reinforce the perceptual experience by enhancing memory and presence through the ceremony, iconography, inscriptions, and the symbolical meaning of the ritual materials. In anticipation of the end of times, the divine elements are consecrated day after day. God was already envisioned in the manna of the Ark of the Covenant by Aaron, but his bodily advent as the Messiah had yet to occur. After the uncovering on Maundy Thursday no transubstantiation is possible; however, the sacred host put inside the portable altar to convey the divine presence. The use of portable altars as a tabernacle during the Maundy days, reveal the altar's symbolism was ascribed to the meaning of its contents.

The Easter understanding of portable altars as tabernacles convert them into a historicised liturgical object of the Universal Church. Their composition and use function as evidence of theological, ceremonial unity, and devotional consistency. It

allows us to understand portable altars as fundamental objects for religious rituals, reinforcing the intellectual and physical participation of the believer. The historical vicissitudes of the eleventh and twelfth centuries raised questions regarding the role of the Church. Councils, synods, and theological treatises highlight the importance of having a doctrine sustained by rigor, universalism, regularity, and delegation of responsibility. Among other social manifestations and thoughts, the stability of faith is expressed through the theological elaboration of the Easter uncovering, staging, and use of portable altars. After the Maundy days, the altar is covered and the transubstantiation resumes. The ritualistic involvement of portable altars is based on the notion of *figura* and participates as such in the discourse of the reformed Universal Church.<sup>82</sup>



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<sup>82</sup> Arnaud Join-Lambert, 'Jeûne et Mystère pascal', *La Maison-Dieu*, 57 (2002), 97–107.