

Byzantine Rite Perspectives on the *Offertorium*¹

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Introduction

Here in Rome—where papal rejection of the erroneous former attitude of *ritus praestantior latini* remains to be understood by the Roman Curia and fully received by the rest of the Catholic Church—it is not uncommon to chance upon a Roman Catholic Mass with “interritual concelebration” and the inclusion of “Eastern elements,” particularly Byzantine Rite liturgical chants adapted for use in the Mass. One of the favourite and most widespread practices is to sing the *Cheroubikon*, or Cherubic Hymn, “Let us who mystically represent the cherubim...,” sung at the transfer of the Gifts of the Great Entrance in the Byzantine Rite Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom and St Basil the Great, during the *Offertorium* of the Roman Catholic Mass.² Presumably, the choice is motivated by the beauty of the chant and the assumption that the transfer of the Gifts at the Great Entrance in the Byzantine Rite is equivalent to the transfer of the Gifts at the *Offertorium* of the Roman Rite.

It is, however, precisely this assumption that motivated the Jesuit liturgist Fr. Robert F. Taft to undertake research on the transfer of the Gifts in the Byzantine Rite Divine Liturgy in his doctoral thesis, defended at the Pontifical Oriental Institute here in Rome in 1970, first published in 1975, and known in the field of liturgical studies and beyond in its fourth edition as the second volume of his multi-volume study, *A History of the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom*. Taft’s main thesis was that “in itself, the very idea of an ‘offertory’ or ‘offertory prayer’ in the modern understanding of the term is foreign to the primitive structure of the

¹ Parts of this essay are based on Daniel Galadza, “Liturgy at the Great Church after Iconoclasm,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Byzantine Church*, ed. Andrew Mellas and Bronwen Neil (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026), 273–291.

² See, for example, Monastères de Bethléhem de l’Assomption de la Vierge et de saint Bruno, *La Sainte Pentecôte* (Camporeggiano: Service de la Liturgie des Monastères, 2016), 48–49.

Byzantine liturgy, and is in fact a redundancy in all liturgies. The gifts are offered in the anaphora, and anything else is superfluous.”³

Yet, despite Taft’s insistence that the authentic Byzantine Rite understanding of “offertory” is directly connected to the central eucharistic prayer of the Anaphora, he dedicated a whole chapter of his book *The Great Entrance* to connections between the offertory nature of the Anaphora, the proleptic allusions to the offertory and consecration in the preparatory Prothesis prayers, and countering various erroneous theories suggesting the Prothesis may have once been connected to the transfer of the Gifts, giving credence to an understanding of the Great Entrance as a Byzantine Rite *Offertorium*.⁴

In this brief and schematic reflection, I would like to review some of the prayers considered to be an offertory in the Byzantine Rite within their liturgical context in the Divine Liturgy, focusing on the Prayers of the Prothesis and the Prayer of the Proskomedē in the current Byzantine Rite, as well as the meaning of their Greek titles associated with “offering” in the Byzantine Rite. These questions connected to the *Offertorium* are also related to the question of the “moment of consecration” in Byzantine thought, due to proleptic language in many of the prayers.

1. The Potential Pitfalls of Western Perspectives on Eastern Liturgy

Before directly entering into the question of Byzantine Rite perspectives on the *Offertorium*, it is necessary to comment on the pitfalls of approaching Eastern liturgy from a Western perspective, unaware of the distinct theological, spiritual, canonical, and liturgical aspects of the life of the Churches of the Byzantine Rite. As René Bornert, whose handbook on Byzantine liturgical commentaries from 1966 remains a classic reference to this day, noted already many decades ago, there are two major problems and pitfalls that students and participants of the Byzantine liturgy in the West must avoid.⁵

³ Robert F. Taft, *The Great Entrance. A History of the Transfer of the Gifts and other Pre-Anaphoral Rites of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, 4th edition, OCA 200 (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2004), 273. For a recent evaluation of this work and its impact on Byzantine liturgical studies, see Stefano Parenti, “The Great Entrance. A Paradigm of Liturgical History Fifty Years Later,” *Ex Fonte – Journal of Ecumenical Studies in Liturgy* 5 (2026), 567–601.

⁴ Taft, *The Great Entrance*, 257–275.

⁵ René Bornert, *Les commentaires byzantins de la Divine Liturgie du VII^e au XV^e siècle*, Archives de l’Orient Chrétien 9 (Paris: Institut français d’études byzantines, 1966), 39–40.

The first problem is “ecumenical unilateralism,” which involves studying the Byzantine Rite and the Greek tradition for the sole purpose of showing its kinship with the Latin tradition. In fact, a comparison between the Byzantine mystagogical commentaries and the *Expositiones missae* of the Latin Middle Ages would easily show that the two parallel currents feed on a common source. But by wanting too much to press the similarities, one runs the risk not only of misrecognizing the profound divergences, but also of posing the problems and seeking the solutions alien to the genius of Byzantine Greek theological thought and liturgical practice. Thus, the theological problems and controversies of the Roman Catholic Church are not those of the Orthodox Church—nor are they necessarily those even of the Byzantine Rite Eastern Catholic Churches. The emphasis on the real presence through celebrations of Corpus Christi, concern for the “moment of consecration,” or new pious devotions such as Divine Mercy, are either simply not relevant or inauthentic to the theological thought of the Byzantine liturgical experience. Byzantine liturgy and theology have approached them in a different way.

The second danger is that of liturgical opportunism, approaching the Byzantine liturgy for an answer to Roman Catholic liturgical problems of today, whether theoretical or practical, doctrinal or pastoral. It is certainly legitimate to look to traditions for guidance for the present. But, as Bornert notes, “to transpose our concerns into the past is to expose ourselves not only to depreciating the originality of a bygone era, but also to neglecting authentic elements of tradition.”⁶

A few examples from the Byzantine Rite Divine Liturgy might help to illustrate this. At the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy, upon entering the church together with the concelebrating deacon, saying common prayers, and venerating the icons, the presider asks God to

stretch forth your hand from your holy dwelling place on high and strengthen me for your appointed service, that standing uncondemned before your fearful throne, I fulfil the unbloody priestly work.⁷

⁶ Ibid., 40.

⁷ *Ieratikón according to the Simonopetra Tradition. Published with the blessing of Archbishop Alexander (Golitzin)*, ed. Silviu Bunta with Matthew-Peter Butrie (n.p.: Cherubim Press, 2019), 67. The earliest *euchologion* to include the full text of this prayer is codex British Library Harley 5561 (13th cent.). See *Θεία Λειτουργία κατὰ τὴν τάξιν τῆς ἐν Ἀθῶν μονῆς τοῦ Βατοπαιδίου* (Agion Oros: Ἱερά μεγίστη μονὴ Βατοπαιδίου, 2020), 61.

Rather than emphasizing an *in persona Christi* theology here, the Byzantine commentator Symeon of Thessalonika notes that the presider is the servant of God and it is God who serves his own servants.⁸ One must admit, however, that such *in persona Christi* theology is not so present in Latin liturgical texts either.

Throughout all the prayers of the Divine Liturgy, the presider truly leads the gathered assembly of the faithful in their common worship, rarely emphasizing himself. In fact, the only time the presider speaks of himself in the first-person singular in the Divine Liturgy of St John Chrysostom is in the first prayer before entering the sanctuary mentioned above, in the dialogues with the deacon asking for the deacon's prayers, and in the following prayer before the Great Entrance during the singing of the Cherubic Hymn, when he beseeches God to be worthy to approach the divine mysteries and participate in the

priestly ministry of this liturgical and unbloody sacrifice...For to you I draw near bowing my neck, and I implore you: do not turn your face away from me, nor cast me out from among your children, but deign that these your gifts be offered to you by me, the sinner and your unworthy servant. For you are the one who offers and is offered and receives and is distributed, Christ our God, and to you we send up glory, together with your unoriginate Father and your all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever to the ages of ages. Amen.⁹

Although the presider's prayers for himself and for the people are mostly in the first-person plural, the people almost never hear these prayers, since they are said "mystically" (*mystikōs*), which in essence means they are recited inaudibly since Late Antiquity. There has been heated debate on this question from the time of the Emperor Justinian in the sixth century, who issued laws ordering that the prayers be recited aloud. This was countered by Narsai of Edessa, who insisted that many prayers were the private dialogue of the priest with God. Likewise, the Palestinian monk John Moschos pointed to the danger of praying the Anaphora out of context, as children were doing while herding sheep in the fields. (And for

⁸ St Symeon of Thessalonika, *The Liturgical Commentaries*, ed. and trans. Steven Hawkes-Teeples, Studies and Texts 168 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011), 170–171.

⁹ Eng. trans. *Ieratikōn according to the Simonopetra Tradition*, 100–101.

doing so, they were struck by lightning!) The debate changed with the greater introduction of vernacular languages in worship and the introduction of microphones in the twentieth century, permitting prayers to be heard and understood, but raising questions of how the presider should say the prayers, how the people should sing the hymns that eventually covered over the prayers, and what the meaning of “active participation” (*participatio actuosa*) in the Divine Liturgy actually meant.

Despite the inaudibility of these beautiful and profound prayers over the many centuries since they went silent, the imposing experience of the Byzantine Divine Liturgy left a mark on those experiencing it—even if they didn’t understand a single word of it. Hans-Joachim Schulz attributes this to the *Symbolgestalt*, or symbolic matrix, of the Divine Liturgy, forever enshrined in the statement of Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople, that “the church is heaven on earth, where the God of heaven dwells and moves”¹⁰ and the excessively quoted legend of the Kyivan emissaries sent to Constantinople “to examine the Greek faith” who then beheld “the glory of the God of the Greeks” in Hagia Sophia of Constantinople, not knowing whether they were in heaven or on earth.¹¹

2. Offertory Prayers in the Byzantine Divine Liturgy

With those caveats behind us, let us take a look at the prayers that have been identified by scholars in the West as an offertory of the Byzantine Rite in the East. Apart from the Anaphora, as highlighted by Taft, there are the Prayer of the Prothesis, as part of the preparatory rites before the initial blessing of the Liturgy of the Word, and the Prayer of the Proskomidē, immediately after the Great Entrance at the transition from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.

2.1. Prayer of the Prothesis

The Prayer of the Prothesis, which is the completion of the rite of preparing the eucharistic Gifts and the rite’s only prayer, reads as follows:

¹⁰ St Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, ed. and trans. Paul Meyendorff, Popular Patristics Series 8 (Crestwood/NY: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 56–57.

¹¹ Robert F. Taft, *Beyond East and West. Problems in Liturgical Understanding*. 2nd revised and enlarged edition (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2001), 143–144.

Ἐπειτα ὁ Διάκονος λέγει·

Ἐπὶ τῇ Προθέσει τῶν τιμίων Δώρων, τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθώμεν.

Καὶ ὁ Ἱερεὺς λέγει τὴν Εὐχὴν τῆς Προθέσεως·

Ὁ Θεός, ὁ Θεὸς ἡμῶν, ὁ τὸν οὐράνιον Ἄρτον, τὴν τροφὴν τοῦ παντὸς κόσμου, τὸν Κύριον ἡμῶν καὶ Θεὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν ἐξαποστείλας, Σωτῆρα καὶ Λυτρωτὴν καὶ Εὐεργέτην, εὐλογοῦντα καὶ ἀγιάζοντα ἡμᾶς· αὐτὸς εὐλόγησον τὴν Πρόθεσιν ταύτην, καὶ πρόσδεξαι αὐτὴν εἰς τὸ ὑπερουράνιον σου Θυσιαστήριον. Μνημόνευσον, ὡς ἀγαθὸς καὶ φιλόανθρωπος, τῶν προσενεγκάντων καὶ δι' οὓς προσήγαγον· καὶ ἡμᾶς ἀκατακρίτους διαφύλαξον ἐν τῇ ἱερουργίᾳ τῶν θείων σου Μυστηρίων.

Ὅτι ἡγιασται καὶ δεδόξασται τὸ πάντιμον καὶ μεγαλοπρεπὲς ὄνομά σου, τοῦ Πατρός, καὶ τοῦ Υἱοῦ, καὶ τοῦ Ἁγίου Πνεύματος, νῦν, καὶ ἀεὶ, καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων. Ἀμήν.

Then the deacon says:

For the precious gifts offered let us pray to the Lord.

The priest says the Prayer of the Prothesis:

God, our God, You sent the heavenly bread—the food for the whole world—our Lord and God, Jesus Christ, Saviour, Redeemer, and Benefactor, to bless and sanctify us. Now bless this offering and receive it upon Your altar in the highest heaven. Remember those who brought the offering and those for whom the offering was brought, for You are good and love mankind. Preserve us from blame in the celebration of Your divine mysteries.

For hallowed and glorified is Your most honoured and magnificent name, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

The prayer speaks of Jesus as the “heavenly bread” being sent by God in the past tense (i.e. ἐξαποστείλας, aorist active masculine singular participle) and then blessed now (i.e. εὐλόγησον, aorist imperative active second-person singular verb), asking God to receive (i.e. πρόσδεξαι, aorist imperative middle second-person singular verb) it on His altar in the highest heaven, remembering those who brought it (προσενεγκάντων, i.e. aorist active masculine plural participle) and for whom they brought it (προσήγαγον, i.e. aorist indicative active third-person plural verb). It should be noted that all of this is said before the initial blessing of the Divine Liturgy proper.

One peculiarity of the prayer’s use in the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy is its recitation by the presiding bishop at a point other than the Prothesis at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy. Due to the nature of the Byzantine Hierarchal Liturgy, during which the bishop does not enter the sanctuary or approach the altar until the Small Entrance, long after the Prothesis rite has usually been completed, the bishop is not yet present in the church when the Gifts of bread and wine are prepared. Thus, three practices have emerged in response to the bishop’s absence from this rite at the beginning of the Liturgy: (1) the bishop recites the prayer just before the transfer of the Gifts to the altar Great Entrance as he himself completes the

Prothesis;¹² (2) the bishop recites the prayer during the Great Ektenē at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, from the centre of the church far away from the prepared Gifts at the Prothesis table, and only adds commemorative particles to the *diskos*, or paten, as he completes the Prothesis during the Great Entrance;¹³ (3) the bishop does not recite the prayer at all, since the whole rite is completed by one of the concelebrating priests before the Divine Liturgy and the bishop does not add commemorative particles at the Great Entrance.¹⁴ Taft noted an evolution in the Greek and Slavonic liturgical books, from complete silence on the bishop's role in commemorating anyone at the Prothesis or saying the prayer, to more elaborate rubrics at the Great Entrance to describe the commemorations and recitation of the prayers by the bishop.

It should be noted that Taft's original, somewhat imprecise, documentation of the content of modern liturgical books for the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy, as well as some of his argumentation based thereon, has been updated by his students, Fr. Stefano Parenti and Sr. Vassa Larin.¹⁵

The disappearance of the *skeuophylakion*, where the Gifts were presented and prepared in a separate building outside the church before the Great Entrance, made it impossible for the bishop to participate in the Prothesis. Instead of the bishop's role in the Prothesis simply being eliminated, Sr. Vassa rightly observes that the rite was at times duplicated instead, repeating the Prothesis Prayer from the beginning of the Liturgy during the Great Entrance. After a detailed overview of Greek and Slavic practice from the tenth century until the present day, Sr. Vassa concludes that these various usages "are at pains to *include* the hierarch in the preparatory rite in one way or another [...] ranging from a mere

¹² For example, *Ἀρχιερατικόν ἢ τῶν Σлужбеникъ Святительскій* (Rome: Вѣтъпографіи крѣптоферратскіа Обители, 1973), 65. Vassa Larin, "The Bishop as Minister of the Prothesis? Reconsidering the Evidence in Byzantine and Muscovite Sources," in *Inquiries into Eastern Christian Worship: Selected papers of the second international congress of the Society of Oriental Liturgy, Rome, 17–21 September 2008*, ed. B. Groen, S. Hawkes-Teeples, S. Alexopoulos, Eastern Christian Studies (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 319–330, here 320, notes that the *Archieratikon* published in Athens in 1994 includes the prayer after the Great Entrance has been completed.

¹³ See *Чиовникъ архіерейскаго священнослуженія*, vol. 1 (Moscow: Издание Московской Патриархии, 1982), 58. The bishop commemorates the living and the dead at the Prothesis before the transfer of the Gifts at the Great Entrance but does not recite this prayer. See *Чиовникъ архіерейскаго священнослуженія*, 82–83.

¹⁴ This is the current practice in the Ukrainian Greco-Catholic Church, which has option (1) in its printed books, but which in reality is never done.

¹⁵ See Larin, "The Bishop as Minister of the Prothesis?"; Robert F. Taft and Stefano Parenti, *Storia della liturgia di S. Giovanni Crisostomo. Il Grande Ingresso. Edizione italiana rivista, ampliata e aggiornata*, *Ἀνάλεκτα Κρυπτοφέρρης 10* (Grottaferrata: Monastero Esarchico, 2014), 451–460.

hierarchal blessing of the Prothesis' ministers to having the bishop recite the entire text of the rite in the nave," instead of at the table of preparation in the sanctuary, implying that "the hierarch's *hand* was perceived as necessary to truly 'complete' the initial action of the Divine Liturgy,"¹⁶ implementing an observation of Symeon of Thessalonica, that "everything accomplished in Church by the lesser clergy is so done by the means of the hand of the bishop,"¹⁷ and following the prescriptions of the Council of Constantinople in 1276, that all should complete the Prothesis if a bishop is present.¹⁸

2.2. Prayer of the Proskomidē

A second prayer, "O Lord God almighty, who alone are holy, who alone accept the sacrifices of praise" (Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ μόνος ἅγιος, ὁ δεχόμενος θυσίαν), which is recited immediately after the Great Entrance, is also of interest, because it was considered to be an offertory prayer due to its title and content. The prayer's title, "Prayer of Proskomidē" (Εὐχὴ τῆς Προσκομιδῆς), was believed to refer to the preparation of the Gifts, also known as the *proskomidē* (ἡ προσκομιδὴ), particular because this is how the mystagogy of Germanus of Constantinople uses the term: "The proskomedē (προσκομιδὴ), which takes place on the altar (ἐν τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ) located in the skeuophylakion (ἥτοι ἐν τῷ σκευοφυλακίῳ), signifies (ἐμφαίνει) the place of Calvary, where Jesus was crucified."¹⁹ From the context, it is clear that Germanus' description applies to rites immediately before the Great Entrance, despite his description of the Rite of Prothesis with the cutting and preparation of the bread and wine at its usual place before the Antiphons of the Divine Liturgy.²⁰ It was such descriptions that gave rise to the theory, now universally rejected thanks to the research of Taft and others, that the original preparation of the Gifts took place at this point of the Divine Liturgy, and not at the beginning, as it is done today.²¹

¹⁶ Larin, "The Bishop as Minister of the Prothesis?"

¹⁷ Ead., 330.

¹⁸ Ead., 325, based on Alexander Rentel, *The 14th Century Patriarchal Liturgical Diataxis of Dimitrios Gemistos. Edition and Commentary*, Unpublished doctoral thesis (Rome: Pontificio Istituto Orientale, 2003), 177–184.

¹⁹ St Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, ed. and trans. Meyendorff, 84–85.

²⁰ Ibid., 70–73.

²¹ For a summary, see Pavlos Koumarios, "Prothesis and Proskomide: A Clarification of Liturgical Terminology," *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 52: 1–4 (2007), 63–102.

Considering the liturgical context of the prayer, Taft has suggested that the term *proskomidē* refers to the *accessus ad altare* before the Anaphora (as an integral part of the Anaphora).²² The prayer's content, which speaks of "accepting the sacrifices of praise from those that call upon you," also asks God to "accept," "bring," and "to present to You these gifts and spiritual sacrifices" to the altar. Due to various assumptions, the punctuation of the Greek text and its translation into other languages was influenced by the notion that this was an offertory prayer equivalent to the Latin *oratio super oblata* or *secreta*. However, a more faithful translation of the text helps correct this view, presenting the prayer as a request to God with three petitions:

Εὐχή τῆς Προσκομιδῆς, ὑπὸ τοῦ Ἱερέως λεγομένη μυστικῶς, μετὰ τὴν ἐπὶ τῆς ἁγίας Τραπέζης τῶν θείων δώρων ἀπόθεσιν.

Prayer of the Proskomidē, said by the Priest mystically, after placing the divine gifts upon the holy Table.

Κύριε ὁ Θεὸς ὁ παντοκράτωρ, ὁ μόνος ἅγιος, ὁ δεχόμενος θυσίαν αἰνέσεως παρὰ τῶν ἐπικαλουμένων σε ἐν ὅλῃ καρδίᾳ, πρόσδεξαι καὶ ἡμῶν τῶν ἁμαρτωλῶν τὴν δέησιν καὶ προσάγαγε τῷ ἁγίῳ σου Θυσιαστηρίῳ· καὶ ἱκάνωσον ἡμᾶς προσενεγκεῖν σοι δῶρά τε καὶ θυσίας πνευματικὰς, ὑπὲρ τῶν ἡμετέρων ἁμαρτημάτων καὶ τῶν τοῦ λαοῦ ἀγνοημάτων. Καὶ καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς εὐρεῖν χάριν ἐνώπιόν σου, τοῦ γενέσθαι σοι εὐπρόσδεκτον τὴν θυσίαν ἡμῶν, καὶ ἐπισκηνώσαι τὸ Πνεῦμα τῆς χάριτός σου τὸ ἀγαθὸν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ προκείμενα δῶρα ταῦτα καὶ ἐπὶ πάντα τὰ λαὸν σου. [...]

O Lord God almighty who alone are holy, who alone accept the sacrifices of praise from those that call upon You with their whole heart, accept also the prayer of us sinners and bring us to Your holy altar, and enable us to present to You these gifts and spiritual sacrifices, for our own sins and for the faults of the people. And make us worthy to find favour in Your sight that our sacrifice may be acceptable to You and that the good Spirit of Your grace may rest upon us and upon these present gifts and upon all Your people. [...]

Ἐκφώνησις·

Exclamation:

Διὰ τῶν οἰκτιρμῶν τοῦ μονογενοῦς σου Υἱοῦ, μεθ' οὗ εὐλογητὸς εἶ, σὺν τῷ Παναγίῳ καὶ ἀγαθῷ καὶ ζωοποιῷ σου Πνεύματι, νῦν καὶ ἀεὶ καὶ εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας τῶν αἰώνων.

Through the compassion of your only-begotten Son, with whom You are blessed, together with Your most-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and always unto ages of ages.

Ὁ Χόρος· Ἀμήν.

Choir: Amen.

²² For an explanation of the term *προσκομιδῆς*, see Stefano Parenti, "Nota sull'impiego del termine *προσκομιδῆς* nell'eucologio Barberini gr. 336 (VIII sec.)," *Ephemerides Liturgicae* 103 (1989), 406–417; Koumarios, "Prothesis and Proskomide: A Clarification of Liturgical Terminology," 68–72.

Here God is asked to accept our prayer for three intentions: that the ministers be brought to the altar; that they be enabled to offer; that they be made worthy, so that the sacrifices will be accepted and the Spirit come upon them, upon the gifts, and upon the people.”²³ This interpretation is consistent with that of the eleventh-century liturgical commentary known as the *Protheoria* of Nicholas and Theodore of Andida.²⁴ Thus, Taft concludes that the prayer is “definitely not an offertory prayer.”²⁵

The confusion over the nature of this prayer is perhaps related to the various possible meanings of the Greek word *proskomedē* (προσκομιδή) and the problematic use of this word as a synonym for *prothesis* (πρόθεσις). As Fr. Pavlos Koumarios has noted, the most precise definition of *proskomedē* (προσκομιδή) in ancient sources would be the central eucharistic prayer of the Anaphora, and hence was applied to the title of the prayer immediately before the beginning of the Anaphora.²⁶ Nevertheless, both in ancient and modern usage, the term *proskomedē* (προσκομιδή) can also mean the whole Divine Liturgy in general, from start to finish.²⁷

3. The Liturgical Context of the Prayers

As the confusion of terminology related to *prothesis* and *proskomedē* reveals, liturgical context matters. However, in considering the liturgical context of these prayers and their relation to the offertory, it should be kept in mind that the Byzantine Rite Divine Liturgy has a complex history of development, with multiple layers of prayers, hymns, and ritual actions from different regions overlayed one upon the other, over the course of the centuries. While the earliest manuscripts of the Divine Liturgy dating from the end of the eighth century only include very few rubrics and begin with the Prayer of the Prothesis presented above, by the thirteenth century additional preparatory prayers are found in the manuscripts, and by the fourteenth century the ritual actions of the clergy become highly regulated and choreographed by the patriarchal *diataxis*. With that in mind, let us turn to the liturgical context of these prayers.

²³ Taft, *The Great Entrance*, 357.

²⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 358.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 357.

²⁶ For the evolution of the title of this prayer and how it came to be simply called the “Prayer of Proskomide” (Εὐχή τῆς Προσκομιδῆς), see Koumarios, “Prothesis and Proskomide: A Clarification of Liturgical Terminology,” 84–86.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–72.

After the entrance and vesting prayers for the Divine Liturgy comes the Prothesis Rite, already mentioned above, where the commemoration is not just of one “intention” of the priest who “offers the Mass.” Rather, the commemorations can encompass every member of the whole human race—past and present, living and deceased. Although the earliest manuscripts already include a prayer, this rite was established in the fourteenth century, through the codification of the *diataxis* attributed to the Constantinopolitan Patriarch Philotheos Kokkinos.²⁸ This prayer is already found in the earliest extant Greek text of the Liturgy of St Basil the Great, the eighth-century Greek *euchologion* codex Barberini gr. 336, today preserved in the *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana*.²⁹ Its text reveals the prayer to be equivalent to an offertory in the Byzantine Rite Eucharistic liturgies, already at the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, rather than at the transfer of the Gifts from the place of the Prothesis. The rite, performed at a side table inside the sanctuary since at least the twelfth century, was originally completed in a separate building known in Byzantium as the *skeuophylakion* and the Gifts were solemnly processed to the church during the Great Entrance.³⁰

Turning to the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom in the same manuscript, the codex Barberini *euchologion*, we find a different prayer of the Prothesis Rite for the Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, which has since disappeared from Byzantine liturgical practice. The prayer reads as follows:

Lord our God, who have offered Yourself as a spotless lamb for the life of the world, look upon us, upon this bread and upon this cup, and make them Your most-pure Body and most-pure Blood for the communion of souls and bodies. For your most honourable and magnificent name is blessed and glorified ...³¹

Such a prayer calling upon God to change the bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ at the very beginning of the Divine Liturgy, rather than during the central eucharistic prayer of the Anaphora, might raise eyebrows, giving the impression that the prayer points to

²⁸ See Galadza, “Liturgy at the Great Church after Iconoclasm,” 278.

²⁹ Barberini gr. 336, fol. 1r; *Евхологий Барберини гр. 336. Издание текста, предисловие и примечания*, ed. E. Velkovksa and S. Parenti, trans. S. Golovanov (Omsk: Golovanov, 2011), 267 (no. 1).

³⁰ Vasileios Marinis, *Architecture and Ritual in the Churches of Constantinople: Ninth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 20–21 and 31–34.

³¹ Barberini Gr. 336, fol. 23r; *Евхологий Барберини гр. 336*, 281 (no. 23).

a “moment of consecration.” In the Alexandrian tradition, from which this specific prayer is believed to have entered the Barberini *euchologion* and where a variant is still used in Coptic liturgy to this day,³² one might already ascribe a consecratory character to this initial part of the eucharistic celebration.

Although ascribing a consecratory character to this prayer is not the same as believing that the bread and wine are changed to the Body and Blood of Christ at this very moment, liturgical commentators from the fifteenth century, such as St Symeon of Thessalonike, defended the faithful who prostrate themselves before the holy Gifts after the Prothesis, especially during the transfer of the Gifts to the altar in the Great Entrance. According to Symeon, the people do so not only because prayers for their own intentions were offered with the bread, but because the priest had already asked that they be received “upon Your heavenly altar” in the Prayer of the Prothesis, thus making them prepared for the consecration as offerings to God and antitypes of the Lord’s Body and Blood.³³

4. Moment of Consecration in Byzantine Thought

The sacramental “moment” of consecration in Byzantine thought was not originally examined in the categories of form and matter, as codified in the scholasticism of the Latin West. Popularly, the “moment of consecration” in the Byzantine East was the epiclesis, considered to be equivalent to the *verba Christi* of the institution narrative favoured in the West. Nevertheless, numerous Byzantine authors, among them Nicholas Kabasilas and Symeon of Thessalonike, understood that the consecratory power of the epiclesis was to be united with the words of Christ in the institution narrative, culminating in the addition of the *troparion* of the Third Hour, first attested in the *diataxis* of Demetrios Gemistos in 1389, in order to highlight the importance of the epiclesis. The *troparion* —originally a hymn from the

³² See Mikhail, *Presentation of the Lamb*.

³³ Symeon of Thessalonika, *Liturgical Commentaries*, 128–131. The term “antitypes” is used to describe the Eucharistic Gifts in the Anaphora of St Basil the Great and Stefanos Alexopoulos has suggested the use of the term was met with suspicion after Iconoclasm. See Stefanos Alexopoulos, “The Influence of Iconoclasm on Liturgy: A Case Study,” in *Worship Traditions in Armenia and the Neighboring Christian East*. An International Symposium in Honor of the 40th Anniversary of St Nersess Armenian Seminary, ed. Roberta R. Ervine (Crestwood/NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminar Press, 2006), 127–137, here 130–131.

Liturgy of the Hours—was clumsily inserted at the epiclesis here as a prayer recited by the clergy to highlight this moment as consecratory.³⁴

Despite such views, other Byzantine commentators after the resolution of Iconoclasm in the ninth century consistently understood the elevation of the Gifts before the fraction before the communion of the clergy and the faithful to be the culminating moment of consecration. Indeed, after the epiclesis and before the elevation, the deacon prays “for the precious Gifts that have been presented and consecrated” (Ὑπὲρ τῶν προσκομισθέντων καὶ ἁγιασθέντων τιμίων δώρων, τοῦ Κυρίου δεηθῶμεν), suggesting that, by praying for the Gifts, something was still perhaps incomplete. Numerous hagiographic accounts present the *topos* of a holy man celebrating the Eucharist who, just as he is about to elevate the Eucharistic Bread and to proclaim, “The holy things are for the holy,” is interrupted: the Holy Spirit descends and sanctifies the Gifts. The most notable examples are the *Life of St Theodore of Sykeon* (c. 641), the *Life of St Stephen Sabaites* (written by Leontios, c. 794), the *Life of St John Chrysostom* (written by Symeon Metaphrastes, c. 1000), and the *Life of St Bartholomew of Simeri*. At times this ritual action was accompanied by the same *troparion* of the Third Hour mentioned above.³⁵

The exclamation of the presider, “The holy things are for the holy” (Τὰ ἅγια τοῖς ἁγίοις), at the moment of the elevation and fraction, hearkens back to St Cyril of Jerusalem in the fourth century, emphasizing a connection between the holy Gifts consecrated and the faithful called to holiness and to communion of these holy Gifts. This same connection is made explicit earlier on in the Divine Liturgy, at the Anaphoral epiclesis, when the presider asks, prays, and implores God: “send down your Holy Spirit upon us and upon these gifts here offered” as part of the “reasonable” or “rational worship”—the Pauline expression λογικὴ λατρεία (Romans 12:1–2)—of giving one’s whole existence in service and sacrifice to God, commonly used in Byzantine prayers and hymns to define the nature of Christian liturgy.³⁶

³⁴ Stefano Parenti, *L'Anafora di Crisostomo. Testo e contesti*, Jerusalem Theologisches Forum 36 (Münster: Aschendorff, 2020), 346–352. The prayer was definitively removed in Greek practice at the end of the nineteenth century.

³⁵ See Michael Zheltov, “The Moment of Eucharistic Consecration in Byzantine Thought,” in *Issues in Eucharistic Praying*, ed. Maxwell E. Johnson (Collegeville/MN: Liturgical Press, 2010), 263–306, here 293–301; Parenti, *Anafora*, 356.

³⁶ Eng trans. *Ieratikón*, 109; Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 247.

5. Concluding Remarks

After all that has been said, allow me to make several concluding remarks:

1. Despite external similarities between the elements of the Roman Rite *Offerotrium* and the Byzantine Great Entrance, scholars have shown some time ago the limitations of applying or imposing the genius of one rite upon another. While the comparative approach to liturgical studies is extremely beneficial, one should be aware of its limitations, avoiding “ecumenical unilateralism” and “liturgical opportunism.”
2. While the Anaphora certainly is the offertory of the Byzantine Rite *par excellence*, as argued by Taft, there are other prayers of the Divine Liturgy that express an offertory character, particularly the Prayer of the Prothesis that concludes the preparatory rites before the initial blessing of the beginning of the Divine Liturgy, confirming the importance of the unity of all the prayers and rites of the Divine Liturgy together as offertory.
3. The role of the bishop in the preparation of the Gifts has changed over time, resulting in several known practices today, raising the question whether he is indeed required to recite the Prayer of the Prothesis at all according to Byzantine Rite liturgical theology.
4. The unity of these prayers is highlighted further by the proleptic language of some of these prayers, suggesting a kind of consecratory character leading up to the Anaphora. Thus, these prayers cannot be understood in isolation but only within their liturgical context in relation to one another.
5. Despite the unity of these prayers, confusion arose regarding their specific function due to the use of terms *prothesis* (πρόθεσις) and *proskomedē* (προσκομιδή) as synonyms, erroneously suggesting that the Prothesis took place at the Great Entrance. Nevertheless, certain elements of the Prothesis has migrated to the Great Entrance in

the Hierarchal Divine Liturgy to permit the participation of the bishop in the rite to some degree.

In the end, however, the meaning of the Great Entrance can be understood through a hymn sung by the faithful while it is taking place, rather than by any of the prayers recited by the priest. While the presider is praying the prayer of apology for himself (in the first-person singular), the people sing (in the first-person plural):

Let us who mystically represent the cherubim, and sing the Thrice-holy Hymn to the life-giving Trinity, now lay aside all cares of life... That we may receive the King of all, escorted invisibly by ranks of angels. Alleluia, alleluia, alleluia.

Father Taft analysed the meaning of the Cherubic Hymn as a mystagogy of our own participation in the Divine Liturgy: the “King of all” whom we receive is the Lord, in His Body and Blood in the Eucharist, but also as the Word of God in the proclamation of the Scriptures, so that the thrice-holy Hymn refers to both the *Sanctus* of the Anaphora that is yet to come, and to the Trisagion in the Liturgy of the Word that was already sung. Thus, the Cherubic Hymn explains to the faithful what is going on in the liturgical rites precisely at the moment when they are taking place, when we pass from the Liturgy of the Word to the Liturgy of the Eucharist.³⁷

This interpretation exists in parallel with an applied meaning to the Great Entrance that explains the transfer of the Gifts as a burial procession of the Body of Christ to the Tomb, symbolized by the altar. This funeral cortège symbolism during the Great Entrance is aided by the recitation of the troparion of Holy Saturday by the clergy, again inaudibly to the ears of the people: “The noble Joseph took down Your most pure body from the tree. He wrapped it with a clean shroud and, with aromatic spices, placed in a new tomb.”³⁸ This text was originally composed as a hymn, later to be sung by the faithful on Holy Saturday at the deposition of the shroud in the Tomb, and at Matins on Sundays throughout the year, when a final phrase is added in order to emphasize Christ’s resurrection from the tomb. At this point

³⁷ Taft, *Beyond East and West*, 221–223.

³⁸ *The Sacred and Divine Liturgy of Our Holy Father John Chrysostom*, 89.

of the Divine Liturgy, however, it has been added to emphasize the mimetic and historical approach of connecting actions of the Divine Liturgy with moments in the life of Christ. Thus, in Patriarch Germanus of Constantinople's liturgical commentary, the same church building that is God's "earthly heaven" simultaneously "represents the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Christ." A systematic ordering of all the symbolic associations assigned to the parts of the church by Germanus results in a long list of recurring places and symbols. For example, the holy table (*hagia trapeza*) and altar (*thysiastērion*) correspond to the place in the tomb where Christ was laid, the throne of God on which he rested in the flesh, the table of the Last Supper prefigured in the table that held the manna that descended from heaven, the holy tomb of Christ, and the heavenly and spiritual sanctuary.³⁹ This is just one example of what Fr. Taft and Fr. Alexander Schmemmann lamented as "the victory of allegory over sober practicality and symbolism rooted in the true meaning of the sacramental rites."⁴⁰

Taken together, these explanations of the meaning of the Great Entrance unite allegory with practicality and symbolism rooted in the liturgical rites, which, at this point, are not an offertory of the Byzantine Rite but a transfer of the Gifts. For an offertory, one needs to look to the Prothesis at the beginning of the Liturgy, whose offertory, symbolic, and sacrificial character continues in the Anaphora and throughout the whole service of the Divine Liturgy.

³⁹ St Germanus of Constantinople, *On the Divine Liturgy*, ed. and trans. Meyendorff, 58–60.

⁴⁰ Taft, *Great Entrance*, 427.