Authority and Performance
Sociological Perspectives on the Council of Chalcedon (AD 451)
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To Bas,

With love and admiration,

In celebration of our years together
# Table of Contents

**Preface** .......................................................... 11

**Acknowledgements** .............................................. 13

**I. Introduction** .................................................. 15

A. Choices, Aims, and Structure .................................. 15
   1. The Scholarly Context ....................................... 16
   2. Scope and Methodological Principles ....................... 19
   3. Structure ...................................................... 28

B. The Council of Chalcedon:
   Historical Background, Procedure, and Documentation ..... 30
   1. Before Chalcedon: The Councils of Ephesus I and II ..... 31
   2. Ecumenical Church Councils as a Governmental Tool ..... 34
   3. Chalcedon: Location and Narrative of Events ............ 37
   4. Chalcedon: Procedure ........................................ 43
   5. Documentation of the Council ................................ 47

C. The Convenor of Chalcedon:
   Marcian and his Theodosian Heritage ......................... 50
   1. Accession ...................................................... 50
   2. Marcian’s Military and Foreign Problems ................ 53
   3. Marcian as a Christian Emperor ............................ 55
   4. From Theodosius II to Marcian:
      A Heritage of Imperial Religious Activism ............... 56
   5. The Two Romes: Byzantine and Roman Identities .......... 58
   6. Features in Marcian’s Identity ............................. 59

D. Socio-Anthropological Perspectives in Reading Ancient Texts . 62
   1. Method and Approach ........................................ 62
   2. Grounds for Comparing Ancient and Modern Societies .... 66
   3. The Purpose of Group Gatherings:
      Contributions from Social Anthropology .................. 70

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Hagit Amirav, Authority and Performance
Table of Contents

4. Non-verbal Gestures: Gesticulation and Tonality in Chalcedon 77
5. Speech Acts as Performatives 81
6. The Ceremonial Functions of Language 84

II. Political and Social Networks 90
A. The Social Importance of Networking 90
B. Networks of Delegates in Chalcedon 91
   1. The First Session: The Composition of the Imperial Delegation 93
   2. Imperial Officials at the Sixth Session 95
   3. State Officials as Religious Figures 96
C. The Formation of ‘Cleavages’ in Chalcedon 98

III. Language and Ceremonial 103
A. Discourse Analysis of Session I 103
   1. The Use of Honorific Titles in the First Session 104
   2. Seating Games: Rhetoric and its Practice 107
   3. Reading Out Loud as an Authoritative Act 113
   4. Theodoret’s Grand Entry 116
   5. The Role of the Imperial Establishment 122
   6. The Process of Boundary Marking 125
   7. Further Reactions to Ephesus I — Reading and Protesting 129
   8. He Who Defines is the One with Power 133
  10. Dioscorus vs. Theodoret 142
  11. Dynamics of Disputation and Concord 144
  12. Cyril of Alexandria 147
  13. The Papal Delegates 151
  14. Communication Strategies 153

B. Discourse Analysis of Session II (On the Orthodox Faith) 163
   1. The Imperial Official as Leader 163
   2. Harmony as a Token of Divine Providence 164
   3. Anatolius’ Rhetorical Tactics 167
   4. Rebellion against Anatolius 168

C. Summary of Discussions 172
IV. The New Constantine: Marcian at Chalcedon ........................................ 174

A. Discourse Analysis of Session VI ......................................................... 174
   1. Bailey’s Normative Rules ............................................................... 174
   2. Marcian as a *Custos Fidei* .......................................................... 175
   3. Attendance and Signatory Lists —
      Ceremonial and Societal Functions ............................................. 179
   4. The Emperor Marcian’s Speeches — General Features ................... 181
   5. Marcian’s Speeches — Discourse Analysis .................................... 189
   6. Concordia, Consensus, and Harmony, Again .................................. 198

B. Imperial Correspondence: The Sociolinguistic Angle ....................... 204

V. Conclusions .......................................................................................... 209

VI. Epilogue: Discussing Religion in a Gadamerian Culture .................. 211

Bibliography .............................................................................................. 215

A. Ancient Literature .................................................................................. 215

B. Modern Literature, Translations, and Reference Works .................... 215

Abbreviations .............................................................................................. 223

Index of Subjects and Themes ................................................................. 224

Index of Personal and Place Names ........................................................ 230

Index of Modern Authors ........................................................................ 233
Languages are the best mirror of the human mind.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, New Essays on Human Understanding

A fresh look at the bulky corpus of proceedings of church councils would necessitate transcending the all-obligatory theological perspective, and placing the sociological aspects of a profoundly ceremonial event at the centre of any interdisciplinary historical study. Dame Averil Cameron’s History as Text and The Rhetoric of Empire and Elizabeth Clark’s Reading Renunciation and The Linguistic Turn,1 to name but a few notable works,2 have been guiding lights and boundless sources of encouragement for ancient historians, such as I am, in our attempts at embracing the wealth of sociological and anthropological knowledge en route to unlocking the social dynamics of ancient societies.

In trying to apply modern sociological and anthropological theories to the study of ancient societies, the works of eminent scholars and thinkers in these fields have been true eye-openers, and equally helpful in my attempts at grasping the social mindset of people involved in communal religious activities more than 1500 years ago. Being an ancient historian, rather than a fully fledged sociologist, I only hope that my occasional criticism of sociological and anthropological theories should be taken more as playful exercises en route to bettering my sociological skills, rather than as serious attempts at refuting the theories of minds far greater than mine. My hope and goal for the future is to refine further my sociological, philosophical, and literary perceptions in a manner which would further benefit the study of ancient societies in sociological and anthropological contexts, and would convince other ancient historians to join the few who have been engaged with similar tasks, or are already doing the same.

Mary Douglas succinctly describes her goals in the introduction to her How Institutions Think, as ‘to put the theme in a new light, to make it clearer and more persuasive, and perhaps, at least, to say it right’.3 Mary Douglas certainly succeeded in achieving her goals. I hope that in trying to weave together history,
sociology, and theology, I, too, have also made the first step towards achieving mine. Given that we scholars, like Pierre Bourdieu’s *hominés academici*, are caught up perhaps even more than anyone else in countless rhetorical loops, I remain forever aware of the fact that our attempts at analysing the discourse of others continuously shape our own academic discourse.

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4 See, for example, P. Bourdieu on cases of euphemism in academic rhetoric: ‘The academic dialectic of recognition and misconstrual attains its most accomplished form when the structure of the system of categories of perception and thought, which organize the expressions of academic judgement and this judgement itself, is in perfect harmony with the structure of the contents which the academic system is entrusted with transmitting, as is the case with literary or philosophical culture in its academic form’ (Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. P. Collier (Cambridge, 1988), pp. 208–209).
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I. Introduction

Sociological theory cannot develop without knowledge of history.

Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*

An anthropologist has one first, necessary, step to make when setting out to study an ancient religion. The step is to locate the religion in some community of worshippers in some known historical time and space. Anthropologists are not trained to interpret utopias. We always try to place the religion to be studied alongside the other religions of its period and its region.

Mary Douglas, *Leviticus as Literature*

A. Choices, Aims, and Structure

The introduction to this book, as any other introduction, has a twofold purpose: to define and present the goals and limitations of the unfolding study, and to characterize its potential and intended readership. This particular work has different audiences as its focus: ancient historians and theologians, and also sociolinguists and cultural anthropologists interested in ceremonial behaviour (and I could be tempted here to end this sentence with the fashionable ‘in traditional societies’, but I will not do that, for society, any society, whether modern or ‘traditional’, is by definition also ceremonial).

In a work of an interdisciplinary nature, moving between the different audiences (and methods, and emphases) makes the writing of the whole piece, not only the introduction, a trickier task. What may be intended as a well-meant attempt at binding different ends together, at weaving a stronger rope from the vast assortment of fibres available, might easily be interpreted as an act of audacity at best, or as an act of intrusion and crude appropriation at worst. These problems present themselves throughout the body of an interdisciplinary work, but naturally, they come to the fore in the introduction and in a set of underlined questions: simplifying or patronizing; clarifying or stating the obvious; synthesizing or highlighting the new and the extraordinary?

As far as this introduction is concerned, at least, I have decided to offer a basic historical outline for the benefit of sociologists and anthropologists and a
basic sociolinguistic overview for the benefit of ancient historians, though also for the benefit of the many sociologists who, despite Mary Douglas’s magisterial socio-anthropological study of the book of Leviticus,¹ might not be aware yet of the vast sociological pasture ground provided by ancient texts.

1. The Scholarly Context

This study was prompted and encouraged by the recent general interest among ancient historians whose focus is the history of ideas in texts which were hitherto considered purely ‘theological’, and the political, social, and religious circumstances which gave rise to their compilation and dissemination.

Within this intellectual context, the revival of interest in the proceedings of ancient church gatherings in general, and in the Acts of Chalcedon in particular, is quite noticeable and remarkable. A better understanding of fifth-century political, ecclesiastical and cultural landscape has been greatly facilitated thanks to the seminal work of key scholarly figures, such as Richard Price, Fergus Millar, and others who, each in their own way, have pushed the relevant material to the fore of the scholarly arena, while embedding church politics in general and the Chalcedonian council in particular in their wider political and cultural contexts. In these studies, special efforts have been made respectively to place the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon within the Theodosian heritage on the one hand, and the Justinianic period, on the other.

In this context, we mention again the recent English translation (which most importantly also includes the ancillary material), translated and annotated, on the basis of Edward Schwartz’s seminal edition,² by Richard Price and Michael Gaddis.³ Their work has greatly facilitated the current study of the text in its original languages. A number of recently published important studies have an equally important role in the revival of interest in ecclesiastical material.⁴

I personally have been most encouraged by this renewed interest in the fifth century and the ecumenical councils of that period, and was convinced by Fergus Millar to direct my attention to the vast wealth of information contained in the Acts. In the following private communication, he stresses the position of the Acts of the Council of Chalcedon in our intellectual history, and their potential for further research:

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of the Acts of the proceedings at the Church councils of the fifth and sixth centuries, in illuminating a vast range of aspects of the Late Roman state and the Church. For example, there is the history of language—first Greek, both as spoken and as written in their own hands by bishops subscribing to the decisions at each session—and then also Latin, in the shape of occasional interventions by bishops from the Latin West and, much more important, Latin translations made in the fifth and sixth centuries [...]. Then there is the social geography of the Greek Church, with the lists of hundreds of bishops from cities large and small (and sometimes very small and obscure ones) from all over the Greek world, from the Balkans to Egypt. Then, either integrated into the texts of the Acts themselves, or attached to them by contemporaries assembling dossiers designed to promote one or other theological viewpoint, there are extracts from the works of the major theologians, homilies by bishops, Episcopal letters, sometimes crossing the Latin-Greek border, and, on a truly remarkable scale, official correspondence generated by secular officials or by the Emperors [...].

The Acts of the Councils concerned are as follows: the first Council of Ephesus of CE 431; the second, of CE 449, where they are not preserved independently (except for one long selection in Syriac translation) but are quoted in vast detail in the Acts of Chalcedon; then Chalcedon itself, called in CE 451; the Synods of Constantinople (not formally recognized as a Church Council) and of Jerusalem of CE 536; and the Fifth Ecumenical Council, called by Justinian in CE 553, and held in Constantinople. [...] However, for completeness, coherence (even if the numbering of the sessions varies as between the Greek and Latin versions vary), for dramatic vividness and for historical importance, none of the Acts of the others can quite match those of the Council of Chalcedon. For the extraordinary influence exercised at a distance by Leo (the Great), the pope of 441 to 460, led the Emperor to impose on the Council a Definition of the Faith, which caused profound conflicts in the Greek Church, and led to a division, which lasts to this day, between the ‘Chalcedonians’, or ‘Dyophyrites’, who accepted the ‘two-nature’ Christological doctrines of Leo, and the
‘Monophysites’ who rejected them (now the Greek Orthodox and Syrian Orthodox Churches respectively). The doctrinal issues, and their long-lasting consequences, have been fully explored in major works, and some attention (though not nearly as much as the remarkably rich material would allow) has been paid both to the political context and the relations of Emperor and Church on the one hand, and to a series of fascinating local conflicts dealt with in the later sessions, which were required to settle disputed issues before the bishops departed. There has also been some analysis (though again far less than would be possible) of the initial record-taking, and the making and distribution of copies of the Acts. But until now no-one has taken the step of seeing the potential of these uniquely detailed records of how high-ranking government officials appointed by the Emperor controlled proceedings, of how the bishops were seated at each session, how rhetoric and gesture were deployed in expressing conflicting viewpoints, and how consensus, or apparent consensus, was reached and expressed (for though dissent was sometimes expressed during the sessions, when it came to the concluding written subscriptions, these, though formulated in each bishop’s own words, always provided an image of complete unanimity). A session of such a Council could thus be seen in one sense, and with absolute justification, as a piece of theatre in which the different actors played out their roles — and in another sense as a real-life drama which was to have a determining effect on the history of Christianity. So this uniquely detailed and extraordinarily vivid record positively invites analysis in terms of social dynamics and the acting-out of different roles.

Following Fergus Millar’s advice, I, too, aim to achieve a better understanding of the social, political, and religious climates which were prevalent in the fifth century in the Eastern Roman Empire, and to see how these climates affected processes of decision-making in the public sphere. Indeed, significant work has been done relating to the function of ceremony in the religious and communal life in the Graeco-Roman world. However, to the best of my knowledge,

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5 A note on my part regarding the terms mentioned: modern scholarly use, following recent discussions in the Middle Eastern Churches, reserves the more commonly used term ‘Monophysite’ for the strict Monophysitism of Eutyches. The term ‘Miaphysite’, however, calls for explanation: grammatically speaking, following the rules by which compound words are formulated in Greek, the term should be ‘Henophysite’ (after the masculine form). However, the term ‘Miaphysite’ is used today by those who wish to stay close to the historical terminology (i.e. Cyril’s formula, μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη). Thus, for them it is probably not a regular compound but rather a way of referring to those who stress the formula ‘Mia physis’.

such a synthesis between the historical and sociological disciplines, based on a close analysis of a verbatim narrative account, carried out in full appreciation of the dramatic qualities of the texts, has not, so far, been carried out in a systematic manner. This statement is certainly true when it comes to the application of sociological methods in the study of ancient texts. I hope that I have not only identified a gap, but have also begun to fill it effectively.

2. Scope and Methodological Principles

Succinctly described, this book focuses on the study of ancient ecumenical gatherings as social events. Being in essence and in effect mass gatherings, ecumenical church councils should be considered one of our first ports of call in our attempts at understanding the social, political, and religious dynamics which determined the course of their development. In this context, the study of ceremony and ceremonial behaviour, both linguistic and gestural, is of great relevance. Again, of all the great church councils, the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) in particular stands out, in that it not only documents a pivotal moment in the history of Christian theology and imperial policy, but is also documented in great detail in its proceedings, also known as the Acts.7

The Spectrum of Relevant Socio-Anthropological Methods

To revert to the socio-anthropological aspect of this study, having such full textual evidence documenting real-life debates,8 opens a wide window onto a detailed investigation of imperial and ecclesiastical ceremony. Using the methods, or rather, establishing key points of reference with the thought of socio-anthropological theorists, such as Douglas who defined symbol systems,9 Austin who studied the use of language in performative contexts,10 De Saussure who first...
differentiated between language and language use,\textsuperscript{11} and Bourdieu who developed scientific methods in the study of social networks, more specifically in the world of Parisian academia,\textsuperscript{12} and studied the relationship between language and symbolic power, will, hopefully prove to be beneficial also to the study of ‘dead’ societies.\textsuperscript{13}

Having mentioned this broad spectrum of social-scientific methods, it is perhaps necessary to single out already at this stage discourse analysis as the main guiding theory, which is applied throughout the analytical section of this study.

\textit{Limitations and Focuses}

In this particular work, considering the vast source material and the practical limitations which are associated with its study, two restrictions were applied: the first is the emphasis given to the social contexts in which the gatherings described and recorded in their respective proceedings were performed and enacted. The second is quantitative, resulting in my decision to offer a detailed analysis of just three sessions (first, second, and sixth) thus, hopefully, creating a scholarly blueprint for further analysis of the other sessions. Perhaps a convincing illustration of the different emphases which different people have chosen so far to place on the \textit{Acts} is Price’s own catalogue of selected, or important, sessions, with the fifth session, in which the Definition of the Faith was drafted, being the most significant.\textsuperscript{14}

\textit{Discourse Analysis — Theory and Praxis}

The analytical part of this book, which offers a running discussion of a selected number of sessions, is, both in fact and in theory, an exercise in discourse analysis such as can be applied to ancient texts. I have applied this method both intuitively (as we constantly do when hearing a conversation and reading a relevant piece of text) and methodologically, by consulting theorists of the field. This short survey is hardly an exhaustive survey of the field of discourse analysis, which itself is blissfully eclectic and interdisciplinary in nature. Sociolinguists have found ways of going beyond the characteristics of language and venturing into the field of language use in sociological contexts. The works of Austin, De Saussure, Gumperz, Hymes, Labov, O’Barr, Van Dijk, to mention but a few sociolinguists, will be discussed throughout the book with this consider-
ation in mind. Their point is that language use is predominantly, or even exclu-
sively, set in the framework of discourses, both conversational and textual. Be-
fore we proceed to discuss the societal situations which find their attestation in
the proceedings of the Acts of Chalcedon, it is important to conceptualize the
term ‘discourse’ and what we mean by it when we offer a ‘discourse analysis’ of
something we may read or say, or overhear others say.

According to a recent general introduction, ‘Discourse Analysis is the study
of the ways sentences and utterances are put together to make texts and inter-
actions and how those texts and interactions fit into our social world’. When
analysing a conversation or a written text (or an image), we aim at identify-
ning discourse markers which are distributed, for example, by gender, age, class,
and geographical area and which are used to denote, among other things, power,
status, group affinity, social bonding and group identity.

Drawing on Hymes’s simplified model, in practice, what we do when we per-
form discourse analysis is to explore the following set of contextual compo-
nents, namely the setting (time, place, and physical circumstances of the speech
event), participants (the different kinds of participants, including passive by-
standers), ends (purpose, goals, and outcomes of the event), act sequence (the
form the event takes as it unfolds, for example the order of different speech acts,
for example, preaching, lecturing, ordering, apologizing), key (the tone or mood
of the speech event), instrumentalities (the message form or media through
which meaning is made), norms of interaction (common sets of understandings
shared by the participants regarding what they consider appropriate behaviour
and how utterances and actions ought to be understood), and genre (the ‘type’ of
speech event, for example, a sermon, which is recognizable as such by members
of the speech community).

Discourse involves an innumerable range of societal situations but perhaps,
the most evident of all is the exercise of political (but also socio-economic and
personal) power. Thanks to Michel Foucault’s The Archaeology of Knowledge,
to name but one of his relevant works, the notion of the exercise of power in
society has been the subject of numerous scholarly monographs (and a random
glance at the bibliography of this book will testify to the popularity of the sub-
ject). In many crucial respects, this book, too, concentrates on power, though
less on the visual attestations of it (of which we have less evidence) at a church
council attended by the emperor, and more on the refined manipulations of

16 Cf. T. van Dijk, Discourse and Context. A Sociocognitive Approach (repr.; Cambridge,
2009), pp. 177–178.
18 M. Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge and the Discipline on Language (originally
speech and its enactment in real time. Bourdieu’s *Langage et pouvoir symbolique* pertains to the same theoretical framework, and we should also mention here principal works by more recent theorists, all drawing on modern situations, such as Fairclough’s *Language and Power*,19 Van Dijk’s *Discourse and Power*,20 and Chilton’s *Analyzing Political Discourse*.21

Speaking of ‘discourse’, it is hard not to recognize the apparent tension which seems to arise from the fact that ‘discourse’ is a term usually associated with spoken language, whereas we, in this book at least, are exclusively occupied with ‘texts’, which a lay reader usually associates with a written output. En route to solving the problem, Fairclough offers a broadening of the term ‘text’ where ‘a text may be either written or spoken discourse, so that, for example, the words used in a conversation (or their written transcription) constitute a text. In cultural analysis, by contrast, texts do not need to be linguistic at all; any cultural artifact — a picture, a building, a piece of music — can be seen as a text’.22 We see, therefore, that the scope and range of cultural outputs which can be subjected to discourse analysis is enormous.

Finally, an important issue is the interpretative nature of discourse analysis. This can be understood inwardly, in terms of how the speaker, or the object, of our investigation (which, if taking a step backwards, in some cases could be the author of a text, the creator of a piece of art, or a choreographer) and outwardly, namely how we, being the consumers of a written text or a spoken speech, interpret what we read, hear, or see. In this vein, Van Dijk’s recent work focuses mainly on issues of context, in which he explains ‘the function of contexts (and) how they enable and constrain the production and comprehension of text and talk.’23 In a subsequent study, Van Dijk asks (and gives answers to) ‘how text and talk are adapted to their social environment’.24 Following Van Dijk’s theory of context, it would be accurate to describe the nature of the discourse analysis offered in the following section as being the unravelling of the social contexts of the people and characters who took part in the Council of Chalcedon, while at the same time applying our own interpretative mode to find similarities with them, but also to distinguish ourselves from them.

In the light of Goffman’s seemingly broad understanding of ‘ceremonial’, ‘performance’, both conscious and unconscious, and ‘ritual’, I could further define my interests in mapping the manners and methods by which people enact their internalised social codes by linguistic means. Here I refer to people’s ethnography of speaking — a term originally coined by Dell Hymes, and which is further elucidated by Richard Bauman and Joel Sherzer as follows:

The Ethnography of speaking has had a relatively short history as a named field of enquiry. It was first defined in Dell Hymes’ seminal essay of 1962, which drew together themes and perspectives from a range of anthropological, literary, and linguistic scholarship, and brought them to bear on speaking as a theoretically and practically crucial aspect of human social life, missing from both linguistic descriptions and ethnographies, and on ethnography as the means of elucidating the patterns and functions of speaking in societies.

Precisely because of my interest in language use, or in the ethnography of speaking, I have chosen to concentrate in this book not on the ‘theological/doctrinal’ sessions, but rather on those sessions in which the different social dynamics came most to the fore. This is why the opening session and the sixth session, in which the Emperor Marcian made his personal appearance, were given most attention here.

Despite its traditional, ‘historical’ opening, which deals with the factual background surrounding the Council, this study is, again, not about Marcian’s reign. Though this is an extremely important subject in itself, attempting to write a historical account can hardly be rewarding, if only because of the severe lack of historical evidence concerning this particular emperor. Furthermore, this study does not presume to offer a study of the Chalcedonian Acts as such — for which reason I rely on the original research carried out by Schwartz, and its excellent summary by Price and Gaddis. To conclude this negative catalogue, I should stress that this study is only superficially concerned with the theology, or rather theologies, expounded at Chalcedon — a subject

25 See Goffman’s Performatve Consciousness on p. 76 below.
27 R. Bauman and J. Sherzer (ed.), Explorations in the Ethnography of Speaking (Cambridge, 1974), pp. 3–17. Bauman and Sherzer’s volume was important in that it sought to promote the study of the broader function of language in social interaction.
28 For the extant documentation of Marcian’s reign, see discussion starting on p. 50 below.
29 See the sub-sections Documentation of the Council starting on p. 47 below.
which has been discussed in numerous monographs and articles,\textsuperscript{30} written by both secular academics and also—to remind ourselves that the issues raised in Chalcedon still affect the lives of living religious communities—by practising clerics.\textsuperscript{31}

**Verbatim Records**

The proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon are of special interest to us: as they are presented (and perceived) as verbatim narrative accounts (rather than summaries of decisions made), a discourse analysis of these *Acts* and their reading as a real-life piece of theatre staged in several acts forms the basis for this study.\textsuperscript{32} The stress, here represented in the italicized words, is on the intention of the compilers and their agents (i.e. notaries and short-hand scribes employed by patriarchal courts and the imperial court respectively) to produce a verbatim account.\textsuperscript{33} The *Acts* are scattered with remarks made by members of different parties and allegiances to the effect that on occasion, records of what was said in the Council of Ephesus II were not accurate.\textsuperscript{34}


\textsuperscript{31} In some cases the importance of Chalcedon induced authorial biases in one or the other direction, as can be seen, for instance, from the way the famous ‘Canon 28’ has been dealt with.

\textsuperscript{32} The overall lack of spontaneity and the acceptance of the ‘rules of the game’ by all participating parties form an essential part of ceremony and ritual. This statement might go against P. van Nuffelen’s observation that ‘many ceremonies were not staged’. However, focusing on historical anecdotes rather than acts of councils, Van Nuffelen would seem to be referring to occasions of disruption of ceremonies, rather than the ceremonies themselves (see Van Nuffelen, ‘Playing the Ritual Game in Constantinople (379–457)’, in: L. Grig and G. Kelly (ed.), *Two Romes. Rome and Constantinople in Late Antiquity* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 183–200).

\textsuperscript{33} A similar distinction made in modern anthropological studies between real-life speech and the evidence of written documents is discussed by D. Parkin as follows: ‘The first thing to say about Bailey’s analysis is that it is intentionally based on chunks of real-life speech set in a social context but on three prepared, written texts distributed by different Indian pre-independence political parties’ (*idem*, ‘The Rhetoric of Responsibility’, in: Bloch (ed.), *Political Language*, pp. 113–139, esp. p. 114).

\textsuperscript{34} See, for example, Session I.52–64.
By way of drawing a simple analogy, these and similar protests regarding the recording of the proceedings of the previous council may teach us about the level of accuracy expected in respect of the documentation of the proceedings of the Council of Chalcedon and their presumed verbatim character. Of course, the process of their compilation was far from being detached from the different agendas which were at play. Evidence of attempted and actual manipulation has been noted and discussed, among others, by Fergus Millar,35 and by Price and Gaddis.36 However, the scholars mentioned here all understand recorded quarrels and disagreements over accuracy as proof of the overall auditory context, in which the proceedings were recorded and circulated.

Price and Gaddis distinguish between different levels of presumed accuracy, depending on the immediate context in which the editorial work was carried out. However, they, too, affirm the overall verbatim character of the proceedings as follows:

Scrupulous and verbatim documentation was expected for such quasi-judicial proceedings when a bishop or his conduct was put on trial, where all parties would demand assurance that proper procedures had been followed. But a different imperative governed the treatment of discussions of faith or the drafting of canons, where the authority of the final product carried an implication of ecclesiastical unanimity that might be undermined by an excess of attention given to debates and disagreements.37

In a private correspondence, Fergus Millar even goes so far as to lament the shortcomings of ancient historians who refuse to acknowledge the value of a rich historical ‘source’ on the few occasions when such a ‘source’ presents itself (italics and brackets are his):

On Chalcedon (and other Acta) what we can say is that they were circulated as verbatim reports of what was said, including angry exchanges. Of course no system of short-hand recording is perfect, and there is evidence of deliberate malpractice. In spite of all qualifications, the intention was to quote people’s interventions verbatim (and not just what they said or the overall conclusions of each session) — and (very important) the Acta of Ephesus II, however, disputed, were available at Chalcedon two years later. To ask for something more perfect than an absolutely contemporary, widely circulated, verbatim report of what was indeed a real-life drama is to be completely unrealistic. If that is not good enough, ancient historians may as well pack up and go home.

35 Millar, Greek Roman Empire, Appendix A, pp. 235–247