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Abstract

Breaking the fast is the central moment and core symbol of the Christian paschal celebration both in the quartodeciman and in the dominical traditions. While it appears constitutive for the quartodeciman celebration to break the fast after the conclusion of the Jewish Passover meal, which terminates in the late evening, the mimetic link of the dominical Easter to the resurrection and to the discovery of the empty tomb on Sunday morning motivates a full-night vigil. Providing the putative historical priority of the quartodeciman celebration, it may therefore be possible that the paschal vigil originated as an extension of an evening celebration and not the latter as a reduction of the former, which in consequence would contribute to explaining puzzles posed not only by some early witnesses but also of fourth century sources that testify to dominical paschal vigils celebrated on Saturday evening.

Key words

Pascha, Easter, Paschal Fast, Paschal Vigil, Quartodecimanism, Dominical Easter

Biography

Harald Buchinger holds the chair of liturgical studies at the University of Regensburg, Bavaria. Born 1969 in Vienna, he studied theology at the University of Vienna and in Jerusalem; after his promotion to Dr. theol. at Vienna University (2002) he undertook post-doctoral research in Rome from 2004–2007. Tenured as associate professor of liturgical studies at Vienna University in 2007, he followed a call to Regensburg in 2008. 2012/13 he was Senior Research Fellow and Visiting Professor at Yale University (Institute of Sacred Music); 2013–2015 dean, since 2015 vice dean of the Faculty of Catholic Theology at Regensburg University.

Breaking the Fast: The Central Moment of the Paschal Celebration in Historical Context and Diachronic Perspective

The early history of the Christian paschal celebration remains enigmatic in many respects, although Gerard Rouwhorst has effectively demythologised ill-founded assumptions of earlier research – such as the purportedly “highly eschatological character” of the quartodeciman celebration¹ or the supposedly universal observance of the Pentecost² – and made crucial contributions to the emergence of a scholarly consensus on open questions, perhaps most notably the historical priority of the quartodeciman over the dominical Easter date (which cannot be proven but is widely assumed in recent scholarship).³ His identification of various historical strata in the 21st chapter of the Syriac *Didascalia* has become textbook knowledge; his differentiated analysis has revealed the wide dissemination of quartodeciman practice, drawn attention to the ruptures in liturgical development, and opened an exemplary window on the transition from the quartodeciman to the dominical celebration.⁴

In this paper it will be argued that a hitherto cryptic detail of the *Didascalia* and Gerard Rouwhorst’s more general reconstruction of the liturgical development may provide the solution for yet another puzzle: why do so many of the early sources, including ones from dominical contexts, insinuate that the paschal vigil was not an all-night celebration even at a very early stage? Was the original paschal celebration really a full vigil leading into Easter morning? Was it necessarily a sign of decadence to break the fast in the evening?⁵ To this end, we will revisit the few existing indications of the time of the day – not the date itself –

¹ Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, “How Eschatological Was Early Christian Liturgy?” *Studia patristica* 40 (2006): 96–103.

² Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, “The Origins and Evolution of Early Christian Pentecost.” *Studia patristica* 35 (2001): 309–322.

³ Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, “The Quartodeciman Passover and the Jewish Pesach.” *Questions liturgiques* 77 (1996): 157–159. This view is adopted as plausible by, among others, Giuseppe Visonà, “Ostern/Osterfest/Osterpredigt. I. Geschichte, Theologie und Liturgie,” *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 25 (1995): 518f., Hansjörg Auf der Maur, *Die Osterfeier in der alten Kirche*, ed. Reinhard Meßner and Wolfgang G. Schöpf, with a contribution of Clemens Leonhard, *Liturgica Oenipontana* 2 (Münster: LIT, 2003), 102, and, most recently, Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, *The Origins of Feasts, Fasts and Seasons in Early Christianity*, Alcuin Club Collection 86 (London: SPCK / Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2011), 51. These works reference the superabundant anterior bibliography that precedes them.

⁴ Gerard A. M. Rouwhorst, *Les hymnes pascales d’Ephrem de Nisibe. Analyse théologique et recherche sur l’évolution de la fête pascale chrétienne à Nisibe et à Edesse et dans quelques Eglises voisines au quatrième siècle*, *Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae* 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 1, 157–193; cf. again Auf der Maur, *Osterfeier*, 88–97, and Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 54–56.

⁵ Cf. the seminal study by Josef A. Jungmann, “Die Vorverlegung der Ostervigil seit dem christlichen Altertum.” *Liturgisches Jahrbuch* 1 (1951): 48–54.

when the paschal fast was broken in the early church: first, the testimonies of the quartodeciman celebration (1), then sources of the dominical practice (2), and last a testimony of unclear origin (3). The *Didascalia* is a key document of transition (4), which possibly sheds light also on the eventual shape and alleged development of the Easter celebration in other contexts (5).

Although Gerard Rouwhorst and others have demonstrated that clichéd typifications in the early historiography of Easter are untenable, there are still a small number of undisputed commonalities among the various early Christian paschal observances. The only absolute constant is the identification of breaking the fast as the central moment and core symbol of any Christian celebration of Easter. The quest for this key element is therefore an apt prism through which to refract the diverse traditions, which are all well-known and oft-treated but still may disclose new aspects when accorded a fresh glance.

1. Testimonies for the Quartodeciman Celebration

The quartodeciman celebration is defined by the obligation to “observe the fourteenth day of the moon at the feast of the saving Pascha [...] and to perform the termination of the fast on that day only”.⁶ Information on further details, however, is rare.

The paschal homily attributed to Melito of Sardis, a proponent of the quartodeciman tradition according to the letter of Polycrates quoted by Eusebius,⁷ does not provide any clear evidence of the shape of the paschal liturgy apart from the fact that the sermon was preceded by a “reading of the Hebrew Exodus”.⁸ Although the transition “from darkness to light”⁹ is important for Melito’s paschal theology, it is not self-evident that this metaphor corresponds to the time of the celebration. While Melito rhetorically constructs a polemical opposition between the passion of the Lord and the concurrent feast of the Jews of his time,¹⁰ which may

⁶ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 23, 1 (GCS 2/1, 488 Schwartz).

⁷ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 24, 5 (GCS 2/1, 492, 3).

⁸ Melito, *Pasch. 1* (OECT 2 Hall). For a critique of more optimistic reconstructions in earlier research, see Clemens Leonhard, *The Jewish Pesach and the Origins of the Christian Easter. Open Questions in Current Research*, *Studia Judaica* 35 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2006), 50f.

⁹ Melito, *Pasch. 68* (OECT 36, 474).

¹⁰ Melito, *Pasch. 80* (OECT 42–44). That “you (i.e. Melito’s rhetorically constructed ‘Israel’) were making merry while he (i.e. the ‘Lord’) was starving”, may be seen as a polemical reversal of the opposition of the quartodeciman Christian fast to the contemporary Jewish feast, neither of which, however, is mentioned in Melito’s homily.

implicitly insinuate a similar antagonism between the Christian celebration of the Passion and the Jewish Passover, he does not mention fasting or reveal any detail of the Christian feast.

Hints as to the moment when the fast was broken come only from later sources:

Epiphanius quotes a certain *Diataxis* of the apostles brought forward by the Audians, which is said to decree to

fast and mourn for them (i.e. the Jews) when those feast, because they crucified Christ on the day of the feast, and when they mourn while they eat unleavened bread with bitter herbs, you shall feast.¹¹

The *Didascalia*, which may be in some way literarily related to the *Diataxis*, confirms this indication: in what Gerard Rouwhorst has identified as the early quartodeciman strand of *Didascalia* 21, the Christian fast is likewise synchronised with the Jewish feast and explicitly motivated by intercession “for those who are lost”, i.e. the Jews;¹² “When therefore that people performs the Passover, do you fast. And be careful to celebrate your vigil within their (feast of) unleavened bread.”¹³ Polemical opposition to the Jewish feast thus appears as the pivotal element in the fast in the quartodeciman celebration of Easter (which has therefore been characterised as “a kind of anti-Pascha” by Gerard Rouwhorst¹⁴); the fast is broken only after the end of the Jewish banquet.

Information on contemporary Jewish practice is supplied by Mishna Pesachim 10:9 which prescribes midnight as the point from which “the Pesach makes the hands unclean”; hence midnight is widely taken by modern scholars as the point in time when quartodeciman Christians broke their fast.¹⁵ This conclusion, however, is tenuous for various reasons. Firstly, the Mishna is not necessarily representative of second- to third-century Judaism as such, which certainly was characterised by great internal diversity; the influence of the Mishna may not have extended beyond rabbinic circles in Palestine. Secondly, the regulation of Mishna Pesachim 10:9 sets a limit, which does not imply that the average celebration even

¹¹ Epiphanius, Pan. 70, 11, 3 (GCS 3², 244 Holl and Dummer). The most recent discussions come from Gerard Rouwhorst, “Liturgy on the Authority of the Apostles.” In *The Apostolic Age in Patristic Thought*, ed. A. Hilhorst (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 81–84, and Leonhard, *Pesach*, 217–224.

¹² Didasc. 21 (Syriac: CSCO 407 = CSCO.S 179, 206, 3f. / English: CSCO 408 = CSCO.S 180, 188, 20f. Vööbus: “when you fast, pray and intercede for those who are lost”; Syr. 211, 23–27 / Engl. 196, 16–19: “perform your fast with all care. And begin when your brethren who are of the people perform the Passover”).

¹³ Didasc. 21 (Syr. 218, 3–8 / Engl. 202, 1–5); after Rouwhorst, *Hymnes*, 1, 162–190, cf. again Leonhard, *Pesach*, 217–224.

¹⁴ Rouwhorst, *Hymnes*, 1, 192; 197: “une sorte d’anti-Pâque”.

¹⁵ For select references to midnight from a non-quartodeciman context, see below n. 33.

in those communities subscribing to Mishnaic law did actually last until this moment. Finally, it is not beyond doubt that the instruction on the Pesach (i.e., the sacrificed animal), which may be understood as a concretion of Exod. 12, 11, is meant to apply to the post-temple Seder at all.¹⁶ We simply do not know how Jews in Asia Minor and other eastern regions beyond Palestine celebrated Passover in the second and third centuries; but if we suppose a sympotic setting, any date in the late evening may correspond to what Christians perceived as the termination of their feast.¹⁷ (Carousing groups strolling through town after the formal conclusion of dinner at Pesach, for that matter, are attested in rabbinic literature by way of objection¹⁸).

2. Sources of Dominical Practice

In contrast to quartodeciman use, it is constitutive for the dominical celebration of Easter to “terminate the fast on no other day than that of the resurrection of our Saviour”.¹⁹ The breaking of the fast is linked to the date of the resurrection, which occasions the Easter joy expressed by terminating the fast and commencing the feast. This concept is confirmed by Dionysius of Alexandria, the only direct source on the question from the ante-Nicene period: “it will be acknowledged by all alike that one ought to start the feast and the gladness after the time of our Lord’s resurrection, up till then ‘humbling our souls with fastings’ (cf. Ps. 34 [35], 13).”²⁰ At the same time, however, Dionysius not only advised against hyper-mimetic tendencies that over-emphasised the search for the precise moment of Christ’s resurrection, since a glance into the Gospels reveals “that nothing definite appears in them about the hour at which he rose.”²¹ Quoting the question of his colleague Basilides, he also testifies to significant diversity regarding the moment of breaking the fast:

For you say that some of the brethren maintain one should do so at cockcrow, and some at evening. For the brethren in Rome, so they say, await the cockcrow; but

¹⁶ My thanks are due to Clemens Leonhard for stimulating and illuminating discussions about this topic.

¹⁷ Cf. Leonhard, *Pesach*, 306: “it was not evident that the Quartodeciman vigil must last until dawn. From its origins, it may be assumed that it lasted *longer* than a Jewish banquet in the evening.”

¹⁸ Cf. the discussion of the enigmatic Aphiqoman of m. Pes. 10:8 in y. Pes. 37d and b. Pes. 119b; cf. Baruch M. Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder. The Passover Rite and Early Rabbinic Judaism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1984; repr. New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 2002), 65.

¹⁹ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 23, 1 (GCS 2/1, 488, 15–17) etc.

²⁰ Dionysius of Alexandria, Ep. 14, 1 (CPT 95, 4–7 Feltoe / English translation TCL.G [6] 76 Feltoe).

²¹ Dionysius of Alexandria, Ep. 14, 1 (CPT 95, 9f. / TCL.G 77).

concerning those there (sc. in Basilides's home, i.e. the Pentapolis in the Cyrenaica) you said they broke the fast sooner."²²

Dionysius nevertheless reproached "those who are premature and relax before midnight, though near it, ... as remiss and wanting in self-restraint."²³

Paul F. Bradshaw and Maxwell E. Johnson, however, have suggested that those breaking the fast earlier "may not in fact have been merely lax but possibly a remnant still keeping to the original Jewish time of the Passover meal".²⁴ Evidence from the early fourth century may suggest that the argument might well be carried even further. When Athanasius, indirect successor of Dionysius on the episcopal see of Alexandria, announces the end of the fast in the concluding passages of his annual festal epistles, the stereotypical formulation – albeit transmitted only in Syriac or Coptic translations – refers to "the late evening" or to "the evening of the Sabbath".²⁵ The practice censured by Dionysius seems to have become standard in his region after few decades at the latest, if it had not been primitive at least in some places, as the testimony of Basilides about his home in the Cyrenaic Pentapolis insinuates.

Other communities of the early fourth century obviously tended to fast longer. A neglected passage in a work of Athanasius's Palestinian contemporary Eusebius of Caesarea makes clear that the custom of fasting until a moment that definitely was considered to belong rather to Sunday than to Saturday was so strongly rooted in his community that the author could build an exegetical case on it, although Eusebius still testifies to the same whole time-span as that mentioned by Dionysius: when Eusebius discusses whether the indication of Matt. 28, 1 "late on/after the Sabbath (ὄψε σαββάτων)" refers to evening or morning, he argues as follows:

Matthew called the moment which shines into the dawn of the Lord's day "late on/after the Sabbath"; he did not mean the evening of the Sabbath or "late on/after the Sabbath", for we would have to break the fast on the day of the Sabbath after sunset,

²² Dionysius of Alexandria, Ep. 14, 1 (CPT 94, 5–95, 2 / TCL.G 76).

²³ Dionysius of Alexandria, Ep. 14, 1 (CPT 100, 11–101, 1 / TCL.G 79).

²⁴ Bradshaw and Johnson, *Origins*, 53, following Alistair Stewart-Sykes, *The Lamb's High Feast. Melito, Peri Pascha, and the Quartodeciman Paschal Liturgy at Sardis*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 42 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 169–172.

²⁵ A comprehensive list of detailed references is given in Harald Buchinger, "Die Bedeutung der Auferstehung für Termin, Gestalt und Gehalt der ältesten Osterfeier." In *"If Christ has not been raised ...": The Reception of the Resurrection Stories and the Belief in the Resurrection in the Early Church*, ed. Joseph Verheyden, *Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, forthcoming).

when it has become evening, and not be joyful on the Lord's day, but in the evening of the Sabbath, if the Evangelist had indicated thus. But we are not accustomed to terminate the fast in the evening of the Sabbath, but when night has fallen, just at midnight or at cockcrow, or towards dawn. Therefore because of both, the matter itself and the usage which is the rule in the churches of God, the moment indicated by "late on/after the Sabbath" is not the evening hour but the one which Matthew himself added when he said "as the first day of the week was dawning" (Matt. 28, 1).²⁶

To summarise, the early documents of the dominical Easter feast provide ambiguous evidence. At best, it cannot be taken for granted that it was self-evident for all adherents to a dominical celebration of Easter to keep vigil until early Sunday morning. Partisans of this conviction are confronted with communities who broke their fast earlier;²⁷ beginning the feast in the first half of the night does not appear to have been an isolated exception. How is this discrepancy to be explained, if commemorating the resurrection on Easter morning was essential for the dominical celebration? The question shall be discussed in the framework of Gerard Rouwhorst's reconstruction of liturgical history after a side glance at an important yet problematic document.

3. A Document of Unclear Origin

Unfortunately, the earliest available description of a Christian paschal vigil at all is problematic in several respects: due to the unclear localisation of the *Epistula apostolorum*, the origin of which has been sought everywhere in the Christian East, and to a lack of respective clues on this matter within the text, it remains totally indeterminate whether the document comes from a quartodeciman or a dominical context (though it has become quite common to claim the former); furthermore, philological ambiguities in the two extant versions also result in uncertainty as to whether the feast should commence or – rather – terminate at cockcrow, though cockcrow is in any case considered a significant moment in

²⁶ Eusebius, *Quaestiones ad Marinum* 2, 2 (SC 523, 204 Zamagni).

²⁷ The disputed question of the apocryphal Gospel of Peter cannot be resolved here: according to Ev. Petr. 7, 27 (GCS.NF 11 = NTA 1, 38, 9 Kraus and Nicklas) the disciples fasted and mourned after the death of Jesus "until Sabbath", while the "dawn of the Lord's day (sic)" is stressed in the Easter morning narrative of Ev. Petr. 12, 50 (ibid. 44, 15f.), and mourning of the disciples is mentioned until the "last day of the (week of the) unleavened (bread), ... when the feast ended," in Ev. Petr. 14, 58f. (ibid. 48, 6–11); cf. Rouwhorst, "Liturgy on the Authority of the Apostles," 70f., and Leonhard, *Pesach*, 224–229.

the paschal celebration.²⁸ Because of this double incertitude, the *Epistula apostolorum* does not contribute to answering our question, although it does provide substantial information about the bipartite shape of an early Christian paschal vigil evidently intended to extend towards Easter morning.

4. The Syriac *Didascalia* and the Rise of the Dominical Celebration

Gerard Rouwhorst's careful analysis of differentiated strata within *Didascalia* 21 has demonstrated that the instructions given for the dominical celebration of the paschal vigil contain remnants of its quartodeciman inheritance. The rationale for keeping vigil and fasting is still the allegedly old quartodeciman motif of "prayer and intercession for those who have sinned", appearing here along with the characteristically dominical motivation of "the expectation and hope of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus until the third hour in the night after the Sabbath." It is concordant with this dominical rationale that the joy and gladness expressed by the Eucharistic oblation and the feast which break the fast are founded on the resurrection of Christ.²⁹ The time indicated for breaking the fast, however, is surprisingly early for a dominical context: notwithstanding attempts of older research to understand it otherwise, the "third hour of the night" is about 9pm,³⁰ which definitely is late evening and can hardly be understood as any anticipation of the following Easter morning. The puzzlingly early moment of breaking the fast can only be explained by an originally quartodeciman shape underlying the source's paschal celebration, which may have changed its date but not yet all its former characteristics, most notably the moment when the fast was terminated.³¹

This view is corroborated by the reception of the *Didascalia* in the *Apostolic Constitutions*: when this later fourth-century church order updated the material of its source to the current state of liturgical development, the breaking of the fast in the paschal vigil was

²⁸ Ep. ap. 26 (Ethiopic: PO 43 = 93/3, 198, 10f. Guerrier and Grébaud / Coptic: Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 43 = 3/13, 6*, VIII, 8–10 Schmidt); cf. Rouwhorst, "Passover," 164; id., "Liturgy on the Authority of the Apostles".

²⁹ Syr. CSCO 407 = CSCO.S 179, 214, 12–14; 215, 5–18; 217, 16–218, 2 / Engl. CSCO 408 = CSCO.S 180, 199, 2–7; 199, 22–200, 5; 201, 16–20. The text-critical instability of the instruction to fast on Friday and Saturday or Friday only along with the prescription of a vigil on Friday and Saturday, or on Saturday or Friday alone, or "until the third hour in the night after the Sabbath" only is an important argument for the assumption of a quartodeciman pedigree of the dominical paschal vigil.

³⁰ Rouwhorst, *Hymnes*, 1, 174; 179.

³¹ Cf. Leonhard, *Pesach*, 282: "When this event becomes linked to the days of the week its structure of 3 hours of mourning followed by a joyful celebration of the Eucharist loses its anti-Jewish focus with the missing parallel Jewish celebration. The curious instance of a 'fast' of 3 hours is only understandable as long as it is directed against the simultaneous Jewish feast."

transferred to cockcrow,³² thus aligning it with a moment more appropriate to the commemoration of the resurrection and therefore perhaps increasingly prevalent in the dominical tradition.

Both the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* are of course church orders, the prescriptive character of which cautions against simple inference on actual ecclesial practice, nor is this essay the place to collect comprehensive evidence for the actual duration of the paschal vigil in the later fourth century.³³ Yet the literary development between the indications of the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* about the paschal vigil not only fits well into the broader framework of liturgical history:³⁴ it may in turn also shed light on other documents of the fourth century that pose intricate historical questions.

5. The dominical Easter in fourth-century Cappadocia and its quartodeciman background

The Easter homilies of the Cappadocian Fathers disclose a perplexingly diverse picture:³⁵ while Gregory of Nyssa preached in a paschal vigil that led into Easter morning,³⁶ Gregory of Nazianzus, in contrast, repeatedly presided over an Easter Sunday celebration that looked

³² Const. ap. 5, 18, 2; 19, 3 (SC 329, 270, 7f. 9f. Metzger). A wording similar to the second reference is used by Epiphanius, Fid. 22, 14 and Pan. 75, 6, 3, as quoted below in n. 33.

³³ In the later fourth-century East, Jerome, Comm. 4 Matt. 25, 6 (CChr.SL 77, 237, 742–746 Hurst and Adriaen) quotes the famous “apostolic tradition ... that on the day of the paschal vigil the people may not be dismissed before midnight in expectation of the advent of Christ”. Midnight is also the moment indicated by the Testamentum Domini 2, 12 (134 Rahmani), which may likewise pertain to the wider Palestinian realm. On the contrary, Epiphanius, Fid. 22, 14 (GCS 3², 524), testifies to a “service at dawn (cf. Matt. 28, 1) of the Lord’s day, when it finishes about cockcrow on the day of the resurrection”; cf. also Epiphanius, Pan. 75, 6, 3 (ibid. 338). An all-night vigil seems to be supposed by Sozomenus, Hist. eccl. 7, 18, 5 (GCS² 328, 3–5 Bidez and Hansen), and is clearly attested by Gregory of Nyssa, De tridui spatio (as quoted in n. 36). In the West, Augustine does not make an unequivocal statement about the duration of the vigil, yet declares in Serm. 221 compl. = Guelf. 5, 1 (SC 116, 212, 22f. Poque) that “this night is understood as belonging to the following day, which we hold as the Lord’s (day)”; cf. also Serm. 235, 1, 1 (PL 38, 1117).

³⁴ Characteristic of the fourth-century paschal celebration is the insertion of Baptism, the abandonment of the communal meal beyond the Eucharist, and the evolution of the reading programme as specified in Const. ap. 5, 19, 3. 7 (SC 329, 270–274).

³⁵ Cf. Harald Buchinger, “The Easter Cycle in Late Antique Cappadocia. Revisiting some well-known witnesses.” *Bollettino della Badia Greca di Grottaferrata* 3a serie 11 (2014): 45–77, with reference to earlier literature.

³⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, De tridui spatio (Gregorii Nysseni Opera, henceforth GNO 9, 304, 11: “the Sabbath has passed”), and its epilogue In sanctum et salutare pascha (ibid. 309, 12, looking back on the “all-night vigil”); English translation and commentary: Andreas Spira and Christoph Klock, ed., *The Easter Sermons of Gregory of Nyssa. Translation and Commentary. Proceedings of the Fourth International Colloquium on Gregory of Nyssa, Cambridge, England: 11–15 September, 1978*, Patristic Monograph Series 9 (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1981); cf. Hubertus R. Drobner, *Gregor von Nyssa, Die drei Tage zwischen Tod und Auferstehung unseres Herrn Jesus Christus*, Philosophia Patrum 5 (Leiden: Brill, 1982).

back to the paschal vigil as “yesterday”³⁷ – which means that Easter morning was separated from its eve by significant portions of the night and probably by sleep. While one does of course have to reckon with substantial diversity in late antique liturgy even within very close temporal, local and ecclesial proximity, perhaps the development documented by the *Didascalia* and the *Apostolic Constitutions* provides a clue for understanding the contradictory evidence: the different uses may have originated in different ways of introducing a commemoration of the resurrection on Easter morning in a region that had previously been dominated by quartodeciman traditions. When the establishment of a dominical celebration superseded earlier quartodeciman practice which broke the fast in the late evening, it may have led to different solutions which can both be recognised in Cappadocian sources of the later fourth century: on the one hand, extending the vigil into the morning (as the community where Gregory of Nyssa preached his sermon did), or on the other hand simply imposing a second celebration on Easter morning (as in Gregory of Nazianzus’s congregations), which left the paschal vigil at its traditional moment of Saturday evening.

A further consequence of this reconstruction of liturgical development is that it possibly explains the puzzling homily “On Holy Sabbath” attributed to Amphilochius of Iconium, a contemporary and friend of the Great Cappadocians: references to the “burial feast ... today”, looking back to the crucifixion “yesterday”³⁸ and expecting the “third day” of the resurrection yet to come unequivocally demonstrate that the sermon was preached on Saturday; but its topics and character resemble contemporary Easter homilies and largely draw on traditional paschal theology.³⁹ Might it not very possibly be the case that this sermon expounds exactly an Easter vigil similar to the one attested by Gregory of Nazianzus – which need not be a stunningly early phenomenon of decadence but, rather, a remnant of a dominical celebration which had not yet lost the time-point it inherited from its quartodeciman prehistory?

³⁷ Gregory of Nazianzus, Or. 1, 3f. (SC 247, 74–76 Bernardi); Or. 45, 2 (PG 36, 624 C–625 A); cf. also the passages quoted below in n. 43. The earlier homily, delivered in A. D. 362, is possibly the earliest extant evidence at all of an Easter Sunday celebration detached from the paschal vigil.

³⁸ Amphilochius of Iconium, Or. 5, 1 (CChr.SG 3, 133–134, l. 17–29 Datema).

³⁹ Hubertus R. Drobner, “Die Karsamstagspredigt des Amphilochius von Ikonium (CPG II 3235). Einleitung, rhetorische Textanalyse und Übersetzung.” In *Greek and Latin Studies in Memory of Caius Fabricius*, ed. Sven-Tage Teodorsson, *Studia Graeca et Latina Gothoburgensia* 54 (Goeteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1990), 10–12, collects some parallels from other paschal homilies; for an English translation and commentary, see Jan H. Barkhuizen, “Amphilochius of Iconium, *Homily* 5: ‘On Holy Sabbath’. Translation and Commentary,” *Acta Classica* 46 (2003): 49–69.

It may not be a mere coincidence that this discordance between full-night and anticipated celebrations of the paschal vigil, plus the developments that possibly underlay them, happen to be observable in Cappadocia: not only was Asia Minor the stronghold of the quartodeciman party in the Easter controversy of the second century,⁴⁰ but the perseverance of quartodecimans in the region is reported as late as the fifth century,⁴¹ and there exist further sources which reveal conflicting concerns and virulent struggles about the Easter date.⁴² The tenacity of traditions influenced by quartodeciman tendencies in Cappadocia may have contributed to stabilising the custom of celebrating the paschal vigil on Easter eve even when dominical orthodoxy imposed a Sunday service on “resurrection day” as the “more beautiful and brighter” festivity.⁴³ In turn, Easter Sunday appears not only and not simply as the conclusion of the paschal vigil even in dominical contexts, but may have arisen as a mimetic feast of the resurrection in its own right when mimetic festal cycles were invented and disseminated in the later fourth century.

6. Conclusion

Although Gerard Rouwhorst and others have rightly stressed that no significant difference can be discerned between the paschal theologies of quartodeciman and dominical sources,⁴⁴ the moment of the basic ritual act, the breaking of the fast, and its rationale may have differed substantially. Whereas the anti-Jewish opposition of the quartodeciman celebration to the Jewish Passover necessitated fasting only in the evening, commemorating the resurrection on Easter morning was constitutive solely of the dominical feast. If the Sunday celebration, however, is to be understood to have been a secondary offspring of allegedly earlier

⁴⁰ Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 5, 23f. (GCS 2/1, 488–496).

⁴¹ Socrates, *Hist. eccl.* 6, 19, 7; 7, 29, 12 (GCS.NF 1, 344; 378 Hansen).

⁴² Cf. the pseudo-chrysostomic homily on the Easter date of A. D. 387 (SC 48 Floëri and Nautin), which is theologically particularly close to Gregory of Nyssa, who himself polemicalises against the quartodeciman observance and dwells on the symbolism of the biblical date in his *De tridui spatio* (GNO 294, 14–298, 18, esp. 294, 21–295, 1); cf. Drobner, *Die drei Tage*, 129f.; 145f. The intricate question of the so-called “solar quartodecimans” – cf. August Strobel, *Ursprung und Geschichte des frühchristlichen Osterkalenders*, *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 121 (Berlin: Akademie, 1977), 368–374, departing, among others, from the sort of quartodecimans Epiphanius, *Pan.* 50, 1, 6 (GCS 2², 245f. Holl and Dummer) claims for Cappadocia, and the practice the above-mentioned homily, 9 (SC 48, 118), and Sozomenus, *Hist. eccl.* 7, 18, 12–14 (GCS² 329), attribute to the Montanists – which contributes to the complexity of the picture, cannot and need not be discussed in the present context, since it is the date and not the time of the day which is at stake in that discourse.

⁴³ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Or.* 1, 1 (SC 247, 72), commences with the exclamation “resurrection day!”, while *Or.* 45, 2 (PG 36, 625 A) hails Easter Sunday as the “more beautiful and brighter” festivity than the paschal vigil, because “today we celebrate the resurrection itself, not any more as hoped for, but as come about.”

⁴⁴ Rouwhorst, “Passover,” 159.

quartodeciman practice (which, as said at the outset, cannot be proven but is widely assumed in recent research), exactly this transformation may have resulted in diverse liturgical solutions: mimetic tendencies may have aimed at stressing the transition to the dawn of resurrection day as the appropriate moment for breaking the fast, while the habit of celebrating Easter in the evening may be a sign not of laxity but of conservative adherence to earlier customs of quartodeciman imprint. A full-night vigil certainly is and was the most appropriate expression of the dominical concept of Easter, which became dominant in the course of late antiquity; yet this demanding ritual may not be original, nor was it universally adopted at any point. The alternative may have been to introduce a mimetic Easter-morning celebration of the resurrection in addition to the pristine evening service.⁴⁵ Where this was the case, the paschal vigil anticipated on Easter eve was never shifted from morning to evening, but had its original place at the latter time of day.

The origins, the primitive shape and the early history of the paschal celebration remain shrouded in mystery in many respects, and any unilinear explanation is suspect in view of the diversity of practices and theologies in the early church; but it may be worthwhile to take account of the possibility, and review further documents with the suspicion, that the full-night paschal vigil may have arisen as an extension of an evening celebration rather than the latter emerging as a reduction of the former.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ It is, nevertheless, remarkable how little impact the Easter morning Gospel pericopes had not only on the early sources of paschal theology but even in the Easter sermons of the fourth century: Buchinger, “Die Bedeutung der Auferstehung”; id., “Die Auferstehungsbotschaft der Evangelien und das Grab Christi in griechischen Osterhomilien der frühen reichskirchlichen Zeit.” In “*Let the Wise Listen and add to Their Learning*” (Prov 1:5). *Festschrift for Günter Stemberger on the Occasion of his 75th Birthday*, ed. Constanza Cordoni and Gerhard Langer, *Studia Judaica* 90 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016): 481–500.

⁴⁶ What we discover in history does not always turn out to be what we like to see or advocate emulating in present practice. Of course the purpose of this paper is not to contest the fact that celebrating a vigil that leads into the Easter morning is indeed the most meaningful expression of the paschal transition “from slavery to freedom, from darkness to light, from death to life, from tyranny to eternal royalty” (Melito, Pasch. 68, as quoted above in n. 9; cf. also m. Pes. 10:5, a text which, however, is instable and influenced by later liturgical practice); but historical research must always avoid the danger of ideological short-circuits between genetic explanation and synchronic understanding. Meaning is not simply the result of historical developments, however illuminating diachronic insights may be; historical perceptions as such neither legitimise nor devalue present choices.

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