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**Horrors of the Perverted Eucharist  
Sensing Pelops' Dismembered Body in *Panteleimon cod. 6***

UDC: 252.7Gregorius Nazianzenus, sanctus  
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In an illuminated manuscript of liturgical homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus, *Panteleimon cod. 6*, there is a miniature representing Tantalus' feast where ancient gods are offered to eat the dismembered body of Pelops served to them by his own father. The aim of the present paper is to show that the illumination in question was cunningly designed in order to depict this act of felony as the 'spectacle of pain'. The paper examines the sensory aspects of perception of this miniature in the context of reading the sermon by a contemporary viewer. It is argued that its emphasis on the somatic nature of pain had potential to prompt a reader's reflection upon the theological disputes and political events of the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, the alleged time of the manuscript's creation, as well as to induce passionate delivery of the sermon to the gathered congregation.

**Keywords:** Gregory of Nazianzus, Tantalus, sensory experience of death, dismembered body, decay, pain, contemplation, reading Byzantine liturgical manuscripts

"And where will you place the butchering of Pelops to serve a meal to hungry gods – a nasty and inhuman sort of hospitality?"<sup>1</sup> This rhetorical question is posed by Gregory of Nazianzus in the oration *On the Holy Lights* – one of his 16 sermons that comprised a collection of homilies read aloud to the congregation as part of the Orthodox Church service over the course of the liturgical year.<sup>2</sup> In one such collection, treasured today in the Panteleimon monastery on Mount Athos as the codex 6,<sup>3</sup> the stated question is accompanied with a depiction of Tantalus presenting the gods at his feast with the meat of his son Pelops, whom he had butchered earlier in order to feed the guests (fig. 1). The boy's body is shown dismembered, with disembodied limbs floating in a huge goblet that dominates the scene, making the implied message of St Gregory's words all the more direct.

Only one other manuscript devoted to the liturgical homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus features the same theme, Paris, Bibl. Nat. Cod. Coislin 239 (fol. 122r),<sup>4</sup> although here, it is rendered differently: the notorious meal is quite simplified and the number of actors is reduced. Instead of clearly visible hands and feet in the giant vessel, which is bigger than the gathered figures dressed in the guise of Byzantine emperors, there is a bowl of 'realistic' size containing only three amorphous pieces of flesh reserved for just three guests who are dressed in simple robes without any indication of their divine nature. Therefore, it is obvious that the horror of Tantalus' inhuman act is specifically emphasized in the *Panteleimon cod. 6*. The aim of the paper is to show the specific intentions for devising this miniature, basing the discussion on the premise that it was not only important to represent the severe act of felony, where a father is offering his son to be eaten, but to transform the image into a spectacle of pain. Therefore, the first step will be to see how this transformation was accomplished, while later chapters will be devoted to the consideration of its immediate effects on a contemporary viewer.

### **Pelops' dismembered body as the trigger for somatic perception**

In Byzantine visual culture we often find the same visual forms and models employed across a number of varied, and sometimes even conceptually distant depictions. To perceive this practice as monotonous and uninventive is to overlook its profound significance. A notably eloquent example in this regard is the miniature depicting a soul trapped in Hades from *Dionysiou cod. 65*. This illustrated psalter, dated to the 12<sup>th</sup> century, was meant for the personal use of a monk named Sabas.<sup>5</sup> Its opening set of illuminations was designed as guidance to a contemplative, otherworldly journey, commonly described in hagiographical and apocalyptic literature. While it is not strange to encounter representations of a naked soul imprisoned below a mountain, and even beaten by demons, it is highly unusual to discover its 'flesh' covered in sores, as one does in fol. 12r (fig. 2). The disembodied soul is shown here as paradoxically experiencing somatic pain. The main figure commonly depicted in this manner is actually Job, an Old Testament personality who enjoyed great popularity in Byzantium, especially among monks who were supposed to identify themselves with him by emulating his virtuous nature. Therefore, it is not surprising to find a number of codices of the Book of Job richly illuminated with particular emphasis on the prophet's physical suffering, oftentimes expressed through his skin, which was marred with dots that symbolized painful and ill-smelling ulcers.<sup>6</sup> This remarkable similarity between the two figures, namely Job and the aforementioned imprisoned soul, both of which were designed for viewer's self-identification, must have been readily grasped in meditation, opening up a path to explore other potential connections on a deeper level. By imitating a well-known model, the illuminator of the *Dionysiou cod. 65* implied the gruesome, yet, at least to a monk, familiar nature of somatic pain as being experienced in the afterlife, underlining the horror of the otherworldly "vision". On the other hand, by intertwining the fate of the depicted soul with that of Job, the ideator of the illumination conveyed not only the agony, but also other potential meanings surrounding the original visual model, namely hope in bodily resurrection. The Book of Job is one of the few passages in the Old Testament where the idea of resurrection of the body occurs (Job 14:14–15; 19:25–27). Moreover, the story in *Septuagint* concludes with a reference to resurrection (Job 42:17a) which, as of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, was even occasionally illustrated by a miniature resembling Byzantine *Anastasis* composition (here too, we come across an example of adapting a familiar visual model for the needs of a new scene).<sup>7</sup> Thus, the figure of Job could easily be connected to bodily resurrection in addition to the great somatic torment or, more precisely, to bodily resurrection that would follow after the corporal misery had passed. The monk who was contemplating the soul with its foul flesh could link those implications to their respective images, consequently enriching the whole experience. A new sense would emerge: instead of a continuous posthumous punishment in afterlife, he would see the process of painful, yet redeeming putrefaction that would eventually end up with the soul (i.e. the viewer who was identifying with it) being liberated from the Hades' womb and uniting with its new resurrected body. This overall positive outcome is also confirmed by the figure of Christ with a gesture of benediction in the upper right corner, highlighting God's ultimate love and mercy towards humankind.

This example alone demonstrates that utilization of a well-known model in a new context does not indicate lack of creativity. On the contrary, it proves that medieval piety was the true locus of creativity. The intertwining of familiar visual forms was used to create a web of possible meanings that could be accessed through meditation, elevating the overall experience.

The image of butchered Pelops deserves equal attention since, though the miniature may appear quite 'original' at first glance, Byzantine visual culture was acquainted with the notion of dismemberment as being equivalent to fragmentation. Despite the fact that mutilations of holy martyrs might seem like the natural starting point in the quest for appropriate analogies, saintly bodies were never actually shown cut to pieces to give the impression of a genuine complete dismemberment. However, representations of infernal torments in the Last Judgment compositions are a different story altogether. Major punishments for sinners that were repeat

edly depicted in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries are those found in the Bible: “the worm that never sleeps”, “the gnashing of teeth”, “the unquenchable fire” and “the outer darkness”. Though often encountered in both written and visual sources, their nature was never explained further than the implications suggested by their names. Nevertheless, many examples of the Last Judgment composition from the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries,<sup>8</sup> especially in manuscript illumination (figs. 3a-b, 4), depict them as floating skulls and heads neatly grouped on backgrounds of varied colors, resembling open tombs with scattered bones and body parts placed inside. While “the worm that never sleeps” obviously suggests the process of eternal decomposition, other infernal torments could also be associated with the funerary context. “The outer darkness” may insinuate darkness of the grave, “the gnashing of teeth” is always represented as a “heap” of skulls and “the unquenchable fire” is yet another example of everlasting bodily destruction.<sup>9</sup> It could be said that they are all conceptually connected to what could be termed “penalties of the grave”, implying “sensations” which the buried body has to endure during the process of decay. Therefore, the impression of scattered body parts (i.e. floating heads and skulls) actually implies dismemberment which, in such an imaginary funerary context, must have been synonymous with fragmentation – a process akin to bodily decomposition.<sup>10</sup> On the Last Judgment mosaic in the Torcello cathedral, rendered by a Byzantine master, there is even a literal depiction of legs, hands and skulls positioned together, directly representing fragmentation/decay through dismemberment – placement of skulls, signifiers of putrefaction, alongside disembodied limbs, indicators of fragmentation, makes it obvious to what extent these two processes were considered alike (fig. 3c).

On the other hand, scenes of Hell should not only be compared with images of Paradise as their antipode. Resurrection of the dead is a rarely omitted part of the Last Judgment and, in some respects, it serves as an even more direct upside-down reflection of what we find in Satan’s domain. Final resurrection is vividly imagined in Byzantine visual culture as a process of regurgitation in which all the beasts, whether being of the earth, sky or sea, are vomiting previously eaten and digested body parts that are now being reassembled. While digestion was yet another symbol of bodily dissolution, its logical ‘visceral’ counterpart standing in for resurrection was regurgitation.<sup>11</sup> Hence, body parts shown as separated could, ironically, refer to both decay and resurrection, depending on the context. In the Last Judgment composition, faced as opposites, they were reaffirming their respective meanings through the intentional contrast.

If we finally go back to the representation of Pelops’ dismembered body painted on a dark background, we will be able to grasp echoes of the basic arrangement of Hell’s torments. Moreover, this allusion is even conceptually present in the miniature, noting that Pelops is food meant to be *digested* by gods. Not only was digestion symbolizing bodily decomposition but the very act of being eaten by the ancient deity was also a quite familiar motive in Byzantine culture. Because Hades, the polyvalent place reserved for the dead, was closely connected to the homonymous mythological god of ancient Greece, it was sometimes visualized in his guise as a gluttonous figure that was devouring or vomiting captured souls.<sup>12</sup> Meanwhile, the myth of Tantalus’ feast was undoubtedly known in Byzantium. We know this because one collection of commentaries, attributed to a supposed abbot named Nonnus, was often following liturgical homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus. These commentaries of Pseudo-Nonnus comprised a collection of short myths which St Gregory referred to in his sermons.<sup>13</sup> Thus, everyone reading the homilies, centuries after they had been originally delivered, was able to learn more about those personalities and events which, by that time, had faded from common knowledge. Interestingly enough, the available version of the myth of Tantalus’ feast mentions that, in the end, Pelops was reassembled and resurrected.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the context of the miniature in *Panteleimon cod. 6* could permit simultaneous existence of both implications – of bodily dissolution and resurrection – the two ideas embedded into the same image of separated body parts, as has been discussed above.

However, the type of contemplation presented in this paper was not only the thought process of finding and understanding hidden associations and connections. It could be argued that contemplation was a sensory process, as well. Images were potential triggers for sensory experiences, especially when the viewer was able to

compare and identify their own, familiar experience with the one depicted or, as cognitive studies more precisely indicate, when the beholder was “bodily engaged” through “embodied simulation”. Nevertheless, let us first determine how familiar with “sensations of death” one could become in the Middle Ages, not only conceptually but sensorially.

Contemplation of one’s own death has had a long history in Christianity. Having deep roots in the tradition of early desert fathers, it was embedded in monastic daily life.<sup>15</sup> With time, thinking about one’s own mortality, along with the proper “meditative technics”, entered even into the private devotion of lay people. However, it was the monastic context that was truly overflowing with references to dying. There is an abundance of sources that discuss monks who went to cemeteries in order to look at corpses, using this sensory encounter to gain knowledge of their own mortality. It can be said that death was actually “practiced” from the very moment the monastic vow was taken. This act marked symbolic dying for the world and entering a liminal state which existed between earthly existence and the hereafter<sup>16</sup> – in many respects, not unlike the “middle state of souls”, i.e. period between death and final resurrection on the Day of Judgment.<sup>17</sup> It was believed that the soul could spend this period enclosed in Hades, but with the possibility of cleansing past transgressions during that time.<sup>18</sup> Life in the monastery corresponded strikingly to the imaginary scenario where, founded on the notion that a person represents psychosomatic unity,<sup>19</sup> a monk was reliving the fate of the imprisoned soul and the buried body simultaneously (unmistakably similar to the already discussed miniature of the “corporeal” soul in *Dionysiou cod. 65*). The fetid anguish of putrefaction, which corpses have to endure in their tombs in order to be transformed into clean, hard (and ultimately good) bare bones, was equated in the Middle Ages with bodily mortifications practiced through ascetic penance.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the understanding that unity between body and soul fashioned the self of every individual instigated belief that affecting one (i.e. body) induced parallel consequences upon the other (i.e. soul). Therefore, bodily mortifications, which were practiced either within monastic communities or in complete hermitic solitude, were a means of cleansing by which the “living corpse” of the monk (he imagined himself to be already dead) was experiencing the gruesome process of decomposition so as to achieve a cleansed state of both body and soul. Hence, the state destined for corpses buried in the ground was corporally experienced in monasteries by the living. Moreover, this phenomenon was enhanced by an imagination devised in literature and visual programs. For example, in several versions of the *vita* of St Symeon the Stylite, there is a strong emphasis on the saint’s bodily mortification, which is followed by graphic descriptions of ghastly liquids, foul odors and creeping worms, only to be replaced by the radiance of sweet-smelling relics in the end.<sup>21</sup> Simply put, St Symeon willingly subdued his body to processes which eerily resembled those of bodily decay and, by virtue of (cleansable) suffering, gained the reward in form of a resurrected body, i.e. relics marked by the fragrance of Paradise. The verbal image painted in texts of his *vitae* once again suggests psychosomatic unity, implying parallel anguish endured by both body and soul in life, as well as the parallel reward to both, i.e. to the saint’s whole self. Even though this is obviously a story of an extraordinary man, common monks were also called upon to share analogous experiences filled with appropriate somatic “sensations”. In *The Heavenly Ladder*, a popular manual by John Climacus on attaining spiritual perfection, the “memory of death” is a necessary thread intertwined throughout the entire spiritual journey.<sup>22</sup> But the accompanying sensory “practice” of death is also present. In an illuminated copy of *The Heavenly Ladder*, *Vat. gr. 394*, vivid descriptions are followed by equally striking visual counterparts: on fol. 46r, hermits (models for monks immersed in meditation) are literally depicted as animated corpses performing purifying penance (fig. 5).<sup>23</sup> Therefore, this analysis shows that death could be sensorially experienced during lifetime because different somatic experiences resulting from various kinds of bodily mortifications were understood as such – pains that the body undergoes in the grave.

From the early days of Christianity, monks were encouraged to contemplate death not only by looking at corpses, but also by imagining the Day of Judgment and even torments in Hell. It is not surprising, then, that we find the Last Judgment images even in the context of private devotion. Likewise, the monumental compositions



1 *Tantalus' Feast*, *Panteleimon cod. 6*, fol. 164v, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 314)



2 *The Soul Trapped in Hades*, *Dionysiou cod. 65*, fol. 12r, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 122)



4 *Joasaph Beholds Hell in a Dream*, *Iveron cod. 463*, fol. 101r, 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 107)



3 *Drawings of Hell's Torments* (author: Sara Đorđević): a) detail of the Last Judgment illumination from MS Paris, BNF, gr. 74, fol. 51v; b) detail of the Last Judgment composition from the Sinai icon n° 151; c) detail of the Last Judgment mosaic from the Torcello cathedral



5 *The Ascetic Penance*, *Vat. gr. 394*, fol. 46r, 11<sup>th</sup> c. (from: MARTIN, 1954, fig. 91)



6 *The Baptism of Christ*, *Panteleimon cod. 6*, fol. 161r, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 309)

could also be used for meditational purposes of any devout individual. Pious viewers were generally invited to identify with different figures, proper Christian “models” and “anti-models”, reliving through contemplation their imaginary scenarios and consequently gaining deeper insight into their own possible fates. Seeing infernal torments in a meditative state allowed the beholder to encounter somatically familiar pain, i.e. that of the buried body, already experienced and sensorial known.<sup>24</sup>

Pelops’ dismembered body cherishes the visual model of infernal torments – the image internalized through meditation and, thus, intuitively known to the viewer who had contemplated the punishments of Hell. This means that the miniature of Tantalus’ butchered son cherishes the familiar image of (actively inflicted) pain and not just the simple (passive) state that resulted from his father’s misdeed. Recent research that was developed around the discovery of mirror neurons has revealed that: “our capacity to pre-rationally make sense of the actions, emotions and *sensations* of others depends on embodied simulation, a functional mechanism through which the actions, emotions or sensations we see activate our own internal representations of the bodily states that are associated with these social stimuli, as though we were engaged in a similar action or *experiencing a similar emotion or sensation*.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, this embodied simulation is not limited to figurative representations. However, in Panteleimon cod. 6, where mutilated anthropomorphic body parts were encountered as the image of actively inflicted pain, opportunities for a viewer’s “bodily empathy” must have been engaging enough. Consequently, the contemporary beholder was not only perceiving Pelops’ dismembered body as an image of pain, but he was also “sensing” it as well. That pain was familiar to the person who experienced bodily mortifications, which were, in turn, synonymous to bodily decay.

### **Pelops’ dismembered body as the object of veneration**

The butchery of Pelops was only one miniature in a series of double illuminations created for the sermon that was read annually in connection with the Theophany feast. Therefore, in order to understand why the emphasis on pain was so important to its ideator(s), one should reconsider the illumination in its original context. The opening miniature of the homily *On the Holy Lights*, as one might expect, is a depiction of the Baptism of Christ, a New Testament event celebrated on that particular feast day (fig. 6). Moreover, Christ’s baptism was also a mystical occurrence of the manifestation of the Holy Trinity. This is why St Gregory begins his oration by contrasting this Christian Mystery with the “deviant” mysteries of pagans.<sup>26</sup> In the aforementioned manuscript Paris Coislin 239, references to pagan mysteries are designed as literal illustrations of corresponding myths, so a number of narrative depictions are found, such as the Birth of Aphrodite or the Rape of Persephone.<sup>27</sup> However, in Panteleimon cod. 6, most of the miniatures show worshipers venerating statues of ancient deities placed on high columns (figs. 8, 9, 11). Rather than lack of creativity, this unvarying compositional arrangement indicates plain “storyline” which should be implemented even in more narrative depictions of Panteleimon cod. 6. The idolatrous worship is actually a common thread intertwined through the entire cycle of double illuminations, including men revering stars and even Orpheus, who is represented as the object of devotion venerated by animals (fig. 10). The only miniature that resists such interpretation is the Deceit of Cronus, an introductory depiction and the only autonomous representation in the series (fig. 7). Even as such, it perfectly sets the tone for the rest of the cycle by emphasizing the general aberrant and horrific nature of pagan gods who are obviously prepared to devour even their own children.

Still, two miniatures are of particular interest for the discussion at hand: the Birth of Zeus and the Birth of Dionysus from Zeus’ knee (figs. 8, 9). The first image can be understood as the birth of a false god challenging, in a sense, Christ’s birth by echoing the joyous atmosphere of the Nativity scenes. However, the connection between Zeus and Christ becomes especially obvious in the second miniature, as the Greek god, represented on a throne in the guise of a Byzantine emperor, bears the “portrait likeness” of Christ. Furthermore, this false Pantocrator has



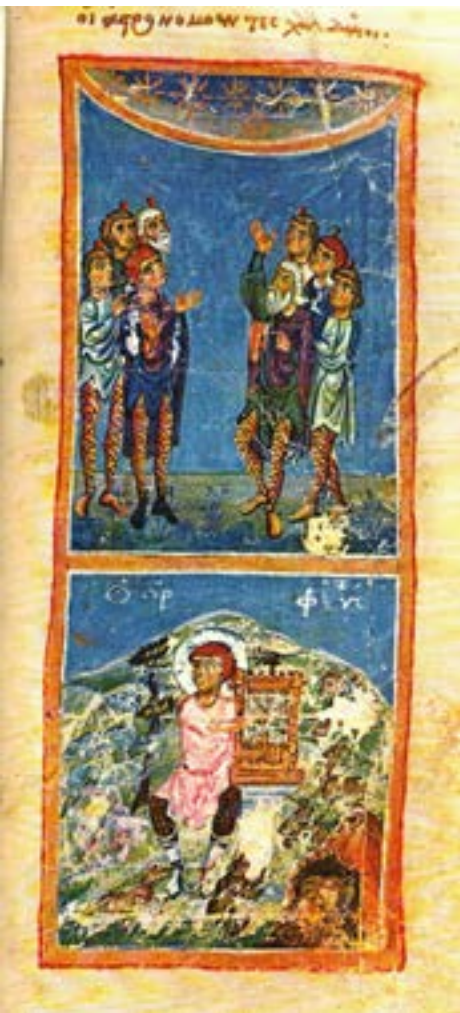
7 *Cronos Swallowing Stone, Panteleimon cod. 6, fol. 162v, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 310)*



8 *The Birth of Zeus and The Cult of Rhea, Panteleimon cod. 6, fol. 163r, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 311)*



9 *The Birth of Dionysos and The Cult of Semele, Panteleimon cod. 6, fol. 163v, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 312)*



10 *The Astrology of Chaldeans and Orpheus Playing his Harp, Panteleimon cod. 6, fol. 165r, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 315)*

11 *The Worship of the Sun of Mithras and The Goat of Mendes, Panteleimon cod. 6, fol. 165v, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from: PELEKANIDIS, 1975, fig. 316)*



his name written in white next to his figure, just as one would expect to find on an icon. Since inscribing names was absolutely necessary for the image of a holy person to be an icon,<sup>28</sup> the placement of corresponding written names next to depictions of pagan deities was always avoided in Byzantium. Therefore, it can be said that *Panteleimon cod. 6* portrays a perfectly rendered idol from the Byzantine point of view. The fact that the figure of Zeus does not look directly at the viewer, preventing direct contact and communication, enhances this position further, for such an image would certainly be seen as pregnant with dangerous powers. It is known from numerous sources that Byzantines believed that ancient pagan sculptures had inherent powers and were to be handled with particular caution.<sup>29</sup> Thus, we can presume there was a certain degree of anxiety in the reader when he encountered this image. Moreover, the same could be said for other miniatures, because all deities depicted in *Panteleimon cod. 6* are accompanied by their proper names written in white. Interestingly enough, in the miniature of Tantalus' feast, only the name of Pelops is written in such a particular manner. Consequently, being preceded and followed by images of false worship, we could assume that in this illumination he was imagined as the object of veneration – a sacrificial meal offered to gods by his father; a perverted Eucharist where gods are those who feed on the flesh of men, instead of *vice versa*. In this representation of inverted values, if one was to identify with the butchered youth, a representative of humankind before the dreadful pagan gods, he would see/experience the image of pain inflicted by deviant cannibalistic appetite.

On the other hand, the polyvalency of images was not unknown in Byzantium. There are instances in which miniatures referred to theological struggles or prevalent beliefs that were relevant at the time of their creation. They were meant to engage readers to reflect on the contemporary discussions, even though they were reading texts that had been written long before then. Hence, interpretations of certain stories, verses with vague meaning or universal moral lessons, could all be (anachronistically) linked to actual events or challenges that were happening at the time when a manuscript was illuminated.<sup>30</sup> Based on stylistic analysis, *Panteleimon cod. 6* is dated by different scholars at various points in the period from the second half of the 11<sup>th</sup> and well into the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>31</sup> However, sometimes iconographic or contextual circumstances offer greater precision. Interestingly, the suggested period coincides with heated Christological disputes that were taking place in Byzantium,<sup>32</sup> while the miniature of Tantalus' feast has unmistakably strong "triggering" potential for reflecting on the issues relating to the nature of the Eucharist.

Recurring problems debated at various points throughout this timespan were the question of how the Eucharist related to the Holy Trinity and the question concerning the essence of Eucharistic sacrifice.<sup>33</sup> Regarding the former issue, the image of the father (Tantalus) who is presenting his sacrificed son (Pelops) as the object of veneration to be eaten must have been perceived as pregnant with opportunities for reflection on the relationship between God the Father and Christ. Still, the second issue is also strongly echoed in the image of the butchered youth because, for example, the synod of 1082 anathematized, among other things, those who thought that bread and wine were mere symbols of the Savior's body.<sup>34</sup> However, the insistence on somatic pain embedded in the representation of dismembered Pelops can be particularly revealing. At the Church Council of 1156/57, the main dispute was fought around the question of whether Christ could simultaneously be sacrificed and receive sacrifice. Another problem that was raised during this debate concerned the very nature of the sacrifice, i.e. whether the Eucharist represented a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice (a historical *memento*) or a real sacrifice genuinely performed during the liturgy. Ultimately, the latter stance prevailed.<sup>35</sup> This is why insistence on somatic pain would be particularly convenient for emphasizing the sacrificial character of the Eucharist – a sacrifice that was truly reenacted during the service. This might be the primary reason why the image of Tantalus' feast was fashioned as a spectacle of pain in *Panteleimon cod. 6*, enabling the contemporary viewer to reflect on the nature of Eucharistic offering. It seems that the positions delivered at the Council of 1156/57 directed the course of further discussions on the body of Christ in Communion, as they were based on the heightened realism of Eucharistic sacrifice. Questions that had been introduced by Michael Glykas sometime in the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (certainly not earlier than mid-1160s) were initially circulated in the monastic sphere before capturing widespread theological attention in the mid-1190s. The issues concerned presumed corruptibility of



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Christ's Eucharistic body, but also whether the faithful receive only a part of Christ or the whole Christ through the Communion.<sup>36</sup> The fierce quarrel failed to be properly resolved due to fall of Constantinople in 1204. However, as scholars have noted, the discussions that took place at the end of the century coincided with the introduction of the new iconographical theme in churches' sanctuaries called the melismos (dismemberment). These images of the sacrificed Christ, most often portrayed as a young child, depicted him lying in a paten or recumbent directly on the altar. They actually alluded to the practice of breaking the Eucharistic bread (i.e. Savior's body) in the liturgy, hence the name.<sup>37</sup> The similarities between ideas embedded in the melismos and the image of Pelops' dismembered body are striking. They would perfectly enable reflection on the issues debated in the 1190s, while simultaneously encompassing, or more likely springing from, earlier positions. But can we presume such a late date for the Panteleimon cod. 6? Luckily, there is additional evidence that can support the accuracy of this assumption.

### **Pelops' dismembered body as the image of the murdered boy emperor**

The polyvalency of Byzantine images does not necessarily end with implications involving contemporary theological concerns; those same images could also allude to actual historical events.<sup>38</sup> The discussed miniature of Zeus in the guise of a Byzantine emperor has such an alluring potential for a political criticism that it becomes difficult to ignore it (fig. 9). But which emperor exactly was he meant to be?

To say that emperors continuously sought to present their power and authority by relating their right to rule to the divine providence would be a truism. Yet, the "art" of imitating Christ was certainly refined to its utmost perfection during the reign of emperor Manuel I Komnenos. Whether it was through his public acts, pious deeds, official patronage or rhetorical works of his court, the Emperor was acquiring the unequivocal "likeness" of Christ Pantokrator.<sup>39</sup> If that is the case, was the image of Zeus "Pantokrator" a mocking, subversive representation of his person? The active involvement of Manuel I in theological debates as the supreme judge who would punish "heretics" proclaimed him to be the "guardian of Orthodoxy".<sup>40</sup> Moreover, in this capacity, he even presided over the said (above mentioned) church dispute of 1156/57. Could it be that the miniature in Panteleimon cod. 6 actually criticized his ideology, marked by numerous persecutions, by perverting his image of Christ into that of Zeus? While this idea might be seductive, the discussed theological implications embedded in the depiction of Tantalus' feast are too much in alignment, it seems, with the winning party of the Council of 1156/57 (i.e. the Emperor's position) for this interpretation to be tenable.

The text of the homily that the miniature of Zeus is "illustrating" might in fact be a clue in the search for the hidden identity of the emperor in question: "Our Mystery is not a story of the affairs and frauds of Zeus, who once ruled the Cretans as tyrant".<sup>41</sup> Observing that the supreme deity of ancient Greeks was imagined as a 'tyrant' by dressing him in the robes and regalia of Byzantine emperors, we could detect echoes remarkably similar to the official ideology devised to justify the claim to the throne of a new ruler – Isaac II Angelos (1185-1195). Isaac II began his reign with the bloody overthrow of his predecessor Andronikos I, last emperor of the Komnenian dynasty. Andronikos Komnenos is a controversial and intriguing figure vividly chronicled in the writing of Niketas Choniates. He came to power after the death of his royal cousin, Manuel I, by eliminating the dowager Empress and becoming the new regent for the underage emperor Alexios II. Soon enough, he turned against his nephew whom he had sworn to protect, and ordered his execution. Although Andronikos I was welcomed by the general public of Constantinople with great hope in 1183, the harsh rule which followed marked him as a tyrant in the eyes of the people, which culminated in his gruesome downfall in 1185.<sup>42</sup> The new emperor Isaac II Angelos exploited the image of tyrant-predecessor to his benefit, using it to support his own claim to the Byzantine throne as the savior of the Empire – a tyrant-slayer.<sup>43</sup> In History by Niketas Choniates, Andronikos I is characterized as he who "reigned as tyrant over the Romans" in a number of places,<sup>44</sup> while in Monodia, written by Niketas' brother Michael Choniates, the Emperor is referred to as "man-eating tyrant" and even as "Zeus" at one point.<sup>45</sup>

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If we now turn to other double miniatures of the homily On the Holy Lights in Panteleimon cod. 6, there will be traceable new hints alluding to the criticism of Andronikos Komnenos. The depiction of Orpheus, which is traditionally similar to that of the biblical King David (who often served as a model of an archetypal ruler to Byzantine emperors),<sup>46</sup> can be interpreted as Andronikos I surrounded by his supporters, who are equated with senseless beasts. On the other hand, the representations of pagan sculptures venerated on their columns in the manuscript may have also referred to Andronikos, as it was known that the last Komnenian Emperor desired to raise a column with his likeness in Constantinople,<sup>47</sup> as had been done in earlier times. Still, in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, it may be presumed that his contemporaries would look at this desire with a certain kind of unease. However, the most interesting image in this context, beside the depiction of Zeus, is once again the miniature of Tantalus' feast. It is highly probable that the contemporary viewer was inclined to identify Andronikos I in the figure of the wicked father who is offering the butchered body of the boy – i.e. his own nephew, Alexios II, whom he had sworn to protect as a foster-father until the Emperor would come of age. Hence, the image of pain in the form of a dismembered body would amplify the horror of the crime committed by the last Komnenian ruler.

Consequently, we can suppose that the manuscript was illuminated during the reign of Isaac II Angelos (1185- 1195), a "tyrant-slaying savior". Furthermore, by taking into account the almost contemporary Christological disputes at the middle of 1190s, we may even hypothesize that the image of the butchered Pelops anticipated those very debates by just a few years, or even months, reflecting upon the starting of a new intellectual turmoil in the Empire.<sup>48</sup>

#### **Pelops' dismembered body as the cue for a preacher's "reading performance"**

So far, the analysis in this paper has revolved around the notion that miniatures of the Panteleimon cod. 6 were vehicles for contemplation and reflection. However, this was a liturgical manuscript, which means that its homilies were read aloud during certain services of the liturgical year. As such, it could be assumed that there was not enough time for the reader to reflect upon these images and grasp all the complex references. Then, the important question arises: were these miniatures contemplated at all?

The miniatures of illuminated lectionaries, being illustrated liturgical books as well, were sometimes seen by scholars as increasing the value of the manuscripts and the prestige of owning them, without any practical contribution to the process of reading the texts they accompanied.<sup>49</sup> However, Robert Nelson had a different interpretation of an illumination that was paired with the text of a lectionary read every September 1<sup>st</sup> (the beginning of the Byzantine secular year) on Constantine's forum by the patriarch of Constantinople. He argued that the unusual miniature of Christ reading to the assembled men was a mirroring model for the patriarch, who would grasp by a mere glance the obvious performative similarities while reading to the capital's public. Robert Nelson further concludes that "this and other miniatures of the period served as models of and models for performance and subjectivity."<sup>50</sup>

While miniatures of the Panteleimon cod. 6 certainly enhanced the performance of its reader, though not as models, contemplation should not be eliminated as a possibility, especially when we see how cunningly these illuminations were devised. Does it not seem natural to assume that priests would want to prepare for the liturgy by reading selected portions of manuscripts before the actual rite? Indeed, this is not unusual, even today. It is quite possible that Panteleimon cod. 6 offers us a rare glimpse into the preparatory process of delivering a "public reading". It should be noted that double miniatures follow the text only at its beginning, when St Gregory speaks of "perverted" ways of pagans and their deities. Immediately after that section of the homily, there is no other richly elaborated illumination, except for the one marginal image of John the Baptist (fol. 173r).<sup>51</sup> Interestingly enough, only one other sermon in Panteleimon cod. 6 developed a visual program such as this – the oration For New Sunday. The colorful pastoral tripartite scenes follow the ekphrasis of spring, which acquired a prominent place in this homily by Gregory of Nazianzus (figs. 12, 13). By speaking about the rebirth of man through

Christ, the celebrated preacher took a long excursion into the detailed and vivid descriptions of nature's rebirth in spring.<sup>52</sup> One may suppose, by comparing the two sermons, that illuminations are placed next to the long enumerations which, had they not been delivered passionately, could have become tedious for the listeners. Thus, we could say that miniatures could also be cues for performance, alongside their already mentioned roles in liturgical manuscripts "as models of and models for performance."

By preparing to read the sermon *On the Holy Lights* in this manuscript, a priest or deacon could closely study the miniatures and their relation to the corresponding text. During the liturgy, they would be transformed from contemplative into mnemonic signs that could trigger sensations in the reader – the same sensations he was experiencing during preparation. If this is true, they truly served as cues for performance – prompting the reader to deliver the sermon passionately in an attempt to engage the congregation. By glancing at the threatening idols, he was supposed to communicate his own anxiety; by glancing at the Tantalus' feast, he was supposed to communicate the horror he was encountering himself. Ultimately, he was to embody the famed charisma of Gregory of Nazianzus and make those passages of enumerating distant, vague deities relevant to his contemporaries who might not have felt moved by the words filled with references of another (bygone) age. By doing so, he would fulfill the first goal determined by this very sermon, for it was St Gregory who wrote: "And let us begin our speculation where it is best to begin: that is where Solomon commands us to begin, when he says, 'As a beginning of wisdom, acquire wisdom for yourself!' To what is he referring, in speaking of 'the beginning of wisdom'? Fear!"<sup>53</sup>



12 Pastoral Scenes,  
*Panteleimon cod. 6*,  
fol. 37r, 12<sup>th</sup> c. (from:  
PELEKANIDIS, 1975,  
fig. 299)



13 Pastoral Scenes,  
*Panteleimon*  
*cod. 6*, fol. 37v,  
12<sup>th</sup> c. (from:  
PELEKANIDIS, 1975,  
fig. 300)

- 1 GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, "Oration 39: On the Holy Lights", in: *Gregory of Nazianzus*, B.E. DALEY (trans.), London, Routledge, 1999, p. 129.
- 2 On liturgical homilies of St Gregory, see L. BRUBAKER, "The Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus", in: *A companion to Byzantine illustrated manuscripts*, Leiden, Brill, 2017, pp. 352-354.
- 3 On Panteleimon cod. 6, see G. GALAVARIS, *The illustrations of the liturgical homilies of Gregory Nazianzenus*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969, pp 209-212; *The Treasures of Mount Athos: Illuminated Manuscripts*, vol. 2, S.M. PELEKANIDIS et al. (ed.), Athens, Ekdotike Athenon, 1975, pp. 352-358; K. WEITZMANN, *Greek Mythology in Byzantine Art*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1984, pp. 11, 57-58.
- 4 On the manuscript see G. GALAVARIS, *op. cit.*, 1969, pp. 246-249; K. WEITZMANN, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 11, 57-58, fig. 69.
- 5 On Dionysiou cod. 65 see G.R. PARPULOV, "Texts and Miniatures from Codex Dionysiou 65", in: *Twenty-fifth Annual Byzantine Studies Conference, Abstracts*, College Park, University of Maryland, 1999, pp. 124-126.
- 6 M. EVANGELATOU, "From Word into Image: The Visualization of Ulcer in Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts of the Book of Job", in: *Gesta*, vol. 48, no. 1, 2009, pp. 19-36; J. DEVOGE, "Quand Job tombe malade. Étude littéraire et iconographique d'une scène biblique d'après la Septante", in: *Zograf*, vol. 33, 2009, pp. 9-18.
- 7 S. PAPADAKI-OEKLAND, *Byzantine Illuminated Manuscripts of the Book of Job: A Preliminary Study of the Miniature Illustrations. Its Origin and Development*, Turnhout, Brepols, 2009, pp. 171-176.
- 8 On the Last Judgment representations in 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> centuries, see N.P. ŠEVČENKO, "Images of the Second Coming and the Fate of the Soul in Middle Byzantine Art", in: *Apocalyptic Thought in Early Christianity*, R.J. DALY (ed.), Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2009, pp. 250-272; M. ANGHEBEN, "Les Jugements derniers byzantins des XIe -XIIe siècles et l'iconographie du jugement immediate", in: *Cahiers Archeologiques*, vol. 50, 2002, pp.105-134.
- 9 Some torments are occasionally represented as full- or half-length figures squeezed together in a "tomb", intentionally visually resembling compositions of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste. This is briefly discussed in: J. ĐORĐEVIĆ, "Macabre Goes East: A Peculiar Verse among Funerary Inscriptions of the Orthodox Christians in the Late Medieval Balkans", in: *Migrations in Visual Culture*, J. ERDELJAN et al. (ed.), Belgrade, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Belgrade, 2018, pp. 22. I am preparing a separate paper that will consider all of the mentioned Hell's torments individually as the "penalties of the grave", discussing all their compositional variations in this context. For now, cf. idem, "Experiencing Resurrection: Persuasive Narrative of the Pictorial Program in the Ossuary of the Bachkovo Monastery", in: *SJBMGS*, vol. 3, 2017, pp. 116-119, where persecution by fire is considered in the similar context of bodily destruction and the Last Judgment.
- 10 This might be the precise reason why ritual "fragmentation" of the body developed and was utilized in order to, paradoxically, deny or at least accelerate decay. In those cases, fragmentation should be perceived as a "conquered" process that is then employed to diminish its original, innate, property (which is not dissimilar to the ancient principle that "like cures like"). Cfr. C.W. BYNUM, *Resurrection of the Body in Western Christianity, 200-1336*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1995, pp. 204-206.
- 11 *Ibid.*, pp. 186-199 and passim.
- 12 A. EASTMOND-L. JAMES, "Eat, drink . . . and pay the price", in: *Eat, Drink, and Be Merry (Luke 12:19) – Food and Wine in Byzantium*, L. BRUBAKER -K. LINARDOU (eds.), Aldershot, Ashgate, 2007, pp. 179-182.
- 13 WEITZMANN, *op. cit.*, 1984, pp. 6-12.
- 14 *A Christian's Guide to Greek Culture: The Pseudo-Nonnus Commentaries on Sermons 4, 5, 39 and 43 by Gregory of Nazianzus*, J.N. SMITH (ed.), Liverpool, Liverpool University Press, 2001, p. 6.
- 15 J.L. ZECHER, "Death among the Desert Fathers: Evagrius and Theophilus in the Sayings Tradition", in: *Sobornost*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2014, 148-169.
- 16 S.T. BROOKS, *Commemoration of the Dead: Late Byzantine Tomb Decoration (Mid-Thirteenth to Mid-Fifteenth Centuries)*, PhD Thesis, New York University, 2002, p. 137.
- 17 On the middle state of souls, see N. CONSTAS, "'To Sleep, Perchance to Dream': The Middle State of Souls in Patristic and Byzantine Literature", in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 55, 2001, pp. 91-124.
- 18 Cfr. V. MARINIS, "'He Who Is at the Point of Death': The Fate of the Soul in Byzantine Art and Liturgy", in: *Gesta*, vol. 54, no. 1, 2015, p. 78.
- 19 CONSTAS, *op. cit.*, 2001, pp. 115, 122.
- 20 On these believes see ĐORĐEVIĆ, *op. cit.*, 2018, pp. 22-25; and also cfr. IDEM, "Made in the skull's likeness: of transi-tombs, identity and memento mori", in: *Journal of Art Historiography*, vol. 17, 2017, pp. 2-6.

- 21 B. CASEAU, "Syméon Stylite l'Ancien entre puanteur et parfum", in: *Revue des études byzantines*, vol. 63, 2005, pp. 71-96.
- 22 J.L. ZECHER, "Death and the Possibility of a Ladder", in: *Studia Patristica*, vol. 52, 2012, pp. 327-338.
- 23 ĐORĐEVIĆ, *op. cit.*, 2018, p. 23 and fig. 4.
- 24 However, unlike the temporary state the soul and body are to endure in the period between death and the Day of Judgment, the punishments in Hell, after the Great Judge pronounces his judgment, will be the everlasting ones. Hence, they were unequivocally the worst possible outcome that could be imagined.
- 25 D. FREEDBERG-V. GALLESE, "Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience", in: *Trends in Cognitive Science*, vol. 11, no. 5, 2007, p. 198. See also D. FREEDBERG, "Empathy, Motion and Emotion", in: *Wie sich Gefühle Ausdruck verschaffen: Emotionen in Nahsicht*, K. HERDING-A. KRAUSE-WAHL (eds.), Berlin, Driesen, 2007, pp. 34-43.
- 26 GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 128-130.
- 27 For the illustrations, see WEITZMANN, *op. cit.*, 1984, figs., 51, 64.
- 28 R.S. NELSON, "Empathic Vision: Looking at and with a Performative Byzantine Miniature", in: *Art History*, vol. 30, no. 4, 2007, pp. 495-496.
- 29 L. JAMES, "'Pray Not to Fall into Temptation and Be on Your Guard': Pagan Statues in Christian Constantinople", in: *Gesta*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1996, pp. 12-20.
- 30 See, for instance, L. BRUBAKER, "Politics, Patronage, and Art in Ninth-Century Byzantium: The 'Homilies' of Gregory of Nazianzus in Paris (B. N. gr. 510)", in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 39, 1985, pp. 4-5; I. KALAVREZOU-N. TRAHOULIA-S. SABAR, "Critique of the Emperor in the Vatican Psalter gr. 752", in: *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, vol. 47, 1993, pp. 195-219.
- 31 See n. 3.
- 32 G. BABIĆ, "Les discussions christologiques et le décor des églises byzantines au XIIe siècle. Les évêques officiant devant l'Hétimasie et devant l'Amnos", in: *Frühmittelalterliche Studien*, vol. 2, 1968, pp. 368-386; M.-H. CONGOURDEAU, "L'Eucharistie à Byzance du XIe au XVe siècle", in: *Eucharistia. Encyclopédie de l'Eucharistie*, M. BROUARD (ed.), Paris, Cerf, 2002, pp. 145-165; S.E.J. GERSTEL, *Beholding the Sacred Mysteries: Programs of the Byzantine Sanctuary*, Seattle, College Art Association, 1999, pp. 44-47.
- 33 *Ibid.*
- 34 GERSTEL, *op. cit.*, 1999, p.46.
- 35 I. SINKEVIĆ, *The Church of St. Panteleimon at Nerezi: Architecture, Programme, Patronage*, Wiesbaden, Reichert, 2000, pp. 38-39.
- 36 M. ANGOLD, *Church and society in Byzantium under the Comneni, 1081-1261*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995, pp. 128-131; CH. KONSTANTINIDI, *Ο Μελισμός. Οι συλλειτουργούντες ιεράρχες και οι άγγελοι-διάκονοι μπροστά στην Αγία Τράπεζα με τα τίμια δώρα ή τον ευχαριστιακό Χριστό*, Thessaloniki, Center for Byzantine Research-Ekdotikós Organismós P. Kiriakídi, 2008, pp. 25-29.
- 37 On the *melismos* see GERSTEL, *op. cit.*, 1999, pp. 40-44; KONSTANTINIDI, *op. cit.*, 2008.
- 38 KALAVREZOU-TRAHOULIA-SABAR, *op. cit.*, 1993, pp. 195-219.
- 39 V. STANKOVIĆ, *Komnini u Carigradu: Evolucija jedne vladarske porodice*, Belgrade, Vizantološki institut SANU, 2006, pp. 218-222, 247-251.
- 40 *Ibid.*, pp. 218-222.
- 41 GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 129.
- 42 On Andronikos I see: G. OSTROGORSKY, *History of the Byzantine State*, Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1968, pp. 394-400; A. SIMPSON, "The Propaganda Value of Imperial Patronage: Ecclesiastical Foundations and Charitable Establishments in the Late Twelfth Century", in: *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, vol. 108, no. 1, 2015, pp. 183-185 and passim; A. EASTMOND, "An Intentional Error? Imperial Art and 'Mis'-Interpretation under Andronikos I Komnenos", in: *The Art Bulletin*, vol. 76, no. 3, 1994, pp. 502-510.
- 43 Cfr. P. MAGDALINO-R.S. NELSON, "The Emperor in Byzantine Art of the Twelfth Century", in: *Byzantinische Forschungen*, vol. 8, 1982, pp. 153-154, 160-162; SIMPSON, *op. cit.*, pp. 189-190, 201.
- 44 NICETAS CHONIATE, *O City of Byzantium: Annals of Nicetas Choniate*, H.J. MAGOULIAS (trans.), Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1984, pp. 30, 58, 80, and on Andronikos' deceits and "tyrannical rule" pp. 127- 195.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. xii. This comparison of an emperor to Zeus is not unique among Byzantine sources.
- 46 KALAVREZOU-TRAHOULIA-SABAR, *op. cit.*, 1993, p. 199.

- 47 SIMPSON, *op. cit.*, p. 185.
- 48 The fresco of the dead Crist in Kurbinovo, which belongs to the group of depictions of the *melismos* too, is also painted before the actual debates – in 1191 (KONSTANTINIDI, *op. cit.*, 2008, pp. 75-77). This might indicate that the interest in the raised issues at the middle of 1190s was smoldering for some time among intellectual cycles of the Empire.
- 49 Cfr. for instance, J. LOWDEN, "Luxury and Liturgy: The Function of Books", in: *Church and People in Byzantium*, R. MORRIS (ed.), Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 1990, pp. 263-80.
- 50 NELSON, *op. cit.*, 2007, p. 500.
- 51 For this marginal image, see GALAVARIS, *op. cit.*, 1969, fig. 171. On performative character of the marginal imagery in the process of reading, see R.S. NELSON, "The Discourse of Icons Then and Now", in: *Art History*, vol. 12, no. 2, 1989, pp. 144-157.
- 52 On the *ekphrasis* in the oration *For New Sunday*, see H. MAGUIRE, *Art and Eloquence in Byzantium*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 43-52, and for these miniatures in Panteleimon cod. 6, see bibliography in n. 3.
- 53 GREGORY OF NAZIANZUS, *op. cit.*, 1999, p. 131.

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**Užasi izopačene euharistije:  
osjećajući bol Pelopova raskomadnog tijela u kodeksu *Panteleimon 6***

U jednom se bizantskom rukopisu liturgijskih homilija Grgura Nazijanskog - *Panteleimon cod. 6* - nalazi minijatura s prikazom Tantalove gozbe, na kojoj je ovaj mitski kralj poslužio bogove raskomadanim tijelom svoga sina Pelopa. Pokazujući da je u izvedbi navedene ilustracije iskorišten vizualni obrazac karakterističan za prikazivanje paklenih muka, u radu se problematizira slika Pelopovog raskomadnog tijela kao svjesno osmišljen prikaz dočaravanja „boli“. Štoviše, budući da su slike paklenih muka bile okidači senzornog doživljaja „muka groba“ prilikom kontemplacije, istovjetno je iskustvo usađeno i u iluminaciju Tantalove gozbe. U radu se također ističe vizualna snaga dotične minijature da onovremenog promatrača potakne na razmatranje problema o prirodi euharistije, koji se javlja tijekom druge polovice 12. stoljeća, baš kao i na promišljanje političkih događaja u vezi s propagandom novog cara, Izaka II Anđela, za vrijeme čije je vladavine iluminacija nastala. Konačno, sagledavanjem rukopisa u njegovom performativnom kontekstu upotrebe u liturgijskoj službi, iznijeta je tvrdnja kako je slika izopačene gozbe trebala potaknuti čitatelja homilije (svećenika ili đakona) da strastveno prenese tekst propovijedi okupljenoj kongregaciji, preuzimajući na sebe proslavljenu karizmu njenog tvorca, Grgura Nazijanskog.

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