

Women Leaders at the Table in Early Churches

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The purpose of this article is to examine the oldest surviving iconographic artifacts that depict early Christians in real churches at the Eucharist table. These provide the oldest visual evidence of early Christian traditions of leadership as it was actually practiced in churches. The reason for doing this is to fill in the cultural gaps about what we know regarding the sex of leaders who performed the ritual, or liturgy.

Three key elements are present in each of the ancient illustrated artifacts under consideration. First, there is a Eucharist table, also called the *mensa* or altar table.¹ Second, the artist depicted real people—not biblical figures—with the table.² And third, the architecture in the scene portrayed the interior of a real church; that is, the artist was not imagining a heavenly or fictive scene, but representing the ritual in that church.³

These windows into early churches help us understand how the earliest Christians must have received certain sayings in Paul's letters, sayings which today are interpreted in some congregations as meaning that Paul did not permit women to be church leaders. These artifacts suggest that early Christians understood texts such as Gal 3:28 as Paul's guiding instructions with respect to interpreting his letters, and especially with respect to women, because all three of the oldest surviving iconographic artifacts portray women in the altar area of these churches. These three artifacts are all the more stunning in that they represent the altar areas of three of the most prominent orthodox basilicas in Christendom. One depicts Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. Another depicts the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. The third depicts the Anastasis, also called the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, in Jerusalem.

Previous Attempts to Reconstruct the Ancient Liturgy

One might think we could read manuscripts to determine who did what in early Christian assemblies, but it has been estimated that eighty-five percent of the Christian literature known from the first two centuries has been lost.⁴ The percentage of liturgical manuscripts lost is even higher, because almost no liturgical manuscripts dating to the first seven centuries have survived.⁵

In addition, Paul Bradshaw has argued that liturgical manuscripts were "more prone to emendation than literary manuscripts."⁶ It is because of this gap in the historical written

record that iconographic artifacts are so important in reconstructing the early liturgy.

In a study of the architectural layout of early churches in the city of Rome, Thomas F. Matthews acknowledged the difficulty of reconstructing the performance of the liturgy solely from fragments of prayers and later manuscripts, and he used archeological evidence to help answer the question of how the liturgy was performed prior to the eighth century. The archeological remains that Matthews considered were of churches in Rome from the seventh century or earlier, with a couple dated as early as the fifth.

The material remains indicated that all of them had two stone walls that formed a corridor down the middle of the nave to the altar area—a corridor that essentially divided the nave into two halves.⁷

Matthews compared this architectural feature of a divided nave with the oldest surviving liturgy for the Roman mass, known as the *Ordo Romanus Primus*, which, despite being the oldest surviving, is only found in manuscripts dated ninth-century or later.⁸ Consistent with the architecture of a divided nave, the *Ordo Romanus Primus* mentions a women's side and a men's side.⁹ Matthews thus reconstructed the nave with men on one side of the corridor and women on the other.¹⁰ The *Ordo Romanus Primus* is usually assumed to describe an all-male clergy in the

altar area, but this is less certain since the masculine gender in Latin can signify both sexes.

Women and Men at the Table in Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome

One of the two oldest iconographic artifacts in this study contradicts any assumption that the early churches in the city of Rome had an all-male clergy. This fifth-century artifact depicts the altar area of Old Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome. While the scene on the artifact confirms that there was a men's side and a women's side in the church, it contradicts that only men were in the altar area. Its sculptor depicted a men's side and a women's side in the altar area, too. Since the discovery of this artifact, almost without exception scholars have agreed it depicts men on the left side of the table and women on the right.¹¹

This scene is on one face of an ivory reliquary (a box for holy relics) that was buried beneath the altar area of a church near the city of Pola in what is now Croatia. It was excavated in 1906.¹²



Figure 1

Ivory reliquary box.

Liturgy in Old Saint Peter's Basilica, ca. 430

Source: Artres ART193402

Today it is in the Venice Archeological Museum. Sometimes called the Pola Ivory, most art historians date this delicately carved box to the 400s, usually no later than 450.¹³ See Figure 1.

In 1908, Anton Gnirs, who was familiar with the excavation, was the first to publish an article about the ivory box. He said the scene had extraordinary value for the liturgy during the era of early Christian culture.¹⁴ He identified two men and two women flanking the ciborium, that is, the columned structure over the altar sometimes called the baldachin or canopy.¹⁵ These two men and two women were sculpted with their arms raised, a pose often associated in Jewish Scripture with the priesthood, and which art historian Alexei Lidov says “is interpreted in iconographic studies as a liturgical one.”¹⁶ Finally, beneath the ciborium, Gnirs also identified a man and a woman on either side of the altar table (*mensa dell’altare*).¹⁷ See Figure 1A.

Although Gnirs did not make the connection, in 1914 Alice Baird published an article pointing out that the six spiral columns of the ciborium on the ivory are an almost perfect match for the six spiral columns that Constantine reputedly donated to Old Saint Peter’s, columns today in the galleries of the modern Saint Peter’s.¹⁸ That they indeed were the same six columns was confirmed in 1940, when the Vatican commissioned excavations beneath the modern high altar.

At the bottom of a stack of medieval altars, Vatican excavators discovered a second-century shrine, which they thought was the same shrine reportedly dedicated to Peter near the site of his martyrdom in Rome. Fourth-century architects had built Old Saint Peter’s Basilica around this second-century shrine. It was “the architectural focus of the whole building.”¹⁹ The shape and size of this shrine with its stone table—an eight-foot high by eight-foot wide wall with the stone table embedded in its front face—was virtually identical to what was carved on the ivory, down to the arched niche behind the table, which on the ivory is seen with a large cross. Englebert Kirschbaum, one of the Vatican excavators, wrote that the scene on the ivory was “so striking even in its details as to confirm conclusively its interpretation

as the Constantinian apse in Saint Peter’s.”²⁰ The excavators also discovered a rectangular stone tomb under the pavement, which they believed at one time held Peter’s bones.²¹ Both Jerome in the late 300s and Gregory of Tours in the late 500s wrote that the basilica’s altar was over Peter’s bones, so with this discovery the excavators seemed to have proved beyond doubt that the stone table had been the basilica’s altar.²² For detail of the shrine



Figure 1A
Detail: Altar area of Old Saint Peter’s Basilica

on the ivory, with the man and woman at its stone table, see Figure 1B.

Gnirs speculated that the man and woman at the altar table were participating in a ceremony of the sacrament of matrimony.²³ In the subsequent thirty years after his article, other art historians agreed that the ivory sculptor had carved a man and a woman at the altar, with most assuming they must be a married couple.²⁴ Others have since proposed they might be mother and son.²⁵ Some art historians have suggested that the pair might be venerating the cross at the altar table, but in 1928 Joseph Wilpert rebutted that suggestion saying, “in Saint Peter’s Basilica the cross was not venerated in such a pronounced fashion as depicted in this scene.”²⁶ Wilpert’s reason was that, unlike some churches, Saint Peter’s did not have a relic of the true Cross.²⁷ Other art historians, however, have pointed out that the woman was sculpted raising some type of container, perhaps a bowl or a pyx (a container for the Eucharist).²⁸ If the sculptor had carved a man instead of a woman at the altar in Old Saint Peter’s, then almost certainly from the beginning scholars would have identified him as a priest or bishop lifting a chalice of eucharistic wine.



Figure 1B
Detail of the shrine and its table

One can imagine that a woman at the altar table in Old Saint Peter’s Basilica must have caused some consternation among the Vatican excavators. They took ten years to publish their final report, and it included two reconstructions of the ciborium as a twenty-foot by twenty-foot square. Without mentioning that a woman had been identified at the altar, the Vatican excavators sandwiched a photo of the ivory between their two drawings of the square ciborium. One drawing was a diagram with dotted lines in front of the shrine, accurately representing that they did not excavate in front of the shrine and

that their reconstruction was hypothetical.²⁹ The second drawing, however, was a three-dimensional illustration of a twenty-foot by twenty-foot square ciborium, presented not as hypothetical, but as real.³⁰ These two drawings both placed the shrine itself at the back of this large square ciborium. What was so important about the square ciborium? Vatican excavator Kirschbaum later explained why it was so important. He pointed out that a square ciborium's overhead ribs would intersect in the middle of the square, and that therefore the lamp would hang ten feet in front of the second-century shrine and its stone table—over empty floor. The altar, he said, would have been under the lamp's light, so he concluded: “We have to suppose a *portable* altar table.”³¹

When I first started analyzing the scene on the Pola Ivory, I reviewed the Vatican excavators' report, and it confused me. I would look at the diagram with dotted lines of a square ciborium, turn the page and see the photo of the ivory, and then turn the page once more and see the three-dimensional illustration of a square ciborium. The more I looked at the ciborium on the ivory, the more I wondered why the sculptor—who otherwise was quite accomplished—had not used proper artistic perspective and sculpted the square ciborium as a square. Most ciboria today are square, so it was easy to imagine a square ciborium, but this ciborium did not look square. Still, I did not question that it *was* square. I trusted the Vatican excavators. The sculptor, in my mind, had failed to represent the square ciborium. See Figure 2 for a comparison of the actual ciborium sculpted on the ivory versus the Vatican's hypothetical square ciborium.

One day, however, I carefully read the Italian in the paragraphs below the photo of the ivory. The Vatican writer mentioned that the ciborium on the ivory “has the exact function and similar form as the famous monument over Christ's tomb inside the Church of the Anastasis in Jerusalem.”³² Suddenly I realized that the sculptor had used perfect artistic perspective. Old Saint Peter's ciborium was not square. The Church of the Anastasis was a rotunda, round, and many artifacts depict the monument over Christ's tomb as multi-sided or six-sided, as a hexagon.³³ In addition, two round ivory pyxes dated to the 500s, which evoke the rotunda with their round shape, depict what was quite possibly its ciborium. Both depict a ciborium with four

spiral columns forming what appears to be a curved trapezoid, or half-hexagon, with the shorter front face framing the altar table, over which hung the lamp.³⁴ So also in Old Saint Peter's. With new eyes I saw that the four spiral columns around the shrine with its stone table formed a trapezoid, or half-hexagon, with the shorter front face framing the shrine, over which hung the large lamp.³⁵

The fourth-century architects of Old Saint Peter's, thus, appear to have copied the architecture of the Anastasis in order to visually invoke the sacral power of Jerusalem, which Galit Noga-Banai demonstrates that other artists in Rome were

doing.³⁶ In Old Saint Peter's, the half-hexagon ciborium over Peter's tomb with the rounded apse above it evoked the half-hexagon ciborium over Christ's tomb with the rotunda above. The architects thus symbolically tied Peter's tomb to Christ's, and Old Saint Peter's Basilica to the Anastasis in Jerusalem.

The Vatican excavators' so-called reconstruction of a square ciborium was simply a misguided attempt to move the altar away from the woman. They could not move the woman on the ivory. So, they moved the altar. In Old Saint Peter's, the large lamp had not hung over vacant floor. It had hung above the second-century shrine and its stone table. The lamp's light had shone exactly where one would expect the light to shine when the second-century shrine itself had been “the architectural focus of the whole building.”³⁷

Women at the Altar in the Anastasis

One of the two round ivory pyxes portrays women in a liturgical recreation of the discovery of the empty tomb. According to the pilgrim Egeria, who around the year 380 described the liturgy inside the Anastasis in her diary, the early morning service began at cock crow, with deacons and presbyters reciting prayers and Psalms, after which they went into the cave, the tomb where Jesus's body had been laid to rest, and their censers filled the whole Anastasis with the scent of incense. She said, “The whole assembly groans and laments at all that the Lord underwent for us, and the way they weep would move even the hardest heart to tears.”³⁸ This service was so popular that according to Egeria, it was not only performed at Easter, but also every Sunday.³⁹

Dated to the 500s, this ivory pyx was carved in the eastern Mediterranean area, perhaps Palestine, but its provenance after that is uncertain until it appeared at an auction in Paris in 1906, after

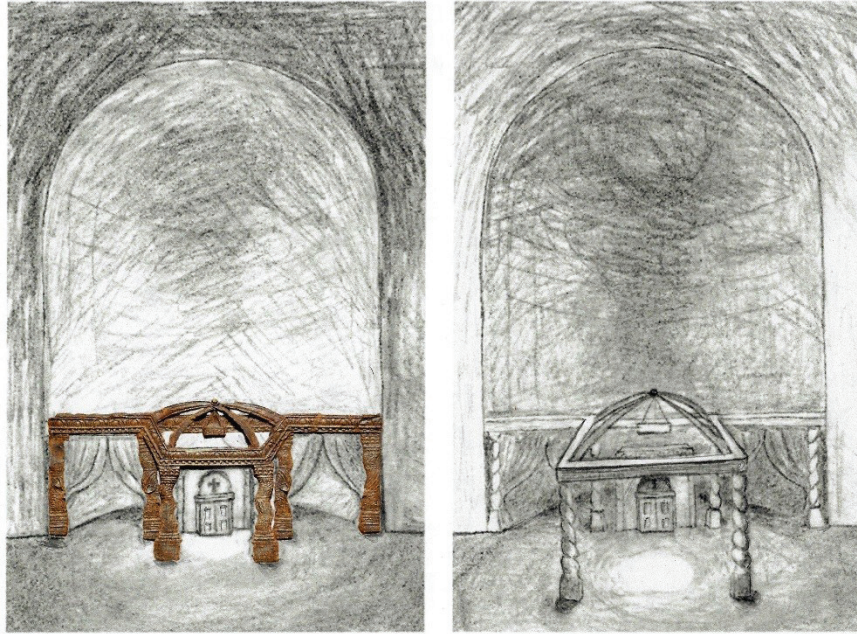


Figure 2

left-Ciborium on the ivory; right-Ciborium per Vatican illustrator

which J. Pierpont Morgan donated it to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It, too, may have been dug up in the twentieth century, but it is unlikely we will ever know where. It is, however, the oldest iconographic artifact to depict a single sex at the altar of a real church.⁴⁰ Most interesting, it depicts only women, not men. Two women carrying censers approach the altar. Three more women, each with her arms raised, appear in procession to the altar. See Figures 3 and 3A.

Signifying that this liturgical procession was eucharistic, a narrow strip of doubled cloth hangs from each woman's girdle. According to Lidov, this cloth or handkerchief, sometimes fringed, sometimes with delicate embroidered stripes at the end, later was called a maniple in the West, but in the East was called the "*enchirion* (literally 'handy')—a white handkerchief hanging at the girdle of an archpriest, later called *epigonation*."⁴¹ Due to its various names over time in both East and West, I call it simply the eucharistic cloth. Church officiants used this special cloth only during the performance of the Eucharist, for example to wipe excess wine from the rim of the chalice. During this era the clergy wore everyday clothes, taking care not to dress as if they were rich or special. The first time in art, for example, that we see a man in the liturgy with any special priestly insignia is the episcopal pallium in the decade around 550, approximately the same time that we see the eucharistic cloth on women in the liturgy.⁴²

Gender Parallelism in the Liturgy of Constantinople

Women are also seen with the eucharistic cloth in one of the two wall mosaics that flank the altar in the holy of holies of the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna. Dated around 547, these two mosaics comprise a scene thought to represent the liturgy in

Constantinople since it portrays Emperor Justinian and Empress Theodora. Three women with the cloth are in the mosaic that depicts Theodora standing between two eunuchs and seven women. Two

women wear the fringed white cloth hanging from their girdles, and a third woman holds it. Lidov cautions scholars who might argue that the cloth must mean something different simply because it appears with women: "Let me remind those who are convinced of the lay provenance of the handkerchief that Theodora with her retinue, as well as Justinian, are presented in San Vitale in a liturgical procession in the sanctuary, both holding liturgical vessels."⁴³ All three women stand on the right of Theodora, who holds the golden chalice. They appear as counterparts to the three male clerics portrayed in the opposite mosaic, men seen on the right of Justinian, who himself holds the golden paten for the bread.⁴⁴ In the San Vitale mosaic, as in the ivory of Old Saint Peter's, the men were seen on the left of the altar and the women on the right. For the two mosaics, see Figures 4 and 4A.

These two mosaics probably represented the practice in the Hagia Sophia, the huge basilica in Constantinople that Justinian built and which still stands today. In any

case, the second of the two oldest artifacts to depict people around the table in a real church further indicates that the gender-parallel liturgical practice seen in the San Vitale mosaics apparently had a long tradition not only in Rome, but also in Constantinople. This ancient artifact portrays similar gender parallelism in the altar area of the second Hagia Sophia.

This carving, on a huge sarcophagus front, was discovered in 1988 inside a hypogeum, an underground room containing sarcophagi made for the elite. Perhaps because the carving is



Figure 3

Two women carry censers to the altar area.

Ivory pyx, ca. 500s. Ciborium over the altar in the Anastasis rotunda, Jerusalem

Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, OA



Figure 3A

Three arms-raised women in the liturgical procession

today in the rather distant Istanbul Archeological Museum, it has been less studied. Johannes Deckers and Ümit Serdaroğlu, who were involved in the excavation, published the find in 1993 and noted that the column capitals on this carving were the same as the column capitals of the second Hagia Sophia, which was completed in 415, but burned in 542. Based on the hypogeum's location at the foot of the Theodosian walls, the style of the man's bulb clasp and clothing, and the early Christian cross on the altar, they dated the carving around the year 430.⁴⁵ See Figure 5.

A cross is on the table, with curtains pulled back to expose it beneath what appears to be the columned ciborium. An arms-raised man and an arms-raised woman flank the altar, again the man on the left and the woman on the right. A boy is beside the woman, much like two eunuchs are beside Empress Theodora in the San Vitale mosaic, but otherwise this arms-raised woman and man are portrayed in mirror-symmetrical poses.⁴⁶

Pre-Constantinian Evidence of Gender-parallelism at the Eucharist Table

Even earlier pre-Constantinian material remains, from the ruins of the Megiddo army church in ancient Palestine to ritual meal frescos in the Christian catacombs of Rome, suggest that the tradition of women's leadership at the Eucharist table was early. For example, the stone table in the "Megiddo Church" in Palestine, the oldest church ruins known in Israel, dated ca. 230 to 305, was flanked by small floor mosaics which commemorated the names of women donors on one side and men donors on the other. This meeting house was next to the camp's bakery, which suggests that bread may have been ritually broken and shared at this table.⁴⁷

Frescos of meal scenes in some of the Christian catacombs of Rome, usually dated from the mid-200s to the early 300s, also

suggest an early tradition of both male and female leaders at the table, for that is what several depict. For example, a fresco in the Cubiculum of the Sacraments in the Catacomb of Callistus portrays a young man and an arms-raised woman standing at a tripod table laden with bread and a fish.⁴⁸ The man is on the left and the woman on the right, the same gender positions seen two centuries later above ground in the liturgy in Old Saint Peter's. See Figure 6.

Janet Tulloch, who studied catacomb meal frescos, noticed that several other frescos portrayed a male and female pair at a table, both holding a cup—and the woman raising her cup in the style of the leader.⁴⁹ According to Tulloch, in these meal frescos, "female figures dominate the cup action"; she notes that in pagan funerary art in Rome the person raising the cup was virtually always male.⁵⁰ Figure 7 is one of the frescos that Tulloch included in her study.⁵¹

On the far right in this fresco, a woman raises the cup above the tripod table, and on the far left a seated man also holds a

cup. This scene resonates with Irenaeus of Lyons' report in the late 100s that in one community of Christ followers, a man and a woman performed the ritual of consecrating the wine together, a ritual that was almost certainly archaic, not innovative.⁵² Notably, Irenaeus used the verb *eucharistein* ("give thanks, bless," cf. Matt 26:27; Mark 14:23; Luke 27:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24) to describe the action of the woman who consecrated the cup of wine.⁵³ These catacomb frescos may have represented funerary meals that included a eucharistic element, because the third-century



Figure 4

Theodora holds the chalice. Altar apse mosaic, Basilica of San Vitale, Ravenna.

Source: Wilpert, *Malereien*, pl. 110



Figure 4A

Justinian holds the paten.

Source: Wilpert, *Malereien*, pl. 109

Latin treatise *Didascalia apostolorum* said that the Eucharist should be performed in cemeteries, and these catacombs were indeed cemeteries.⁵⁴

The tradition of women raising the eucharistic cup, thus, is witnessed from the late 100s to the mid-500s—from the woman consecrating wine in the community that Irenaeus knew, to the women raising the cup above the table seen in catacomb frescos, to the woman raising the cup above the altar table in Old Saint Peter's Basilica, to Empress Theodora holding the golden chalice in Constantinople.

Additional provocative evidence suggests that rituals with gender-parallel leadership may have been present in some Jewish communities during the time of Jesus. In the first century, Philo of Alexandria described the gender-parallel meal ritual of a Jewish sect that he called the Therapeutae, whom he knew outside Alexandria, but which he said were also active in other areas. He described their all night ritual as having two leaders, with a woman in the role of Miriam and a man in the role of Moses.⁵⁵ This ritual reimagined the temple in Jerusalem, with an altar table, libation, bread, and priests.⁵⁶ Joan E. Taylor says, "Both men and women saw themselves not only as attendants or suppliants but as priests in this Temple."⁵⁷

Philo also described two choirs, one male and one female, who sang all night and, when the sun rose, lifted their hands.⁵⁸ This part of their ritual is astonishingly similar to the liturgical moment represented on the Pola Ivory, because the four arms-raised men and women have open mouths, as if singing, as if they were two choirs⁵⁹—and the ritual for which Old Saint Peter's Basilica was famous was also an all-night ritual, an all-night Mass that commemorated Peter. The ivory sculptor, thus, may have captured the singing men and women raising their arms at the very moment during the Mass that the sun rose. Further suggesting the reality of the ritual of the Therapeutae in the liturgy of Old Saint Peter's Basilica, Eusebius of Caesarea in the early 300s wrote that the meetings of the Therapeutae, including their rituals and their separate areas for men and women, were still in vogue in churches of his time.⁶⁰ It seems likely Eusebius knew of gender-parallel liturgies such as practiced in Old Saint Peter's and the second Hagia Sophia. Given the iconographic artifacts, we have no reason to doubt Eusebius's report, which provides all

the more reason to conclude that the gender-parallel ritual seen in the most important orthodox churches in Rome and Constantinople was probably first performed by Jesus's Jewish disciples, both male and female.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Christian tradition of women's leadership in the assembly was ancient, orthodox, and widespread. So why did it disappear? An easy answer is to suggest that Roman men who were overly prideful of their masculinity were

to blame, such as the emperor Constantine, who reportedly had been a member of the military cult of Mithras, which did not permit women members, much less women priests. Yet early statements in opposition to women church leaders are exceedingly rare, even in the fourth century, even among the bishops of Rome. For example, not until Pope Gelasius, who only ruled from 492 to 496, do we hear a complaint such as his, that "women are encouraged to serve at the sacred altars [*ministrare sacris altaribus*] and to perform all the other tasks [*cunctaque*] that are assigned only to the service of men."⁶¹ Gelasius appears to have been an aberration, because popes before him and after him did not voice similar views. Over time, however, this changed, perhaps due to the breakdown of the Roman Empire and the rise of fear and superstition. Good evidence demonstrates that scribes of these later centuries excised passages from early Christian narratives that described

women in liturgical leadership—women who preached, taught, exorcised demons, healed with their hands, and baptized⁶²—including narratives about women who, like Junia of Rom 16:7, were called apostles.⁶³ This slow degenerative process resulted in our modern false imagination of the early Christian past as a time of an all-male clergy.

Today those who oppose women in church leadership often claim some of Paul's sayings as justification for their position. Nearly two thousand years later, however, it is easy for someone to misinterpret Paul or to selectively quote his verses out of context. These iconographic artifacts of the early Christian gender-parallel liturgy validate an egalitarian interpretation of what Paul meant in certain passages of his letters about women in leadership. These artifacts indicate that for Paul the guiding light, the overarching rule, was Gal 3:28. Just as both slave and free could be leaders in the assembly who preached and taught, and just as both Jew and



Figure 5

Liturgical scene ca. 430, second Hagia Sophia, Constantinople
Photo courtesy author



Figure 6

Man and woman at a mensa
Callistus Catacomb, Rome
Source: Wilpert, Malerei, pl. 41.1.

Greek could, so also both male and female could—for all were one in Christ Jesus.

Notes

1. This excludes the lower register of the late fourth-century rotunda mosaics in Saint George in Thessalonica, which depict only men, including bishops, presbyters, musicians, and soldiers, but who are usually thought to portray martyrs in heaven; see Laura Nasrallah, “Empire and Apocalypse in Thessaloniki: Interpreting the Early Christian Rotunda,” *J ECS* 13/4 (2005) 465–508, esp. 488–90.

2. This excludes Melchizedek and Abraham and Sarah in the San Vitale nave mosaics dated ca. 547; see Otto G. von Simson. *Sacred Fortress: Byzantine Art and Statecraft in Ravenna* (Princeton University Press, 1987) 25, plates 14 and 15. It also excludes two men adjacent the Anastasis altar on the Cleveland pyx dated 500s, but who face away from it because they are part of the Gospel scenes which flank it; see Archer St. Clair, “The Visit to the Tomb: Narrative and Liturgy on Three Early Christian Pyxides,” *Gesta* 18/1 (1979) 127–35, esp. 131–32, fig. 10. It also excludes the idealized double-Jesuses on silver patens dated 574–578; see Marlia Mundell Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium: The Kaper Koraon and Related Treasures* (Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1986) 159–70, figs. 35.3 and 35.4.

3. This excludes meal scenes in catacomb and other art, which often depict women at the table, as seen below.

4. Christoph Marksches, “Lehrer, Schüler, Schule: Zur Bedeutung einer Institution für das antike Christentum,” in *Religiöse Vereine in der römischen Antike. Untersuchungen zu Organisation, Ritual und Raumordnung*, ed. Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser and Alfred Schäfer (Mohr Siebeck, 2002) 97–120, esp. 98.

5. Paul F. Bradshaw, *The Search for the Origins of Christian Worship: Sources and Methods for the Study of Early Liturgy* (Oxford University Press, 2002) 3–4: “Extant liturgical manuscripts are almost all of a much later date, beginning around the eighth century CE. It is true that within early Christian literature there is a group of documents that look very like real, authoritative liturgical texts, containing both directions for the conduct of worship and also the words of prayers and other formularies. Since they claim in one way or another to be apostolic, they have generally been referred to as apostolic church orders. But they are not what they seem. . . . Not only is their claim to apostolic authorship spurious—a judgement that has been universally accepted since at least the beginning of the twentieth century—but they are not even the official liturgical manuals of some third- or fourth-century local church, masquerading in apostolic dress to lend themselves added authority.”

6. Bradshaw, *Search for the Origins*, 4.

7. Thomas F. Matthews, “An Early Roman Chancel Arrangement and Its Liturgical Functions,” *Rivista di archeologia cristiana* 38 (1962) 73–95, esp.

73–75.

8. For dating of these manuscripts, see E. G. Cuthbert F. Atchley, *Ordo Romanus Primus, with Introduction and Notes* (London: Alexander Moring, 1905) 3–4.

9. Atchley, *Ordo Romanus Primus*, 135, 145, 157, 160.

10. Matthews, “Early Roman Chancel Arrangement,” 87–95, fig. 1.

11. Anton Gnirs, “La basilica ed il reliquiario d'avorio di Samagher presso Pola,” *Atti e memorie della società istriana di archeologia e storia patria* 24 (1908) 5–48, 34, 36–37, fig. 28; Pietro Toesca, *Storia dell'arte italiana I* (Turin: Unione, 1927) 322; Pericle Ducati, *L'arte in Roma dalle origini al sec. VIII* (Bologna: Cappelli, 1938) 380; Alexander Coburn Soper, “The Italo-Gallic



Figure 7

A woman raises the cup above the tripod mensa.

Marcellino and Pietro catacomb. Late 200s to early 300s.

Source: Wilpert, *Malereien*, pl. 157.2.

School of Early Christian Art,” *The Art Bulletin* 20/2 (June 1938) 145–92, 157; Henri Leclercq, “Pola,” in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie*, vol. 14, part 1, ed. Fernand Cabrol and Henri Leclercq (Paris: Letouzey et Ane, 1939) col. 1342–1346, esp. col. 1345; Joseph Wilpert, “Le due più antiche rappresentazioni della Adoratio Crucis,” *Atti della Pontificia Accademia romana di archeologia*, series 3, *Memorie* 2 (1928) 135–55, 148; Carlo Cecchelli, *La vita di Roma nel Medioevo*, Vol. 1: *Le arti minori e il costume* (Rome: Palandt, 1951–52) 208; Margherita Guarducci, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: un cimelio di arte paleocristiana nella storia del tardo impero* (Trieste: Società istriana di archeologia, 1978) 126–27; Jaś Elsner, “Closure and Penetration: Reflections on the Pola Casket,” in *From Site to Sight: The Transformation of Place in Art and Literature*, ed. V. P. Tschudi and T. K. Seim (Rome: Scienze e Lettere, 2013) 183–227, 187; Fabrizio Bisconti, “La Capsella di Samagher: Il quadro delle interpretazioni,” *Il cristianesimo in Istria fra tarda antichità e alto Medioevo* (2009) 217–31, esp. 230–31; Davide Longhi, *La capsella eburnea di Samagher: iconografia e committenza* (Ravenna: Girasole, 2006) 109–12; Theodor Klausner, *Die römische Petrustradition im Lichte der neuen Ausgrabungen unter der Peterskirche* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1956) 111; and Anna Angiolini, *La capsella eburnea di Pola* (Bologna: Pàtron, 1970) 12–14, 22–30.

12. Gnirs, “Basilica ed il reliquiario,” 5.

13. Longhi, *Capsella eburnea*, 123; Tilmann Buddensieg, “Le coffret en ivoire de Pola: Saint-Pierre et le Latran,” *Cahiers archéologiques* 10 (1959) 157–95, 192; Elsner, “Closure and Penetration,” 183; and Angiolini, *Capsella*, 101–4.

14. Gnirs, “Basilica ed il reliquiario d'avorio,” 32–33: “straordinario valore per la liturgia del periodo della primitiva civiltà Cristiana.”

15. Gnirs, “Basilica ed il reliquiario d'avorio,” 34.

16. Lev 9:22, Deut 10:8, 23:20, 1 Chronicles, and Sirach 50:20–21 depict high priests raising their hands, and Luke 24:50 depicts Jesus. Quote from Alexei Lidov, “The Priesthood of the Virgin Mary as an Image-Paradigm of Christian Visual Culture,” *IKON* 10 (2017) 9–26, 10.
17. Gnirs, “Basilica ed il reliquiario d’avorio,” 34, 36–37, fig. 28.
18. Alice Baird, “La Colonna Santa,” *The Burlington Magazine* 24 (1914) 128–31.
19. Jocelyn Toynbee and John Ward Perkins, *The Shrine of St. Peter and the Vatican Excavations* (Pantheon, 1957) 201.
20. Engelbert Kirschbaum, *The Tombs of St. Peter and St. Paul*, trans. John Murray (St. Martin’s, 1959) 60.
21. Kirschbaum, *Tombs*, 81–94, 113–19.
22. Jerome, *Against Vigilantius* 1.8; Gregory of Tours, *Glory of the Martyrs* 27.
23. Gnirs, “Basilica ed il reliquiario d’avorio,” 37.
24. Toesca, *Storia dell’arte*, 322; Ducati, *Arte in Roma*, 380; Soper, “Italo-Gallo School,” 157; Leclercq, “Pola,” col. 1345; Cecchelli, *Vita di Roma*, 208; and Wilpert, “Due più antiche rappresentazioni,” 148.
25. Guarducci, *Capsella*, 126; Longhi, *Capsella*, 109–12; and Ally Kateusz, “‘She sacrificed herself as the priest’: Early Christian Female and Male Co-Priests,” *JFSR* 33/1 (Spring 2017) 45–67, 62–63.
26. Wilpert, “Due più antiche rappresentazioni,” 149: “Però a S. Pietro non si venerava la Croce in modo così pronunciato.”
27. Leclercq, “Pola,” col. 1345.
28. Longhi, *Capsella*, 100; Buddensieg, “Coffret en ivoire de Pola,” 163; Angiolini, *Capsella*, 29; Kateusz “‘She sacrificed herself as the priest,’” 62; and Jelena Bogdanović, *The Framing of Sacred Space: The Canopy and the Byzantine Church* (Oxford University Press, 2017) 185.
29. Bruno M. Apollonj Ghetti, Antonio Ferrua, Enrico Josi, and Engelbert Kirschbaum, *Esplorazioni sotto la confessione di San Pietro in Vaticano, eseguite negli anni 1940–1949*, 2 vols. (Vatican City: Città del Vaticano, 1951) vol. 1, fig. 121.
30. Ghetti, *Esplorazioni*, vol. 1, plate H; also see Kirschbaum, *Tombs*, fig. 10, plate 29.
31. Kirschbaum, *Tombs*, 61, italics added.
32. Ghetti, *Esplorazioni*, 1:171: “ha esattamente la medesima funzione e forma simile al monumento eretto da Costantino nella Anastasis sulla tomba del Salvatore.”
33. See Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Thrupp, UK: Sutton, 1999) 20–30, esp. figs. 16, 17, 21, 23, and 24. See also ampoules that depict a hexagon structure, which Grabar calls the ciborium, in André Grabar, *Les ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza – Bobbio)* (Paris: C. Klincksieck, 1958) 15–44 for descriptions of plates 9, 11, 14, 22, 24, 34, 35, 45; other ampoules depict only the rectangular doorway, but the same doorway within the hexagon shape can be seen in the detail of plates 22 and 24. Also hexagonal glass vessels represented the Anastasis shrine; see Dan Barag, “Glass Pilgrim Vessels from Jerusalem, Parts II and III,” *Journal of Glass Studies* 13 (1971) 45–63, esp. 51–63.
34. See both pyxes and discussion about whether they represent the altar area in the Anastasis in St. Clair, “Visit to the Tomb,” 129–33, figs. 7–9; also see below for the pyx in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, which is accompanied by a legend that specifies its altar area and the altar area depicted on the Pola ivory are quite similar: <https://metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/17.190.57>.
35. For more on the square ciborium deception, see Ally Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women: Hidden Leadership* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2019) 170–72.
36. Galit Noga-Banai, *Sacred Stimulus: Jerusalem in the Visual Christianization of Rome* (Oxford University Press, 2018).
37. Toynbee, *Shrine*, 201.
38. Egeria, *Travels* 24.9–10 (John Wilkinson, trans., *Egeria’s Travels* [3rd ed.; Oxbow, 1999] 144–45, quotation on 145).
39. Egeria, *Travels* 24.8, 27.2–3.
40. To my knowledge, the next oldest to portray a Christian officiant at the table is a ninth century ivory tablet which depicts a man at the table, although what church is unclear or idealized; see Edward Foley, *From Age to Age: How Christians Have Celebrated the Eucharist*, rev. ed. (Liturgical, 2008) 167, fig. 131. As noted above, I exclude the silver patens depicting double-Jesuses at a table because this is an idealized biblical figure, not a representation of people at the table in a church. These patens may be evidence of a propaganda effort against the gender-parallel liturgy in Constantinople (discussed below) because they are silver stamped 574–578, thus made during the reign of the emperor directly after Justinian; see Mango, *Silver from Early Byzantium*, 159–70, figs. 35.3 and 35.4.
41. Lidov, “Priesthood of the Virgin Mary,” 20. See also Joseph Braun, “Maniple,” in *The Catholic Encyclopedia: An International Work of Reference on the Constitution, Doctrine, Discipline, and History of the Catholic Church*, vol. 9, ed. Charles G. Herbermann, Edward A. Pace, Conde Benoist Pallen, Thomas J. Shahan, John J. Wynne, and Andrew Alphonsus MacErlean (New York: Encyclopedia, 1910) 601–2. This doubled cloth may have originated from the doubled cloth *mappa*, which Roman emperors and consuls used as a symbol of their authority, for it similarly signified the authority of the person who used it in the church. For an example of the *mappa* in a consul’s hand, see Kurt Weitzmann, *Age of Spirituality: Late Antique and Early Christian Art, Third to Seventh Century: Catalogue of the Exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, November 19, 1977, through February 12, 1978* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1979) 6, fig. 5.
42. For more on the cloth, see Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women*, 89–99, and on the episcopal pallium, 81–89.
43. Lidov, “Priesthood of the Virgin Mary,” 17.
44. For the dating of San Vitale and these mosaics, see Simson, *Sacred Fortress*, 23–39, plates 2–4, 18–19. For the images, see Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche, 1903) plates 109 and 110.
45. Johannes G. Deckers and Ümit Serdaroğlu, “Das Hypogäum beim Silivri-Kapi in Istanbul,” *Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum* 36 (1993) 140–63, 160–63. Agreeing with their dating are László Török, *Transfigurations of Hellenism: Aspects of Late Antique Art in Egypt, AD 250–700* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 215; and Guntram Koch, *Frühchristliche Sarkophage* (Munich: Beck, 2000) 408. Matthews dated it towards the end of the fifth century, but without addressing Deckers’s criteria; Thomas F. Matthews, “I sarcophagi di Costantinopoli come fonte iconografica,” *Corso di cultura sull’arte ravennate e bizantina* 41 (1994) 313–35, esp. 320.
46. Deckers, “Hypogäum beim Silivri-Kapi in Istanbul,” 147–52.
47. Joan E. Taylor, “Christian Archaeology in Palestine: the Roman and Byzantine Periods,” in *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Archeology*, ed. David K. Pettegrew and William Caraher (Oxford University Press, 2019) 369–89, esp. 371–72.
48. Paul Corbey Finney, *The Invisible God: The Earliest Christians on Art* (Oxford University Press, 1994) 214–16, fig. 6.47. For image, see Joseph Wilpert, *Die Malereien der Katakomben Roms*, 2 vols. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herdersche, 1903) plate 41.1.
49. Janet H. Tulloch, “Women Leaders in Family Funerary Banquets,” ch. 8 in *A Woman’s Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carolyn Osiek, Margaret Y. MacDonald (Fortress, 2006). For more catacomb meal

scenes with women, see Pierre du Bourguet, *Early Christian Painting*, trans. Simon Watson Taylor (Viking, 1965) figs. 87 and 100.

50. Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 182.

51. Tulloch, "Women Leaders," 178, fig. 8.3. Image source: Wilpert, *Malereien*, plate 157.2.

52. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1 13.2 (ANF 1:334); Cécile and Alexandre Faivre, "La place des femmes dans le rituel eucharistique des marcosiens: déviance ou archaïsme?," *RevScRel* 71 (1997) 310–28.

53. Faivre, "Place de femmes dans le rituel eucharistique des marcosiens," 312 n. 6 for *eucharistein*.

54. Latin *Didascalia apostolorum* 26 (R. Hugh Connolly, trans., *Didascalia Apostolorum: The Syriac Version Translated and Accompanied by the Verona Latin Fragments* [Clarendon, 1929] 253).

55. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life* 1–90, esp. 68–69. For women's leadership among the Therapeutae, see Joan E. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers of First-Century Alexandria: Philo's 'Therapeutae' Reconsidered* (Oxford University Press, 2003) 309–43; and Hanna K. Teravanotko, *Denying Her Voice: The Figure of Miriam in Ancient Jewish Literature* (Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2016) esp. 231–33 regarding Philo calling all high-status women *parthenos* ("virgin").

56. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life* 83–89; and *On Agriculture* 80–81.

57. Taylor, *Jewish Women Philosophers*, 343.

58. Philo of Alexandria, *On the Contemplative Life* 83–89.

59. Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women*, 166, fig. 7.4.

60. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History* 2 17.21–23. Gender-parallel roles may also have continued in synagogues, because around the Mediterranean some Jewish women had titles of synagogue leadership

parallel to those of men—"Head of the Synagogue," "Elder," "Mother of the Synagogue," and "Priestess"; Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues*, BJS 36 (Scholars, 1982) 5–99.

61. Gelasius I, *Letter 14* (Kevin Madigan and Carolyn Osiek, trans. *Ordained Women in the Early Church: A Documentary History* [John Hopkins University Press, 2011] 186–88, quotation on 186).

62. Ally Kateusz, "Collyridian Déjà Vu: The Trajectory of Redaction of the Markers of Mary's Liturgical Leadership," *JFSR* 29/2 (Fall 2013) 75–92; and Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women*, 19–86.

63. Kateusz, *Mary and Early Christian Women*, 49–65. Worthy of mention here is Taylor's argument that Jesus sent out the disciples two by two, in male and female pairs, based on the Greek of Mark 6:7, the same Greek (*duo duo*) used in the Septuagint for the male and female pairs that Noah sent to the ark; Joan E. Taylor, "'Two by two': The Ark-etypal Language of Mark's Apostolic Pairings," in *The Body in Biblical, Christian and Jewish Texts*, LSTS 85, ed. Lester Grabbe (T&T Clark Bloomsbury, 2014) 58–82.

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