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The Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance

Devotion and Iconography

Edited by
José María Salvador-González

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Editor

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About the Editor

José María Salvador-González

José María Salvador-González is a Professor at the Complutense University of Madrid. His publications are in Mariology and religious studies. He holds twenty degrees from Rome, Paris, Louvain, Caracas and Madrid universities. He has five PhDs: in Aesthetics and Art Sciences, Université Panthéon-Sorbonne, Paris I (1981); in Social Sciences, Universidad Central de Venezuela (2002); in Art History (2007); in Sciences of Religions (2018); and in Philosophy (2022). The last three were obtained from the Complutense University of Madrid. He is the Director of the journal De Medio Aevo and the CAPIRE Research Group.

Preface to "The Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: Devotion and Iconography"

As its main scope, this reprint investigates some of the many ways in which Christianity venerated and performed the Virgin Mary in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Our motivations for writing this scientific work derive from the conviction that there is still much to rigorously document the various issues related to the Virgin Mary in the period under study. We believe that this book is a good response to this motivation. The reprint is especially addressed to scholars and researchers in religious issues, Christianity, Marian studies, medieval and Renaissance art and culture, as well as to everyone interested in the development of the societies and cultures of medieval and Renaissance Europe. The reprint, written by fifteen researchers in various areas of the Arts and Humanities, consists of two parts. In the first one, "Medieval and Renaissance Marian Iconography", seven papers deal with several iconographic manifestations by which Christians made their devotion to Mary visible in pictorial or sculptural forms. The second part, "Medieval and Renaissance Marian Devotion", six papers analyze some ways through which Christians rendered worship and devotion to the Virgin Mary during this long period. We take the opportunity to sincerely thank the managers and technicians of the Editorial Office of Religions for their valuable help in the difficult task of improving the content and form of each paper incorporated in this reprint.

José María Salvador-González
Editor

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Article

Living Images and Marian Devotion: Words, Gestures, and Gazes

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Abstract: This article examines the living images of the Virgin through the illustration of one of the most important collections of miracles of the 13th century, *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame* by Gautier de Coinci. In this case, I will focus my attention on manuscript 551 of Besançon (Besançon, BM, MS 551), which, although it has many flaws in its manufacture, offers an interesting presentation of living images. The study of these miniatures reflects the importance of devotion, the set of gestures, words, and gazes, in the medieval spectator's experience of Marian images. At a time when these images' legitimacy as sacred objects was still being debated, the artists in this manuscript show their power without censorship, presenting them as if they were the Virgin herself.

Keywords: Marian miracles; Gautier de Coinci; Illuminated Manuscripts; miraculous images; medieval visual culture

1. Introduction

> In so many places the Mother of God works so many miracles and wonders that the whole world marvels at them[1].

Cult images in the Middle Ages, especially those of a miraculous nature, have occupied an important part of Visual Culture Studies over the last two decades. In the first centuries of the Middle Ages, Christian intellectuals rejected their sacred character, giving them a didactic function (Chazelle 1990, 1995; Schmitt 2002, pp. 63–95; Wirth 2001). However, the very evolution of liturgy and devotion meant that this role acquired other nuances, such as stimulating spiritual contemplation and recalling the most important events in Sacred History (Jung 2010; Kessler 2006b; Palazzo 2010). This circumstance, which did not limit individual experience, meant that the boundaries with veneration became increasingly blurred, and, with the recovery of Byzantine postulates from the 12th century onwards, Western authors gradually constructed a discourse that legitimized their position as sacred objects (Boulnois 2008, pp. 237–42; Kessler 2006a). It would be in the following century when the semantics and ontology of the images were equated, and, under the protection of the new frameworks of thought, it was recognized that the *virtus sancta*, the divine power, could work miracles through them (García Avilés 2010; Sansterre 2009b).

Apart from theoretical debates, attention has also been paid to other types of sources, further away from intellectual debates, which focus on the devotion they aroused in the viewer. In this field, the most illuminating cases are the stories about images that prove to have miraculous qualities (Belting 2009, pp. 407–9; Freedberg 2009, pp. 123–25; Sansterre 2013). In contrast to the previous debates, here we do not find so many discrepancies; quite the contrary, that power makes them objects of worship from an early date (Chazelle 2005; Sansterre 1998, 2020, pp. 21–35). Comparing the development of both discourses, theological and devotional, we see that they run parallel to each other until the 13th century, when they finally converge. This is largely due to the fact that the two positions have a point in common, the miracle (Brown 1989, p. 329; Ward 1982).

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Within this large group we also find differences. The images of the Crucified are the first to appear as miraculous (Horn Fuglesang 2004; Palazzo 1992; Sansterre 2005, 2009a), even before the year 1000 and the resurgence of monumental sculpture, while the Marian images appear mainly during the 12th century (Gold 1985; Marks 2004; Russo 1996; Sansterre 2006). This discrepancy is due to the construction of the character of the Virgin and the development of her cult. Although her image was already present in the liturgical context, given that she symbolized the Incarnation, the increase in the number of accounts is due to the consolidation of her role as mediator, which had been crystallizing since the 11th century (Clayton 1990, p. 77; Fulton 2002, pp. 218–21; Oakes 2008; Rubin 2009a, p. 27). This role made her more independent from her strictly maternal condition, which was reflected in the rise of Marian pilgrimage centers and the writing of the first collections of miracles (Albert-Llorca 2002; Bayo 2004; Fuchs 2006, p. 69; Rubin 2009a, pp. 185–87; Signori 1996). Although the latter were intended as a compilation, they were the seed of the works that would first appear in the 13th century and which would be considered a literary genre in their own right (Montoya Martínez 1981). These new compilations would no longer be written in Latin but in vernacular, would have a defined internal structure, and would be intended to honor the Virgin and to teach readers about her cult and that of her images (Sansterre 2010; Murcia Nicolás 2016, pp. 22–27).

Among these works, the Benedictine Gautier de Coinci's *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame*, written before 1236, stands out. The final version, which went through several stages of redaction (Okubo 2005), consists of two volumes with an identical table of contents: it begins with a prologue, where the author makes his motivation clear, followed by a group of songs, and continues with the narration of the miracles in verse and several lyrical compositions (Ducrot-Granderye 1932, p. 169; Grossel 2001). In addition, and to further highlight their sobering character, he ends each story with a reflection for the reader which, although it is a moral drawn from the events narrated, ultimately emphasizes the role of the Virgin as an all-powerful mediator (Benoit 2007; Grossel 2005; Montoya Martínez 1979). *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame* was widely distributed if we consider the number of manuscripts preserved, more than fifteen with the complete version of the text, many of which are also illustrated (Duys et al. 2006). This particularity makes this corpus ideal for the study of miraculous images, since both the textual and the visual aspects come together.

In the second half of the 13th century, six examples are illustrated, three of which are linked to the same workshop located in the Soissons area, two two the Paris region, and a sixth possibly made in the southern half of France (Stones 2006a). The latter, preserved in the Besançon Library, is the most controversial. While the rest are finished, which has allowed for a more extensive study of their codicological and iconographic features and even the establishment of relationships with other later copies, the Besançon manuscript 551 is incomplete, only has the miniatures of the first part, and contains many errors and lacunae in its text. When we analyze its possible production process, we find two teams with different qualities: the first, present in the first notebooks, is far superior to the second, as its miniatures are much more complex and elaborate (Stones 2006b, pp. 93–95; Murcia Nicolás 2013, 2014). It is plausible to think that it was commissioned as a luxurious manuscript, but, for reasons unknown to us, its quality declined and it was never finished. The lack of documentation, coupled with its uneven manufacturing process, has led to its dating being disputed and revised. At first it was catalogued as an example made in the first decades of the 14th century, but later, according to codicological criteria, it was placed, with reservations, between the 1260s and the 1270s (Stones 2015, p. 163; Russakoff 2019, p. 124). Despite its dubious chronology and its heterogeneous artistic quality, it is the manuscript with the most illustrations in the whole corpus. The other copies contain around eighty, whereas this has 136 finished illustrations, a number that more than doubles (over 300) if we take into account those that were projected.

In addition to this important number, which gives it a much superior visual narrative, there is the particular representation of the miraculous images (Murcia Nicolás 2012; Russakoff 2004). In the rest of the corpus, from the second half of the thirteenth century, we

find standards of representation that show iconographically the importance of the image in Marian miracles, either as mediators of the event or as sacred objects. However, in the case of those that come to life, the presentations are somewhat disparate (Murcia Nicolás 2016, p. 60). In some cases, there is an omission of the living character, possibly because of the misgivings that this attribution could still arouse (Camille 2000, p. 252). In contrast, in the Besançon manuscript 551, these images are shown uncensored and are even included without any textual reference. Until now, this subject has always been approached as a whole, comparing the different manuscripts and establishing the relationship between written and visual culture (Murcia Nicolás 2016, 2017, 2020; Russakoff 2019).

This manuscript is of particular interest because it allows us to study the new visual culture of the 13th century regarding these Marian images. Its miniatures are a reflection not only of Gautier de Coinci's text but also of the importance that devotional practices had acquired. The examples analysed demonstrate the sacred character of the image, which works miracles through the words, gestures, or looks addressed to it. Although the two illustrators of manuscript 551 have different styles, the idea they capture in their miniatures is the same: the living character is the maximum expression of the power of the image, which is amplified by the mediating and close character of the Virgin.

2. Love and Hate: The Power of Words

In the prologue to the second volume, Gautier de Coinci encourages his fellow ecclesiastics to devote all their love to the Virgin, since she is superior to any lady in the pastoral tales. This declaration, typical of courtly love, is present in a group of stories where the protagonist is admonished for not keeping a promise of a loving nature (Baum 1919). One of the best known, the so-called "miracle of the bridegroom", is about a young man who is betrothed to a statue of the Virgin, to whom he gives a ring as proof of his love. What is relevant in the text is his declaration, marvelling at the beauty of the image:

> One day they were playing ball in front of the doorway of a church, where there was a seated image (. . .) He looked at the image, which was new and fresh. When he saw its beauty, he knelt down in front of it, and devoutly bowed down and greeted it. In a short time, his will is transformed. "Madam," he says, "I will serve you from now on all my life, for I have never seen a young woman so beautiful and seductive in my eyes. You are a hundred thousand times more beautiful and lovely than the one who gave me this ring. I had given her my heart, but because of my love for you, I want to leave her with her affection and her jewels. I want to give you this beautiful ring for my sincere love, and I promise never to have any other friend or woman than you, sweet and beautiful lady". The ring he wears, he puts it on the finger of the image and, quickly, the statue closes it so tightly that no one could remove it without cutting it off[2].

As if it were a wedding ritual, the young man puts on the ring to sign his promise, which he later breaks, provoking the Virgin's anger at his infidelity:

> "You have acted neither correctly nor legally towards me," she says, "You have discredited yourself in front of me. Here is your friend's ring, which you gave me for your sincere love. You said I was a hundred thousand times more beautiful and seductive than any other young woman. You would have had in me a faithful friend if you had not forsaken me. You have left the rose for the nettle, the rose hip for the elder. You wretch! You are so credulous that you leave the fruit for the ear, the lamprey for the seven-eyed, for poison and gall you leave the sweet honeycomb and honey". The clergyman, stupefied by the vision, awoke with a heavy heart. He thought he would find the statue beside him[3].

Apart from the fact that we find a story from the classical world Christianized to become an example of renunciation and abstinence, the importance of the protagonist's declaration (Smith 2006, p. 168) is noteworthy. It is his words that provoke the response of the image, which closes its finger to preserve the proof of the love professed. In the

miniature in manuscript 551 we see the young man kneeling while the image extends his hand for him to place the ring on it (Figure 1). The illustrator has removed the references to the architectural context, since it is a statue placed in the doorway of a church, to make it an intimate and private scene. He has also stripped her of her status as an object, presenting her on the same level, face to face, with her admirer. Gautier de Coinci makes her share in the beauty of her model, the Virgin, and makes it clear that the words addressed to the former are as valid as if they were addressed to the latter in person (Rubin 2009b, p. 231; Sansterre 2010, p. 155). The same message is conveyed by the illustration, which, beyond showing the living character, humanizes the statue.

Figure 1. The young man betrothed to a statue. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fols. 43r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

Another miracle that demonstrates the power of the word as a trigger is that of the desecrated icon. A Jew visits the house of a Christian who has an image of the Virgin. The antagonist, who later ends up throwing it into a latrine, questions the veracity of its sacredness, clearly expressing his repulsion:

> Near him there was an alcove, and he looked and noticed an icon that displayed a small image that looked like Our Lady. "Tell me", he said, "by your soul, who is this image of?" "She is" the Christian replied, "of the Virgin, who is so pure, clean, and innocent, that the Lord of all people took on human form in her loins". The blood of the Jew boiled while speaking to him. "Do you venerate" he said, "Him whom we choose not to name? One should indeed beat you or tear your heart apart like a cow! You could just as well venerate an old pillar or a beam and bow before it and adore it as you do him of whom you speak to me. Fi!" said the dog [i.e., the Jew] "Too great is the shame, too great the outrage, too great is the affliction, that any man believes that the great God was born of this image of the Virgin Mary. There are no churches or even chapels, where there are not six or seven of these images. Such great shame should never happen!"[4].

The Jew profanes the image twice. The first occurs when he refutes the legitimacy of the image and the second when he rejects Mary's motherhood. His words will be punished accordingly, his tongue torn out and he himself led away by a group of demons:

> The Mother of God, who was in this image, did not want to suffer from this great outrage. Cruelly and quickly, she paid him back, because she struck him with a

> piece of wood covered in mud. The Jew's tongue flew out of him. The Jew's soul and body taken all at once by evil spirits[5].

Gautier de Coinci explicitly cites the presence of the Virgin in his image, although the interpretation of who executes the punishment is doubtful. The illustration in manuscript 551 deviates from the usual depiction, focusing on profanation, to show retaliation (Murcia Nicolás 2016, pp. 59–60; Russakoff 2019, p. 37). However, the choice of illustrator is surprising (Figure 2). First, it is the image that pushes the Jew, but, more relevantly, it is how he represents it. Even though the title alludes to the term *yconia*, he opts for a sculptural representation. It seems clear that he wants to show the living character of the image, despite the dubious textual reference, and for this purpose the three-dimensional format is more suitable. Although in the Western tradition such images are mainly sculptural (Palazzo 2020, p. 114; Sansterre 2020, pp. 270–71), the illustrator has modified the interpretation to include an animated effigy.

Figure 2. The Marian image insulted. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fols. 32r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

The two stories are based on different assumptions. The first responds to an idealization of the Virgin as a lady of courtly love, while the second demonstrates the transfer of an act associated especially with the Crucified, profanation, to other Christian representations (Bacci 2005, pp. 32–34; Sansterre 2013, p. 81; Schmitt 1998). However, they share a common element. The declaration made before the image has the same value as if it were made before the Virgin herself. The popularization of these stories of living images is instigated by the belief that the divine, the *virtus sancta*, can activate them and make them adopt human attitudes (Freedberg 2009, p. 339; García Avilés 2007; Vauchez 1999). From the end of the twelfth century, but especially in the thirteenth century, miracles gave greater independence to the Virgin, with her image, and not that of her son, coming to life (Barnay 1999, pp. 39–41; Fulton 2002, p. 218; Sansterre 2020, p. 274). This shift is mainly due to

two factors, the humanization of the sacred, which transforms Mary into a character close to human experience, and the development of private devotion towards closer spheres (Camille 2000, p. 243; Murcia Nicolás 2020). In this context, prayer becomes more emotional, to provoke greater proximity between the faithful and the sacred personage, and the image becomes the main addressee, as it is able to show the invisible in the visible world (García Avilés 2010; Kessler 2007; Palazzo 2010; Sansterre 2013). The final message is that words spoken in front of an image are heard and considered. That real presence is what we see in these two miniatures from manuscript 551: the Virgin responds through her animated effigy, either to claim a promise of love or to punish a declaration of hatred.

3. Honoring and Greeting: The Value of the Gesture

Gautier de Coinci makes numerous references to the importance of honoring images throughout the text (Murcia Nicolás 2016, p. 27; Sansterre 2010). This act consists of kneeling and saluting, after which, in gratitude, the Virgin acts in favor of the protagonist, using her image if necessary. In this sense, it tells the story of a nun who tries to flee from the convent to escape with her lover, an attempt that is thwarted on two occasions by the statue that presides over the chapel:

> As night falls on the community, the damsel discreetly leaves the dormitory. On the right she found the chapel dedicated to Our Lady, which she quickly entered. Her heart pounding, and as she used to do, she knelt in front of her image, which she humbly greeted. She got up quickly and went to the door, but the image that was inert, without delay, stood in the doorway with its arms crossed. It was so large that the young woman could not pass (. . .) The nun could not sleep, she got up from her bed and went to the chapel, for there was no other way out. Very humbly she knelt as she passed the altar and did with the image what she had done the first time. She is shocked when She sees her again at the door, blocking her way. She stretches out her arms in front of her face, as if to say, "Dear friend, you shall not pass this way"[6].

As in the miracle of the bridegroom, here the Virgin acts as the guarantor of abstinence and guardian of feminine virtues (Drzewicka 1985; Garnier 1985), preventing the nun from fleeing just after kneeling in front of her image. Genuflection is a gesture associated with the worship of images from before the year 1000 (Sansterre 2020, pp. 60–61), but those representing the Virgin would become more prominent from the 12th century onwards, thanks to the Marian sanctuaries (Sansterre 2010, pp. 56–58; Sansterre and Henriet 2009, pp. 64–65; Turner and Turner 1978, p. 171). In these centers, the image, seen as Mary's intermediary and capable of working her wonders, became the focus of prayers and greetings (Freedberg 2009, p. 119; Henriet 2006, p. 243). This type of devotional practice was legitimized by the revaluation of Byzantine ideas, in particular the concept of *transitus*. The fundamental basis of the cult of icons, it dictated that "the honor given to the image is received by its sacred prototype", so that images were not worshipped, but venerated to honor the personage they represented (Kessler 2006a, p. 155; Schmitt 2002, p. 90).

Throughout the 13th century there were misgivings about accepting that images could be venerated as sacred objects, but part of the theoretical discourse assumed the assumptions inherited from the work of John Damascene. One of the best-known examples is Thomas Aquinas' statement concerning the image of Christ:

> Therefore, we have to say that no veneration is to be paid to the image of Christ as an object, whether in carved or painted wood, because only the rational creature can be venerated. We show veneration only for what it represents. The same honor is to be paid to the image of Christ as to Christ Himself. Thus, since the cult of *latreia* is due to Christ, it is logical to do the same to his image[7].

The scenario set out by the Dominican saint also takes us back to the consequences of the Fourth Lateran Council. The Dogma of Transubstantiation, which recognized the presence of Christ in the Eucharistic substances, appears here applied to images, establishing

for them the same honor that is paid to their model (García Avilés 2010, p. 35). Gautier de Coinci does not reflect on these questions, but he does include the same conclusions in a devotional context (Murcia Nicolás 2016, p. 25). The inclusion of genuflection appears as a trigger for the miraculous event in the story of the nun. It is this gesture that makes it possible for the image to come to life to prevent her from fleeing, thus creating a cause-effect relationship, which we see in the miniature of this miracle (Figure 3). The illustrator chooses to embody the model in his own representation, like that seen in the example of the young man with the ring. The juxtaposition of the two scenes not only indicates that the Virgin was present, animating her statue, but also that the gestures of veneration are not in vain, as she receives them and acts accordingly.

Figure 3. The nun who escapes from the convent. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 80r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

Another aspect that helps us to understand these signs of devotion is the evolution that the Virgin undergoes. The Lateran synod also promoted her human motherhood, even above the spiritual (Bynum 2011, pp. 135–49; Gauthier 1993). Although her figure had always been linked to the incarnation of Christ, her images would become more realistic to show the bond with her son in a more empathetic and close way (Trotzig 2004). In manuscript 551 we find several miracles, the first miniature of which depicts the protagonist in front of a statue of the Virgin: the story of the noble woman of Rome (Figure 4), the pregnant abbess (Figure 5), and that of the monk with the five roses (Figure 6). In these depictions the altar motif has been removed, and the image becomes an almost animated figure. It is revealing not only its sacred character (García Avilés 2007, p. 325; Wirth 1991, p. 161) but also its mediating role in the devotional context, that of achieving a closer and more accessible experience (Camille 2000, p. 243; Sansterre 2010, p. 165).

Figure 4. The noble woman of Rome. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 35r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

Figure 5. The pregnant abbess. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 41r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

Figure 6. The monk with the five roses. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 46r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

4. Seeing Is Believing: The Importance of the Gaze

One characteristic of Marian miracles is their universality: anyone can benefit from the Virgin's intervention, whatever their social status, sex, or creed (Cazelles 1978; Switten 2006). Thus, Gautier de Coinci records two miracles of conversion, that of the Jewish child and that of the Saracen. According to the account, the former attends the celebration of the Eucharist, where he contemplates an image of the Virgin:

> On the altar stood a beautifully carved image, its head covered with a mantle and with a child on its lap. The little Jew, when he stood before it, looked at it with attention, for he had found it very beautiful and gentle. In his heart he felt that he had never seen anything like it. It also seems to him that, instead of the priest, the image approaches him; it takes the host consecrated by the priest from the altar and makes him receive communion so sweetly that his whole heart overflows with joy[8].

The father, on learning of his son's habits, punishes him by throwing him into an oven, but he escapes unharmed thanks to the protection provided by Mary's mantle. In this case, the image allows him to identify the sacred model and then to provoke his conversion (Ahsmann 1930, pp. 92–96; Cuche 2012; Sansterre 2010, p. 163). The miniature at the head of the story depicts neither the punishment nor the salvation of the protagonist, but the moment when the statue gives him communion (Figure 7), which is unusual in the rest of the corpus (Murcia Nicolás 2012, pp. 179–80). This scene captures the vision in which he first contemplates her beauty and then "sees" how it is she, and not the priest, who gives him the consecrated host. The living image materializes the Virgin's function as the officiant of the Eucharist, an analogy based on the postulates of Bernard of Clairvaux (Angheben 2016, p. 166). She, as the personification of the Church, also shows true faith to the Jewish child through the animation of her statue. The real presence of the model allows the image to guide the vision towards the spiritual and the understanding of that which is invisible (Kessler 2021, p. 127). In contrast to idols, Christian representations stand as reliable proof of true faith and instruments of conversion (Geagea 1991; Roggema 2003; Russakoff 2019, p. 33). This anagogical process, based on contemplation, is also described in the Saracen story:

According to my books and my texts, a Saracen has an image with a representation of the Virgin Mary. I am not able to tell you, by my soul, neither where he found it, nor from where it came to him, but he held it very dearly, and kept it very carefully. The icon was painted richly with very rich colors. The Saracen held this icon in great reverence, and because it was so lovely and beautiful, he had gotten used to praying to it with great ardor: he adored it a least once a day on his knees with his hands joined (. . .) Thus, as God wanted, a day came that he came before this image. He looked at it for a very long time, and greatly in his mind wondered with astonishment if it could be true that this was the Mother of The Heavenly King, she whose image this was (. . .) While he was thinking in this way in the meantime and was reflecting in his mind, all at once from his image he saw two breasts appear and project, which were so glorious and so beautiful, so small and so perfectly made, as if just then they had been pulled out from the chest of a girl. As if from a fountain, he saw clear oil flow and come out of it. The Mother of God, the merciful, made this miracle happen, to extract him from his impiety, for he had much honoured and long protected her image[9].

Figure 7. The Jewish child. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 31v. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

The description equates the beauty of the Virgin with that of her image, which is manifested when she is incarnated in her to bring about conversion (Sansterre 2010, pp. 161–62; Smith 2006). Thus, in the miniature, we see the image standing with her tunic open, showing her breast (Russakoff 2019, p. 31). As we have noted in the history of the desecrated icon, the illustrator represents a statue and not a painted image (Figure 8). This choice was made because the sculptural format favored a closer approach by the faithful (Bynum 2011, p. 70; Jung 2010, p. 215), but also because the miraculous transformation of the material is a way of moving the Saracen, who ends up becoming a Christian.

Figure 8. The conversion of Saracen. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 58r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

These conversion stories focus on the gaze as the trigger for miraculous animation, in a contemplative context that, while beginning with a sensual appreciation, ends in a spiritual vision. This phenomenon was linked to the affective component that images, especially the Crucified One, could arouse (Sansterre 1998; Palazzo 2010; Schmitt 1994). However, the prominence given to the maternal and protective character of the Virgin means that these qualities are reflected in her depictions, which are described as beautiful and gentle (Oakes 2008; Rubin 2009b; Saxon 2006). In both miniatures, the living image is an agent of conversion which, beyond showing the relationship with its model, mediates the vision

towards an essential component of devotion: to believe, it is necessary to be able to see (Camille 1985; Hahn 2006).

5. The Devotee in Front of the Living Image

The examples examined so far are related to the text, despite the liberties taken by the illustrators to show the miraculous power of the images. However, at the beginning of the manuscript we find an exceptional illustration, which accompanies the prologue to the first book in the collection. In a historiated initial, Gautier de Coinci kneels in front of a living image of the Virgin (Figure 9). We have no textual support, since, throughout the prologue, the author explains the motivations for his work, from his interest in instructing potential readers to extolling Mary's qualities as a mediator (Benoit 2007; Montoya Martínez 1979). This living image therefore has no context; it has been freely added by the illustrator, who interprets Gautier de Coinci's fervor with devotion to Marian images.

Figure 9. Gautier de Coinci in front of a living image. Gautier de Coinci, *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Besançon, BM, MS 551, fol. 1r. Photo: Bibliothèque Municipale de Besançon.

His composition includes all the assumptions mentioned above. Firstly, the author is kneeling in front of an altar, a practice that he himself encourages in his accounts and which connects us with the idea of Byzantine transit (García Avilés 2007; Murcia Nicolás 2012, 2017). This gesture within a scene of private devotion refers us to the new liturgical connotations in which, like the Eucharistic substances, sculptures were the most frequently animated objects, an activation intended to produce a specific spiritual effect on the spectator (Palazzo 2020, pp. 116–18). This transformation is reinforced by the presence of the nimbus crowning the image. However, Gautier de Coinci not only kneels, he also prays, "Mother of God, have mercy", which is inscribed on the cartouche he holds in his hands. These visible words are in turn taken up by the image because prayer is a direct and

effective means of communication, rising from the faithful to the object of their devotion (Debiais 2017). Finally, we have the gaze, which not only contemplates how the image has come to life but also Christ in the heavenly sphere, which opens in the upper corner. The material component of the sacred image acts in the first instance by making the invisible visible, and then leads the gaze to its spiritual counterpart (Kessler 2021, pp. 148–49).

This miniature has a double interpretation. Firstly, the illustrator shows the value of the devotion given to Marian images and how these gestures, words, and gazes can activate them to come to life. Their relationship with the person they represent makes the Virgin respond by animating her statue, which touches Gautier de Coinci's mouth as a sign of gratitude. Secondly, however, the living image appears here as a link in two directions: on the one hand, it allows for the manifestation of Mary in the earthly world, and on the other, it is an ascending path for the devotee, who, after contemplating the prodigy worked by the *virtus sancta*, can contemplate and understand the divine. If the Virgin was placed as the closest mediator to Christ, the animated statue in this miniature exemplifies how Marian representations had assumed the qualities of their model.

6. Conclusions

The set of miniatures examined reflects the importance that the image had acquired in devotional and religious experience. The legitimization of its sacred character and the acceptance of its miraculous qualities generated a new visual culture, intended to show the close union they had with their model. In the case of the Virgin, her miracles become an extensive display of the roles they had acquired, as in Les Miracles de Nostre Dame. Gautier de Coinci stresses both Mary's mediating power and the need to honor her images through gestures, greetings, offerings, and prayers. His work, which is widely distributed, also shows us the new visual culture and all the iconographic resources forged around images as objects of worship, mediators, or agents of the miraculous.

Of the copies produced in the 13th century, the Besançon manuscript 551 is the most innovative in its representations. Despite the problems of its chronology and the flaws in its production, its illustrators explicitly depicted the qualities of the Marian images. In fact, it is the codex with the most living images in the entire corpus. Although some of them have a textual reference, the moments chosen from the narrative demonstrate the illustrators' interest in showing this virtue and no other. Thus, in the miracle of the desecrated icon, they interpret that it is the image and not the Virgin which punishes the Jew, and, furthermore, they opt for a sculptural format, more plausible to the reader's eyes. Moreover, the living attitudes appear for multiple reasons, from a young man's promise of love, the genuflection and greeting of a nun, to the gaze of a Jewish child. All these devotional practices are brought together in the first miniature of the manuscript, which corresponds to the prologue, where Gautier de Coinci kneels and says a prayer to the image he contemplates on an altar, which comes to life as a sign of gratitude, while above them the celestial sphere is contemplated.

In Les Miracles de Nostre Dame, the Virgin is present and materialized in her image, breaking the strict relationship between the model and her effigy and equating herself with her own representation—an idea that is not only narrated but also shown. The perception that matter could be modified by divine action and the Virgin's own close nature encouraged a vision of her images which, under the protection of the miracle, ended up becoming substitutes for their model. Examples such as manuscript 551 demonstrate the impact that conceptions of the sacred image had, but also set a precedent in medieval imaginary. As Michael Camille noted, "the collection of Gautier de Coinci, the most popular of the Marian miracles, although it takes up earlier Latin accounts, had a fundamental use in the new visual culture of the 13th century" (Camille 2000, p. 243).

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Notes

1 Car en tant liuz fait la Dieu mere tant myracle et tante merveille touz li mondes s'en esmerville. I Pr 1, 54–56. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 1: 4.

2 Un jor jooit une grant flote de clerçonciaus a la pelote devant les portaus de l'eglyse ou cele ymage estoit assise (. . .) Quequ'il pensoit en son corage, regardez s'est, se voit l'ymage, qui toute estoit freche et novele. Quant l'a veüe si tres bele, devant li s'est agenoilliez; devotement a ielz moilliez l'a enclinee et saluee. En peu de tans li fu muee la volontés de son corage. "Dame, fait il, tout mon aage d'or en avant te servirai, car onques mais ne remirai Dame, meschine ne pucele qui tant me fust plaisans et bele. Tu iez plus bele et plus plaisans que cele n'est cent mile tans qui cest anel m'avoit doné. Je li avoie abandoné tot mon corgae et tot mon cuer, mais por t'amor veil jeter puer li et s'amor et ses joialz. Cest anel ci, qui mout est biaus, te veil doner par fine amor par tel convent que ja nul jor n'arai mais amie ne fame se toit non, bele douce dame". L'anel qu'il tint bouta luez droit ou doit l'ymage, qu'ot tot droit. L'ymage tost isnelement ploia son doit si durement nus hom ne l'en poïst retraire s'il ne vossit l'anel desfaire. I Mir 21, 19–22, 33–634. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 2: 198–99.

3 "Ce n'est mie, fait ele, drois ne loiautez que tu me fais; laidement t'iez vers moi mesfais. Vois ci l'anel a ta meschine, que me donas par amor fine et se disoiez que cent tans ere plus bele et plus plaisanz que pucele que tu seüsses. Loial amie en moi eüsses se ne m'eüssez deguerpie. La rose laisses por l'ortie et l'aiglentier por le seüz. Chetiz! Tu iez si deceüs que le fruit laissez por la fuelle, la lamproie por la suetuelle; por le venim et por le fiel laissez la ree et le doz miel" Li clers, qui mout s'esmervilla de l'avisïon, s'esvilla. Esbahis est en son corage. Lez lui cuide trover l'ymage. I Mir 21, 116–136. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 2: 201–2.

4 Pres de lui en une fenestre garda et vit une tavlete ou painte avoit une ymagete a la samblance Nostre Dame. "Di moi, fait il, di moi, par t'ame, ceste ymage de cui est ele?" "Ele est, fait il, de la pucele qui tant fu pure, nete et monde que li sires de tot le monde humanité prist en ses flans". Au gïu boli toz li sans quant ul oï parler de li. "Aeures tu, fait il, celi que ne daignome nes nomer? On te devroit voir assomer ou acorer com une vache! Un viez piler ou une estache tout ausi bien puez honorer et encliner et aourer comme celi dont tu me contes. Fi! Fait li chienz, trop est grant hontes, trop grans viltance, trop grans diex quant nus hom croit que li gran Diex fust nez de cele marïole. Il en est mais tex carïole n'i a mostier ne mosteret ou il n'en ait ou sis ou set. Ains mais si grant honte n'avint!". I Mir 13, 16–43. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 2: 102.

5 La mere Dieu, cui fu l'ymage, ne volt souffrir ce grant outrage. Cruelment et tost li meri, car paissïons luez le feri, se li sailli la langue fors. L'ame enporterent et le cors tout maintenent li anemi. I Mir 13, 47–53. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 2: 103.

6 Quant vient la nuit de l'assamblee, fors del dortoir s'en est emblee mout coiement la damoisele. Droit par mi outre une chappele de Nostre Dame estoit sa voie. Ses dras escorce, si s'avoie vers la chappele isnelement. Batant sa coupe doucement ensi com l'avoit en usage, s'agenoille devant l'ymage. Quant humelement l'a salüee, isnelement s'est relevee. A l'uis en vient et passer cuide, mais l'ymage son estal wide, a l'uis en vient, plus n'i atent, ses bras en crois devant li tent. Grant piece i est ne se remuet si que cele passe ne puet (. . .) Et la nonne ne dormi mie, mais dou dortoir s'en ravala, vers la chappele droit ala, car n'i avoit nule autre voie. Mout humelement ses genolz ploie quant ele vint devant l'autel, et l'ymage refist autel com ele eut fait premierement. Esbahie est mout durement quant emmi l'uis revoit l'ymage, qui li devee le passage. Ses bras estent devant son vis si qu'il li samble et est avis que dire doie: "Bele amie, par ci ne passeras tu mie". I Mir 43, 93–100, 148–162. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 3: 194–97.

7 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Pt. III, Q. 25, a. 3–4.

8 Une ymage eut desor l'autel qui mout estoit de bele taille, deseur son chief une toaille, un enfançon en son devant. Li giuetiaus, quant vint devant, la regarda par grant entente, car mout li sambla bele et gente. Ses cuers bien li dist et revele qu'ainc mais ne vit chose tant bele. Avis li est en son corage qu'en liu del prestre vient l'ymage; desuer l'autel prise a l'oblee que li prestres avoit sacree; si doucement l'en commenie que toz li cuers l'en rasassie. I Mir 12, 20–34. Gautier de Coinci. *Miracles de Nostre Dame*. Koenig, vol. 2: 95–96.

9 Ce dist mes livres et ma page c'uns sarrasins ot une ymage a la samblance Nostre Dame. A dire ne vos sai, par m'ame, ou la trova ne dont li vint, mais en mout grant chierté la tint et mout la garda netement. De riches colors richement painte estoit en une tavlete. Li sarrasinz cele ymagete avoit en mout grant reverence et aüssez s'estoi en ce, por ce que tant ert bele et gente, que chascun jor par fine rente l'aoroit une fois au mains a genolz et a jointes mains (. . .) Si com Diex volt, un jor avint que devant cele ymage vint. Mout longuement l'a regardee et durement en sa pensse se merveille se voirs puet estre que mere fust au roi celeste cele dont estoit cele ymage (. . .) Quesque penssoit en tel maniere, une eure avant et autre arriere, et devisoit en son corage, tot maintenant de cele ymage voit naistre et sordre deus mameles si glorïeuses et si beles, si petites et si bien faites con se luez droit les eüst traites fors de son saim une pucele. Ausi com d'une fontenele cler oile en voit sordre et venir. Cest myracle fist

avenir la mere Dieu, la debonaire, por lui de mescreance traire, car il avoit mout honoree s'ymage et longuement gardee. I Mir 32, 3–18, 25–31, 55–70. Gautier de Coinci. Miracles de Nostre Dame. Koenig, vol. 3: 23–25.

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Article

The Nursing Madonna in the Middle Ages: An Interdisciplinary Study

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Abstract: Because of the transgression of the first woman Eve, all medieval women bore the punishment, including the biological consequences related to pregnancy and birth. This affected the entire female gender, according to Judeo-Christian tradition. Although Mary was able to avoid some biological consequences, this was not the case with breastfeeding. This work aims to study sacred images—and especially those of the Nursing Mary—from an interdisciplinary point of view, by delving into rather unconventional sources such as medical treatises, whose perception of the female body may have influenced the creation and reception of certain iconographic types of the Virgin.

Keywords: Nursing Madonna; Madonna of Humility; Eve; Mary; breastfeeding; virginity; redemption

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1. Introduction

In antiquity and early Judaism, women were considered inferior to men: a woman was an imperfect man. Indeed, according to Galen (130–210) her organs were inside-out (Noga 2007, p. 18). These ideas were transferred with nuances to the Christian world, which borrowed the negative burden associated with the figure of Eve from Jewish tradition and placed Eve's guilt on the entire female gender. As the instigator, the first woman was held completely responsible for the Fall (Gn 3), despite Adam's necessary participation. As a result, humanity was marked by the original sin, which only baptism could erase. Women were especially stigmatized, with one exception: Mary, the future Mother of God.

Despite the Church's secular vacillations, which did not proclaim Mary to be free of the original sin until 1854, the Virgin's Immaculate Conception was resolutely defended by numerous ecclesiastical authorities, since it was unthinkable that the womb that received the Savior might not have been clean. They based their thinking on the text from the Old Testament narrating the Fall: "So the Lord God said to the snake: '[. . .] You and this woman will hate each other; your descendants and hers will always be enemies. One of hers will strike you on the head, and you will strike him on the heel"[1] (Gn 3:14–15). Biblical exegesis saw the mother of Christ in the woman who was to crush the serpent's head, by which it was inferred that Mary was in God's plans and had been conceived in his mind from the beginning of time (Doménech García 2014, p. 70), so that she was exempt from the original sin and its consequences, as we shall see. In the opinion of the Church Fathers, the Virgin's humble acceptance of being the mother of the Son of God (Lk 1:26–38) marks the beginning of the history of redemption (Melero Moneo 2002–2003, p. 125; Doménech García 2014, p. 70).

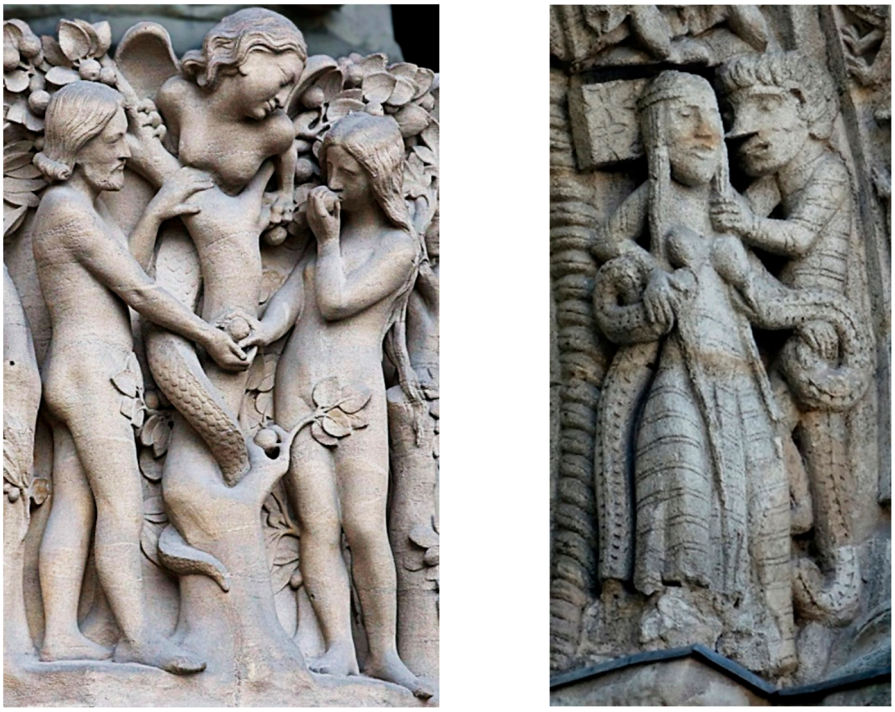
However, during the early years of the Church, testimonies again emerged against women due to Eve, who was not only considered to be a sinner, but also guilty of all the afflictions that struck humankind. Furthermore, in the seventh century, Saint Isidore of Seville emphasized the malign nature of the female body:

> These are also called "womanish things" (*muliebria*), for the woman is the only menstruating animal. If touched by the blood of the menses, crops cease to sprout, unfermented wine turns sour, plants wither, trees lose their fruit, iron is corrupted by rust, bronze turns black. If dogs eat any of it, they are made wild with rabies.

> The glue of pitch, which is dissolved neither by iron not water, when polluted with this blood spontaneously disperses[2]. (Isid. orig. XI, 140–41; Barney et al. 2006, p. 240)

Isidore's ideas pervaded thought for centuries, so that in the thirteenth century, Albertus Magnus (*De secretis mulierum*, chap. I, comm. B) affirmed that during menstruation women were an instrument of the devil that corrupted all within their reach. As a result, women themselves were considered diabolical (Melero Moneo 2002–2003, p. 113). Occasionally, the serpent from Paradise was represented with female breasts, which hints at the evil character of femininity (Figure 1a).

In this article, I will examine sacred images of the Virgin lactating to investigate to what extent the extra religious knowledge and beliefs associated with breastfeeding may have influenced the public's view of these works. For this, we cannot ignore the fact that painful childbirth, and everything associated with motherhood, were seen by Christian society as a punishment for original sin; therefore, the sections below are dedicated to the dichotomy between Eve and Mary. In the case of Mary, however, her particular circumstance as the virgin mother of the Son of God, which is unattainable for other women, implies that the interpretation of those images in the light of the aforementioned sources reinforce aspects of Mary, such as her virginity—which contradicts her motherhood—or her redeeming condition.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 1. (**a**) *Adam and Eve, Portal of the Virgin*, 1210–1220, Paris, Notre Dame Cathedral; (**b**) *Punishment for Lust*, late 11th cent.-early 12th cent., Bordeaux, Church of the Holy Cross.

1.1. Objectives of the Study

This study takes an interdisciplinary approach. After establishing a visual context for the argument, that is, the consideration of women and female visuality in Judeo-Christian culture, the main aim is to provide a new vision of late medieval Marian imagery, especially that of the Virgin breastfeeding Christ. To do this, I will draw on sources of a medical or social nature, not exclusively those that are religious or theological. As we shall see, the images of the Lactating Madonna—and especially the Virgin of Humility—could paradoxically point to Mary's virginity, rather than to her divine maternity. On the

other hand, Mary's motherhood, according to what doctors believed about the anatomy of pregnant women, could have given her a Eucharistic nature. As we will see later, the medieval belief that the body of a child was formed from the blood of the mother, implied that the blood of Christ was the same as that of his mother and, therefore, Mary's blood could also be considered Eucharistic.

Thanks to those two prerogatives of being a mother while remaining a virgin and being the Mother of God, together with the as yet undeclared dogma of her immaculate conception, some images show Mary as redeemer of Eve and all women: the redemption of Eve thanks to Mary had already become manifest in the early Middle Ages—for example, in the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* (8:9–9:3) from the 6th century, as we shall see later. However, its visual representations are more recent. Some of them date back to the 11th and 12th centuries in, respectively, Germany (Figure 2) and France (Figure 3). Meanwhile, the Trecentro and Quattrocento Italian images are especially explicit, including Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Maestà*, made ca. 1336, in Montesiepi Chapel (San Galgano); Paolo di Giovanni Fei's *Nursing Madonna* of ca. 1385–1390 (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art); Paolo di Giovanni's *Nursing Madonna*, made after 1370 (San Marino, private, collection); and Carlo da Camerino's *Madonna of Humility*, made ca. 1400 (Cleveland Museum of Art, Figure 4a).

Ultimately, this study considers these images in a new light, by applying the conclusions of studies on breastfeeding and the use of nurses at the end of the Middle Ages, as well as the advice of medical or moral treatises to the interpretation of the images of the *Virgo Lactans*.

Figure 2. *Maria Regina*, *Gospels of Bernward*, 11th cent., Hildesheim, cathedral treasury, Ms. 18, fo. 17.

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 3. (**a**) *Original Sin* and (**b**) *Annunciation*, the Miègeville doorway, early 12th cent., Toulouse, Basilica of Saint-Sernin.

1.2. Brief State of Research

Medical and moral treatises, sociological studies on motherhood and the use of wet nurses, and some recent articles on the *Virgo Lactans* and the Virgin of Humility inform the current study. These set the stage for the contraposition of Eve-Mary and, above all, the study of sacred images from the perspective set out above, which will lead to new conclusions about, curiously, Mary's virginity and her role in the redemption of humanity. This is where the reader will find the greatest contribution of this work.

In terms of the influence of medical "knowledge" on iconic representations, the publications by Giménez Tejero (2016), González Hernando (2010) and Moral de Calatrava (2008) stand out, while Phillips (2018), Alfonso Cabrera (2013) and Holmes (1997) have carried out specific studies on the imagery of breasts or breastfeeding. These authors work in different parts of Europe, and therefore draw on different regional and national collections. This has allowed me to make generalizations across Western European images.

However, Williamson (1996, 2009) remains the point of reference in studies on the iconographic types of the *Madonna Lactans* and the Virgin of Humility, as well as on the relationship between Eve and Mary (Williamson 1998). Sperling (2013, 2018a, 2018b, 2021), Rivera (2016), Arroñada (2008) and Bergmann (2002) have studied the use of wet nurses; however, scholars have not reached agreement on the consideration of breastfeeding and the hiring of wet nurses in the Middle Ages. Moreover, as we will see later, painted images have contributed to this confusion. Finally, Castiñeyra Fernández (2017) and Martínez-Burgos García (2002) have written about humanist sources, while Ramón i Ferrer (2021) and Gregori Bou (2016a, 2016b) have explored late medieval (Valencian) sources.

2. Motherhood as a Punishment for the Original Sin

Motherhood and all that it entails (sex, painful birth, breastfeeding) was presented as a consequence of the original sin. The medical treatises and social habits, which I will detail below and with which I intend to provide a new perspective of sacred images, were themselves entangled with Christian dogma as regards maternity and breastfeeding, especially regarding Mary.

The so-called curse of Eve, which affected all women, had other well-known, denigrating consequences: "Then the LORD said to the woman, 'You will suffer terribly when you give birth. But you will still desire your husband, and he will rule over you'"[3] (Gn 3:16). Thus, the punishment for having let herself be deceived by the serpent while also tempting her husband is tripled.

Lastly, God mentions woman's submission to man, which as we have seen, is not exclusive to Christian societies. Backed by Genesis, Saint Paul (1 Co. 11:3) insisted on female inferiority and the need for women to have men as their guardians. Later, Tertullian (160–220)

spoke of the need for women to purify themselves through weeping, penitence and mourning because they were natural sinners (Martínez-Burgos García 2002, pp. 214–15):

> If there dwelt upon earth a faith as great as is the reward of faith which is expected in the heavens, no one of you at all, best beloved sisters, from the time that she had first "known the Lord," and learned (the truth) concerning her own (that is, woman's) condition, would have desired too gladsome (not to say too ostentatious) a style of dress; so as not rather to go about in humble garb, and rather to affect meanness of appearance, walking about as Eve mourning and repentant, in order that by every garb of penitence she might the more fully expiate that which she derives from Eve,—the ignominy, I mean, of the first sin, and the odium (attaching to her as the cause) of human perdition[4]. (TERT. cult. fem. I, 1, l. 1; CPL, 11)

The second consequence ("you will still desire your husband") is also striking, since it is considered a condemnation that a wife should feel attracted to her husband. Hence, all women have been considered temptresses by nature. In fact, the lust[5] with which God punished Eve (Bergmann 2002, p. 93; Melero Moneo 2002–2003, p. 115) was one of the seven deadly sins and the visual representation of its corresponding punishment was usually a woman whose breasts and pudenda are being attacked by snakes and other reptiles (Figure 1b). So, it was not sexuality itself that the Church condemned, but the libido, or the fact that the act of sex had to be accompanied by pleasure (Giménez Tejero 2016, p. 56), which was a necessary evil to ensure the continuity of the species.

Eve was to take responsibility for this continuity with the first consequence of her sin ("You will suffer terribly when you give birth"), since she was condemned to give birth with pain and all that this entails, as we shall see below. On the other hand, the birth by the Mother of God was free from suffering, since she had also conceived without pleasure. Thus, proclaimed the saint deacon Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373): "Your womb escaped from the pangs of the curse./By the serpent the pains of the female entered./Let the defiled one be put to shame, seeing that his pangs were not in your womb" (*Hymns on Virgnity*, 24, 11; McVey and Meyendorf 1989, p. 368). Saint Augustine (396–430) also affirmed this, as did Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274):

> Augustine says (Serm. de Nativ.), addressing himself to the Virgin-Mother: "In conceiving thou wast all pure, in giving birth thou wast without pain." (. . .) as Augustine says (Serm. de Assumpt. B. Virg.), from this sentence we must exclude the Virgin-Mother of God; who, "because she conceived Christ without the defilement of sin, and without the stain of sexual mingling, therefore did she bring Him forth without pain, without violation of her virginal integrity, without detriment to the purity of her maidenhood."[6]. (*Summa Theologica*, Part III, Question 35, Article 6)

As for the consequences of the original sin, Mary had to be exempt from them since her conception had been ab initio as we have seen, and thus completely immaculate with no carnal lust involved (Boto Varela 2002–2003, p. 77). On the other hand, the births by the Virgin's cousin, Elisabeth, and mother, Anne, would have been different. In some images, both women are holding their hand over their belly and/or leaning on midwives for support (*Nativity of the Virgin*, early 14th century, monastery of Studenica, Serbia) (González Hernando 2010, pp. 94–95). However, John Damascene believed Anne miraculously gave birth, because she did not suffer the pains of childbirth (Io. *D. Homilia in nativitatem B. V. Mariae*, 1–2; Salvador González 2009, p. 9).

There were consequences of Eve's curse that the Virgin could not avoid, and which were intimately bound to maternity, such as pregnancy—and even menstruation? Another was breastfeeding, which by itself could have acquired negative connotations. Recent studies on breastfeeding and raising children have taken into consideration the custom of hiring wet nurses, as we shall see below. Comparing images of Eve and Mary reveals some of the complexities that underlay breastfeeding. Therefore, the following section addresses

the visual representation of the typological relationship between Eve and Mary, especially the Nursing Madonna.

3. The (Nursing) Madonna as the New Eve

There was a typological relationship established in the visual representation of the Late Middle Ages between Eve and Mary. I will focus especially on images that contrast Eve with the Nursing Madonna, which could indicate a relationship of breastfeeding with the original sin; for example, the Virgin feeds the redeemer as Eve had done with Adam.

The correspondence between Eve and Mary had existed in the early centuries, but only in extracanonical gospels and theological writings, not in religious imagery (Schiller 1980, p. 81). In the *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* from the 6th century[7], Eve, who has been rehabilitated from her sin, witnesses Mary giving birth, symbolically uniting the two moments:

> Joseph looked far away and saw a woman coming from a distance (. . .) And as the two went together, Joseph asked her on the way and said: "Woman, tell me your name that I may know who you are." The woman said: "Why are you asking me? I am Eve, the foremother of all, and I have come to behold with my own eyes the redemption that is wrought on my behalf." (. . .) they boved down and fell prostrate, and raising their voices they blessed God saying: "Blessed are you, Lord God of Israel, who today wrought salvation to the children of men by your coming." (Eve added): "And you restored me from that fall and established (me) in my former glory. (. . .) And the foremother entered the cave and took the infant into her lap, hugged him tenderly and kissed him and blessed God. (. . .) When the foremother came out of that cave, she suddenly met a woman who was coming from the city of Jerusalem whose name was Salome." The foremother approached her and said to her: "I bring you recent good news: a virgin who had never known a man gave birth to a male child.". (8:9–9:3; Terian 2008, pp. 43–45)

Likewise, Severian (4th cent.) interprets Gabriel's greeting to Mary as a revelation of the "whole economy of Christ" in which Eve's salvation is revealed while Mary becomes the "advocate" for her sex (Beattie 2002, pp. 167–69). Mary's acceptance, in contrast to Eve's disobedience, led to her designation as the new Eve in the 12th century, since the Incarnation of Christ occurred because of her sacrifice, thanks to which the original sin was redeemed. We can find iconic representations of this idea in that century. The Miègeville doorway (early 12th cent.) of the Basilica of Saint-Sernin of Toulouse, for example, is flanked by capitals with the *Annunciation* on the left and the *Fall of Humanity* on the right (Figure 3). Even before, the enthroned image of *Maria Regina* in the manuscript of the *Gospels of Bernward* is flanked by the busts of Eve and Mary (Figure 2). The typological correspondence of the two women is thus established, with Eve as Mary's type, while Mary is Eve's antitype. The woman from the Old Testament acts as a figure or precedent of the Mother of God.

However, the visualization of the theological contrast between the two female figures began to converge in the 14th century. The images showing the semi-naked effigy of Eve at the feet of the Nursing Madonna are particularly noteworthy (Figure 4a). In some cases (*Nursing Madonna*, Paolo di Giovanni, after 1370, San Marino, private collection; *Nursing Madonna*, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, c. 1385–1390, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; *Madonna of Humility*, Carlo da Camerino, c. 1400, Cleveland Museum of Art, Figure 4a) Eve is holding the fruit she fed Adam, in contrast to the food that Mary gives Christ: her own milk.

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 4. (**a**) *Madonna of Humility*, Carlo da Camerino, c. 1400, Cleveland Museum of Art; (**b**) *Virgin of Humility with Saints* (detail), Giovanni da Bologna, 1381–1383, Venice, Galleria dell'Accademia.

The *Virgo Lactans* (*Galaktotrophousa* in Byzantine art) type became very popular in the Late Middle Ages[8], given that it also refers to the Incarnation of the Son of God and hence recalls the origin of his human nature. On emphasizing the humanity of the Infant, a more compassionate image of God was given, since it was hoped that, unlike the prior period, his mercy would overcome his ire at crucial moments for humanity such as in the Last Judgment. In the Gospels, we can find the primary sources for the iconographic type of the Nursing Madonna ("And it came about that when he said these things, a certain woman among the people said in a loud voice, Happy is the body which gave you birth, and the breasts from which you took milk"[9], Lk 11:27), though the more explicit ones are apocryphal or extracanonical: "Zelomi said to Mary: Allow me to touch thee. And when she had permitted her to make an examination, the midwife cried out with a loud voice, and said: [. . .] It has never been heard or thought of, that any one should have her breasts full of milk, and that the birth of a son should show his mother to be a virgin" (*Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew*, 13:3)[10] (Figure 5).

Figure 5. *Nativity of Christ*, Guillaume de Digulleville, *Pèlerinage de Jésus-Christ*, 1393, Paris, BnF, French 823, fo. 182.

In the West, examples of the *Virgo Lactans* were rare until the 13th century, when devotion to Mary had become fully established. The success of this iconographical type is mainly explained by the spirituality of the era, fed by texts such as *Meditationes Vitae Christi* (1220–1310), which called for a more intimate relationship from worshippers with Christ and the latter with the Virgin, always for the purpose of providing a more humane aspect of God, and thus a more compassionate one: "How readily she nursed Him, feeling a great and unknown sweetness in nursing this child, such as could never be felt by other women!" (chp. X; Miles 1986, p. 203; Blaya Estrada 1995, p. 168).

The contrast between Eve and the Virgin, though not a new subject, pivots around the importance of Mary's virginity, motherhood, and breastfeeding. These differences are contrasted in the relationship between the two women and will lead to the redemption of the former. However, not only do we find images of the Nursing Madonna in the iconographic type of the *Virgo Lactans*, but also in the images of the Madonna of Humility, which became widespread between the 14th and 15th centuries, as we will see in the next section.

4. Breastfeeding in Sacred Images

Since the subject of our study is sacred images of breastfeeding, and above all those of Mary, we cannot fail to mention the iconographic type of the Virgin of Humility, because most images of this type show Mary breastfeeding the Infant. In the painting by Carlo da Camerino (Figure 4a), she is even represented as the antitype of Eve, who is also holding the fruit and is accompanied by the serpent. By considering this image alongside medical sources about breastfeeding, one can better understand the Nursing Madonna imagery. Could their creation and reception by devotees have been influenced in some way by extra-religious issues such as medieval knowledge of the female anatomy?

4.1. The Virgin of Humility: Another Iconographical Type of the Nursing Madonna

In case the visualization of the divine suckling may not sufficiently show that the Son of God has become flesh, many of these images include a reference to the episode of the Annunciation. Sometimes the full iconographic type is shown, with the figures of Archangel Gabriel and the Virgin (Figure 4b)[11]; in others, there are just some attributes such as the lilies or, if we can consider him as such, the Archangel Gabriel (Figure 4a). In the *Madonna of Humility* by Silvestro dei Gherarducci (after 1350, Florence, Galleria dell'Accademia), a book recalls Mary reading and being interrupted by the angelical greeting, and the christomorphic God sends the Holy Ghost, as in the images of the Annunciation/Incarnation.

The Incarnation occurred, as mentioned above, due to Mary's positive willingness. The humility shown by Mary in accepting being the mother of Christ would explain the name given to the iconographic type: the Virgin of Humility. That title would not be related to the fact that Mary is directly seated on the ground or that there is evidence of her poverty[12], but to the written and visual references to the Annunciation found in many of the images of the Virgin of Humility (Mocholí Martínez and Montesinos Castañeda 2021; Mocholí Martínez 2019). Another possible interpretation is based on Mary's humble act of breastfeeding her child (Sperling 2018b, p. 889), in addition to her mother doing the same[13]. Unlike Mary, religious sources (the apocryphal gospels) offer some information about Anne's breastfeeding. These references should be taken into account, along with the other visual, medical and social sources, which we will discuss later, to consider the connotation of breastfeeding in the Middle Ages.

4.2. Breastfeeding in Religious Sources

According to medieval believe, Anne also fed her daughter, at least for most of the time, without resorting to wet nurses, since "when the days were fulfilled, Anne purified herself and suckled the child and called her by the name of Mary" (*Book of James*, 5:2) or "when the child was three days old, the midwife was ordered to bathe her and to put the bandage gently; and she was presented to her (mother), and she gave the breast to the child, to be nursed with milk" (*Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 2:8; Terian 2008, p. 11). Still in the Jewish environment of the Middles Ages (as can be read in *Les infortunes de Dinah: Le livre de la generation*, 13th and 14th centuries, Southern France), it was believed that the mother's milk would be of poor quality, especially in the first days after childbirth (Alfonso Cabrera 2016, p. 31). This was an ancient and widespread belief in the Christian society, too, as we shall see later. In any case, they all agree that Anne breastfed Mary: "when the circle of three years had rolled round, and the time of her weaning was fulfilled, they brought the Virgin to the temple of the Lord with offerings" (*Gospel of the Nativity of Mary*, 6:1) (Alfonso Cabrera 2013, pp. 189–90).

However, the images, which should support the benefits of maternal breastfeeding (Alfonso Cabrera 2013, p. 190) do not always correspond to the sources: the representation of Anne breastfeeding the Virgin is not common; it is even rarer immediately after birth, as we can surmise in an image in which Anne, with an uncovered breast, is about to receive her daughter in her arms (Figure 6a). On the other hand, there are images showing Mary being fed from the breast of another woman (Figure 6b), which logically occurred before "the days were fulfilled" (*Book of James*, 5:2). This hesitation in medieval visuality evidences the debate around mercenary breastfeeding as opposed to biological breastfeeding[14].

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 6. (**a**) *Birth of the Virgin*, altarpiece of the church of San Juan Bautista, Master of Velilla de Jiloca, c. 1430–60, Velilla de Jiloca, Zaragoza (Spain); (**b**) *Birth of the Virgin*, altarpiece of the church of Santa Maria la Mayor, Fernando Gallego, c. 1485, Trujillo, Extremadura (Spain).

In any case, the breastfeeding could have been considered an act of humility and charity, based on the negative consideration the action may have acquired, as a result of Eve's curse. Breastfeeding studies (Williamson 2009, pp. 132–47; Bergmann 2002) conducted in different parts of Europe suggested that the widespread use of nurses by aristocratic mothers—but also by other women, even the humblest ones—might be due to the belief that breastfeeding was demeaning. The reason could be, as explained, that breastfeeding was a consequence of the original sin, on being associated with the painful childbirth with which Eve was punished. Although this may not have been the reason for the significant demand for nurses, it is not to be excluded that breastfeeding was considered an act of humility; that is how we should interpret the central panel of Antoni Peris' *Altarpiece of the Nursing Madonna* (Figure 7a), where Mary is the nurse of Christ and of all believers in Christ: Mary's milk, apart from feeding her Son, also goes to a crowded group of faithful, who are trying to collect it in different receptacles, as they are accustomed to doing with the blood of Christ in representations of the mystical winepress. In this image, the Mother of God as *Mater omnium* is also the *Nutrix omnium*, the channel through which the waters of grace reach us (Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, *De aquaeducto*; PL CLXXXIII), since God wants us to receive everything through Mary[15].

(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 7. (**a**) *Altarpiece of Nursing Madonna* (detail), Antoni Peris, 1404–1423, Valencia, Museo de Be-llas Artes; (**b**) *Madonna of Humility*, Llorenç Saragossa, 1363–1374, Barcelona, Fundació Francisco Godia.

4.3. Breastfeeding in Medical Sources: Lactation and Chastity

On the contrary, it has been put forward that breastfeeding would not have been considered a humiliating or undignified act and that resorting to wet nurses would have been motivated by medical and social reasons (González Hernando 2010, p. 106). Since antiquity, medical tradition had perpetuated the belief that it was safer to resort to wet nurses, at least during the first twenty-one days of the child's life. On the one hand, it was thought that in the weeks following birth the maternal milk was not good. The Greek physician Soranus of Ephesus warned in the 2nd century of the danger posed by colostrum for the newborn, since it was "thick, too cheese-like, and therefore hard to digest" (*Gynaecology*, 2.18). On the other hand, resorting to wet nurses avoided using up the nutritional qualities of the milk due to successive births and breastfeeding by the mother (Rivera 2016, pp. 21–22).

It was also believed that sexual relations and pregnancies influenced the quality of the milk, as affirmed by Soranus of Ephesus and by doctors and philosophers, the Persian Avicenna (c. 980–1037) and the Jew Maimonides (1135–1204) (Phillips 2018, p. 13; Rivera 2016, p. 25; Bergmann 2002, p. 94), so it was preferable to avoid them during lactation. Hence, breastfeeding acquired positive connotations because it was associated with sexual chastity and even purity in the case of the Virgin[16], but impregnation was believed to have an effect upon the breasts, so that large, loose breasts signaled sexual experience and "did not meet the contemporary cultural requirements for an erotic female image" (Miles 1986, p. 203). Phillips considers that "images of the Virgin Mary nursing Jesus employ several tactics for resolving problems of how to depict breasts that are at once virginal and lactating [. . .]": only one bare breast is displayed, while the covered breast remains flat; on the other hand, Mary's virginal status is shown by her bare neck, flowing hair and youthful face (Phillips 2018, p. 8).

In the case of the iconographic type of the Virgin of Humility, Mary's connection with the earth, seated on soil with wild plants, as we can see in many of the images (Figure 4b),

could refer to metaphors of her virginal status (Mocholí Martínez 2019), such as in the example of St. Bernard:

> Christ, then, may be symbolized both as a bee and as the flower springing from the rod. And, as we know, the rod is the Virgin Mother of God. This flower, the Son of the Virgin, is "white and ruddy, chosen out of thousands." It is the flower on which the angels desire to look, the flower whose perfume shall revive the dead, the flower, as He Himself declares, of the field, not of the garden. This flower grew and flourished in the field independent of all human culture; unsown by the hand of man, untilled by the spade, or fattened by moisture. So did the womb of Mary blossom. As a rich pasture it brought forth the flower of eternal beauty, whose freshness shall never fade nor see corruption, whose glory is to everlasting. O sublime virgin rod, that raisest thy holy head aloft, even to Him Who sitteth on the throne, even to the Lord of Majesty! And this is not wonderful, for thou hast planted thy roots deeply in the soil of humility. O truly celestial plant, than which none more precious, none more holy! (*Sermones de Tempore. In Adventu Domini. Sermo II*, 4; PL 183, 42; Bernard of Clairvaux 1909, pp. 17–18)[17]

Elsewhere, St. Bonaventure forges a metaphor, whereby Mary is defined as "*terra ista, in qua homo non est operates* [land not worked by man]" (Saint Bonaventure, *De Annuntiatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III*).

Naturally, only the upper classes could afford wet nurses who lived with them, ensuring their abstinence and even exclusivity, and for them to comply with certain requisites: they should not have given birth recently nor be pregnant (Holmes 1997, p. 188), since the milk would become watery or even be harmful to the nursing child. The milk was of greater quality if the wet nurse had had several children, she should be free of illnesses and alterations in skin color, have well-developed breasts and be beautiful; otherwise, the child could develop a bad character or develop an illness involving seizures (Arroñada 2008; Alfonso Cabrera 2013, p. 197).

Due to the difficulty in finding a suitable wet nurse, such workers were held in high esteem, as represented in an Italian sculpture (*Wet Nurse*, Mariano d'Agnolo Romanelli, last quarter of the 14th cent., Florence, Museo del Bargello). In Castile they were covered by a special protection: anybody who seriously wounded a woman's breast was severely punished, with the legislation recognizing that maternal milk was vital for the child during their first two years of life (Bergmann 2002, p. 91). This period could last even longer: Soranus of Ephesus had prolonged the period of lactation, advising it until even after three years of age (Hernández Gamboa 2008–2009, p. 3)[18].

The use of a full-time wet nurse as of the 1st century was a sign of wealth and social status. It also had aesthetic implications, since it avoided wearing out the mothers. Given Mary's humble condition, the Mother of God could not have permitted herself such a luxury. Perhaps that is why, in order to counterbalance her apparent simplicity shown by the act of breastfeeding the Infant, many images of the Madonna of Humility are shown with a crown, especially in Aragon (Figure 7b), but also in Italy (Mocholí Martínez and Montesinos Castañeda 2021, p. 13).

But female liberation from their maternal functions was due to the predominance of their conjugal and nobiliary obligations, in the case of noble wives. The sexual abstinence required of mothers during lactation (Rivera 2016, pp. 24–25) was incompatible with the reproductive demands of the economic and social elites. Women had to provide their husbands with descendants to ensure their lineage (Holmes 1997, pp. 187–88), not to mention their sexual satisfaction, since it was positively accepted that masculine impulses were irrepressible. Rodrigo Sánchez de Arévalo (*De arte, disciplina et modo aliendi et erudiendi filios, pueros et juvenes* [*Treatise on technique, method and manner of raising children and youths*], 1453) privileged the reproductive role of upper-class women (Rivera 2016, pp. 17, 25; Bergmann 2002, pp. 93–94), since the value of lineage in the Middle Ages was more important than the value of family.

> [. . .] the mother, in the child she engenders, puts only part of her blood, from which the male's virtue, shaping it, makes flesh and bones. The wet nurse that raises the child also provides the same, since milk is blood, and in that blood the same virtue from the father, who lives in the son, makes the same creation. But the difference is this: the mother provided her flow for nine months, and the wet nurse for twenty-four; and the mother did so during birth when the child was a trunk with no feelings at all, but the wet nurse did so when the child begins to feel and recognize the good he or she receives; the mother influences the body, the wet nurse the soul. Thus, taking proper stock, the wet nurse is the mother, and the one that gave birth to the child is worse than a stepmother, since she alienates the child from herself and makes a bastard of one that was born legitimately, and is the reason one who could have been noble is born badly; and in a way she commits a kind of adultery, a little less ugly and no less harmful than the ordinary kind. Because in one case the woman sells the husband a child that is not his; and in the other one that is not hers, making the successor the son of the wet nurse and of the lass, who is more often than not a villain or slave (345)[19].

By the early modern period, Fray Luis de León (*La perfecta casada* [*The Perfect Wife*], Salamanca, 1584), on the contrary was recommending that nobles' wives should give birth to few children and breastfeed them with their milk to make them good, since it was believed that maternal lactation not only continued the child's physical formation, but also infused the mother's virtues into the children's souls (Castiñeyra Fernández 2017). In addition, by doing so the descendants' legitimacy and nobility was protected, since mothers who did not raise their children turned them into bastards and villains. It was believed that wet nurses who were villains or slaves[20] corrupted children's good natural conditions (*Antonio de Nebrija, Tratado sobre la educación de los hijos* [*Treatise on the education of sons and daughters*], 1509), whereas wet nurses nourished them through the period of lactation —twenty-four months, generally—they had only received nourishment from their mother for nine months during pregnancy.

Moreover, following the ancient tradition, it was said that mothers who did not breastfeed were incomplete or "half-mothers" (Rivera 2016, pp. 13, 14, 17, 21; Villa Prieto 2011–2012; Bergmann 2002, pp. 92, 95, 97; Arroñada 2007, pp. 17–18). In the case of Mary, as Mother of God, the link between lactation and lineage would have made it unthinkable to resort to wet nurses (González Hernando 2010, p. 107). A shift occurred in the 16th century, when it became advisable for mothers to breastfeed their own children. Together with moralizing literature, it would be Renaissance humanism that established the family model that lasted until the early modern period.

But, returning to the Middle Ages, medical sources have provided information that allows us to delve into certain Marian identities, such as her condition as co-redeemer.

5. Milk as Eucharistic Fluid

In this section, we return to medieval beliefs about the anatomy of women to study how this "knowledge" could have affected the Virgin's mediating condition, and especially her Eucharistic character. The divine maternity of Mary supports her nature as intercessor and even as co-redeemer, always in accordance with Christian dogma. This means that Mary is the most effective advocate before Christ because she is his mother. Indeed, it has been said that, during the Late Middle Ages, the Virgin's participation in the act of salvation was beyond her role as intercessor, because it was at the same level as that of Christ himself, to the point of being considered a co-redeemer of humanity (Mateo Gómez 2001; Domínguez Rodríguez 1998; von Simson 1953). Based on these beliefs, one can even establish three levels of mediation, according to the degree of her participation in the history of salvation.

First of all, as has been mentioned, Mary's acquiescence after the announcement by the Archangel Gabriel lends this evangelical episode special significance in the redeeming story of Christ. That is why the Virgin can be considered a passive mediator simply because

she gave birth to the Son of God. That is, Mary would have been the means by which Christ acquires the human condition. Secondly, her condition as the Mother of God makes her an extremely effective intercessor. In some iconographic types, in order to get something from her son Mary reminds him that she is his mother and that she nursed him. Further, in numerous images, the Virgin shows Christ the breasts that fed him in order to move her Son to compassion (*Scala Salutis*[21], epitaph for the Pecori family, attributed to Lorenzo Monaco, before 1402, from Florence, New York, The Cloisters). No other intercessor can make those same arguments. Moreover, the situations in which Mary may get to intervene are very diverse: for one or several devotees or for an entire population; at the time of death or faced with imminent danger such as an epidemic; with the devil himself; and even for humanity as a whole, in the apocalyptic context of the Last Judgment.

Lastly, Mary's mediation and co-redemption may also be based on the medical treatises on female anatomy and the changes occurring in the female body before and after giving birth. These texts of a "scientific" nature could be interpreted from the perspective of the Eucharist, such that they become sources analyzing the medieval religious visual repertoire. It was believed that during pregnancy the child's body was formed with the mother's blood and, after birth, it rose to the breasts to become milk to feed the newborn (Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiae*, c. 560–636; Arib Ibn Sa'id, 10th cent.; Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et Curae*, mid-12th cent.; Physici, *Anatomia magistri*, second half of 12th cent.) (Phillips 2018, p. 13; Giménez Tejero 2016, p. 49; Rivera 2016, p. 18; Alfonso Cabrera 2013, pp. 194, 197; González Hernando 2010, p. 107).

Based on this, it was concluded that Mary had not only enabled the redemption of humanity on engendering, giving birth to and breastfeeding Christ, but she also continued participating in her Son's work of salvation every time that wine was consecrated in the sacrament of the Eucharist. This became the blood of Christ (transubstantiation, established as dogma in 1215 in the 4th Council of the Lateran) which was Mary's own blood, thus acquiring an equally Eucharistic worthiness. Given that the Son of God had received the body from his mother, Mary was also the source and origin of Christ's Eucharistic body. The consecration of the bread and wine, which by transubstantiation becomes his body and blood, actualizes Christ's sacrifice on the cross, by which he redeemed humanity from sin. In this way, with Mary sharing the Eucharistic sacrifice with her Son[22], through consanguinity, her status as co-redeemer is reinforced.

The equivalence between the milk of Mary and the blood of Christ had been revealed before. Abbot Aelred of Rievaulx (1109–1167) exhorted the monks to have crucifixes in their cells so that Christ could "delight them with his embraces and offer them the milk of sweetness from his naked breast" (Sperling 2018b, p. 874), while Heinrich Suso (c. 1295–1366) wrote about visions of suckling from Christ's wounds (Sperling 2015, pp. 64–65). According to Sperling, between the Late Middle Ages and the early Modern Age, this equivalence is visually expressed, for example in images by Gossaert, in "a gender-bending manner by alternating between showcasing the Virgin's and the Christ child's engorged breasts and nipples" (Sperling 2015, p. 67).

Iconographic types concerned with the Incarnation of Christ can be associated with the transubstantiation of bread into the body of Christ. Some of these may be the Annunciation or the Nativity (Williamson 2004, p. 351), but especially the nursing Virgin. Based on the biological suppositions described above, Beth Williamson interprets the *Nursing Madonna* by Paolo di Giovanni Fei (Figure 8) as a Eucharistic symbol. The odd position of Mary's breast in an image of accentuated naturalism must necessarily bear some meaning. Holmes argues that the 14th-century Italian images of the Nursing Madonna showed one of Mary's bare breasts as deformed or in an anatomically incorrect place, to reduce their erotic appeal and increase the symbolic one[23] (Holmes 1997, pp. 175–78). Williamson, on the other hand, compares it to a chalice: with the breast's cup-like shape, it is to be understood that Mary's milk would end up turning into Christ's Eucharistic blood, thus consecrated in a chalice (1996, pp. 195–232).

Figure 8. *Nursing Madonna*, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, c. 1385–1390, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

As opposed to Eve, Mary distributes the Eucharist in the other species: bread; Eve, who is still the temptress, does the same with apples in an image of the Tree of Death and Life (Figure 9). Just as Eve is the mother of humanity, which was stained by the original sin because of her actions, Mary is the "Mother of the Eucharist," as Jean Gerson calls her (Miles 1986, p. 201). Both kinds of food, the body of Christ and the fruit that allowed sin to be introduced, spring from the same tree. A crucifix, that is, Jesus sacramentalized, hangs from it. But the perception of the figure of Eve had begun to change long before.

It is also worth mentioning the representations belonging to the iconographic type for the Dream of the Virgin, such as the one by Simone dei Crocefissi (c. 1365–1380, National Gallery in London). Emphasizing Mary as an instrument of salvation, Simone depicts her as *radix sancta* from the Tree of Life, fused with the tree of the cross (Montesano 2009, p. 349). This image also involves the figure of Mary as the origin of Christ's Eucharistic body, since the leaves of the tree on which he appears crucified look like vine leaves. They are also similar to the leaves in another version of the subject by the same painter (Pinacoteca Nazionale in Ferrara). The trunk stems from the Virgin's belly, making it unnecessary to portray the breastfeeding to accentuate the link between Christ and his mother. Furthermore, at the bottom of the painting, a hand that seems to be a prolongation of the cross through the mother takes the hand of Adam, who is followed by Eve, to take him out of Hell, whose gates lie on the ground. Thus, albeit preceded by Adam, Eve is represented as having been redeemed of her sin.

Figure 9. *The Tree of Death and Life*, *Missal of Bernard von Rohr*, Berthold Furtmeyer, 1481, Munich, Bayerisch Staatsbibliothek, Clm. 15710, fo. 60v.

In this vein, in some of the typological images that compare Eve with Mary (*Nursing Madonna*, Paolo di Giovanni Fei, c. 1385–1390, New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art; *Nursing Madonna*, Paolo di Giovanni, after 1370, San Marino, private collection; *Madonna of Humility*, Carlo da Camerino, c. 1400, Cleveland Museum of Art, Figure 4a), the first woman is presented with a polygonal halo. Occasionally, straight-edged or star-shaped halos hover over the patriarchs of the Old Testament or the Just that have died before Christ. In this case, the representation of Eve with a halo recalls her redemption through Mary. Her disobedience was even seen as a necessary evil to reach the Savior. Hence, the temptress *par excellence*, the sinner, the cause of humanity's perdition, is also redeemed by Christ thanks to his mother.

An image belonging to an exclusive iconographic type from Valencia, supported by local sources, presents Eve already fully redeemed. I shall dedicate the last section of this paper to this image.

6. Redeemed and "Sanctified" Eve

In this section, I intend to close the circle that was opened in the first one. We have seen how Eve bore the greatest guilt of the original sin and suffered its consequences. However, by the Late Middle Ages, her image appears to have been slightly whitewashed, which

is visually represented by touching her with a polygonal halo and placing her at the feet of Mary, through whom she will reach redemption. The image of Eve in the Valencian iconographic type of the Calvary of the Redemption already presents her as a sacred figure.

It is after the death of Christ on the cross, during those three days before his resurrection, when the descent of Christ into Hell takes place (*Descensus ad inferos*, *Gospel of Nicodemus*, part II) to rescue the patriarchs from limbo. The iconographic type that visualizes this shows the Son of God, after wrecking the gates of Hell, sometimes taking Adam and Eve by the hand, followed by the rest of the Just. Nevertheless, the *Calvary of the Redemption* in the Museo de Bellas Artes in Valencia (Figure 10) is noteworthy. It is not the only image of this type held by the museum, since it seems to be characteristic of the Kingdom of Valencia (Gregori Bou 2016b, pp. 69, 80), although the one by the Master of Perea has a significant peculiarity, which we can interpret in the context of Eve's redemption.

Toward the end of the Middle Ages, religious authorities around Valencia, such as Francesc Eiximenis in 1404 (Eiximenis 1420–1430, bk. 9, chap. 117, fo. 334v), Saint Vicente Ferrer in the sermon *Surrexit, non est hic*, Easter Sunday (April 23) 1413 (Ferrer 1485, 24ff) and Isabel de Villena (1497, chp. 201, fo. 204), included in their writings on the descent to Hell an episode in which the patriarchs recently rescued from limbo express their wish to witness the moment of his redemption, that is, to venerate the image of the crucified one in gratitude for his sacrifice. It should be noted that the vision of Christ crucified could take on a Eucharistic nature, since the sacrifice of the Eucharist actualizes the one by Christ on the cross. However, during the Middle Ages communion was not common by lay people, since attending the consecration alone had acquired similar importance, to the point where the faithful tried to see as many Eucharistic consecrations as possible, which is known as visual communion.

Hence, the patriarchs' viewing of Christ sacrificed could come to be considered a kind of visual communion. In 1215, the 4th Council of the Lateran took steps to encourage effective reception of the Eucharist by the faithful (Mocholí Martínez 2017). In the work by Isabel de Villena specifically, it is the women headed by Eve (Gregori Bou 2016b, pp. 73–75; Ramón i Ferrer 2021) who decide to ask to see the effigy of Christ crucified. In this way, the Son of God appears twice: on the cross in the center of the composition, and at its foot, pointing to his own image for Adam and Eve and the other Old Testament characters.

All of them, even the good thief, have star-shaped halos over them, except for Eve (Gregori Bou 2016a). The first woman shares a round halo with the figures of the New Testament, among them the Mother of God, who is symmetrically opposite Eve. Between the two women at the foot of the cross, there is a third woman, who has also been forgiven by Christ: Mary Magdalene. Hence, not only is Eve's redemption manifested (*"Veniu, venerable mare, per mi molt amada: acostau-vos a mi e sereu coronada segons mereix vostra virtuosa penitencia, car ja són finides les vostres dolors"* [Come, venerable mother, much beloved by me: come close to me and you will be crowned as your virtuous penitence deserves, since your pains have ended][24], de Villena 1497, chp. 198), but her saintliness is also recognized ("*Aprés ve la santa Eva, que santa fo per gran penitencia*" [Afterwards comes Eve, who was a saint due to great penitence][25], Ferrer 1485, 24ff). Unlike the previous period, these devotional texts reject a natural female inclination for sin by the first woman, so that Eve's liberation from captivity enables her to occupy a notable place in Paradise together with her husband Adam.

Figure 10. *Calvary of the Redemption*, Master of Perea, end of 15th cent., Valencia, Museo de Bellas Artes.

Although with this latter work we have deviated from the main theme of the text, which is the imagery of the Nursing Madonna, it should be remembered that the study of those works has been conditioned by the possible negative or at least humble condition of the act of breastfeeding, as part of Eve's punishment, which affected all women except Mary. Although the reception by the faithful of the images of Mary breastfeeding the child could have been mediated by beliefs that were not exclusively religious, her condition as the Mother of God has led her to share with her son a Eucharistic and even redemptive character. In this sense, it should be noted to what extent, shortly before the Reformation, the redemptive capacity of Mary had led Eve to be considered even a sacred character.

7. Conclusions

In Judeo-Christian tradition, Eve's sin had negative consequences for the female gender as a whole, who were not only subjected to man, but also shouldered practically all of the burden for the survival of the species: sexual attraction to her husband and the painful act of giving birth. After human birth, the woman's body continued to suffer the effects of the divine curse, such as producing milk to feed the newborn. Unlike the desire and pleasure associated with the sexual act (and even the physical sexual act itself) or the pain associated with childbirth, the Virgin could not avoid lactation. The paradox implied by this gave rise to opposing interpretations regarding how humiliating (due to its punitive

nature) or simply humble and charitable the act of breastfeeding was considered for women in general, and for Mary in particular.

However, beyond religious sources, what was believed to be known about the female anatomy, the social customs and even the aesthetics of the Late Middle Ages make it difficult to acquire a proper perspective about this matter, and more specifically about some of the iconographical types of Mary as the Nursing Madonna or as the Virgin of Humility. In this latter case, as it was a widespread belief in Europe that sex reduced the quality of milk and was therefore incompatible with breastfeeding, we have proposed the possibility that the visual representation of Mary's lactation is compatible with allusions to her virginal character in the same image —or even reinforces it. Such allusions are characteristic aspects of the iconographical type of the Madonna of Humility, who is breastfeeding the child: her representation seated on ground covered with wild plants, which refers to virginity, as Saint Bernard and Saint Bonaventure state.

Nevertheless, all of this enables a more incisive interpretation to be made about the typological correspondence between Eve and Mary, and especially the role of the Virgin in the story of salvation, to the point that she may be considered not only a co-redeemer of the human species, but also to have a Eucharistic nature similar to that of Christ. This statement can be made based on the medical "knowledge" of the time according to which the child's blood came from the mother's blood, previously converted into milk in her breasts. In this way, it is another woman who redeems Eve, who had unjustly borne all the burden of the Fall, together with all other women. Her redemption reaches the point of being considered a saint by revered authors in the Late Middle Ages in Valencia. This idea has been visually translated by means of a circular halo into a significant image of a particular iconographic type, the Calvary of the Redemption.

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Notes

1 CEV <https://www.biblegateway.com> (accessed 9 October 2021). "*Et ait Dominus Deus ad serpentem: [. . .] Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem, et semen tuum et semen illius: ipsa conteret caput tuum, et tu insidiaberis calcaneo ejus*" (*Vulgata Clementina* <https://vulsearch.sourceforge.net/html/index.html>, accessed 15 September 2021).

2 "*Haec et muliebria nuncupantur; nam mulier solum animal menstruale est. Cuius cruoris contactu fruges non germinant, acescunt musta, moriuntur herbae, amittunt arbores fetus, ferrum rubigo corripit, nigrescunt aera. Si qui canes inde ederint, in rabiem efferuntur. Glutinum asphalti, quod nec ferro nec aquis dissolvitur, cruore ipso pollutum sponte dispergitur*" (*Documenta Catholica Omnia* <https://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu>, accessed 24 September 2021).

3 CEV <https://www.biblegateway.com> (accessed 9 October 2021). "*Mulieri quoque dixit: Multiplicabo ærumnas tuas, et conceptus tuos: in dolore paries filios, et sub viri potestate eris, et ipse dominabitur tui*" (*Vulgata Clementina* <https://vulsearch.sourceforge.net/html/index.html>, accessed 15 September 2021).

4 Christian Classics Ethereal Library <https://www.ccel.org> (accessed 30 September 2021). "*Si tanta in terris moraretur fides quanta merces eius expectatur in caelis, nulla omnino uestrum, sorores dilectissimae, ex quo Deum uiuum cognouisset et de sua, id est de feminae condicione, didicisset, laetiorem habitum, ne dicam gloriosiorem, appetisset, ut non magis in sordibus ageret et squalorem potius affectaret, ipsam se circumferens Euam lugentem et paenitentem, quo plenius id quod de Eua trahit -ignominiam dico primi delicti et inuidiam perditionis humanae- omni satisfactionis habitu expiaret*".

5 Medieval medicine attempts to explain the sexual desire in women compared to the model established by female animals: while in females sexual appetite disappears after conception, in the case of women it did not respond only to an alleged reproductive need. On the other hand, female pleasure was analyzed according to the ecstasy model that was devised for men and, therefore, it was held that women reached orgasm when they expelled their "seed". Therefore, men had to attend to the enjoyment of their partners for conception to occur (Moral de Calatrava 2008, pp. 136–40).

6 <http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/1225-1274,_Thomas_Aquinas,_Summa_Theologiae-Tertia_Pars,_EN.pdf> (accessed 23 October 2021). "*Augustinus dicit, in sermone de nativitate, alloquens virginem matrem, nec in conceptione, inquit, inventa es sine pudore, nec in partu inventa es cum dolore (. . .) sicut dicit Augustinus, in sermone de assumptione beatae virginis, ab hac sententia*

excipitur virgo mater Dei, quae, quia sine peccati colluvione et sine virilis admixtionis detrimento Christum suscepit, sine dolore genuit, sine integritatis violatione, pudore virginitatis integra permansit".

7 Peeters considers that this gospel, along with the rest of the childhood cycle gospels, derives from a common source, due to the thematic overlap between them. The *Armenien Gospel of the Infancy* was based on the *Book of James* and the *Gospel of the Infancy of Thomas*, as well as fragments of the *Arabic Infancy Gospel*. It is presupposed to be a translation of a Syrian text, which in turn would have been translated from a Greek one (Piñero 2009, p. 300; Olivares 2019, p. 1610). Western religious images were affected by the influence of this gospel, for example, by depicting the birth of Christ in a cave or transforming the three wise men into kings with proper names: Melkon, king of the Persians; Balthasar, king of the Indians and Gaspar, king of the Arabs (Grau-Dieckmann 2011, p. 170).

8 Miles considers that the greater popularity of the nursing Virgin, especially in the iconographic type of the Virgin of Humility, in early Renaissance Florentine society is due to the characteristic chronic malnutrition and anxiety about food supply at the time (1986, p. 198). However, for the Virgin of Humility, Mocholí Martínez and Montesinos Castañeda (2021) propose a development directly related to changes of a theological nature.

9 CEV <https://www.biblegateway.com> (accessed 9 October 2021). "*Factum est autem, cum hæc diceret: extollens vocem quædam mulier de turba dixit illi: Beatus venter qui te portavit, et ubera quæ suxisti*" (*Vulgata Clementina* <https://vulsearch.sourceforge.net/html/index.html>, accessed 15 September 2021).

10 Other extracanonical text are as follows: "And by little and little that light withdrew itself until the young child appeared: and it went and took the breast of its mother Mary" (*Book of James*, 19:2); "The child, enwrapped in swaddling clothes, was sucking the breast of the Lady Mary his mother" (*Arabic Infancy Gospel*, 3:1); "And he came and took the breast of his mother, as he was fet with milk" (*Armenian Gospel of the Infancy*, 9:2; Terian 2008, p. 45).

11 Regarding the redeeming character of the Virgin and, specifically, of the Madonna of Humility, the presence of a penitent brotherhood in the lower part of the alterpiece should be noted. Other confraternities also dedicated their altarpieces to the Virgin of Humility: *Madonna of Humility*, Bartolomeo Perellano or Bartolomeo da Camogli, 1346, Palermo, Galleria Regionale della Sicilia.

12 As some of the authors who have written about the *Virgin and Child before a Firescreen* (Master of the Mérode Altarpiece, c. 1440, London, National Gallery) have suggested (Williamson 2004, p. 394).

13 According to ancient medical theories, as the woman both emitted and received semen during satisfying sex, which would flow into her womb, such flux may have filtered into the breastmilk; So Saint Anne would have breastfed her daughter to prevent the residues of eternal sin from polluting her immaculate being (Sperling 2021, p. 285; Phillips 2018, p. 13).

14 As early as the 11th and 12th centuries, images on the bronze door of the Basilica of San Zeno in Verona (11th-12th centuries) and on the doorway of the Church of San Esteban in Sos del Rey Católico (Zaragoza) (late 12th century) have been interpreted as representing the adulterous woman or the mother who refuses to breastfeed her children or orphaned children, as opposed to the mother who does (Alfonso Cabrera 2016, p. 42).

15 The same idea has been given by Williamson in relation to the image *Virgin and Child before a Firescreen*. According to this author, the Virgin offers her milk to the viewer, not to the child, "because of the general associations of the Virgin's milk with mercy and charity" (Williamson 2004, pp. 402–3).

16 However, virginity and chastity posed medical problems for women. Although Soranus of Ephesus considered it healthy, a poor understanding of his theory led to the belief that sexual abstinence caused uterine or hysterical suffocation. Further, despite being previously known (Avicenna, *Summa conservationis et curationis*, 1285), sex as the most effective treatment was not proposed until the 14th century (Moral de Calatrava 2008, p. 136). Indeed, the iconographic type of the Madonna of Humility was created in the 14th century.

17 "*Ex his manifestum jam arbitror, quaenam sit virga de radice Jesse procedens, quis vero flos super quem requiescit Spiritus sanctus. Quoniam Virgo Dei genitrix virga est, flos Filius ejus. Flos utique Filius Virginis, flos candidus et rubicundus, electus ex millibus (Cantic. V, 10); flos in quem prospicere desiderant angeli, flos ad cujus odorem reviviscunt mortui, et sicut ipse testatur, flos campi est (Cant. II, 1), et non horti. Campus enim sine omni humano floret adminiculo, non seminatus ab aliquo, non defossus sarculo, non impinguatus fimo. Sic omnino, sic Virginis alvus floruit, sic inviolata, integra et casta Mariae viscera, tanquam pascua aeterni viroris florem protulere; cujus pulchritudo non videat corruptionem, cujus gloria in perpetuum non marcescat. O Virgo, virga sublimis, in quam sublime verticem sanctum erigis! usque ad Sedentem in throno, usque ad Dominum majestatis. Neque enim id mirum, quoniam in altum mittis radices humilitatis. O vere coelestis planta, pretiosior cunctis*".

18 Religious sources are also confusing as regards the age for weaning. The *Armenian Gospel of the Infancy* narrates that Jesus stopped breastfeeding immediately after nine months: "When the child Jesus became nine months old, he was no longer fed from his mother's breasts. And upon observing him, they were very surprised and kept asking each other and saying: 'What (child) is this? He neither eats nor drinks nor sleeps, but stays up, wakeful and watchful day and night.'" (12:6; Terian 2008, p. 61); but the *Gospel of the Nativity of Mary* affirms that Anne breastfed Mary for three years: "and when the circle of three years had rolled round, and the time of her weaning was fulfilled, they brought the Virgin to the temple of the Lord with offerings" (6:1).

[19] In the case of Tuscan towns of the early Renaissance, Miles echoes the words of Petrarch, who called the slave wet nurses *domestici hostes* (domestic enemies). The consideration of these women as hostile and untrustworthy must have contributed to the anxiety surrounding wet nursing (1986, p. 199).

[20] Translated by the author from "[. . .] *la madre, en el hijo que engendra, no pone sino una parte de su sangre, de la cual la virtud del varón, figurándola, hace carne y huesos. Pues el ama que cría pone lo mismo, porque la leche es sangre, y en aquella sangre la misma virtud del padre, que vive en el hijo, hace la misma obra. Sino que la diferencia es ésta: que la madre puso este su caudal por nueve meses, y el ama por veinticuatro; y la madre, cuando el parto era un tronco sin sentido ninguno, y el ama, cuando comienza ya a sentir y reconocer el bien que recibe, la madre influye en el cuerpo, el ama en el cuerpo y en el alma. Por manera que, echando la cuenta bien, el ama es la madre, y la que le parió es peor que madrastra, pues enajena de sí a su hijo y hace borde lo que había nacido legítimo, y es causa que sea mal nacido el que pudiera ser noble; y comete en cierta manera un género de adulterio, poco menos feo y no menos dañoso que el de ordinario. Porque en aquél vende al marido por hijo el que no es de él, y aquí el que no lo es de ella, y hace sucesor al hijo del ama y de la moza, que las más veces es una o villana o esclava*".

[21] Christ and Mary interceding with God (Mocholí Martínez 2015, pp. 512–89).

[22] We could relate this co-leading role of Mary to the statement by Jutta Sperling that "Mary's divine fluids grace the beholder, the fiction of patriarchal blood is deconstructed", based on the eroticization of maternal power through the lactating breast (Sperling 2018a, p. 119).

[23] Since this author, the Renaissance's naturalism was to be imposed on the *decorum* owing to the Marian representations, which would entail the temporary disappearance of the iconographic type of the *Madonna Lactans* from the mid-1440s to the 1470s.

[24] Translated by the author.

[25] Translated by the author.

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Article

Lucretia as a Figure of Mary in Machiavelli's Mandragola

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Abstract: When studied in political and ideological contexts, the numerous references to the Virgin Mary in Machiavelli's comedic masterpiece Mandragola enable us to see how the author not only parodies a sacred play, but also deftly repurposes Christological and Mariological symbolism to celebrate his work's unnamed referent: the first Medici pope, Leo X.

Keywords: annunciation; erotic symbolism; mystical wedding; political theology; sacred play

1. Introduction

> "Io voglio giudicare che venga da una celeste disposizione che abbia voluto così, e non sono sufficiente a recusare quello ch'el cielo vuol che io accetti. Però io ti prendo per signore, patrone, guida: tu mio padre, tu mio defensore e tu voglio che sia ogni mio bene."
>
> So I'm forced to judge that it comes from Heaven's wish that has ordered it so, and I'm not strong enough to refuse what Heaven wills me to accept. I take you then for lord, master, guide; you are my father, you are my defender; I want you as my chief good".
>
> *Mandragola*, Act V, IV.[1]

Lucretia as a figure of the Virgin Mary, of the Church, and of Italy as the spouse of her redeemer? Mirabile dictu: yes. The present essay, which is part of broader research both on Machiavelli's "courtier" theology and on the structure and meaning of the *Mandragola*, brings to light the complex symbolic value of the character Lucretia.[2] The portrayal of the 'Marian' nature of the most beautiful, wise, and honorable woman in all of Florence covertly but unmistakably invokes the biblical *Song of Songs*, a move on Machiavelli's part that sanctifies the play's eroticism and invests it with political–theological significance. The parody, which presents the adulterer Lucretia as a novel Virgin Mary, turns out to be integral to an encompassing sacred play that has a clear courtly objective: to celebrate and magnify Leo X (Giovanni de' Medici; pope, 1513–1521), head both of the Church and of the most powerful family in Florence.

The play becomes fully intelligible only in light of Machiavelli's comparatively neglected political and intellectual profile *post res perditas*, which I have reconstructed as a progressively increasing engagement with the courts of the Medici popes, first Leo and then Clement VII (1523–1534), who, as a cardinal, had commissioned him to write the *Istorie fiorentine*, and on whose behalf he was later sent on a secret mission to Venice for the establishment of an anti-imperial league in the context of the wars of Italy (Lettieri 2018). If the last two years of Machiavelli's life are proof of his profound involvement with the military, political, and religious strategy of the papacy (as shown by his writing of the *Esortazione alla penitenza*),[3] the *Mandragola* evidence of how far his rapprochement with the Medici had already advanced before Leo X's demise. While the comedy lauds the pontiff, its positive reception is attested by Leo's sponsoring a revival of the play in the Vatican in 1520, on the occasion of the wedding of Luisa Salviati, sister of the powerful cardinal Giovanni Salviati and niece of the pope (Lettieri 2019, 2021).

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2. The Mandragola as a Political–Christological Allegory

The Vatican setting of one of the first performances of the play is but one strand in an elaborate and systematic web of references of the *Mandragola*, which replicates, in a different register, the symbolical figures of *The Prince*. In fact, the final exhortation of the *Prince* is addressed not to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici, duke of Urbino, but to Pope Leo X: Machiavelli saw in the fusion of temporal and ecclesiastical power, which happened in Leo's elevation, a "providential" occasion for the miraculous redemption of Italy. Through the reference to Paul's letter to the Corinthians, alluded to in the text,[4] Machiavelli boldly transfers the Christological dialectic between Christ as head and as his "mystical" body, which suffers and dies but, having been redeemed, is reborn (1 Cor 11:3, 12:12), from the theological–mystical level to the political one. The Pope, the vicar of Christ, is called to be "the leader of this redemption" (Machiavelli 1989a, p. 93): the head of a languishing body, Italy, that awaits redemption.

In the *Mandragola,* the metaphorical level is reached through systematic allusion to the *Song of Songs*, the most erotically charged book of the Old Testament, which, from early on, was read as an allegory of the relationship of God/the Son with a female figure/Israel/Mary/the Church. In the first decades of the 1500s, the structure of the metaphorical marriage between the pope, as vicar of Christ, and the Church was strongly reiterated by prominent curialists, including Cristoforo Marcello, Egidio da Viterbo, and Antonio Pucci, who conjoined the ideology of papal just war with metaphors of mystical marriage drawn from the *Song of Songs*. Sexual imagery is employed similarly by Machiavelli in the *Prince* and in the *Mandragola*. The former portrays sexual dominance in the figure of the young man (XXV, 12–14) who masters Fortune by cuffing and mauling her (Machiavelli 1989a, p. 92), and calls for the rescue of an abandoned and derelict bride, as in the final exhortation to save Italy, who is a languishing spouse who needs a powerful groom. The *Mandragola* presents the same imagery, introducing, in Callimaco, an image of the pope, whose force and sexual dominance will perform the miracle. Callimaco's erotic urge is here a figure of the political and military will to conquer that Machiavelli attributed to the Medici family and, above all, to Leo. We would do well not to allow the play's comic and lascivious tone to distract us from appreciating its more elevated allegorical register, in which the figure of the Virgin Mary plays an important part.

3. Lucretia's Marian Portrait

I have already analyzed, in a broader essay (Lettieri 2019), the presence of a remarkable series of echoes in the *Mandragola* of the *Song of Songs*, both of which feature a relationship between a dominant and powerful male and a feeble female, according to the paradigm of sexual and generative desire. If some scholars—such as Aquilecchia (1971), Perocco (1973), Baratto (1975, pp. 113–18), Triolo (1994, pp. 173–79), Alonge (1999), Newbigin (2008), Stoppelli (2005, pp. 92–105), Boggione (2016, pp. 49–53)—had already noted the sacral references in the text and the Marian nature of some of the allusions, the political context just described and the erotic subtext of the Marian references, sanctified as allusions to the *Song of Songs,* allows us to better understand this framework. These references are not merely crass comic reduction or simple blasphemy (as in Alonge 1999); as will be seen, the *Song of Songs*, which is at the same time a highly explicit erotic description of the passion of two lovers and a sublime allegory of divine love, provides the key to understanding the complex double register of Machiavelli's play.

In this context, the traditional identification of the bride of the *Song of Songs* with the Virgin Mary—which allowed the attribution to Mary of the *Song of Songs'* verses *macula non est in te*, *inmaculata mea*, *hortus conclusus*—enables the parallel between the bride of the Scriptures and Lucretia. This double typological identification allows Lucretia to be at the same time the purest and most honorable woman in the world and the adulteress conveniently satisfied with the remedy concocted by Callimaco. Correspondingly, Lucretia's nature is said to be without corruption ("la natura di lei, che è onestissima e al tutto aliena dalle cose d'amore... non c'è luogo ad alcuna corruzione» I, I, 5: Machiavelli 2017, pp. 20,

24); the praises to her nature (they gave to her "tanta laude di bellezza e di costumi, che fece restare stupidi qualunque di noi"; "bella donna, savia, costumata e atta al governare") seem to echo the Marian prayer *Salve regina*.

It bears mentioning that Machiavelli was intimately familiar with the *Song of Songs'* verses, which we find in the painting of his lover Barbara Salutati, made by Domenigo Puligo and possibly commissioned by Machiavelli himself (Slim 2002). Salutati was also the singer of five songs in the 1526 Faenza revival of the *Mandragola*, organized by Guicciardini; the songs had been set to music by Philippe Verdelot, the favorite musician of the Medici popes and friend of Puligo. In the painting, Barbara holds open before her two volumes, Petrarch's *Canzoniere* and a musical partiture with a popular French love song and the Latin motet *Quam pulchra es amica mea, et quam decora, vox enim tua*. These words are a contraction of various verses of the *Song of Songs*: *Ecce tu pulchra es, amica mea* (1:14); *Vox enim tua dulcis et tua dulcis et facies tua decora* (2:14); and *Quam pulchra es et quam decora* (7:6). Here, a courtesan is exalted through epithets from the *Song of Songs* that were traditionally attributed to the Church and to the Virgin Mary *tota pulchra*, but, in Machiavelli's play, the words carry a purely aesthetic and erotic charge, i.e., to dignify the equivocal identity of the refined prostitute beloved by Machiavelli. Again, the highest sacred expressions of Scripture are subjected to a Renaissance game of reversal. Here, they describe the carnal graces of a courtesan and the enchantment of her voice. Thus, we can see that the allegorical reversal proposed in the *Mandragola* is nothing new in Machiavelli's environment.

The Annunciation is, as Boggione (2016) recognized, a major theme in the play, and it is the referent of a series of significant allusions: Nicia will be the putative father of the baby conceived by Lucretia, as Joseph was to Jesus; like Joseph, he is a devout man, praying constantly at night; like the archangel Gabriel, he salutes his wife with the words "Blessed are you." Another reference to Gabriel can certainly be found in the words of Ligurio, who speaks of a "uomo da metterli il capo in grembo" (act II,1,2; " a man in whose lap you can lay your head": Machiavelli 1989b, p. 786). Here, the allusion, at the same time erotic and sacred, is clearly directed at the conception of Jesus. Moreover, an ironic reference to a miraculous conception is made by Nicomaco in the *Clizia*, who, jesting, declares Frate Timoteo "a holy man", who "has worked some miracles": "through his prayers Madam Lucretia, the wife of Messer Nicia Calfucci, who was sterile, became pregnant." (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 835).

In Florence, the theme of the Annunciation was highly charged. The Church celebrated the feast on the 25 March, which, in the city's calendar, opened the new year. It has been argued that the Annunciation was the foremost identifying image of Florence (Phillips-Court 2007, p. 245), celebrating Mary's political association with the city of Florence. This fact is alluded to in the *Mandragola* with an important topographical hint that has usually escaped scholarly notice.

In Act III, I-II Nicia refers to his wife's vow "to hear the first mass at the Servi for forty mornings"(Machiavelli 1989b, p. 794); she has consecrated herself to the Annunciated Virgin in a church where Florentine women routinely went to pray to be blessed with conceiving a child: the Basilica of the Santissima Annunziata, whose painting of the Annunciation (13th century) was considered miraculous. The church had been the object of constant and bountiful attention on the part of the Medici family since the 15th century; Piero de Medici, in 1449, fulfilled the vow, taken on the occasion of the birth of his son Lorenzo by the very devout mother Lucretia Tornabuoni, to build the highly ornated marmoreal tabernacle, based upon Michelozzo's design, which contained the Annunciation fresco (Liebenwein 1993; Davies 2014). Piero's devotion to the Annunziata was praised by Feo Belcari in the sonnet which opened his sacred representation: *La Rapresentazione quando la Nostra Donna Vergine Maria fu annunziata dall'Angelo* Gabriello (1465) (Belcari 1996, p. 239).

Therefore, Lorenzo the Magnificent—the father of Giovanni de Medici, who is the key referent of the play—was linked, from birth, to the Basilica dell'Annunziata. Giovanni's first visit in Florence upon returning from exile was to the Annunziata,[5] and when elevated as

Leo X in 1513, he conferred upon the church the privilege of a perpetual jubilee, prompting a new iconographical scheme devoted to the Virgin in the cloister of the vows. Nicia's reference to his wife's vow to attend masses at the Church of the Annunziata thus confirms the thesis that the real subject of the *Mandragola* is the generation of the *masculinum* from the Medici family. The allusion is to the "miraculous" birth of Lorenzo de Medici from a woman named Lucretia, and, through Lorenzo to his son, Giovanni, the pope is the new spouse of the derelict Italy.

Allusions to Mary abound in the play; they are not confined to a single scene. For instance, Lucretia is depicted as a *mater dolorosa* in front of Christ's passion when she says that "io sudo per la passione" (Act III,10,1).[6] More importantly, Lucretia's assent to the sexual union with Callimaco, as reported by the latter, is certainly modeled on the assent of the Virgin in the Annunciation. Consider the passage as the whole:

> [Lucretia] doppo qualche sospiro, disse: "Poi che l'astuzia tua, la sciocchezza del mio marito, la semplicità di mia madre e la tristizia del mio confessoro mi hanno condutto a fare quello che mai per me medesima arei fatto, io voglio giudicare che venga da una celeste disposizione che abbi voluto così, e non sono sufficiente a recusare quello ch'el cielo vuole che io accetti. Però io ti prendo per signore, patrone, guida: tu mio padre, tu mio defensore, e tu voglio che sia ogni mio bene. E quel che mio marito ha voluto per una sera, voglio ch'egli abbia sempre. Fara'ti adunque suo compare, e verrai questa mattina a la chiesa; e di quivi ne verrai a desinare con esso noi; e l'andare e lo stare starà a te, e poterèno a ogni ora e senza sospetto convenire insieme". Io fui, udendo queste parole, per morirmi per la dolcezza. Non potetti rispondere a la minima parte di quello che io arei desiderato. Tanto che io mi truovo el piú felice e contento uomo che fussi mai nel mondo; e, se questa felicità non mi mancassi o per morte o per tempo, io sarei piú beato ch'e beati, piú santo ch'e santi." (Machiavelli 2017, p. 52)

After some sighs she said: "Your cleverness, my husband's stupidity, my mother's folly, and my confessor's rascality have brought me to do what I never would have done of myself. So I'm forced to judge that it comes from Heaven's wish that has ordered it so, and I'm not strong enough to refuse what Heaven wills me to accept. I take you then for lord, master, guide; you are my father, you are my defender; I want you as my chief good; and what my husband has asked for one night, I intend him to have always. You'll make yourself his best friend; you'll go to the church this morning, and from there you'll come to have dinner with us; after that your comings and stayings'll be as you like, and we can be together at any time without suspicion." When I heard these words, I was ready to die with their sweetness. I couldn't answer with even a little of what I tried to. So I'm the happiest and most fortunate man who ever lived; and if I should never lose this happiness through either death or time, I should be more blissful than the blessed, happier than the saints above. (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 819) This passage is one of the most revealing examples of the biblical reversal that characterizes the comedy, bringing into play, as it does, the mystery of the "carnal" union between Christ and the church/spouse/Mary. Lucretia is visited and made fertile by a kind of "heavenly groom", "taken for lord" as sent according to "Heaven's wish", and Callimaco enters this erotic paradise, whose permanence would make him "more blissful than the blessed, happier than the saints above"(Machiavelli 1989b, p. 819). This final hyperbole, which concludes the description of the amorous ecstasy of the "mystery" celebrated in the "sante hore nocturne", contains, indeed, the two privileged epithets which traditionally and commonly designate the pope, namely, Your Beatitude and Your Holiness.

4. Lucretia's Mystical Wedding

The final scene of the comedy encompasses all the play's imagery, fusing two major Marian/Christological episodes: the purification of the Virgin after the birth of the child and the entrance into the Temple in Jerusalem; and the Marriage of the Virgin. While many studies have recognized the presence in the play of these two episodes (Perocco 1973; Triolo

1994; Alonge 1999; Danelon 2004; Stoppelli 2005; Newbigin 2008; Boggione 2016), the sacral significance of these scenes is more profound than has been recognized. By invoking both the biblical episode and the contemporary context, it simultaneously brings to fruition both (a) the parody and (b) the allusion to the mystical wedding of Christ (and his vicar) with Mary/the Church.

The scene at V.6 opens with frate Timoteo—who, we may remember, is presented in the play (act V, 1) as a devotee of the Virgin Mary[7]—who greets, at the church, Lucretia, accompanied by her mother and her husband; here, they meet Ligurio and Nicia. In this way, the opening presents together, in a sacral atmosphere, Nicia and Callimaco—the husband and the lover, the old man and the young—in a way that upends the sanctioned relationship with the woman, Lucretia. Thus staged, the nuptial ceremony makes the lover the groom, and displaces the old for the new. The substitution—a bigamous marriage, even—was foreshadowed by Frate Timoteo in act III, 11 with words that already allude to the sacral, even eucharistic[8] nature of the rite: "Do not fear, my daughter. I shall pray to God for you; I shall repeat the prayer of the angel Raphael, so he will be with you. Go with assurance and get ready for this secret act (*misterio*), because it's now evening" (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 803). Next, the frate addresses Lucretia, saying "may such happiness be yours, Madam, that God will give you a fine boy (*bel fanciul mastio*)" (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 820). Nicia intervenes and presents his wife's hand to Callimaco, in a pose surely reminiscent of the ancient ritualistic gesture from Classical Rome but charged with an evident reference to the iconography of the Marriage of the Virgin: a scene famously represented in those years by Raphael (1504) (Perocco 1973, pp. 49–50), but already immortalized by Giotto and one of his pupils, Taddeo Gaddi, as we will see. Nicia presents Callimaco to Lucretia as the man "who'll cause us to have a staff to support our old age" ("quello che sarà cagione che noi aremo uno bastone che sostenga la nostra vecchiezza", Machiavelli 1989b, p. 820) and announces his intention to give him "the key of the room on the ground floor in the loggia" (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 821), introducing Callimaco into Lucretia's utmost intimacy. Frate Timoteo concludes, telling Sostrata that "to my eye you've put a new shoot on the old tree (*un tallo in sul vecchio*)" (Machiavelli 1989b, p. 821).

In deciphering the scene, we have first to go back to the evangelical account of the presentation of Mary in the temple (*Luke* 2:22–24) with its quotation of a verse from Exodus (13,2): *Omne masculinum adaperiens vulvam sanctus Domino vocabitur*, "every male opening the womb shall be called holy to the Lord". If we are correct to identify Machiavelli's audience as the Curia and the play's setting as the Sistine Chapel (the site of the 1520 wedding), the double meaning of the reference to this biblical verse is crystal clear. The ritual consecration in the Temple of the firstborn—namely, the first male child who has "opened" the womb that brings him into the world—is applied in Luke's Gospel to the presentation of Jesus, blessed by Simeon and presented as the Christ attended by Israel. The appropriation of that sacred story in the final scene of the *Mandragola* presents a clear contradiction, as Perocco and Stoppelli noted: in the play, there is no child, no male, to be presented to the Temple. However, the dissonance disappears if one focuses upon the second level of the metaphor: the male presented is not the awaited child desired by Nicia, but the actual *masculinum*, the one who has opened Lucretia's vulva: Callimaco. On Callimaco's person, therefore, the obvious sexual metaphor, authorized by the Gospel of Luke itself, adumbrates a Christological meaning which clearly indicates the real referent of the comedy: the pope, the male to whom a solid exegetical tradition referred as the vicar of Christ, the sprout on which the Spirit rested.

We must also remember the presence in Florence of a Confraternity of the Purification, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the Archangel Raphael: a strategic civic institution and the most important promoter of sacred plays, patronized and attended by the Medici Family since Cosimo the Elder (Polizzotto 2004). According to the statutes, the youths in the confraternity—including the young Giovanni and Giulio de' Medici—were to perform, every year, a sacred play on the subject; thus, the confraternity educated its youth in the tenets of Florentine civic religion, centered on faith in the advent of the messianic prince,

the new David of the New Jerusalem. If we look at the *Rappresentazione della purificazione*[9] (Newbigin 1983)—which was most probably the text performed every year by the young boys—we can see its strong resemblance to the final scene of the *Mandragola*. Keeping in mind how closely "a parallel is established between the redeeming role foreshadowed for the Child Christ when presented to the Temple and the role which the *fanciulli* of the Purification were to play in the fulfilment of Florence's destiny", (Polizzotto 2004, p. 87) we can recognize how, through sacred plays such as this, the two Medici cardinals, and then popes, were educated since youth about how they themselves would fulfill messianic promises. On 2 February 1516, Leo X was present in Florence for the Feast of Candelora, which celebrates the Purification of the Virgin and the Presentation in the Temple. By making his entrance that day into the Church, Pope Leo was taking on the role of the *masculinum* (the male who enters the temple, see Newbigin 1983, p. 83). In short, by alluding to the scene of the Purification, the *Mandragola* was not only parodying Florentine sacred representations but also referring to the fulfilment of messianic expectations that the Medici family had nurtured in the context of the confraternal civic tradition—expectations that had begun to be realized when Leo was elevated to the papacy. Thus, the Marian symbolism here is at once a parodical, erotic allusion, and a much more serious homage to the vicar of Christ who enters the temple, a scene clearly legible for a pope who had been a child of the company of Purification.

If the Purification is key to our decrypting the final scene, the general reference (mentioned above) of the *Mandragola* to the Song of Songs helps us understand the play's connection with the Marriage of the Virgin. At *Mandragola* V,VI,1, Nicia's carefully chosen words directed at Callimaco—"Maestro, toccate la mano qui alla donna mia"[10]—could be taken to allude to the gift of the wedding ring as depicted by Raphael. However, another representation of the scene of the Marriage of the Virgin, which I am certain Machiavelli had in mind, resonates far more with Nicia's words here.

The *Marriage of the Virgin* (1327–ca.1338), painted by Taddeo Gaddi, the most talented of Giotto's pupils, represents the scene of the betrothal of Mary and Joseph as a light touching of hands, a gesture echoed precisely in the *Mandragola* when Nicia invites Callimaco and Lucretia to join hands. More importantly, in the painting, Joseph is surmounted by a staff from which new growth springs and, above it, a dove; imagery that suggests the backstory of the betrothal according to a solid literary tradition. In fact, Chapter CXXXI of Jacopo de Voragine's *Legenda aurea*—which was based on New Testament apocrypha such as the Proto-gospel of James, the Infancy Gospel of Matthew, and The Gospel of the Infancy of Jesus and Mary—presents Mary as a young woman who, despite her desire to remain a virgin, is forced by the high priest to marry a descendant of David. A voice from heaven orders that each of her suitors be assigned a staff that is to be left at night in the temple; the chosen groom will be the one whose assigned staff would be topped by new growth overnight. The old Joseph, to everyone's surprise, is the elected suitor. The flourished staff is the symbol of the mystical groom of the Virgin, the Spirit (dove) who will gift her with a son, who will become the Spouse. The fresco's location is telling: the church of Santa Croce in Florence, in the Cappella Baroncelli, adjacent to the chapel of the Machiavelli family in which Bernardo was buried and Niccolò himself would be interred (Giura 2011, p. 37). Machiavelli, thus, would often have seen this typology of representation of the scene of the marriage of the Virgin, with the touching of the bride and groom's hands and the flowering staff, on top of which rests the dove of the Holy Spirit who, in Joseph's stead, will impregnate Mary's womb with the Messiah.

Thus the *Mandragola* presents a parodic and yet deeply serious reinvention of this 'triune' wedding between Mary, the immaculate bride of the Canticle; her aged husband; and the bridegroom/son, that is, the young and powerful staff/*virga/remedy* who, alone, would make her mother. The *staff* and the *shoot*, whose erotic allusion to the phallus is clear, initiates a play of words that is crucial to the general allegory of the comedy: the play between the *virga*/phallus and Christ, through the figure of Callimaco, the doctor (*medicus*),

whose erotic strategy enables expression of the political *libido dominandi* of the Medici pope Leo X.

The extraordinary line with which fra Timoteo addresses Sostrata ("to my eye you've put a new shoot on the old tree") summarizes all the multiple *codices* of the play with an irresistible comic power, authorizing three metaphorical or allegorical interpretations: (a) the shoot is the son, the bud, the young flower, *il bel fanciul mastio* growing in Lucretia, thus sprouted on the trunk of the 'old' Nicias, finally 'made father' thanks to Callimaco; Timoteo therefore 'promises' Sostrata a forthcoming grandchild. (b) The shoot is the phallus, by synecdoche the powerful male, so that "il bel fanciul mastio" is precisely Callimachus, who has, in fact, superimposed himself on the "old" Nicias, taking his place in Lucretia's heart; and (c) the most profound and revelatory meaning of the term shoot, strangely never acknowledged by critics, is, in my opinion, the biblical one, opportunely expressed by a friar; it is the reference to the *virga*, the shoot, in Isaiah 11:1–2. The Vulgate translation of the verse is *Et egredietur virga de radice Iesse et flos de radice eius ascendet, et requiescet super eum Spiritus Domini* is connected with Is 53:2 (*Et ascendet sicut virgultum coram eo et sicut radix de terra sitienti*). The *radix* is the trunk of Jesse, David's father, from which a *virga* (a *flos*, a *virgultum*, a shoot) sprouts; and the prophetic interpretation of the *virga* as referring to the virgin Mary, from whom the messianic *flos*, Jesus Christ, would be born, on whom the Holy Spirit himself would rest, was also well-established. The reference to Christ immediately brings us to the encomiastic reference to his vicar, the pope, here saluted as flower/sprout/shoot, who enters into the temple and mystically weds his bride (Mary/the Church).

In conclusion, in the final ceremony of the play, the 'marriage' between Lucretia and her 'shoot,' Nicia, stages what is actually a symbolic death, a real substitution, comparable to that of Joseph being substituted for by the Spirit of God (thus with Christ himself as Mary's husband), or to the *Nunc dimittis* of the old Simeon, or that of the Baptist, who declares that he is not the true bridegroom, but only the friend of the true bridegroom (i.e., Christ; John 3:29–30). As happened for John the Baptist with respect to Jesus, Nicia shrinks in importance, while Callimachus 'grows' in the paradoxical finale.

5. Conclusions

To summarize the findings of this brief analysis: Machiavelli's Lucretia, made a *casta meretrix*, has multiple Marian allusions. To read her story as no more than a blasphemous erotic parody of the Scriptures is to miss its point. It is intended as part of a common language, shared among all the interlocutors and offered to an audience well-equipped to decipher the deeper Christological meaning, and to recognize how that meaning is being appropriated for an encomium of Leo X. Lucretia-as-Mary, therefore, as a symbol of the Church, is a theological–political figure in whom can shine the glory of the Groom who has married her: a new young leader, a *medicus* whose coming was foreordained, and who will not only heal but command.

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Notes

1 Machiavelli (2017, pp. 49–51); English translation in Machiavelli (1989b, p. 819).

2 This essay is a further elaboration of the research presented in Lettieri (2019).

3 Lettieri (2017a, 2017b): the *Esortazione* has to be understood as an anti-Lutheran summary of Desiderius Erasmus' *De immensa Dei misericordia Concio*, which Machiavelli wrote in the context of his closeness to a high-level circle of curialists and cardinals of Clement VII's court.

4 Chapter XXVI gravitates around the invocation pronounced by Moses, a typos of the new redeemer prince: "Qui si veggono estraordinari sanza esempio, condotti da Dio: el mare si è aperto; una nube vi ha scorto il cammino; la pietra ha versato acque; qui è piovuto la manna. Ogni cosa è concorsa nella vostra grandezza (now we see marvelous, unexampled signs that God is

directing you: the sea is divided; a cloud shows you the road; the rock pours out water; manna rains down; everything unites for your greatness)". In fact, the hidden text that supports the Machiavellian quotation, whose aim is to exalt the paradoxical "eschatological" occasion offered by the political misery of Italy as I Cor 10:1–4: "our ancestors were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2 and were all baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 and all ate the same spiritual food, 4 and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual rock that followed them, and that rock was Christ. [. . .] 6 Now these things occurred as examples [. . .] These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come". The Pauline text, therefore, presents the same four providential events of Exodus, cited by Machiavelli as signs of the imminent messianic advent of the savior of Italy. Ex 14:21 and 26–31 (the sea which opens to let the Israelites pass and which closes to drown the Egyptians); 17:5–6 (the water which pours out of the rock that Moses strikes); 16:1–36 (manna); 13:21 and 40:36–38 (the cloud which leads Israel on its journey).

5 As reported in Cerretani (1993, p. 285); cf. Ventrone (2016, pp. 358–59).

6 Machiavelli (2017, p. 97). Machiavelli (1989b, p. 801) translates the line with "I'm sweating with anxiety", in which the biblical reference is lost.

7 See Machiavelli (1989b, p. 815), Timoteo's monologue: "All night I haven't shut an eye, I'm so eager to learn how Callimaco and the others have got on; I've been attending to various things to use up the time; I said matins, read a life of the Holy Fathers, went into the church and lit a lamp that had gone out, changed the veil of a Madonna who works miracles. How many times I have told these friars to keep her clean! And then they are puzzled if worship falls off".

8 The allusion to the evening can be referred to the notation in Luke 24:29 (*advesperascit* in the Vulgate) which introduces Jesus' Eucharistic epiphany to the disciples of Emmaus.

9 Newbigin (1983, p. 90): "Ma con che lingua o con che sermone/si potrebbe mai dire l'allegrezza/che voi vedrete avere a Simïone/quando arà in braccio sua dolcezza?/O giusto, o santo, o fedel vecchione,/quanto fu bella questa tua certezza . . . Vedrete ancora umile Maria/ch'al tempio viene con pudica faccia/portando il suo Figliuolo per la via,/peso dolcissimo alle caste braccia,/ed a Giuseppe vecchio in compagnia;/ed anche lui d'andar molto s'avaccia,/portando seco dua tortorelle,/offerta giusta delle poverelle./Cinque danari darà il vecchiarello,/in segno dell'umana redenzione"; "la mia mente si alieta tutta quanta,/Se questo tuo figliuolo in braccio piglio:/Ché certo son che gli è Cristo re nostro,/Come ben dal Signor m'è stato mostro".

10 Machiavelli (2017, p. 57). The English translation of Machiavelli (1989b, p. 820)—"Doctor, let me present you to my wife"—fails to capture the symbolic importance of the gesture.

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Article

The Medieval Apparition of the Virgin of the Girdle and the Marian Appendix of Liturgical Sequences in E-TO 135

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Abstract: Based on the fervor and devotion of the Virgin of the Girdle of Tortosa—which gained a strong establishment from the 17th century onwards—this article explores the possibility of a cause-effect relationship between the apparition of the Virgin in the cathedral in 1178 and the Marian appendix contained in the troper-proser E-TO 135 (c. 1228–1264). By comparing the narration of the miracle and the sequences in this appendix, we can verify the existence of an early and incipient veneration—both inside and outside the walls of the cathedral—that would predate what was previously believed.

Keywords: the Virgin of the Girdle; troper-proser; sequence; liturgical song; medieval devotion; medieval music; miracles; Tortosa

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1. Introduction

"And with great affection, I say to you, as I did the first time: Farewell, Spain! Farewell, land of Mary!" With these words, Pope John Paul II bid farewell to Spain in 2003, and they certainly have their raison d'être. The Iberian Peninsula has been a land of deep-rooted devotion to the Virgin and a clear belief in the Immaculate Conception since early on. For example, there is the legendary apparition of the Virgin on a pillar to the Apostle St. James, whose popular fervor gave birth, according to a questionable tradition from the 7th century (St. Ildephonsus and St. Julian of Toledo), to the first particular feast dedicated to the Immaculate Conception (Peinado Guzmán 2012). Or, on 25 March 1858, the day of the Incarnation, there was her self-disclosure in the Patois language (similar to Catalan), "que soy era inmaculada Concepciou" (that I am/was the Immaculate Conception), during the apparitions of Lourdes in the Pyrenees (Laurentin 1988, p. 1160).

Nearly every village, nearly every corner of the Peninsula, had its own advocation to Our Lady. In the case of Tortosa, which had been recently reconquered, this devotion was to the Virgin of the Girdle, thanks to yet another numinous apparition. According to tradition (Vidal Franquet 2008, pp. 53–64), on the night of 24–25 March 1178, the Virgin appeared to a canon who was about to celebrate Matins in the cathedral but was late amid *Te Deum*. She gave him the girdle that bound her mantle with the following words: "Et quoniam in honorem filii mei, et meum haec Ecclesia est constructa, et vobis Dertusensibus curae est me plurimum venerari, ideo quia diligo vos, pro quibus meum ad filium intercedo, soluens Cingulum, quo praecingor, a me fabricatum, super Altare illud pono, et vobis trado: ut hoc in pignus amoris mei memoriam habeatis". (Martorel y de Luna 1626, p. 459) (And since this church was built in honor of my Son and in mine, and because I love the people of Tortosa who take care that I should be highly revered and for whom I intercede with my Son, loosening the girdle with which I gird myself, made with my own hands, I place on the altar. I give it to you so that you may keep it as a sign of my love). From then on, especially since the 17th century (Alanyà i Roig 2004), this relic has been the subject of strong devotion in Catalonia and throughout Spain as a miraculous gift, also on the part of both the Habsburg and Bourbon monarchs. For instance, from 1629 to modern times,

it was customary for queens of Spain to receive the reliquary with the Girdle as a means of protection during childbirth, while Felipe V was the first monarch to be a member of the Archconfraternity of the Virgin of the Girdle (Bayerri Bertomeu 1989, pp. 147–52; Vidal Franquet 2008, p. 30). Precisely, the support of the Crown was decisive for the construction of a majestic chapel (Figure 1) in honor of the Virgin of the Girdle to guard the relic in the cathedral (Gil Saura 2008).

Figure 1. Baroque Chapel of the Girdle (1672–1725) seen from the main nave of the cathedral. Photographed by Amador Àlvarez (public domain picture).

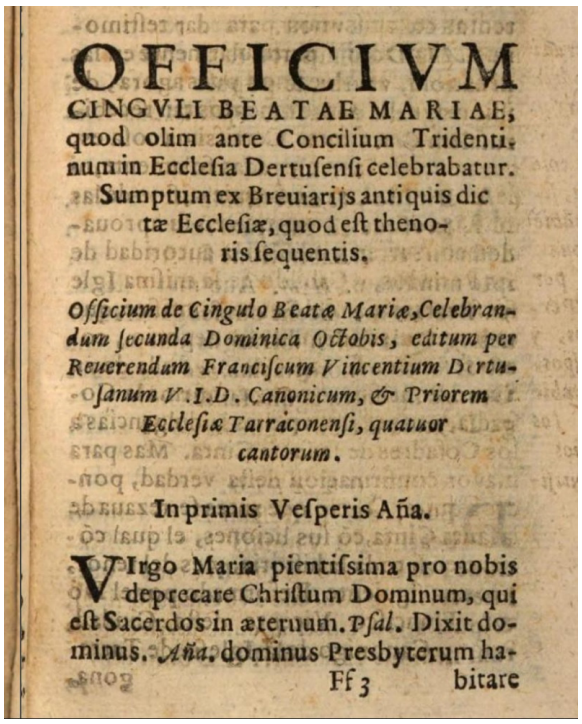
The connection between the advocation and the relic with childbirth is not coincidental. From the beginning, the fact that the relic of the *Cinta* (Girdle) was considered a protector of women in labor, as a sign of the Virgin's motherhood, could have originated from the meaning Saint Isidore's *auctoritas* gave to *incincta* (*in-cincta*): "sine cinctu; quia praecingi fortiter uterus non permittit" (*Etymologiarum* X, 151) (Oroz Reta and Marcos Casquero 2004, p. 818) (without girding, because the uterus does not allow itself to be forcefully girded). There may have been a mistaken assimilation of this term with the vernacular term *encinta*, meaning pregnant. Although etymologically debatable (Corominas and Pascual 1980, pp. 598–99), the initial steps of devotion towards this advocation by women in labor were likely taken under the same principle of authority, surely promoted by the Cathedral Chapter of Regular Canons of Saint Ruf of Avignon.

Precisely, the membership and affiliation of Tortosa's Cathedral Chapter to the reforming spirit emanating from Saint Ruf of Avignon is not a trivial aspect of this matter. Alongside the monastic arm of Cluny, Saint Ruf of Avignon had become the canonical arm with which the Gregorian Reform was articulated, and in this, the emphasis on the figure of the Virgin was a key element (Vones-Liebenstein 1996). Thus, just 30 years after Tortosa was recovered from Muslim hands (1148) and 20 years since the construction of the new temple dedicated to Saint Mary began (1158), the second consecration took place in the same year as the appearance of the Virgin (Ramos 2005). Therefore, it is logical to think

that from the times of the first bishop and abbot Gaufred of Avignon (1151–1165) until the consecration by Bishop Ponç of Monells (28 November 1178), the promotion of a faith in which Mary had a preponderant role was the usual trend, as evidenced by the cathedral's own dedication. From then on, in this sense, the miracle of the girdle became the definitive endorsement in devotional terms.

On the other hand, as is so often the case in the Middle Ages with extraordinary events of a sacred nature such as apparitions, and this one should not be an exception, once they gain popularity and become widely known, the need to bring them quickly into the liturgy arises. This process involves an exchange and composition of chants in which a diversity of roles come into play, some of them representing an extension of old uses and materials, while others are new and, to a certain point, largely original areas of creativity, with new nuances and meanings. Following this process, the Ciceronian axiom *variatio delectat* flies over medieval creative consciousness, where the production of something new could also have included the practice of expanding or adapting something that already existed and would have been valued as such by tradition. In other words, "the new is usually presented with the look of the old since the river is always the father of the stream" (Tello Ruiz-Pérez 2016, p. 22).

However, where are the medieval chants for the Virgin of the Girdle? We know that in 1508, bishop Alfonso of Aragon and the Cathedral Chapter of Tortosa jointly commissioned an *Officium Cinguli Beate Marie, suntum ex breviario antiquo Ecclesie Dertusensis*[1] (Figure 2) (O'Callaghan, I pp. 174–77; Bayerri Bertomeu 1989, pp. 77–81; Querol 1999, pp. 86–87; Alanyà i Roig 2004, pp. 62–63) (Office of the Girdle of Blessed Mary, taken from the ancient breviary of the Church of Tortosa) from Francesc Vicent, prior of Tarragona (Toldrà i Sabaté 2003), for a new proper worship on the second Sunday of October, but we have no trace of earlier chants directly related to the Girdle . . . Does this mean that it was not venerated before in Tortosa?



OFFICIVM
CINGVLI BEATAE MARIAE,
quod olim ante Concilium Tridentinum in Eccleſia Dertuſenſi celebrabatur.
Sumptum ex Breuiarijs antiquis dictæ Eccleſiæ, quod eſt thenoris ſequentis.

Officium de Cingulo Beatæ Mariæ, Celebrandum ſecunda Dominica Octobris, editum per Reuerendum Franciſcum Vincentium Dertuſanum V.I.D. Canonicum, & Priorem Eccleſiæ Tarraconenſi, quatuor cantorum.

In primis Veſperis Aña.

VIrgo Maria pientiſsima pro nobis deprecare Chriſtum Dominum, qui eſt Sacerdos in æternum. *Pſal.* Dixit dominus. *Aña.* dominus Presbyterum habitare

Ff 3

Figure 2. Incipit of the Office of the Girdle of Blessed Mary (1508) (Martorel y de Luna 1626, p. 453).

Using the evidence from the Marian sequences found in the Tortosa troper-proser, Chapter Library Cod. 135 (E-TO 135),[2] compiled during the mid-13th century (c. 1228–1264) (Peláez Bilbao 2021), and specifically those collected in an unusual Appendix dedicated to the Virgin, this article examines the interrelationships between the selection of chants

from the manuscript and early devotion to the Virgin of the Girdle. The Marian anthology, comprising 22 sequences, nine Alleluias, and one Sanctus (non-troped), draws mainly from the repertoires of the so-called "second-epoch", "victorine", or "classical" sequence (from the 12th century onwards) (Peláez Bilbao and Tello Ruiz-Pérez 2021, pp. 476–84), where four sequences are unique to Tortosa, seven have a very limited diffusion (sometimes only between peninsular sources), and 11 have pan-European dissemination. The analysis focuses on the literary and musical connection points of these sequences with the main features of the apparition and devotion of the Virgin of the Girdle, such as her self-presentation as *Maiestas Mariae* (*in solio*, on a throne), the emphasis on her title as a patroness of women in labor, the allusion to her womb (girdled by the girdle), and her love for humankind.

As a result of our approach, the Marian appendix and private or public devotion can be seen as two sides of the same coin, the apparition, finding many common elements and mutually explaining each other. Thus, going beyond establishing a simple direct dependence that would place these sequences as the possible first testimony of liturgical veneration related to the Virgin of the Girdle, something which, on the other hand, is entirely plausible, our intention is to present both as realities imbued by the unique expansive wave of the miracle.

2. Main Features of the Apparition

Unfortunately, we do not have a complete narration of the events that took place surrounding the apparition before 1508. The *breviarium antiquum* on which Francesc Vicent based his work, later edited by Martorel y de Luna, has not come down to us. However, what we do have are two references to the existence of the story, in the form of prayer without music, collected in two cathedral cartularies (E-TO 14, f. 173r and E-TO 81, f. 183r),[3] both from the early 14th century. Therefore, it is worth quoting Martorel's account of the miracle in extenso in order to examine its characteristics. Distributed among the third and ninth lessons of Matins, this is essentially what the Office says:

> [Third Lesson]: In Tortosa, there was a virtuous priest [canon] with a God-fearing heart. Although we do not know his name, it is clear from the following account that he was a pious man. He had renounced the world to follow Christ and turned his attention to heavenly things, particularly to the Virgin Mary, mother of God, whom he honored diligently. One ordinary day, in the middle of the night, he woke up to attend Matins at the church of Tortosa, as was his custom. Miraculously, he was transported by the Lord to the gates of the church adjoining the cemetery. Still wondering how he had arrived there, he heard the *Te Deum laudamus* chant and was saddened, saying to himself, "Alas! I am late for church because I have slept too much. But since today there should be a ferial service, what is this solemn service that I hear inside the church?"
>
> [Fourth Lesson]: While he was silently pondering these things, the doors of the church opened, and an immense brightness of light appeared to him as he stood at the threshold. From the chevet of the church to the very threshold, he saw the holy angels of God clothed in white, standing on either side of the choir and holding lighted white candles in their hands. The sight of them made him tremble. The angels nodded to him, handed him a lighted candle, and beckoned him to approach the high altar. The priest obeyed them and went to the altar, where he saw a very beautiful woman sitting on a throne adorned and crowned. Two men stood at her sides, and she looked at him and asked him: "Do you know me, priest?" In terror, the priest answered: "Although I suspect who you are, lady, I am not quite sure". Then she said to the priest: "I am the mother of God, to whom you serve and pay the highest homage. These two men beside me are the principal apostles of Christ: on the right, Peter the Vicar of Christ, and Paul, the doctor of the gentiles, on the left".

> [Fifth Lesson]: Then the priest knelt down and said to her: "Oh, the Holiest Virgin Mary, mother of our Lord Jesus Christ and my Lady! Being an unworthy priest and a sinner, Queen of heaven, why do I deserve to see you while I still dwell in the flesh?" And the Holiest Virgin Mary said to him: "Because you have always tirelessly served me, you have deserved to see me in this life and be here among the choirs of angels. And since this church was built in honor of my Son and in mine, and because I love the people of Tortosa who take care that I should be highly revered and for whom I intercede with my Son, loosening the girdle with which I gird myself, made with my own hands, I place on the altar. I give it to you so that you may keep it as a sign of my love. And you will tell all these things to the bishop of the city, the clergy, and the people". Having said that, she untied it and placed it on the altar, handing it over to him. The priest said to her: "Considering that I am alone, if I tell them all these things they will not believe me". Then the most pious Virgin Mary said to him: "Behold, you have the major monk ("monachus maior", i.e., deacon)[4] who is in the choir, and he saw everything. Therefore, you two will report on all these things to each and every one of them". And after these words, the vision disappeared. [...][5]

As can be observed, the pace of the narrative in actions and situations sets the progression of its features. Initially, the distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary lies in the difference between the past and present tenses, respectively. The narrative's past tense portrays the daily reality that coincides with the present of the narrator and our present time. On the other hand, the present tense serves as an open door (as described in the story) to the wonderful, similar to the timeless present of the liturgy. While this may appear obvious, it is an essential detail for the narration. The liturgical chant (*Te Deum*) grants access to a supratemporal reality, enabling the eruption of heaven on earth. The narration demonstrates that participation in the liturgy is the open door to heaven, to miracles, and to encounters with things beyond our world. In the words of Cabié, "the 'Divine Liturgy' is, in a sense, heaven come down to earth and the focal point of a cosmic vision of reality. Here the entire universe is transfigured by the Holy Spirit in the offering of the sacred gifts [. . .] thus the singing echoes the singing of the angelic choirs". (Cabié 1986, p. 148).

Precisely the latter, despite the overwhelmed fears of our canon/priest, suggests that in heaven, the same chants are sung as on earth, and in the same way: here, the *Te Deum* is sung antiphonally, with two angelic choirs, or more specifically, with the two halves of a choir ("standing on either side of the choir"). Hence, under "an immense brightness of light," the two rows of angels form a corridor that leads directly to the Lady. She appears as the beautiful Queen of heaven crowned, enthroned, and flanked by the two visible heads of the apostolic college, Saint Peter, and Saint Paul, with typical attributes of the iconographic theme of the *Maiestas Mariae* (see e.g., Forsyth 1972; Verdier 1980; Thérel 1984; Piano 2003; Salvador-González 2012, pp. 175–209). Such a mise-en-scène is key and fundamental to understanding the vassalage relationship established between the Virgin and the canon, where she occupies the dominant position of the *dompna/dame/domina* (lady) of the troubadours as if she were a feudal lord, and he assumes the position of the vassal/lover who bows before the mighty presence of the beloved lady ("domina mea") in gestures of service, worship, respect, and homage. Overall, we see how mystical fervor portrays itself with the earthly feet of courtly love.[6]

Within the codes of courtly love on which this relationship is based, the girdle would then become the *gazardo/guizardo* (reward) for the merits of our spiritual lover, as a representative of the people of Tortosa and, we could say, all of humanity. Apart from the point at which she individually grants the canon the prize of being able to participate for a few moments in heavenly glory, thanks to his loyal and tireless service to her, the change from "my lady" to "our lady" is articulated. The girdle is, therefore, a gift for everyone, as evidenced by the fact that the lady sends the canon to tell everyone what has just happened, assuring that he will be believed by the deacon's testimony.

Here, the displayed portrait of Mary depicts her as a queen, as the beloved, but above all, as a mother ("I am the mother of God"), and this detail is of paramount importance in regard to the holy girdle. The girdle, being a garment that was made by the Virgin with her own hands, and used to girdle her belly and womb, was immediately recognized as a symbol of her motherhood. It is not surprising, as there existed very extensive imagery since ancient times in which Mary was depicted as the tabernacle, monstrance, container, and reliquary of Christ, that is, of *Corpus Christi*. Just to give an example, we have these eloquent words from Saint Germanos I of Constantinople (c. 634–733 or 740):

> Of that belt, which encircled that all-holy body and covered God who was hidden in her womb. Of that belt, which adorned the ark of God in a beautiful and sacred fashion. Of that belt, which was often enriched by undefiled drops of milk from the one who was wholly undefiled. [. . .]
>
> For if a vessel which has been in contact with myrrh even for a short time knows how to preserve its sweet smell for a long time after it has been emptied, what might one say about the belt that was wound about and attached for a long time to that truly inexhaustible and divine myrrh—I mean the most pure and wholly unblemished body of the Theotokos? Would it not preserve eternally the sweet smell of healing and fill those who approach it with faith and desire? [*Oratio IX*, 4–5][7] (Cunningham 2008, pp. 249–250; Migne, PG 98, 376B–C)

The correlation between the living vessel and the Word-made-flesh explains the early association of the holy girdle with the fruit of Mary's womb. This identification was developed to such an extent that, even in the time of the Virgin, the holy girdle or *τιμίας ζώνης* (holy belt) was revered as a relic of Christ himself. We can trace this association far back in time because the episode of Tortosa, to a certain extent, replicates the one narrated by the Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea about the delivery of the belt to Saint Thomas Apostle while Mary was taken up by angels into heaven[8] (Salvador-González 2013, 2019). In fact, several girdles have come down to us in different parts of Europe (Constantinople, Prato, Puy-Notre-Dame, and Bruton), each with its specific devotion (Réau 1957, pp. 62–66). However, in all these pious manifestations, the most important aspect of being observed is not so much the diversity of the girdles themselves but rather the fact that they are interconnected in one way or another. For instance, all of them are seen as a sign of the Virgin's universal motherhood and a means of maternal protection during childbirth.[9]

For the first time in 1347 (and later also in 1363), the "Inventari Antic de les Sanctes Relíquies" (Ancient Inventory of the Holy Relics) from Tortosa (Figure 3) recorded these practices as follows:

> Ítem, té el monge major, en una caixa de fusta pintada, una Cinta, la qual se diu ésser de Santa Maria, la qual és de seda blanca et és feta a manera de eixàrsia de pescar, la qual presta a les dones que van en part et no poden enfantar, et és nuada en sinch llochs et hay 12 palms de llonch e més de 1 de ample, e hals caps és feta a manera de trena fil o de cairell, et hai un tros de cuiro lligat a cada un cap a 4 palms, la qual se diu que Santa Maria la ha tinguda Cintada en esta sgleia com hic apparet segons que pus llongament és contingut en un miracle, lo qual és escrit en alguns llibres segons ques diu.
>
> (O'Callaghan, I, p. 160; Bayerri Bertomeu 1956, p. 488; Alanyà i Roig 2004, p. 60; Ballester 2004)
>
> [Item: The deacon possesses a Girdle in a painted wooden box, which is believed to have belonged to Saint Mary. The Girdle is made of white silk and is shaped like a fishing tackle. It is customary to bring it to women in labor who have complications. It has five knots, 12 spans in length, and more than one span in width. At each end, it resembles the shape of a braided thread or hair braid, with a piece of leather tied to four spans. It is said that Saint Mary wore the Girdle

("Cintada") in this church, as mentioned in a miracle that is reportedly more extensively written in some books.]

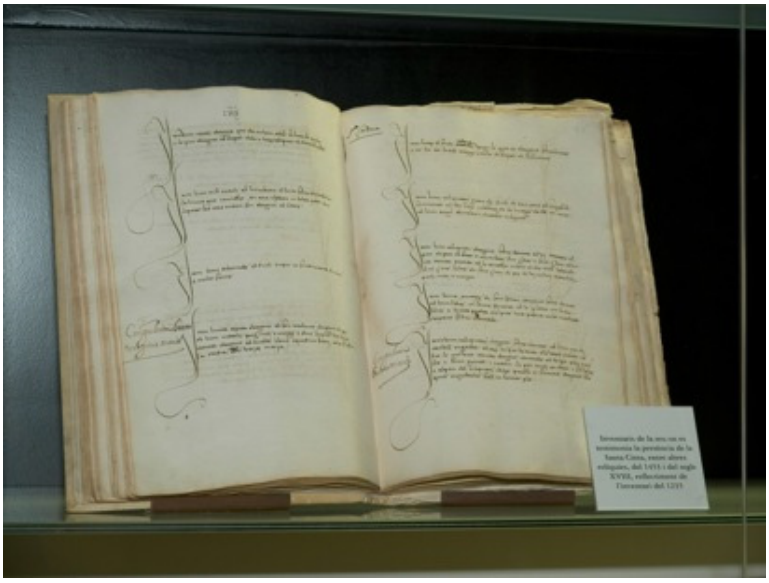


Figure 3. Ancient Inventory of the Holy Relics (1357) from Tortosa (E-TO c.n. 73, s.n.). @ Tortosa Chapter Library. Picture used with permission.

As previously mentioned, it is highly probable that the term *cintada* (and, by extension, *encinta*) may have been confused with the Isidorian definition of *incincta*, whether intentionally or not. However, it is a fact that the Virgin Mary was already regarded as a protector of women in labor, as evidenced by other girdles that preceded this one in time. The interesting issue for our purposes is the significance of this protective dimension for the people and the city of Tortosa. As discussed by Amades (1932), in 1148, after the reconquest of the city by Berenguer IV in the context of the Second Crusade, many lives were lost. It was crucial to ensure safe childbirths, and the apparition of the Virgin at that moment provided confidence and hope to a Tortosa that had lost its bearings. Out of love, the Virgin was with them, and now the people had to entrust themselves to her through their devotion and songs of praise. Thus, an ideal environment existed for the compilation of a specific repertoire.

3. The Marian Appendix in E-TO 135

At this juncture, we arrive at the crux of our hypothesis. Is it plausible that an appendix of sequences (Figure 4), such as that found in the troper-proser E-TO 135, was compiled to exalt the Virgin of the Girdle? This would imply that, in one way or another, from a liturgical standpoint, veneration and devotion to the Girdle were active in Tortosa long before its specific feast was established in the 16th century and certainly long before what was previously believed. Why else would an appendix of Marian nature be included in a liturgical codex that already covered Marian festivities within its overall corpus?

However, as we have already pointed out, seeking a direct and explicit dependence relationship of the repertoire with respect to the entire current of devotion aroused by the miracle—such as, for example, that of protection during childbirth spread among women in labor—would be too simplistic a way of seeing things. Perhaps it would be much more useful here to employ the concept of "interdependence" between both dimensions, liturgical and popular, as two coetaneous fruits of the same tree, each with its own subtleties and characteristics. One is reflected and explained in the other because both have the same origin—the same root.

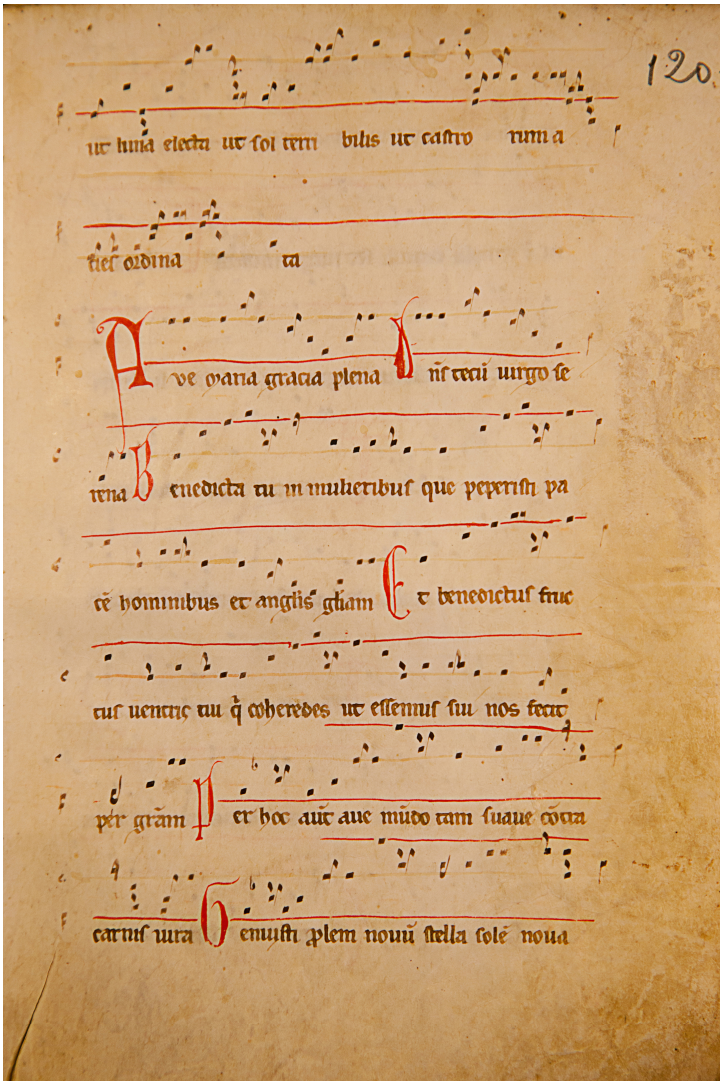


Figure 4. Incipit of *Ave Maria/gratia plena*, first sequence of the Marian appendix (E-TO 135, f. 120r). @ Tortosa Chapter Library. Picture used with permission.

The troper-proser TO 135 can be considered one of the most representative within the Spanish repertoire of sequences for three main reasons (Peláez Bilbao 2003, 2021). Firstly, because it contains a large number of sequences, no less than 77, surpassed only—as far as sequences with melody are concerned—by E-H 4 (another troper-proser), dated to the early 12th century, from San Juan de la Peña (Tello Ruiz-Pérez 2017). Secondly, it provides a fairly balanced sample of all the styles of the medieval sequence as a genre. Finally, precisely because of the presence of this interesting, enigmatic, and unusual Marian appendix.

The organization of the manuscript (Appendix A) is established by collections that develop without interruption, followed by our appendix: Kyrie (ff. 1–9v), Gloria (ff. 9v–15v), Sanctus (ff. 15v–32v), four Episcopal blessings (ff. 32v–33r), Agnus Dei (ff. 33r–39r), sequentiary or proser (temporal, sanctoral, and common) (ff. 39r-118r), and Marian appendix (ff. 118v–144v). Each section change is marked by an illuminated initial of the first piece that starts a new collection (for example, the sequentiary: Figure 5). This occurs in all cases except in the appendix, which was added by a contemporary hand (Figure 6b): it is precisely where the sequentiary ends (f. 118r) and the appendix begins (f. 118v)—the only point of the manuscript in which this continuum is interrupted, since the sequentiary ends in the sixth line of the folio (Figure 6a). That is, there is a clear intention to separate the Marian appendix as a section apart from the rest of the manuscript.

The Marian appendix comprises eight Alleluias, 21 sequences, an additional Alleluia, one Sanctus, and a final incomplete sequence. It can be considered a kind of anthology, specifically, a Marian anthology. In fact, the appendix lacks illuminated initials and rubrics assigning each item to a feast of the Virgin or other occasions, thus exhibiting a high degree of simplicity. The last incomplete sequence (*Uterus virgineus*), with the ambiguous rubric "Sancta Maria"—added by another hand that made corrections to the manuscript during the 14th century—is an exception. As with any anthology, liturgical versatility and interchangeability are essential traits of the repertory. In this regard, as previously mentioned several times, discovering an appendix with similar characteristics is exceedingly uncommon. In the current corpus of 3381 manuscripts with sequences from all over Europe in our database, we could only identify a certain resemblance to six sources,[10] all of which are later than E-TO 135 (i.e., from the 14th to the 16th centuries) and have an anthological nature centered on the figure of the Virgin Mary. This scarcity of comparable testimonies further enhances the value of this Tortosa appendix.

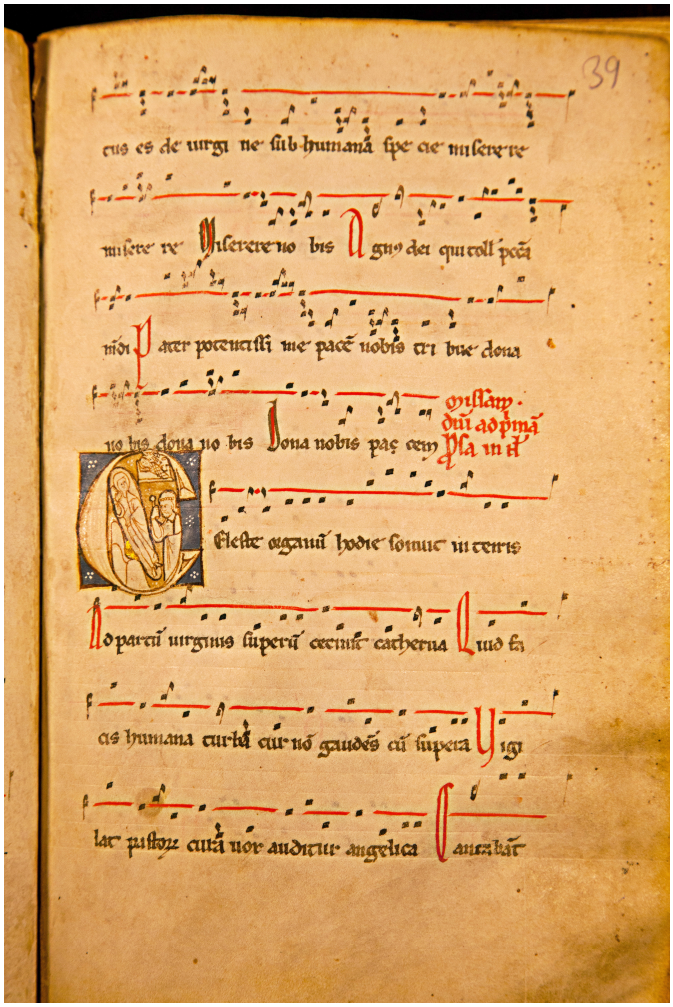
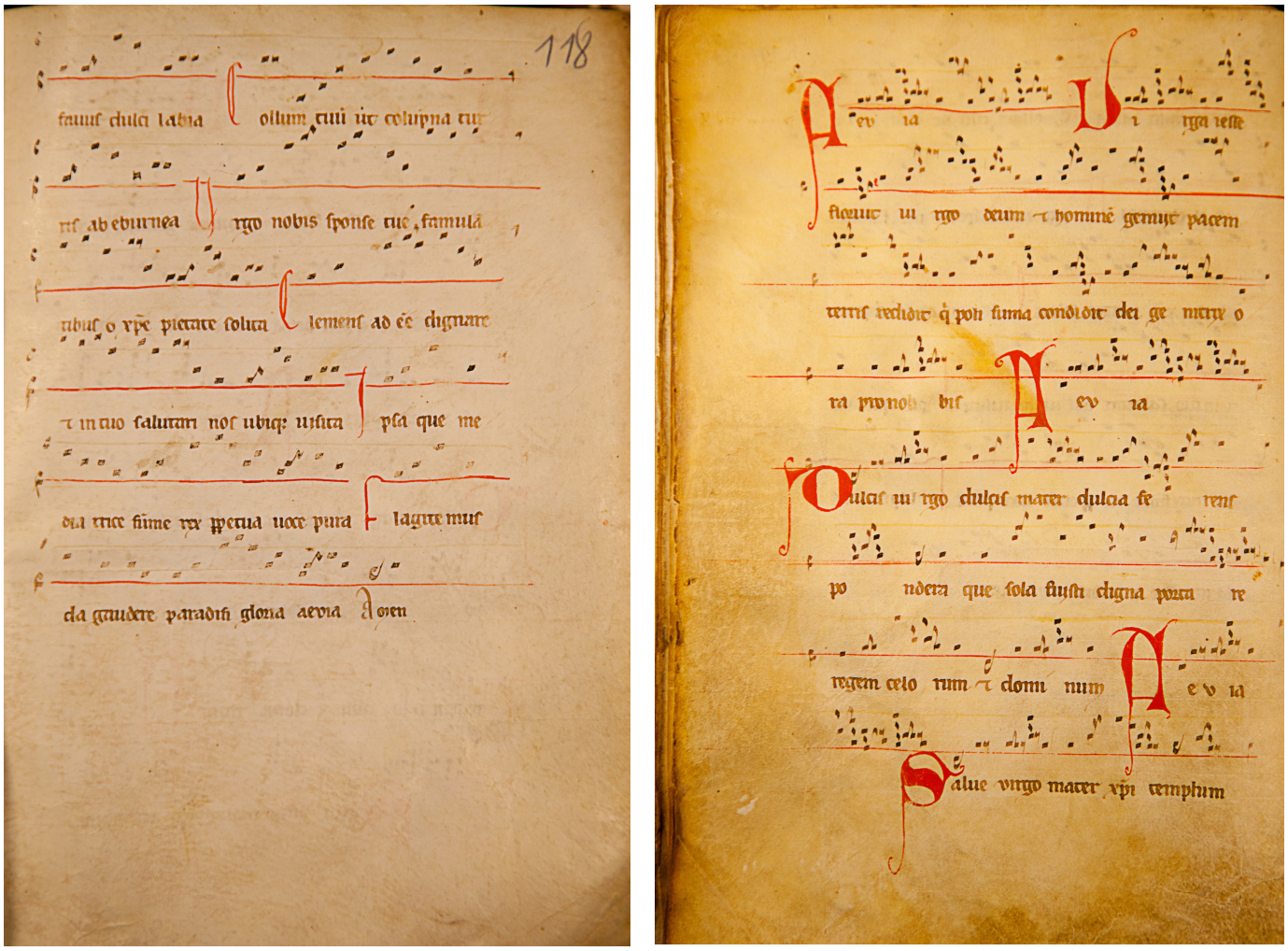


Figure 5. Beginning of the sequentiary (E-TO 135, f. 39r). @ Tortosa Chapter Library. Picture used with permission.



(**a**) (**b**)

Figure 6. (**a**) End of the sequentiary (E-TO 135, f. 118r); (**b**) Beginning of the Marian appendix (E-TO 135, f. 118v). @ Tortosa Chapter Library. Picture used with permission.

It is worth noting that, out of the total of 32 items in the appendix, including the Sanctus (not troped), exactly a quarter (8) are *unica*: four out of nine Alleluias (as shown in Table 1) and four out of 22 sequences (as shown in Table 2). Moreover, while the remaining Alleluias have generally had very limited circulation, half of the sequences (11) have been disseminated to a greater or lesser extent among European sources. These figures indicate that almost two-thirds of the items have either had regional circulation, with E-TO 135 often being the earliest source, or that E-TO 135 is the only surviving record of them. Both scenarios suggest a limited use, which is well suited for a focused devotion or worship, such as that of the Virgin of the Girdle. Furthermore, even among the sequences that have been more widely disseminated, their association with Alleluias that are relatively uncommon confers a special character upon them.

Table 1. Alleluia concordances of Marian appendix (E-TO 135).

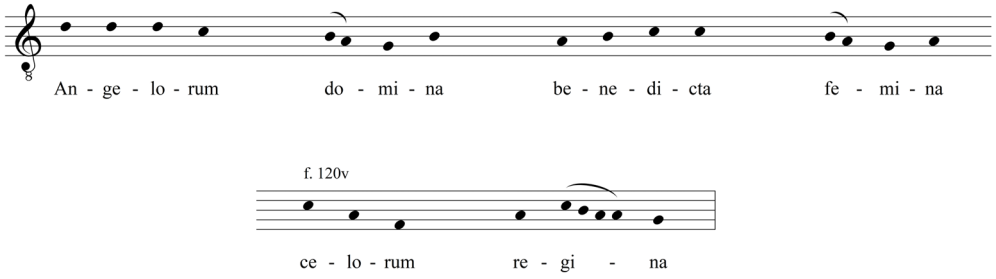
Alleluia	Concordances
Dulcis virgo dulcis mater	I-Ac 695 (c. 1230), from Reims
Es rosa vernalis	unicum
Felix mater	unicum
Mater Christi gloriosa	unicum
Ora pro nobis pia	(Cantus n.d., chant ID No. g02266)
Que est ista	E-BUlh 11 (c. 1320), from Las Huelgas
Salve virgo mater Christi	E-BUlh 11 (c. 1320), from Las Huelgas
Virga iesse floruit	(Schlager 1965, ThK 259)
Virgo sacra	unicum

Table 2. Sequence concordances of Marian appendix (E-TO 135).

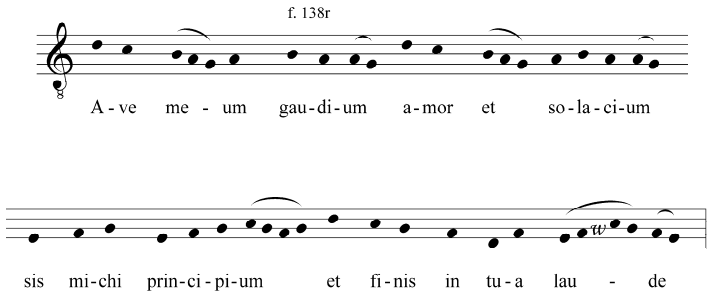
Incipit	Melody	Author	Spain	Meridional Group	Southwest	West	East	Italy	Total
Ave gloriosa/Virginum regina		Philip the Chancellor	2		1	7			10
Ave Maria/gratia plena			8	4	4	61	116	11	204
Ave mater domini/Flos odoris gemini	Veni sancte spiritus/Et emitte		3				2		5
Ave mater gratiae/Speculum ecclesiae	Veni sancte spiritus/Et emitte		1						unicum
Ave porta gratiae			1						unicum
Ave spes mundi Maria			1	2	3	57	56	3	122
Ave virgo virginum/Ave salus hominum			3			2		1	6
Dolens auctor omnium			3			1			4
Hodiernae lux diei/Celebris		Adam of St. Victor	5	4	3	63	75	3	153
Iesse virgam humidavit		Henricus of Pisa	3		4	16	5	2	30
Maria virgo virginum/Ora pro nobis Dominum			5			1			6
Missus Gabriel de caelis			5	4	3	29	18	5	64
Mittit ad virginem			3	1		27	66	2	99
Nativitas Mariae virginis			6	6		8	57	6	83
Promereris summae laudis			3					1	4
Salve mater salvatoris flos			1						unicum
Salve sancta Christi parens			2	1		7	17	3	30
Sancti spiritus/assit nobis gratia/Quo fecundata	Cithara/Occidentana		3			2	1		6
Uterus virgineus/Thronus			1			3	30		34
Verbum bonum et suave			7	6	2	37	142	33	227
Virga Iesse generosa			1						unicum
Virgini Mariae laudes/intonent christiani/Eva tristis	Victimae paschali laudes		5	2	5	20	111	3	145

However, we must keep in mind that medieval mentality is not the same as our own. Even though these data indicate a high proportion of locally or regionally disseminated compositions, the sense of originality was far different from what we currently understand. In this way, a composition chosen for a particular aspect and used locally did not cease to be considered and felt as if it were "one's own," even in cases where it was widely spread and not composed ad hoc for a specific community. On the contrary, the weight of tradition, as attested by the general dissemination of a particular item, could even further authorize its suitability for a specific use. Only when the general corpus could not meet local needs did medieval creativity turn to the composition of new pieces, which ultimately tended to seek to present themselves with the appearance of pre-existing ones. We want to emphasize this idea because we believe it is essential to put the peculiar nature of our repertoire in its proper perspective in connection with the miracle and veneration of the Virgin of the Girdle.

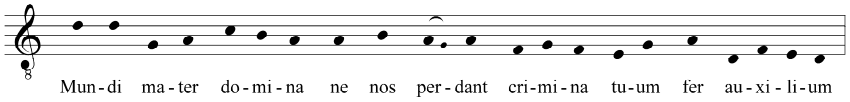
From this perspective, with regard to the thematic connections of this anthologized repertoire with the main features that we have emphasized of the Virgin of the Girdle, it can be observed that they are plentiful and appear to multiply. Some examples of this can be found in the portrayal of the Virgin as "the beautiful and blessed woman, Queen of heaven, Lady (*dompna*) of the angels" in the sequence *Uterus virgineus* (Dreves et al., AH 54, No. 248; p. 389; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 77, p. 961), which is already significant enough in its incipit, "Virgin womb":



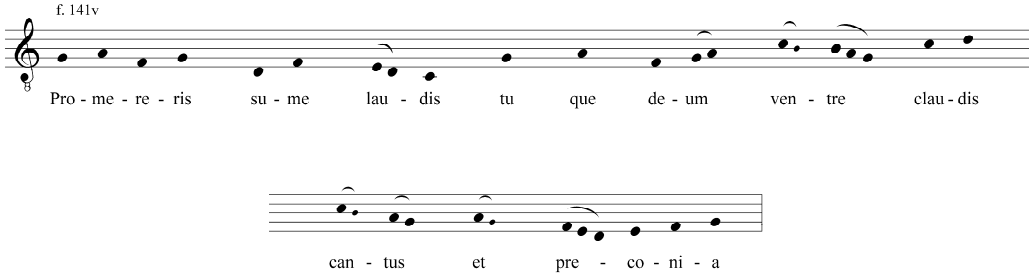
In *Ave virgo virginum/Ave salus hominum* (Dreves et al., AH 42, No. 65; p. 75; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 73, p. 911), the Virgin is addressed as the beloved, with the words "Hail, my joy, love and solace! Be my beginning and end in your praise":



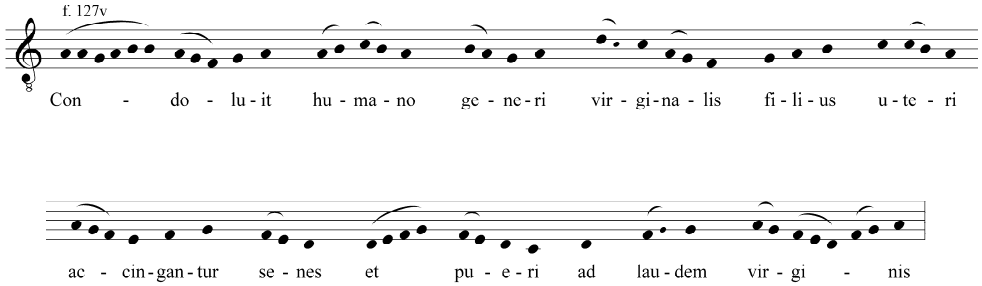
As the Mother Protectress, the Virgin is referred to as "Mother of the world, Lady; let not our crimes destroy us, bring your help" in *Ave mater gratiae/Speculum ecclesiae* (Dreves et al., AH 34, No. 113, p. 95; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 69, p. 890):



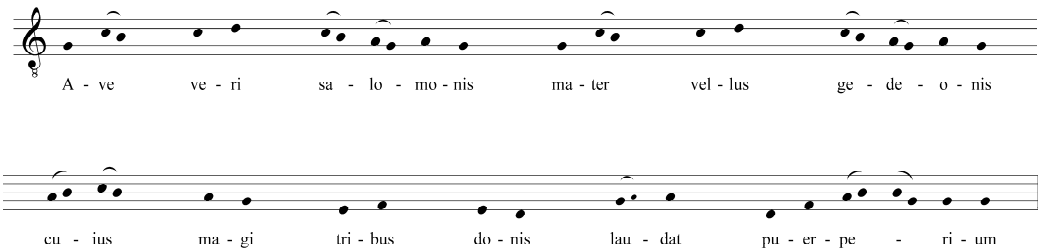
As a holy womb deserving of praise, the Virgin is hailed with the words "Thy, who close God in your womb, will deserve the highest praises, songs and announcements" in *Promereris summae laudis* (Dreves et al., AH 34, No. 79, p. 71; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 75, p. 930):



Referring to the girdle that encircled her waist, which is accessible to all, the sequence *Nativitas Mariae virginis* (Dreves et al., AH 54, No. 188, p. 288; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 62, p. 799) proclaims, "The virginal Son of the womb condoled with humankind. Infants and the elderly are girded for the praise of the Virgin":



Or finally, for the sake of brevity, she is also portrayed as the emblematic figure of all women in labor, with the words "Hail, Mother of the true Solomon, the fleece of Gideon, to whom the magi with three gifts praise the childbirth" in *Verbum bonum et suave/Personemus* (Dreves et al., AH 54, No. 218, p. 343; Peláez Bilbao 2021, II No. 66, p. 847):



In this simple thematic sampling of the appendix, at least two highly interesting aspects of our hypothesis are evident. The first is that the connections of each of the themes with the veneration of the Virgin of the Girdle develop independently of whether a sequence has wide or limited diffusion. This corroborates our basic idea that there is no positive or negative balance between the assumption of pre-existing repertoire and the composition of a new one to meet a local need. Simply put, all sequences are viewed as "proper".

To illustrate this, let us take two of the examples presented here as extreme cases: *Promereris summae laudis* and *Nativitas Mariae virginis*. The former, cited as a reference to the deserving praises and songs of the womb that housed the Son of God, has a very restricted diffusion, with only four other sources besides E-TO 135. Of these, the oldest is E-Mbhmv 98 (from the end of the 12th century and the beginning of the 13th century), from the monastery of San Vicente de la Sierra (Toledo), also belonging to the regular canons of Saint Ruf of Avignon. Then we have E-TO 133 (from the end of the 13th century), from the cathedral of Tortosa, and finally, the two-voice version given by the Cistercian Las Huelgas Codex E-BUlh 11 (c. 1320), which also includes I-Rvat vat 4743 (c. 1400–1410), a Franciscan missal from Gubbio. Therefore, the diffusion of *Promereris summae laudis* seems to stem from the charisma of the Rufinians, to spread, probably through Toledo, to Las Huelgas and from there to some Franciscans in the heart of Italy. But beyond now delving into the fascinating question of the transfer of this chant between different centers (Tello Ruiz-Pérez 2006), we would like to point out the fact that, in each and every one of them, its presence could have different nuances and yet, in all of them, it would be felt as a proper chant by each community, regardless of the origin of the chant (Rufinian, Cistercian or Franciscan). At the opposite end, we have the second example, *Nativitas Mariae virginis*, with more than 80 agreeing sources from all the most important traditions of Europe, and in which E-TO 135 is the earliest peninsular testimony. Yet, we can reasonably assert the same governing

principle. This sequence, cited here as a paradigm of reference to the girdle that girds (an expression found only in five other sequences out of a corpus of over 4700), would equally enjoy the same proper status during its life in each of the monasteries and convents, churches, and cathedrals in which it was employed over time. The important thing in both cases is to adequately meet a repertoire need that may respond to different conditions but certainly not to our modern concept of originality.

The second aspect of interest in our sample is the style of the sequences, all from the second period, which emerges as a push towards poetic and musical regularity in the midst of the 12th century. At this point, the Marian appendix of E-TO 135 attests to a common and pan-European taste, regardless of the fact that the style originated in a very specific context, the Abbey of Saint Victor in Paris. Once again, the fact that it is widespread does not hinder its use in Tortosa with a sense of local response to singing to the honored Virgin Mary, who delivered her girdle in the cathedral.

4. Conclusions

Given that the devotion that arose after the apparition of the Virgin of the Girdle in the cathedral of Tortosa (1178) does not seem to have reached its splendor until centuries later, as criticism has pointed out, this article has demonstrated that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there was early veneration both in the popular and liturgical context shortly after the miracle. In fact, both dimensions have a relationship of dependency with respect to the miracle itself but of interdependence between them. The peculiarities of the Marian appendix in E-TO 135 meet all the conditions to be the product of a specific veneration towards the Virgin within the walls of the cathedral, exactly as in the popular realm, the protection and shelter of the Virgin of the Girdle and her relic were sought, particularly in difficult childbirths.

In addition to the fact that it is a purely Marian appendix and the promotion of fidelity and praise to Saint Mary by the people of Tortosa, the most interesting aspects of all these peculiarities in both interdependent contexts can be summarized in six points:

1. An exclusive, self-consistent, and autonomous corpus of sequences is gathered in order to honor the figure of the Virgin Mary. This is something uncommon and even more so in such an early period (c. 1228–1264).
2. Within this Marian corpus, the high rate of *unica* or compositions with very little diffusion denotes a localized observance, that is, the veneration of the Virgin of the Girdle sparked by her apparition. However, stating this is not the same as saying that only through these compositions made *ex profeso*, so to speak, can the needs of such veneration be fulfilled. In fact, widely disseminated compositions, through a process of exchange and adaptation from other traditions, may be just as or even more suitable for the specific need. *Traditio obligat*.
3. Comprised primarily of 22 sequences, accompanied by nine Alleluias for them, and predominantly consisting of the "classical sequences" dating back to the 12th century onwards, this repertoire can be considered to be in tune with the most fashionable liturgical genre of its time in terms of composition.
4. There is a palpable interaction and continuous dialogue between the images portrayed in the sequences and the characteristic devotional themes that arise from the narration of the miracle of the delivery of the Girdle by the Virgin.
5. Although the repertoire is entirely dedicated to customary Marian themes in the liturgy (it is worth remembering that there was no specific Office for the Virgin of the Girdle until 1508), its versatility is noteworthy. It can be used in liturgical, votive, or even extraliturgical and purely devotional contexts, as the items are not specifically tied to a particular feast of the Virgin.
6. Both sprouting from the same impact that the miracle of the apparition caused, the Girdle, as an object of popular devotion to assisting women in labor and the Marian appendix of liturgical sequences, added to E-TO 135, are autonomous but

interdependent realities, which embody an early impulse of faith and dedication of the entire city of Tortosa to the Virgin Mary.

As a whole, these peculiarities shape an incipient piety towards the girdle and the new Marian advocation in the 13th century, at least among the members of the cathedral chapter, that is, the regular canons of Saint Ruf of Avignon, in whose charism Mary was already deeply rooted. However, the veneration of the relic for the protection of difficult childbirths, documented as early as 1357, also denotes a popular devotion that culminated in the 17th century. The current state of this fervor was recently described by the bishop of Tortosa, H.E. Msgr. Enrique Benavent Vidal, during his audience with Pope Francis in the company of the Archconfraternity of the Virgin of the Girdle of Tortosa, as follows:

> This girdle, which in material terms is that of a poor girl, is the most precious treasure our Cathedral conserves (*lo mostre tresor*). For centuries it has been the bond that binds the hearts of the people of Tortosa to that of the Virgin, uniting them in heaven and on earth, in life and in death. Thanks to this, devotion to the Blessed Virgin and the faith have been transmitted in our city from generation to generation. [. . .] It is a dedication that, from its origin (the feast of the Incarnation of the Lord), leads to the protection and care for the life of the unborn human being. During these years I have heard the testimony of pregnant women in difficulty who have protected the lives of their children entrusting them to the Virgin, and have experienced her protection over their unborn children. (Holy See Press Office 2019).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Complete inventory of E-TO 135 *.

Folio	Rubrics	Incipit	Category	Base Chant
—				(Kirrieleyson)
1r		Kirrie Fons bonitatis	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
1v		Tibi promit cohors	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
2r		Kyrrie Rex genitor	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
2v		Ihesu redemptor	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
		Clemens rector	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
3r		Summe deus qui	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
3v		Cunctipotens genitor	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
4r		Summe pater voces	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
4v		Kyrrie deus sempiterne	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
5r		Deus solus et inmensus	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
5v		Theoricam practicamque	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
6r		Kirrie Rex seclorum	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
6v		Rector Cosmi pie	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
7r		Pater cuncta qui	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
		Ihesu redemptor	Kyrie trope	Kirrieleyson
7v		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson

Table A1. *Cont.*

Folio	Rubrics	Incipit	Category	Base Chant
8r		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
8v		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
9r		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
9v		Kirrieleyson	Kyrie	Kirrieleyson
		Spiritus et al.me	Gloria trope	Domine deus
10v			Gloria	Gloria
11v			Gloria	Gloria
12r			Gloria	Gloria
13r			Gloria	Gloria
13v			Gloria	Gloria
14v			Gloria	Gloria
15r			Gloria	Gloria
15v			Sanctus	Sanctus
16r			Sanctus	Sanctus
			Sanctus	Sanctus
16v			Sanctus	Sanctus
	In honore sancte Marie virginis	Celeste preconium	Osanna prosula	Osanna
17v		Maria mater egregia	Osanna prosula	Osanna
18r		Clemens et benigna	Osanna prosula	Osanna
18v		Clangat cetus iste	Osanna prosula	Osanna
20r		Fidelium turma	Osanna prosula	Osanna
20v		Patris sapientia	Osanna prosula	Osanna
21v		Perpetuo numine	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
22r		Sancte ingenite	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
22v		Nunc tuum plasma	Osanna prosula	Osanna
23r		Cuncta creans genitor	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
24r		Osanna salvifica tuum	Osanna prosula	Osanna
24v		Carmina plebs	Osanna prosula	Osanna
25r		Clemens verbi sator	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
25v		Sanctorum exultatio	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
26r		Genitor omnium	Osanna prosula	Osanna
	In pentecosten	Veni redemptor	Osanna prosula	Osanna
27r	In die sanctum pasche	Hostia promiseri	Osanna prosula	Osanna
27v		Sanctorum motus	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
28r		Summe pater virgo	Osanna prosula	Osanna
28v		Splendor Christe	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
29r		Tu super omnia	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
30r		Divinum misterium	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
31r		Tempora disponens	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
31v		Fons vivus vite	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
		Deus pater cuius	Sanctus trope	Sanctus
32v		Pastor amande gregi	Versus	
		Princeps celeste pastor	Versus	
		Indignos meritisque	Versus	
33r		Sume sacerdotum	Versus	
		Cum mansuetudine	Versus	
			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
33v			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
34r			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei

Table A1. *Cont.*

Folio	Rubrics	Incipit	Category	Base Chant
34v			Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
	In honore sancte Marie		Agnus Dei	Agnus Dei
		Congaudentes in hac	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
35v		Ave Maria celi	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
		Mortis dira ferens	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
36r		Mittis agnus	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
36v		Fons inmense pietatis	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
37r		Splendor patris	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
37v		Verus adest agnus	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
		Rex inmense pietatis	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
38r		Eructavit cor meum	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
38v		Rex eterne glorie	Agnus trope	Agnus Dei
39r	Prosa in natale domini ad primam missam	Celeste organum	Sequence (Prose)	
40r	In luce	Christi hodierna	Sequence (Prose)	
41v	Ad missam maiorem	Hec dies est sancta	Sequence (Prose)	
42v	Alia in die vel in octabas	Potestate non natura	Sequence (Prose)	
44v	Ad vesperas	Replet nova dies	Sequence (Prose)	
45r	Sancti stephani	In armonia voce sonora	Sequence (Prose)	
—	(Pascua)			
46r	(Feria II)	(Fulgens preclara)	Sequence (Prose)	
47r	Feria III	Zima vetus expurgetur	Sequence (Prose)	
49r	Feria IIII	Splendent ecce novi	Sequence (Prose)	
50r	Feria V	Sabbato namque	Sequence (Prose)	
51r	Inventio sancte crucis	Laudes crucis attollamus	Sequence (Prose)	
53r	In die ascensionis domini	Rex omnipotens	Sequence (Prose)	
54v	Ad vesperas	Adest nobis summa	Sequence (Prose)	
55r	In die pentecosten	Alleluia. Dicamus preclara	Sequence (Prose)	
56r	Ad vesperas	Sancti spiritus assit	Sequence (Prose)	
57v	Ad vesperas	Veni sancte spiritus	Sequence (Prose)	
58v	Alia ad vesperas	Laudes deo devotas	Sequence (Prose)	
59r	Feria II	Orbis conditor	Sequence (Prose)	
60r	Feria III	Cantantibus hodie cunctis	Sequence (Prose)	
62r	Feria IIII	Alleluia Laudiflua cantica	Sequence (Prose)	
63r	Feria V	Alme corus domini	Sequence (Prose)	
63v	De trinitate	Benedicta semper sancta	Sequence (Prose)	
65r	Alia [Hic ponatur de corpore xpisti (add)]	Quicumque vult salvus	Sequence (Prose)	
66r	Alia	Profitentes unitatem	Sequence (Prose)	
67v	Sancti iohannis babtiste	Hodierna dies veneranda	Sequence (Prose)	
68v	Alia	Gaude caterva diei	Sequence (Prose)	
70v	Alia	Vox clamantis in deserto	Sequence (Prose)	
72v		Helisabet Zacharie	Sequence (Prose)	
74v	In natalis sancti petri apostoli	Pulcra prepollent	Sequence (Prose)	
75v	Alia	Gaudet chorus electorum	Sequence (Prose)	
78r	Alia	Gaude Roma capud	Sequence (Prose)	
80r	Sancta Maria Magdalene	Mane prima sabbati	Sequence (Prose)	
81v	Sancti iacobi	Gratulemur et letemur	Sequence (Prose)	
84r	Sancti laurencii martiris	Alme martir domini	Sequence (Prose)	
85v	In assumptione sancte Marie virginis	Aurea virga iesse	Sequence (Prose)	
86r^{bis}	Alia	Laudes claras canticorum	Sequence (Prose)	
88r	Sancti bartolomei	Psallat concinat plebs	Sequence (Prose)	
90r	Sancti augustini	Gaude preclara reboat	Sequence (Prose)	
92r	In nativitate beate Marie	Virgo es sacra	Sequence (Prose)	
93r	Sancti Michaelis	Ad celebres rex	Sequence (Prose)	
95r	Alia	Laus erumpat	Sequence (Prose)	
96v	Sancti francisci	Salve fratrum dux	Sequence (Prose)	
99r	In die omnium sanctorum	Sancta ac digna	Sequence (Prose)	
100v	Sancti Martini	Hec est dies veneranda	Sequence (Prose)	

Table A1. *Cont.*

Folio	Rubrics	Incipit	Category	Base Chant
102r	[Hic ponatur de dedicatione ecclesie prosa (add)] Prosa Sancti andree	Adest precelsa	Sequence (Prose)	
102v	Sancti Nicholai	Congaudentes exultemus	Sequence (Prose)	
104r	De apostolis vel de martiribus	O alma trinitas deus	Sequence (Prose)	
105v	De apostolis vel evangelistis	Celi solem immitantes	Sequence (Prose)	
106v	De evangelistis	Iocundare plebs fidelis	Sequence (Prose)	
108v	De martiribus vel de confessoribus	Voci sono dulce tono	Sequence (Prose)	
110v	De plurimorum virginum	Virgines egregie	Sequence (Prose)	
111v	In dedicatione templi	Quam dilecta tabernacula	Sequence (Prose)	
113v	Alia	Rex Salomón fecit	Sequence (Prose)	
115r	Alia	Ad templi huius lumina	Sequence (Prose)	
116v	Alia	Clara chorus voce	Sequence (Prose)	
118v		Alleluia Virga iesse	Alleluia	Alleluia Virga iesse
		Alleluia Dulcis virgo	Alleluia	Alleluia Dulcis virgo
		Alleluia Salve virgo mater	Alleluia	Alleluia Salve virgo mater
119r		Alleluia ora pro nobis	Alleluia	Alleluia ora pro nobis
		Alleluia Virgo sacra	Alleluia	Alleluia Virgo sacra
119v		Alleluia Mater xpisti	Alleluia	Alleluia Mater Christi
		Alleluia Es rosa vernalis	Alleluia	Alleluia Eia rosa vernalis
		Alleluia Que est ista	Alleluia	Alleluia Que est ista
120r		Ave maria gracia plena	Sequence (Prose)	
121r		Missus gabriel de celis	Sequence (Prose)	
122v		Maria virgo virginum	Sequence (Prose)	
123r		Hodierne lux diei	Sequence (Prose)	
124r		Virga iesse generosa	Sequence (Prose)	
125v		Iesse virga humidavit	Sequence (Prose)	
126v		Sollempnitas marie	Sequence (Prose)	
128r		Sancti spiritus adsit	Sequence (Prose)	
129v		Virginis marie laudes	Sequence (Prose)	
130r		Ave mater domini	Sequence (Prose)	
130v		Verbum bonum et suave	Sequence (Prose)	
131v		Mitit ad virginem	Sequence (Prose)	
132v		Salve sancta xpisti	Sequence (Prose)	
134r		Ave mater gracie	Sequence (Prose)	
135r		Salve mater salvatoris	Sequence (Prose)	
135v		Ave porta gracie	Sequence (Prose)	
136v		Ave mundi spes	Sequence (Prose)	
137v		Ave virgo virginum	Sequence (Prose)	
139v		Ave gloriosa virginum	Sequence (Prose)	
141v		Promereris sume	Sequence (Prose)	
142r		Dolens auctor omnium	Sequence (Prose)	
144r		Alleluia Felix mater	Alleluia	Alleluia Felix mater
		Sanctus	Sanctus	Sanctus
144v	Sancta Maria	Uterus virgineus	Sequence (Prose)	
—				

*— Lacuna/( ) Texts or rubrics that were omitted or lost in the codex/(add.) Added later.

Notes

1 All manuscripts are cited following the RISM Library Sigla: https://rism.info/community/sigla.html (accessed on 7 January 2023).

2 The Office can be found not only in the edition made by Martorel (Martorel y de Luna 1626, pp. 453–65), but also in the 16th-century manuscript codex E-TO 274bis and the printed codex E-TO 274ter (Lyon 1547) from the Chapter Library (Bayerri Bertomeu 1962, pp. 448–55; 1968, p. 105).

3 "Deus, qui Ecclesiam Dertusensem Beatissimae Virginis Mariae Visitatione et Cingulo decorasti; eius nobis intercesione concede, ut cingulo fidei et puritatis accinti, a cunctis peccatorum nexibus eruamur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum. Amen" [O God, who adorned the Church of Tortosa with the Visitation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary and the Girdle; grant us through her intercession that, girded with the belt of faith and purity, we may be liberated from all bonds of sin. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.]. A second prayer, this time from a 16th century hand, is collected in the orational E-TO 77, f. 26v (14th century), in the following terms: "Omnipotens sempiterne Deus, qui gloriosae Virginis Matris Mariae corpus et animam, ut dignum Filii tui habitaculum effici maereretur, Spiritu Sancto cooperante praeparasti; da, ut cuius Visitatione et Cinguli traditione hanc Ecclesiam decorasti, eius pia intercessione ab instantibus malis et a morte perpetua liberemur. Per Dominum nostrum Iesum Christum. Amen" (Almighty and eternal God, who with the cooperation of the Holy Spirit prepared the body and soul of the glorious Virgin Mother Mary to be a worthy dwelling place for your Son, grant us that, through the visitation and tradition of the Girdle with which you have adorned this Church, and through her pious intercession, we may be delivered from immediate evils and from eternal death. Through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.).

4 "Diaconatus qui vocatur monachus maior" [The diaconate is called major monk] and "Diaconus qui est monachus maior" [Deacon who is major monk]. Tortosa, *Llibre de Constitucions Episcopals*, núm. 2 (10 October 1325). E-TO 187, f. 32r-32v (Bayerri Bertomeu 1962, pp. 344–45; Almuni Balada 2007, pp. 649–50).

5 "[Lectio tertia]: Dertusae fuit quidam presbyter probus, et timoratus; et quis is fuerit ignoramus: qualis tamen fuit sequentia luculenter ostendunt. Hic curans Christum sectari abiecto mundo mentem ad coelestia vertit Mariae Virgini Dei matri sedulo obsequia praestans. Cotigit semel, cum nocte quiesceret: ut surgens in noctis dimidio in Ecclesia Dertusana matutinis (prout erat solitus) interesset (res mira) a domino ad ianuas dictae Ecclesiae, contiguas coemeterio ductus in ea. Te Deum laudamus audiens cantari illuc quomodo venisset curans, tunc minime perscrutari caepit contristari, et intra se dicere. Heu quia fauens somno ad Ecclesiam serus accessi. Sed cum hodie officium de feria debeat sieri: quid est quod solemne officium intra Ecclesiam sentio celebrari?
[Lectio quarta]: Haec dum secum tacicus cogitaret: Ecclesiae ianuas cernens apertas, stans ad limen, ingentem intuitus est luminis claritatem: conspexit a capite Ecclesiae, usque ad ipsum limen sanctos Dei Angelos investibus albis per choros hinc inde stantes, accensos cereos albos habentes: quos tremens cum cernerer: illum nutu Angeli vocauerunt, sibi cereum accensum tradentes: et ut Altare ad maius accederet innuentes. Quibus assensit. Perrexit igitur ad Altare, cuius ad latus vidit mulierem speciofam valde, ornatam, sedentem in solio coronatam. Cui aderant stantes ad latera duo viri, quae illum intuens: eum accersiuit, et dixit illi. Tu Presbyter noscis me? Cui perterritus respondens Presbyter ait. Ego quamquam suspicer: plene tamen, domina te non noui. Tunc illa inquit Presbitero. Ego sum mater Dei: cui tu summe obsequia praestas. Hi duo viri hinc inde stantes praecipui sunt Christi Apostoli: a dextris Petrus Christi Vicarius, et Paulus doctor gentium a finistris.[Lectio quinta]: Tunc Presbyter flexis genibus dixit illi. O sacratissima Virgo Maria mater domini nostri Iesu Christi, et domina mea: unde hoc mihi, quod ego indignus Presbyter, et peccator merear te Reginam caeli viuens adhuc corpore intueri: Virgo autem Maria sacratissima dixit ei. Surge, ne timeas, tu quidem assidue mihi seruis infessus: propterea viuens in hoc seculo me videre: chorisque his interesse Angelicis meruisti. Et quoniam in honorem filij mei, et meum haec Ecclesia est constructa, et vobis Dertusensibus curae est me plurimum venerari, ideo quia diligo vos, pro quibus meum ad filium intercedo, soluens Cingulum, quo praecingor, a me fabricatum, super Altare illud pono, et vobis trado: ut hoc in pignus amoris mei memoriam habeatis. Et tu haec omnia Urbis Episcopo, Clero, et Populo reserabis. Et haec dicens soluit, et posuit super Altare Cingulum: tradens illud, dixit illi Presbyter. Cum sim solus, mihi si dixero haec, non credent, Virgo Maria pientissima dixit illi. Ecce Monachum maiorem habes contestem, qui est in choro: et haec omnia cernit ideo illis vos duo haec omnia, et singula referetis. Et visio his dictis euanuit. [. . .]" (Martorel y de Luna 1626, pp. 453–60).

6 A similar and highly representative case would be that of the Benedictine monk Gautier de Coinci (1177–1236) and his *Les Miracles de Nostre Dame* (for a summary, see Tello Ruiz-Pérez 2010).

7 The numbering and translation follow (Cunningham 2008). For a comprehensive analysis of the entire homily, refer to (Arentzen 2019).

8 "Tunc beatissimus Thomas subito ductus est ad montem Oliveti et vidit beatissimum corpus petere caelum, coepitque clamare et dicere: 'O mater sancta, mater benedicta, mater immaculata; si inveni gratiam modo, quia video te, laetifica servum tuum per tuam misericordiam, quia ad caelum pergis'. Tunc zona qua apostoli corpus sanctissimum praecinxerant, beato Thomae de caelo iactata est. Quam accipiens et osculans eam ac Deo gratias referens venit iterum in valle Iosaphat." (Santos Otero 2006, pp. 649–50) (Then the most blessed Thomas was suddenly brought to the Mount of Olivet, and saw the most blessed body going up to heaven, and began to cry out and say: O holy mother, blessed mother, spotless mother, if I have now found grace because I see thee, make thy servant joyful through thy compassion, because thou art going to heaven. Then the girdle with which the apostles had encircled the most holy body was thrown down from heaven to the blessed Thomas. And taking it, and kissing it,

and giving thanks to God, he came again into the Valley of Jehoshaphat.) (trans. Roberts and Donaldson 1951, pp. 593–94). See the discussion of the scene depicted in the main altarpiece of the cathedral in (Alanyà i Roig 2004, p. 61).

[9] For other analogous customs of childbirth assistance in the medieval world, see (Rieder 2006, pp. 105–21).

[10] Specifically, the manuscripts are: Las Huelgas Codex E-BUlh 11 (c. 1320), from Las Huelgas monastery (Burgos, Spain); F-Pn 5247 (14th century), from the Benedictine Prieuré St. Robert-de-Cornillon (Chaise-Dieu) at Saint-Égrève (Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes, France); F-Pn 10513 (14th century), from Cathédrale St. Cyr-et-Ste. Julitte of Nevers (Bourgogne-Franche-Comté, France); and D-Rtt 7/II (c. 1500) and D-Rtt 42/II, from the Benediktinerabtei Salvator, BMV, St. Ulrich und Afra at Neresheim (Baden-Württemberg, Germany).

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Mary's Transparent Beauty in St. Bernard's Aesthetics

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Abstract: The subject of the beauty of the Virgin Mary was a delicate one in medieval aesthetic thought. Halfway between the sacred and the profane, the theological and the anthropological, the question of Mary's beauty opened up a strictly material dimension of appreciation that could generate problems related to decorum. However, the progressive humanization of Marian images from the thirteenth century onwards invites us to wonder if there was not, after all, a way to balance or, better, to sublimate the immaterial beauty of Mary, Mother of God, and material beauty of Mary, the young virgin of Nazareth. Taking as our leitmotiv a fictional scene from Umberto Eco's novel *The Name of the Rose*, we will analyze St. Bernard's position on this issue, because he was particularly influential on this matter in his own time and later, since his work brings together not only Marian concerns of deep theological depth, but also aesthetic questions that can contribute to clarifying this question.

Keywords: St. Bernard of Clairvaux; mariology; beauty; medieval aesthetics; medieval philosophy

1. By Way of Introduction: In the Company of Adso de Melk and Ubertino da Casale

I would like to begin this paper by taking a walk through that mysterious abbey in Umberto Eco's *The Name of the Rose* (1980). Let us go to the church. We will meet two Franciscans there: the young novice Adso of Melk, the protagonist of the story, and an elderly Ubertino of Casale, a historical character. They speak in whispers. The themes revolve around the terrible end of the controversial Fra Dulcino, a subject which leads them to slightly more personal paths. In this way, one of the most poignant concerns that Umberto Eco deploys throughout his novel is undoubtedly the one related to the concupiscible desires of Adso. The fear, sometimes dread, that he manifests towards his own passions makes him a tormented character that reflects very well the aesthetic tensions of the period. Moved by the purpose of seeking advice from Ubertino, because he is an experienced man, he finds him prostrate before a column, on which there is a statue of the virgin. That sculpture is the same in front of which William of Baskerville and Adso, at the beginning of the story, had found Ubertino.

The description of sculptures that populate the tenebrous Benedictine monastery occupies a good part of the novel. One can appreciate here the influence that the interest in medieval aesthetics played in Eco's own career, to which he dedicated several works (Eco 1956, [1959] 1986). In the scene at hand, the statue is described in sufficient detail to give us a very approximate idea of it. The text reads: "Near the last chapel before the altar, in the left nave, stood a slender column on which a stone Virgin was set, carved in the modern fashion, with an ineffable smile and prominent abdomen, wearing a pretty dress with a small bodice, the child on her arm" (Eco [1980] 2004, p. 53).

The elements that, in an iconographic key, contribute to fix the appearance of the statue are, therefore, the following: a column specifically intended to exhibit devotional figures; a new fashion or manner in the design of the image of the Virgin and Child; a particular facial gesture—the smile—and a bodily detail—the belly; the clothing, which draws attention because it is beautiful or pretty; and, finally, the position of the child on her arm. Without further clues in the story than those indicated by Adso, but considering that 1327 is the year of the narrative, we can safely infer that such an image would be integrating a typology of the Virgin Mother originating in the French sculpture of the first

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third of the fourteenth century, which probably finds its maximum expression—or, at least, the most recognizable—in the Golden Virgin of the cathedral of Amiens, which "will mark the devotional sculpture of the century" (Martín Ansón 2002, p. 43). A brief glance at the sculptural panorama of the Madonnas in this period allows us to confirm that we are not only witnessing a flowering of the Marian cult cultivated throughout the previous century, but also a considerable diversification of Her images (Waller 2011, p. 32).

Umberto Eco's description, certainly concrete, is not trivial: on the one hand, it responds to contextual interests, since it serves to situate the narration temporally, an aspect that is undoubtedly relevant for any historical novel; on the other hand, it also serves as a material witness for the end of the conversation that Adso himself and Ubertino da Casale have about feminine beauty. Kneeling in front of the statue of the Virgin, their conversation, which dealt with the heresy of Fra Dolcino and the Apostolic Brotherhood, leads to the base instincts of Remigio da Varagine, the monastery's cellarer. Taking the latter as a counterexample, the old friar urges the young novice to initiate himself into "immaculate love" and, embracing him and pointing to the image of the Virgin, declares:

> 'There is she in whom femininity is sublimated. This is why you may call her beautiful, like the beloved in the Song of Songs. In her,' he said, his face carried away by an inner rapture, like the abbot's the day before when she spoke of gems and the gold of his vessels, 'in her, even the body's grace is a sign of the beauties of heaven, and this is why the sculptor has portrayed her with all the graces that should adorn a woman.' He pointed to the Virgin's slender bust, held high and tight by a cross-laced bodice, which the Child's tiny hands fondled. 'You see? As the doctors have said: *Pulchra enim sunt ubera quae paululum supereminent et tument modice, nec fluitantia licenter, sed leniter restricta, repressa sed non depressa* . . . What do you feel before this sweetest of visions?'. (Eco [1980] 2004, p. 221)

Umberto Eco exposes in this brief discourse one of the most important crossroads of medieval aesthetic thought: the possibility of a disinterested contemplation of matter capable of sublimating it and turning it into an occasion for elevation. In order to present the stress elements, he invokes two key voices, halfway between fiction and history—voices which he had already used in his work *Apocalittici e integrati* (Eco [1964] 1994, pp. 17–19) to illustrate two types of position vis-à-vis mass culture: the first character, Abbone, abbot of the fictitious monastery, a reflection of another historical abbot, Suger of Saint-Denis, also a Benedictine and a lover of the beatific power of precious stones in devotional spaces; the second one, present in Ubertino's literal quotation, is Gilbertus of Hoyt, who was, according to tradition, the first continuator to the exegetical work of St. Bernard of Clairvaux in relation to the Song of Songs, today conceived as a "work in progress" (Pranger 1994, p. 22). In other words, in Ubertino's quote, St. Bernard of Clairvaux is present, the main spiritual impugner of the 12th century and the driving force behind the Cistercian reform . . . and its artistic expression.

As we know, both figures, Suger and St. Bernard, embodied two completely different ways of confronting material delights: while the latter wrote that "those of us who have come out of the people" are precisely those who consider the beauty of material things "as garbage" (*ut stercora*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854a, col. 915a)[1], the other, possibly influenced by the aesthetic theology of Hugues de Saint-Victor (Poirel 2001, pp. 141–70), interpreted the contemplation of material objects, in their aesthetic properties, as meditative occasion (Pradier 2022), suitable for a mystical ascent of anagogical character (*more anagogico*), in which Suger was "transferred from the material to the immaterial" (*de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo*) (Suger of St. Denis 2018, p. 106; Suger de St. Denis 1867, p. 198)[2]. What is interesting, in this case, is that aesthetic tension between one and the other way of facing material charms does not develop in relation to the role of plastic arts in religious spaces—a genuine controversy of the aesthetic thought of the twelfth century, but around the feminine beauty through the figure of Virgin Mary. However, Ubertino's choice of words borders on a total lack of decorum in such a delicate matter. What is the proper way to address Her in aesthetic terms? Is it appropriate to speak of Her material beauty, that is,

Her bodily beauty? Is She beautiful in a strictly aesthetic sense? And, if these questions can be asked, how should they be articulated?

If there is one medieval author who dedicated a large part of his theological reflection to the figure of the Virgin Mary, it was undoubtedly St. Bernard of Clairvaux. On the other hand, in him also converge deep aesthetic concerns about the desirability of cultivating a type of inner beauty based on the cultivation of virtues, as opposed to the external beauty of matter. His position will contribute to the formation of an aesthetic discourse on the beauty of Mary which, after all, serves to indicate the appropriateness of a certain aesthetic attitude towards her image and, at the same time, shape a spiritual theory on beauty of deep philosophical depth. Accordingly, my presentation will be organized as follows: first, I analyze St. Bernard's theory of humility as the basis for all his subsequent aesthetic developments; second, I study the counterpoint to Mary's beauty in the biblical figure of Dinah, the young and beautiful daughter of Jacob, who, in contrast to Mary, embodies the exercise of curiosity as an occasion for personal downfall; finally, I present Mary's beauty in terms of transparent beauty. In other words, Her beauty, which is inner, is also based on the supreme virtue of humility, which is what, in some way, makes it shine, anticipate itself or, better, transparent itself in Mary's body. Her material beauty is only a consequence, a pale reflection of that other superior, immaterial beauty emanating from Her virtuous soul.

2. Humility and Curiosity in St. Bernard's Thought

The thesis that articulates St. Bernard's whole approach to the beauty of Virgin Mary—and, by extension, all feminine beauty—is founded on a general theory of humility, which "can be defined as follows: humility is a virtue by which a man humbles himself by the truest knowledge of himself" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 942b)[3]. Therefore, the first step in addressing this delicate question consists in clarifying this point, whose foundational character reverberates throughout Bernardine's philosophical and theological thoughts. The Abbot of Clairvaux considered humility to be the touchstone against which to test the worth of any person dedicated body and soul to the encounter with the divine: actions, thoughts, omissions, and faults should thus be reviewed and evaluated in terms of humility and, consequently, of pride. To humble oneself is, in fact, "essentially to prove by acts of the body and of thought that one's own misery is known and that one judges oneself" (Gilson [1986] 2006, p. 95). It is necessary, however, a personal commitment to interior truth, in line with the Benedictine Regula, so that such judgment is not only said in words: it is fundamental that each one "believes it also in the depths of his heart" (Benedict Nursiae 1847, col. 374a)[4]. Only in this way is humility capable of revealing the fragility of oneself; the brokenness of humanity; the profound and unbearable lightness of life; the anguished solitude in which the evanescence of interpersonal bridges is revealed; the lightness of spirit; the complacent pleasure of passionate falls; and, in short, the evident contrast between the ontological richness of the human, as God's favorite work, and the ontic indigence of the individual, exposed to the elements.

St. Bernard's theory of humility, which runs through his entire oeuvre, was first formulated in a treatise of his youth written around 1118: *On the degrees of humility and pride* (*De gradibus humilitate et superbiae*). The purpose was to collect in writing his fundamental teachings of his catechesis, given by himself, to the Clairvaux cloisters (McGuire 2011, p. 30; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 58–60). Humility is thus at the summit (*culmen*) of all virtues, for it is the only one whose exercise, for those disposed (*dispositi*) to carry it out and who have surpassed all previous degrees, places men in a true contemplative attitude (*in speculatione*), situated (*positi*) to "see the truth" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 942b)[5].

Following Saint Benedict, each degree of possession of the truth in the way of humility corresponds to each of the twelve degrees of humility recognized by Saint Benedict of Nursia (Benedict Nursiae 1847, col. 371a–376a). Additionally, for each degree ascended on the path of contemplation, one descends on the path of pride, and vice versa. The image that serves to illustrate tropologically the whole "task of ascension" (*labor ascensionis*) coincides with the biblical account of Jacob's ladder. As is well known, Jacob saw in the course of

a dream a ladder which, "resting on the earth, touched the heavens with its head", and "the angels of God ascended and descended" (Gen. 28:12–15)[6]. Jacob's ladder represents for St. Bernard the ethical idea of the need to choose "between progress and failure" (*inter profectum et defectum*), dimensions that he considers absolute, mutually and logically exclusive; but, at the same time, it symbolizes the condition of the human spirit, exposed "always either to advance or to decay" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 461d)[7]: "You need to go up or you need to go down: if you want to stand, you will fall" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 224a)[8]. In other words, humility implies choosing and accepting the more than foreseeable defeats. At the same time, the twelve steps of the ladder, in correspondence with Benedictine indications, are not to be enumerated, but to be climbed (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 941c)[9]: the revelation of the ladder already implies, in a certain way, a form of ascent by which those to whom grace has been granted can ascend; that is, all the angels and saints, as well as men who are on their way to the first degree of the possession of truth, that is, humility.

If the path of humility implies a retreat from the exterior to the interior of oneself, the path of curiosity runs in the opposite direction and constitutes the first degree of ascent up the ladder of pride or the first step of descent from the summit of humility. From the ancient perspective of St. Augustine, curiosity was already considered a vice rather than a virtue, leading to the confusion of the faithful and the unhealthy search for sensual, rather than spiritual, gratifications. The position became more acute in the framework of the Cistercian theological thought of the 12th century, where St. Bernard characterized it as "the starting point of the degradation of the soul" and "the very negation of Cistercian asceticism" (Gilson [1986] 2006, p. 181)[10]. The reason for such a rejection finds its origin, besides in St. Bernard's own character, in a radicalization of the maxim *nosce te ipsum*. The search for the divine must begin with oneself, "but not only that, but in you it ends" (*non solum autem, sed et in te finiatur*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854e, col. 745d)[11]. In this way, the Premonstratensian Adam Scott, for example, very influenced by St. Bernard (Ardura 1995, p. 116), considered that the reprobate "prostrate themselves" (*prosternuntur*) because of desire; "arise" (*eriguntur*) because of vanity; and "go forth" (*egrediuntur*) on account of curiosity "for the concupiscence of the eyes" (Adamus Scotus 1844, col. 454c-d)[12].

St. Bernard's ideas on this subject are grounded in the practice of the Desert Fathers and in the thought of St. Augustine. There is, even if the idea of a St. Bernard reader of Pseudo-Dionysius is unlikely, a methodological coincidence with the practice of his negative theology. This is properly exercised by the purest souls and can be defined as a mode of contemplation characterized by its impulse towards the contemplation of the Divine through the negation of all things that are not God or do not point to Him (Williams 1999; Turner 1995, pp. 19–49; Roques 1949, pp. 209–10; Lossky 1939, pp. 213–14). Consequently, the specific movement of the soul ends up being "circular", a movement whereby the "entrance into itself of those which are outside it" takes place. This movement confers stability on the soul insofar as it maintains itself identical to the natural movement of the divine intelligences, which, being united to the Good-Beauty principle that attracts them, find their motor around Him. Logically, and due to the proximity of the former in relation to God, the movement from bottom to top becomes circular here (Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite 1999, p. 141; 1857, col. 705a)[13]. In short, this is the path of negations, traced on a total adherence of the soul to the divine principle, in a recollection stripped of everything external and of every element foreign to itself.

This abyssal encounter of the soul with itself unfolds a bridge, given by God's grace, as far as the soul is allowed and as long as it has been freed from material burdens and the pleasures of sensibility. Any incursion into the "outside" (*foras*) could modify the meaning of the ascent journey and closing to the soul its possibility of "transcending" (*transcendere*) both the material world and itself: it is precisely within this idea, deeply rooted in the theological thought of the 12th century, that the famous Augustinian adage "do not want to go outside" (*noli foras ire*) takes on meaning and context (Augustinus Hipponensis

[1953] 1964, 1841a, col. 154)[14]. In reality, the best of beauty resides in the soul, so the soul must be loved more than the body. Its continuous exposure to corruption and passions makes it the door through which the attraction of matter enters and, consequently, also the pleasures aroused by the corresponding beauty, which are like anchors in the earthly world that hinder the advancement of spiritual perfection:

> Of what do we consist? Of soul and body. Which of these is the better? Doubtless, the soul. What is praised in the body? Nothing else than beauty. What is beauty of the body? A harmony of its parts with a certain pleasing color. Is this form better when it is true or when it is false? Who could doubt that it is better when it is true? But, where is it true? In the soul, of course. Therefore, the soul is to be loved more than the body. But, in what part of the soul is that truth? In the mind and in the understanding. What is opposed to these? The senses. Therefore, it is clear that the senses are to be resisted with the whole force of the mind. But, what if sensible things give us too much pleasure? They must be prevented from giving pleasure. How? By the practice of renouncing them, and aiming at higher things. (Augustinus Hipponensis 1951, pp. 9–10; 1841b, col. 63)[15]

The Spanish Professor Luis Rey Altuna, who was a profound connoisseur of Augustinian aesthetics, wrote that "when St. Augustine, an interiorist observer if ever there was one, made psychological aesthetics, he did not walk any other path", namely "the observation and study of the aesthetic effects of the soul" (Rey Altuna 1945, p. 67). It is worth noting that this is not an observation of passions aroused in the soul in the face of the beautiful, but of the soul's own passions before itself: it welcomes beauty among its own attributes and gathers under it. In this way, for St. Bernard, too, the contempt for oneself and recognition of one's own misery, in word and in heart, not only reaches the spiritual dimension, but also the misery of the body. Where the immaterial beauty of the soul prevails, there is no room left for material beauty, which is only so in appearance, and which therefore only attracts the inexperienced people. To appreciate these delights and to desire to remain in them thus becomes a sign of weakness (*infirmitas*), which extends, ultimately, to the human body itself. This is a commonplace for Cistercian aesthetic thought, but also for Latin Fathers. For Boethius (1847, col. 742a), for example, "he who considers you beautiful does so not because of your nature, but because of the weakness of the eyes of the beholder"[16]. Compared to the beauty of the soul, the beauty of the body pales (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, col. 901d)[17].

3. Biblical Figures of the Fall into Curiosity: Dinah and the Goatlings

St. Bernard's theory of humility begins with self-contempt and interior recollection, in search of the most precious and beautiful thing in life: the immaterial soul. Under this general approach, it is obvious that "Cistercian artistic and aesthetic research will always lead us towards a conception of spiritual beauty" (Piñero 2000, p. 55). This implies recognizing it as the thing around which the task of one's salvation revolves: to care for the soul means to attend to it at every possible moment; to renounce everything that maintains us submerged under the pressure of trivial and therefore unnecessary external occupations; to discard, consequently, bodily pleasures. In this way, St. Bernard also opens the fight against senses, almost as if they were the progenitors of curiosity: they are the ones that make us go outside. Curiosity, consequently, finds its origin in a "defective self-knowledge" that is the cause of "an excessive interest in external things, frivolity of mind and heart" (Casey 2011, p. 103).

If it is already difficult to express the difficulties of a mystical encounter with the divine, it is even more difficult to communicate it to others (Lázaro Pulido 2022, pp. 983–84). For this purpose, he refers to the biblical figure of Dinah on at least two occasions: in *On the degrees of humility and pride* and in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*. He was possibly supported by the identification that St. Isidore had established between the figure of Dinah and the soul (Isidorus Hispalensis 1850, col. 108a)[18].

The first text reads as follows:

> [. . .] (the soul) that, because of its laziness, is hindered in taking care of itself, becomes curious in the affairs of others. It does not know itself. That is why it is sent out to feed the goatlings. The eyes and ears are rightly called goatlings, symbols of sin; for just as death entered the world through sin, so it enters the soul through these windows. (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, cols. 957b)[19]

The biblical account of Dinah, the daughter who Jacob had with Leah, plays a key role in the Bernardine theory of humility. The scene is focused on the following verse: "and Dinah the daughter of Leah went out to see the women of that country" (Gen. 34:1)[20]. Hamor, son of Shechem, falls in love with her and rapes her. It is interesting to note that, although in a certain way he partially releases Dinah from her total responsibility, he nevertheless locates the fault in the occasion that curiosity originally opened, which, as he himself expresses, "brings to light the experience of evil": "these steps you have in Dinah, the daughter of Jacob" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854f, cols. 578b-c). With extreme crudeness, St. Bernard reads the story by focusing on problems derived from the verb *videre* and the term *curiositas* attributed to Dinah: "Why did you have to go and browse foreign women; what necessity, what utility was imposed on you; was it out of sheer curiosity?" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[21].

> Although you see idly, you are not seen idly. You observe curiously, but you are observed more curiously. Who would have thought then that your curious innocence, or your innocent curiosity, would be not only idle, but very pernicious to you, to your own and to your enemies? (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[22]

As can be seen, there are no goatlings in the biblical text. This is because St. Bernard is combining two figures: that of Dinah, daughter of Jacob, who goes outside to "see"; and that of the goatlings, which is taken from the *Sermons on the Song of Songs.* It is in this text that the bride, asking the members of the choir about the whereabouts of her bridegroom, receives the following answer: "If thou knowest not thyself, O fairest among women, go forth and follow in the steps of the flocks, and feed thy goatlings by the shepherds' tents" (Song of Songs 1:7)[23]. St. Bernard interprets this verse in the *De gradibus* as follows: the young bride, who represents the soul, is illustrated in the need to know herself in the context of a soliloquy, logically interior, before she is worthy to enter the King's chamber (*cellaria Regis*) (Song of Sg. 1, 3; 3, 4)[24], that is, the space of mystical intimacy with the Lord, Christ. Conforming to the idea that she is not ready to accede, the soul must therefore go out to herd the goatlings (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 957c)[25]. The figure is frequently used by St. Bernard to illustrate those moments in which the soul reveals self-ignorance, more concerned with what is happening outside. We find the most clear explanation for this issue in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs*:

> Terrible therefore, and a very fearful threat: "Go forth, and let your goatlings graze". Which is: "You know yourself unworthy of that familiar and sweet contemplation of heavenly, intelligible, and divine things. Wherefore go forth from my sanctuary, from your heart, where you used to draw sweetly the secrets and sacred senses of truth and wisdom; and more like one of the secular, feeding and entertaining entangle the senses of your flesh". (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, cols. 963d–964a; see Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 286a)[26]

However, every departure implies the risk of losing oneself, hence he himself writes: "For while Dinah was going out to let the goatlings graze, she herself was taken away from her father and her own virginity" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 958c)[27]. The term *haedos* here means "goatlings", but its allegorical sense, according to St. Bernard, is that of "sin" (*peccatum*). Therefore, their care, their feeding, and, in general, any occupation related to their maintenance requires going outside. Hence St. Bernard goes so far as to identify the goatlings with "eyes and ears", for just as "death enters the world through sin, so it enters the mind through these windows". He continues:

> The curious person, therefore, attends to these tasks, while he cares not to know in what manner he stays within. And truly if you pay attention to yourself in a watchful way, man, it will be a remarkable thing if you ever pay attention to anything else. Curious man, listen to Solomon! Listen, fool, to the wise man: "With all watchfulness keep thy heart, because life issueth out from it,"[28], and all your senses be vigilant to guard that from which life springs. Curious! Where do you go when you turn away from yourself; to whom do you entrust yourself during that time; how dare you lift up your eyes to Heaven, you who sinned against Heaven? Look at the earth, so that you know yourself. It will represent you, for you are earth, and to earth you will go. (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854b, col. 957c-d)[29]

St. Bernard was simply taking up a long tradition in which, contrary to the attitude of the Marian model, the attitude of Dinah, whose gaze is lost in the territory of desire, passions, or curiosity, is emphasized. Alain de Lille thought in this respect that the appetite for what is foreign is what leads the monk to look back, acting "like the wife of Loth" and withdrawing its "hand from the plow; like Dinah, the daughter of Jacob", for she craves "the ornament of strangers" (Alanus ab Insulis 1855, col. 190d)[30]; Thomas of Perseigne, or Thomas Cisterciensis, known for writing another commentary on the Song of Songs, wrote that death entered the world through the windows, symbol of the eyes, "just as it is said of Dinah, Jacob's daughter" (Thomas Cisterciensis 1850, col. 192b); finally, it is interesting to consider the position of Hugh of Saint-Victor, who, displaying his famous moderation, considers that the "force" (*vi*) that impels Dinah to look outside "does not go out to corrupt herself, but, nevertheless, by going out recklessly, she also suffered the losses of chastity against her will" (Hugo de S. Victore 1854, col. 639c)[31].

Interesting is the position of Richard of St. Victor, who departs considerably from Bernardine ideas, not only in relation to the exculpatory treatment of Dinah, but also with regard to his aesthetic positions—largely indebted to Hugh's own convictions. In fact, he maintains the same perspective as his master, but his point of view is more exhaustive, detailed, and abundant, insofar as he throws a whole series of reasons to excuse or, at least, to understand and exculpate Dinah's fall. She represents "shame", but "ordered shame" (*intelligimus per Dinam nisi verecundiam, sed ordinatam*) (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 34a). In this sense, it is interesting how shame becomes an aesthetic criterion of a moral order, which is added to Dinah's own physical virtues and thus makes it possible to explain the strong attraction felt by others: "Dinah is of an admirable beauty and singular form, and that easily attracts the eyes of those who look at her with admiration, and quickly attracts the hearts of those who admire her with their love", for, indeed, "who does not know how the modesty of shame makes men both commendable and loved by all others? [. . .]. Emor is a witness to this matter, the son of Shechem, who was united to her with such ardent love that he would rather have all her males circumcised without delay than not have her" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 36b-c)[32]. On this basis, Richard considers Dinah's beauty to be captivating for all of us (*captivamur*), and, far from thinking of it as an occasion of downfall, he sees it as an ingredient that deepens her beauty in a moral, behavioral root, rather than only physical. In fact, external beauty is increased by shame itself:

> How else to explain the fact that we always embrace shy men with more affection than others, but that, while we marvel in them at the modesty of shyness and the grace of modesty, we are somehow attracted by the beauty of Dinah and captivated by the grandeur of her loveliness in her love? Oh, how singular is the beauty of this Dinah! (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 36b-c)[33]

Richard, like St. Bernard, also locates the occasion of downfall in Dinah's departure to the outside: "the integrity", he says, "that she might have been able to maintain inside, she loses it when she leaves". However, there is an elementary difference: for him, that departure does not take place according to an interest in the beauty of the other women, but to an edifying motive. The cause that has forced her to leave her innermost places and wander outward is the need to verify, in others, the presence of her own weak-

nesses: ashamed of herself, she goes outward with the purpose of learning about human condition. Hence, she looks "around her with curiosity at the shapes of women" and discovers "that sometimes they are very beautiful and sometimes they are less beautiful" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 38a-b)[34]. Vainglory strikes her every time that, on the basis of this innate shame, she nevertheless receives the flattery of others, the praise, and, consequently, she then suffers consequences of her own corruption . . . but by a "kind of violence rather than by will, and resists as much as she can with the flattery of a perverse pleasure" (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 37d)[35]:

> For as the beauty of shame is praised, praised and loved by almost all, Dinah is going out and abandoning her intimates, and soon forgetting the memory of her weakness, which had accustomed her to humiliate, she suddenly receives the praises of men, and while they soften her with favors, they corrupt her. [. . .], what do you think is the cause that has compelled her to leave her innermost recesses and wander abroad, but that we are often too ashamed of our weaknesses, so that perhaps others feel the same weaknesses in themselves, or at least our allies? So it happens that we begin to look more curiously at the affairs of others, now to look frequently around us at their faces, now at their gestures and the attitude of their whole body, ready to learn their secrets from the reports of others. (Richardus S. Victoris 1855a, col. 37c–38a)[36]

The difference between both authors, Richard and St. Bernard, consists in the figure chosen to speak about shame as a moral virtue: for the former, shame, when it is ordered, is represented by Dinah; hence, being beautiful, she is even more so. On the contrary, St. Bernard considers that shame is more appropriate for the Virgin Mary, not Dinah. Shame makes her even more pleasing in the eyes of God, as can be read in the *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary* (*Sermones in laudibus Virginis Mariae*): "because the Virgin is shy, simple, shameful by nature" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 57c)[37].

With the exception of Richard and the School of St. Victor, the general idea treats the figure of Dinah as the counterpoint of a soul whose appetites are ordered according to its own divine nature. For St. Bernard, it is obvious that Dinah shows a series of gestures and actions contrary to humility, motivated by curiosity, and always centered on the position of the one who "looks outside". This subject leads to the question of what could be the motive that drives such a gaze, and since it is a gaze centered on matter—the shapes of other women—it is interpreted, then, that the driving force is material delight, ephemeral and subject to corruption and loss of self. St. Bernard does not deny, therefore, the aesthetic power of matter, but its correlative influence on the sensibility to divert attention from oneself. This approach implies a condemnation of curiosity at the same time as a rejection of material beauty, especially when compared to the beauty of the soul.

4. Dinah's Counterpoint: Mary's Transparent Beauty

The *Homilies in Praise of the Virgin Mary* (*Sermones in laudibus Virginis Mariae*) were probably written by St. Bernard around 1119–1120 (McGuire 2011, p. 32; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 36–39), that is, immediately after the writing of the treatise *On the degrees of humility and pride*. It is understandable, consequently, that they share the same perspective on the value of humility. These are four texts belonging to the genre of the homily since, in Leclerq's terms, the subject is not entirely free, but rather "the explanation of a biblical passage", "verse by verse" (Leclerq 1965, p. 314). It is not, therefore, a treatise or reflection on beauty, much less on the material beauty of Mary—which, we must remember, would imply on the part of St. Bernard a clumsy affirmation. However, there are sufficient propositions that point to a consideration of beauty in psychological terms, that is, in terms of a beautiful soul, which find their highest expression in the figure of Mary. In synthesis, Mary's beauty, as opposed to Dinah's, is based on the humility with which she accepts the task of her universal Motherhood.

The setting chosen by St. Bernard is that of the Annunciation. The main theme around which the four homilies revolve is the motif of the humility with which Mary (1) receives the Archangel Gabriel, keeping her head fixed on the ground, as can be seen in the most common iconographic types as a sign of humility and obedience (Salvador 2015); (2) welcomes the news; and (3) accepts her destiny. Our Lady is indeed "holy", "simple", and "devout" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 59c)[38]. What is interesting is the way in which the Abbot of Clairvaux links one dimension with the other and establishes, in practice, his aesthetic theory of humility ... or his moral theory of aesthetics based on the Marian example: "This is a beautiful (*pulchra*) combination of virginity and humility. God is very pleased with this soul, in which humility exalts virginity, and virginity adorns humility" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 58d)[39]. Humility again becomes the pillar of discharge of all appreciable conduct, so that the Virgin Mary is thus insinuated as the perfect example in the exercise of two virtues, one of which, virginity, is commendable (*laudabilis*) and advised (*consulitur*), while the other, however, is indispensable (*necessaria*) and prescribed (*praecipitur*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 59a)[40].

The beauty of the Virgin was not a taboo subject. On the contrary, it is a theme with strong patristic roots that can be traced, with particular intensity, in the texts of Ephrem the Syrian (ca. 306–373), although it is true that his "insistence" is centered, above all, on her "spiritual beauty and holiness, and on her freedom from any stain of sin" (Gambero [1991] 1999, p. 110). In this way, St. Bernard describes the Virgin as "adorned with the gems of the virtues" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 62a)[41]. It is not the first time that he uses this metaphor to extol certain virtues: for example, he refers to the "gem of wisdom" (*gemma sapientiae*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854h, cols. 814a)[42] or the "gem of shame" (*gemma pudoris*) (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854d, col. 258d)[43]. It is interesting to see how the allegorical sense prevails over the purely aesthetic value of the gems. To appreciate the specific value enjoyed by these comparisons, it is necessary to recall the criticism that St. Bernard, around 1122 (McGuire 2011, p. 34; Holdsworth 1994, pp. 48–52), carried out in his *Apologia to Abbot William* (*Apologia ad Guillelmum abbatem*) about the use of precious stones, gold, and silver in conventual spaces.

The target of his criticism was the prominent visual culture of excess that, emanating from Cluny, seemed to spread little by little to the rest of the Benedictine monasteries. Therefore, as opposed to the usual criterion of Ovidian origin, whereby the artistic result was exalted for its superiority to the material, St. Bernard denounced a loss of the simple and plain nature of everyday things. In the words of Conrad Rudolf, "not only has the material surpassed the craftsmanship, it has surpassed nature itself" (Rudolf 1990, p. 60). St. Bernard's tropological use of precious stones thus reinforces the importance of inner as opposed to outer beauty: Mary's jewels are not exterior, they are interior. Mary's beauty is not essentially exterior, but only and fundamentally interior.

The beauty of Mary, however, does not end in a collection of metaphors, more or less elaborated, more or less articulated in an aesthetic discourse on spiritual beauty. Nor does it exhaust itself in revealing a certain aesthetic taste for precious stones. She is beautiful in two ways, "resplendent with the beauty of her mind and body alike, renowned for her appearance and beauty in the heavenly places" (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854g, col. 62a)[44]. This is not indicative that both beauties walk separately, but rather that they are united under a hierarchical principle, I would say, of cause and effect. In reality, Mary's beauty, entirely dependent on her soul, is transparent, to the point that her own body receives such beauty and shines outwardly. This idea, which seems to breathe the same atmosphere of Neoplatonic theory of the period[45], is founded, again, in the *Sermons on the Song of the Songs*, which St. Bernard would begin to draft—and left unfinished before his death—about fifteen years after composing his treatise on humility and his homilies on the Virgin (Casey 1988, p. 13; McGuire 2011, p. 45). The final thesis of this whole approach is that withdrawal into the interior is the condition of possibility that anticipates the triumphant appearance of exterior beauty:

> When the love of this beauty has fully filled the most intimate parts of the heart, it must go beyond the doors and not be like a lamp lit under a bushel basket, but rather like a lamp that shines in a dark place and does not know how to hide itself. The body, mirror of the soul, receives this resplendent light that gives off brilliant rays, and diffuses it through the limbs and senses until every act, speech, appearance, movement and smile (if there is), take on splendour, as well as seriousness and complete decorum. When the movement, gesture and use of these and all the other members of the body are serious, pure, modest, devoid of all insolence and lewdness, foreign to weakness and indolence, but adjusted to the convenience and dictated by piety, the beauty of the soul will be patent, as long as the heart does not hide any duplicity. [. . .]. Happy is the soul clothed with this chaste beauty, with this mantle of celestial innocence, which enables it to claim a glorious conformity, not with the world, but with the Word, of whom it is said to be the radiance of eternal life (W. 7:26), the radiance and figure of the divine substance (Hebr. 1:3). (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, col. 1193c–1193d)[46]

It is evident, therefore, that no description of Virgin Mary's charms is necessary, since her *interior* moral beauty anticipates her *exterior* physical beauty, which is only a reflection of the first. Conversely, in other words, there is no need for any exterior beauty, since it is the interior beauty that imposes itself on matter and shines, with the strength of the virtues, in the territory of the sensible appearance, when this latter is detached from matter[47].

5. Conclusions and a Short Epilogue on Adso, Ubertino and the Sculpture of the Virgin

As mentioned before, Virgin Mary's beauty was not a taboo subject in medieval aesthetic thought. It is evident, however, that there is a tension between the renunciation of Mary's material beauty—or, at least, of Her aesthetic appreciation—and the exaltation of Her moral beauty—which implies, in short, the development of a psychological or, if one prefers, spiritual aesthetic. In this sense, we consider that St. Bernard's solution is undoubtedly of interest. In his treatise, he establishes a theory of humility as the moral basis from which to appreciate Mary's beauty, a beauty that, consequently, is translucent, that is transparent in her body: Mary's beauty is, in reality, the perceptible effect of a suprasensible disposition.

It is obvious, therefore, that the role of matter in the aesthetic appreciation of Mary's body, under St. Bernard's consideration, is minimal, insofar as it only plays the role of vehicle of perceptual qualities, which are the ones that are properly considered. Under this consideration is placed the historical distinction between the "veneration" (*veneration*) of images, where they play a mediating role between the visible and the suprasensible, and their "adoration" (*adoratio*), where both the subject and its image are considered objects of worship and, therefore, subjects of idolatry. The liberation of the image from its specifically material rootedness, as something effectively emanating from its superior moral condition—linked, in the Marian case, to the beauty of Her soul—neutralizes the status of the images as effectively material and thus eliminates the idolatrous risks in clear harmony with the theological results of the Synod of Paris of 825, according to which such distinctions were established[48].

In this sense, the appreciation of Her material beauty would not make sense if it is not done expressly taking into account her condition as an immaterial result. If this is so, man's attention to devotional representations of Mary should attend not so much to the concrete materiality of figures, but rather to their appearance, detached from those pleasures provided only by direct contact with matter. This perspective situates the experience, in Hegel's terms, "in the middle between immediate sensuousness and ideal thought" (Hegel [1835] 1975, p. 38). Focusing attention on the material representation of Mary in this way implies paying attention to that which, "despite its sensuousness, is *no longer* a purely material existence either" [. . .]; on the contrary, the sensuous in the work of art

is something ideal, but which, not being ideal as thought is ideal, is still at the same time there externally as a thing" (Hegel [1835] 1975, p. 38).

Cistercian aesthetic thought, which finds in St. Bernard one of its best representatives, differs greatly from other thinkers of his time, especially Hugh and Richard of Saint-Victor. The senses, which for the latter are also windows of access to the visible world from which to deploy approaches to the invisible—as can be seen in Hugh's own positions in the *De arca Noe morali* (Hugo de S. Victore 1854)—pose a notable risk of moral and spiritual falling for St. Bernard. The same question arises in Richard's thought on the power of the visible to reach the invisible, where sensorial beauty plays an indisputable role (e.g., Richardus S. Victoris 1855b, col. 153c). This difference can also be seen in aesthetic questions: the resistance of the Cistercian to consider Mary's sensitive beauty as an aesthetic element of appreciation is only possible if it depends heteronomously on a prior moral condition that anticipates that beauty as a sort of emanation, while in the Victorian framework it could be contemplated, according to the texts, as another element of Mariological dignity, but in any case autonomous (Kovach 1974; Pradier 2022).

Let us now return to the meeting between Adso and Ubertino. We had left them in front of an image of the Virgin, probably carved following the model that Amiens and other similar types marked during that period. Ubertino explained to Adso that feminine beauty should be sublimated and, consequently, also that of the Virgin herself. When Ubertino "pointed to the Virgin's slender bust", he then quotes the words of another Cistercian scholar, Gilbert of Hoyt, author also of some *Sermones in Cantica Canticum Salomonis*. He writes there the famous sentence: "For beautiful breasts are those that protrude a little and swell moderately, not floating freely, but gently contained, contained but not depressed" (Gillebertus de Hoilandia 1854, cols. 163a-b).

Certainly striking is Gilbert's appreciation, which, however, always responds to the same Bernardine criterion: it is possible to appreciate beauty without the apparent physical and material necessity of its abuse. Elsewhere Umberto Eco writes that "only nowadays, perhaps, we can see that his gravity is suffused with a certain malice" (Eco [1959] 1986, p. 11). Both St. Bernard and Gilbert point to the possibility of appreciating things when there is nothing else to do—remember, in this regard, the previous requirement of withdrawing into the interior—in their purely sensory condition, separated from their material prison, and rejoicing in the encounter with the beautiful exterior because it constitutes a precious occasion for extolling the interior beauty, which is undoubtedly superior. It is obvious that Ubertino is testing poor Adso. This reminds us that beauty, in medieval thought, was always a limit experience, in need of a suprasensible meaning, in order to become an occasion of salvation.

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Notes

[1] *Apol. ad Guil.* XII, 28: *Nos vero qui iam de populo exivimus, qui mundi quaeque pretiosa ac speciosa pro Christo reliquimus, qui omnia pulchre lucentia, canon mulcentia, suave olentia, dulce sapientia, tactu placentia, cuncta denique oblectamente corporea arbitrari sumus ut stercora,* [. . .].

2 *Adm*. XXXIII: *Unde, cum ex dilectione decoris domus Dei aliquando multicolor, gemmarum speciositas ab exintrinsecis me curis devocaret, sanctarum etiam diversitatem virtutum, de materialibus ad immaterialia transferendo, honesta meditatio insistere persuaderet, videor videre me quasi sub aliqua extranea orbis terrarum plaga, quae nec tota sit in terrarum faece nec tota in coeli puritate, demorari, ab hac etiam inferiori ad illam superiorem anagogico more Deo donante posse transferri*.

3 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 2: *Humilitatis vero talis potest esse definitio: humilitas est virtus, qua homo erissima sui cognitione sibi ipse vilescit*.

4 *Regula* VII: *Septimus humilitatis gradus est, si omnibus se inferiorem et viliorem, non solum sua lingua pronuntiet, sed etiam intimo cordis credat affectu, humilians se, et dicens cum Propheta: Ego autem sum vermis, et non homo; opprobrium hominum et abjectio plebis (Psal. XXI); exaltatus sum, et humiliatus, et confusus (Psal. LXXXVII). Et item: Bonum mihi, quod humiliasti me, ut discam mandata tua (Psal. CXVIII)*.

5 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 2: *Haec autem convenit his, qui ascensionibus in corde suo dispositis, de virtute in virtutem, id est de gradu in gradum proficiunt, donec ad culmen humilitatis perveniant, in quo velut in Sion, id est in speculatione, positi, veritatem prospiciant*.

6 Gen. 28:12–15: "Then he had a dream: a stairway rested on the ground, with its top reaching to the heavens; and God's messengers were going up and down on it. And there was the Lord standing beside him and saying: 'I, the Lord, am the God of your forefather Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you are lying I will give to you and your descendants. These shall be as plentiful as the dust of the earth, and through them you shall spread out east and west, north and south. In you and your descendants all the nations of the earth shall find blessing. Know that I am with you; I will protect you wherever you go, and bring you back to this land. I will never leave you until I have done what I promised you'."For English translations of biblical texts, we use the New American Bible Revised Edition (NABRE); for excerpts from St. Jerome's *Vulgate* (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845a, 1845b), translations are mine.

7 *Epistola* CCLIV. *Ad Abbatem Guarinum Alpensem. Laudat in sene abbate studium reformandi Ordinis. Temporis brevitatem non obsistere studio perfectionis. In vita espirituali semper proficiendum, nunquam standum*, 5: *Vidit scalam Jacob, et in scala angelos, ubi nullus residens, nullus subsistens apparuit; sed vel ascendere, vel descendere videbantur universi (Gen. XXVIII, 12): quatenus palam daretur intelligi, inter profectum et defectum in hoc statu mortalis vitae nihil medium inveniri; sed quomodo ipsum corpus nostrum continue aut crescere constat, aut decrescere, sic necesse sit et spiritum aut proficere semper, aut deficere*.

8 *Epistola* XCI. *Ad Abbates sucessione congregatos. Abbates excitat ad strenue curandum negotium, cujus causa convenerunt. Studium profectus serio commendat: nil morandum, si tepidi quidam et dissoluti forsan detrectent et obmurmurent, 3: Vidit Jacob in scala Angelos ascendentes et descendentes:* [. . .]. *Aut ascendas necesse est, aut descendas: si attentas stare, ruas necesse est*.

9 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* I, 1: *[. . .] non numerandos, sed ascendendos*.

10 On the concept of curiositas in medieval thought, see (Labhardt 1960; Newhauser 1987; Krüger 2002; Bruce 2019).

11 *De consideratione III*, 6.

12 Adamus Scotus, *De ordine habitu et professione canonicorum ordinis Paremonstratensis* II, 4: "And so reprobate fall down, go out, and rise up. Now the cause of these three are: pleasure, curiosity and vanity; these three things. For pleasure makes them prostrate, curiosity makes them go out, vanity sets them upright. And pleasure belongs to the lust of the flesh; curiosity to the lust of the eyes; vanity to the pride of life" (*Itaque reprobi prosternuntur, egrediuntur, eriguntur. Horum autem trium causa sunt: voluptas, curiositas, vanitas; tria haec. Nam voluptas prostratos, curiositas egressos, vanitas reddit erectos. Et ad concupiscentiam carnis pertinet voluptas; curiositas ad concupiscentiam oculorum; vanitas ad superbiam vitae*).

13 *De divinis nominibus* IV, 9: "In this circular motion a non-erring motion is given to the soul which returns and gathers the soul from the many which are outside it. It is first returned into itself and then, as it comes to be of one form, it is singly united with its unified powers; in this way it is conducted to the beautiful and good beyond all beings: the one and the same, without beginning and end" ([. . .] ἡ ἑνοειδὴς συνέλιξις ὥσπερ ἔν τινι κύκλῳ τὸ ἀπλανὲς αὐτῇ δωρουμένη καὶ ἀπὸ τῶν πολλῶν τῶν ἔξωθεν αὐτὴν ἐπιστρέφουσα καὶ συνάγουσα πρῶτον εἰς ἑαυτήν, εἶτα ὡς ἑνοειδῆ γενομένην ἑνοῦσα ταῖς ἑνιαίως ἡνωμέναις δυνάμεσι καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸ καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν χειραγωγοῦσα τὸ ὑπὲρ πάντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ ἓν καὶ ταὐτὸν καὶ ἄναρχον καὶ ἀτελεύτητον).

This idea is taken (Rico Pavés 2001, p. 427) from Plotinus (1939, p. 330; *Enn*. VI, 9, 8, 3–5; 19), for whom, "except when there is a kind of break in it," the "natural movement" of the soul is "in a circle around something, something not external but a center, and the center is that from which the circle derives" (ἡ δὲ κατὰ φύσιν κίνησις οἵα ἡ ἐν κύκλῳ περὶ τι οὐκ ἔξω, ἀλλὰ περὶ κέντρον, τὸ δὲ κέντρον ἀφ'οὗ ὁ κύκλος, [. . .]).

14 *De vera religione liber unus* XXIX, 72: "Do not go abroad. Return within your self. In the inward man dwells truth. If you find that you are by nature mutable, transcend yourself. But remember in doing so that you must also transcend yourself even as a reasoning soul. Make for the place where the light of reason is kindled. What does every good rea- soner attain but truth? And yet truth is not reached by reasoning, but is itself the goal of all who reason. There is an agreeableness than which there can be no greater. Agree, then, with it. Confess that you are not as it is. It has to do no seeking, but you reach it by seeking, not in space, but by a disposition of mind, so that the inward man may agree with the indwelling truth in a pleasure that is not low and carnal but supremely spiritual" *(Noli foras ire, in teipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas; et si tuam naturam mutabilem inveneris, transcende et teipsum. Sed memento cum te trascendis, ratiocinantem animam te transcendere. Illuc ergo tende, unde ipsum lumen rationis*

accenditur. Quo enim pervenit omnis bonus ratiocinator, nisi ad veritatem? Cum ad seipsam veritas non utique ratiocinando perveniat, sed quod ratiocinantes appetunt, ip a sit. Vide ibi convenientiam qua superior esse non possit, et ipse conveni cum ea. Confitere te non esse quod ipsa est: siquidem se ipsa non quaerit; tu autem ad ipsam quaerendo venisti, non locorum spatio, sed mentis affectu, ut ipse interior homo cum suo inhabitatore, non infima et carnali, sed summa et spirituali voluptate conveniat).

15 E*pistolae* III, 4: *Unde constamus? Ex animo et corpore. Quid horum melius? Videlicet animus. Quid laudant in corpore? Nihil aliud video quam pulchritudinem. Quid est corporis pulchritudo? Congruentia partium cum quadam coloris suavitate. Haec forma ubi vera melior, an ubi falsa? Quis dubitet ubi vera est, esse meliorem? Ubi ergo vera est? In animo scilicet. Animus igitur magis amandus est quam corpus*.

16 *De consolatione philosophiae* III, 8: [. . .] *igitur te pulchrum videri non tua natura, sed oculorum spectantium reddit infirmitas*.

17 Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXV, 6: "No carnal beauty is comparable to it, nor a glowing and rosy complexion; nor a healthy face soon worn by the years; nor a valuable dress exposed to the passage of time; nor the beauty of gold or the splendor of precious stones or similar things, which have a common destiny: corruption" (*Non comparabitur ei quantalibet pulchritudo carnis, non cutis utique nitida et arsura, non facies colorata vicina putredini, non vestis pretiosa obnoxia vetustati, non auri species, splendorve gemmarum, seu quaeque talia, quae omnia sunt ad corruptionem*).

18 *De Allegoriae sacrae Scripturae, Ex veteri testamento*, 51: *Dina, filia Jacob, Synagogam, vel animam, significat: quam in exterioribus saeculi curis repertam Sichem princeps terrae opprimit, id est, diabolus vitio concupiscentiae carnalis corrumpit*.

19 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 28: *[. . .] quam, dum a sui circumspectione torpescit incuria sui, curiosam in alios facit. Quia enim seipsam ignorat, foras mittitur, ut haedos pascat. Haedos quippe, qui peccatum significant, recte oculos auresque appellaverim, qoniam sicut mors per peccatum in orben, sic per has fenestras intrat ad mentem*.

20 Gn. 34:1: *Egressa est autem Dina, filia Liae, ut videret mulieres regionis illius* (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845a, col. 208b).

21 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *O Dina, quid necesse est ut videas mulieres alienigenas? Qua necessitate? qua utilitate? An sola curiositate?*

22 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *Etsi tu otiose vides, sed non otiose videris. Tu curiose spectas, sed curiosius spectaris. Quis crederet tunc illam tuam curiosam otiositatem, vel otiosam curiositatem, fore post sic non otiosam, sed tibi, tuis, hostibusque tam perniciosam?*

23 Song of Sg. 1:7: *Si ignoras te o pulchra inter mulieres egredere et abi post vestigia gregum et pasce haedos tuos iuxta tabernacula pastorum*.

24 Song of Sg. 1:3: *Trahe me post te curremus introduxit me rex in cellaria sua exultabimus et laetabimur in te memores uberum tuorum super vinum recti diligunt te*; 3:4: *paululum cum pertransissem eos inveni quem diligit anima mea tenui eum nec dimittam donec introducam illum in domum matris meae et in cubiculum genetricis meae*.

25 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 28: *Quia enim seipsam ignorat, foras mittitur, ut haedos pascat*.

26 On this subject, *Epistola CXXX Ad Pisanos*: "Otherwise, if you do not know yourself, O fair one among the cities, you will go out after the flocks of your comforters to graze your goatlings" (*Alioquin si ignoras te, o pulchra inter civitates, egredieris post greges soladium tuorum pascere haedos tuos*); Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXXV, 3: "[. . .] and go after the flocks of your fellows, and so your little goats they will be able to graze. In which, as it seems to me, he reminds us of something important. What is that? Alas! That an excellent creature, already once made of the herd, and now rushing miserably into the worse, is not at least allowed to remain among the herds, but is ordered to go away" (*et abi post greges sodalium tuorum, et pasce haedos tuos. In quo, ut mihi videtur, magnae cujusdam rei nos admonet. Quid istud? Heu! quod egregia creatura, jam olim facta de grege, et nunc in pejus miserabiliter proruens, non saltem inter greges remanere permittitur, sed post abire jubetur*).

27 *De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus* X, 29: *Dina namque dum ad pascendos haedos egreditur, ipsa patri, et sua sibi virginitas rapitur*.

28 Prov. 4:23 (Hyeronimus Stridonensis 1845b, col. 1247b).

29 De gradibus humilitatis et superbiae tractatus X, 28: Haedos quippe, qui peccatum significant, recte oculos auresque appellaverim: quoniam sicut mors per peccatum in orbem, sic per has fenestras intrat ad mentem. In his ergo pascendis se occupat curiosus, dum scire non curat qualem se reliquerit intus. Et vere si te vigilanter, homo, attendas, mirum est si ad aliud unquam intendas. Audi, curiose, Salomonem; audi, stulte, Sapientem. Omni custodia, inquit, custodi cor tuum: ut omnes videlicet sensus tui vigilent ad id, unde vita procedit, custodiendum. Quo enim a te, o curiose, recedis? Cui te interim committis? Utquid audes oculos levare ad coelum, qui peccasti in coelum? Terram intuere, ut cognoscas teipsum. Ipsa te tibi repraesentabit, quia terra es, et in terram ibis.
Again in Sermones in Cantica Canticorum XXXV, 2 (Bernardus Claraevallensis 1854c, 963b): "For goatlings—which signify sin, and are to be placed in judgment on the left side—are the wandering and malicious senses of the body, through which sin, like death through windows, entered into the soul" (Haedos quippe—qui peccatum significant, et in judicio collocandi sunt a sinistris—dicit vagos et petulantes corporis sensus, per quos peccatum, tanquam mors per fenestras, intravit ad animam).

30 Alanus ab Insulis, *De arte predictatoria* XLIII: "The cloistered man, therefore, who longs to have his own, looks back like Lot's wife, turns his hand away from the plow, while Dinah, Jacob's daughter, desires the adornment of strangers) (*Claustralis ergo qui proprium habere desiderat, retro respicit cum uxore Loth, manum ab aratro retrahit, cum Dina filia Jacob, ornatum alienigenarum appetit*).

31 *De arca Noe morali* V: *Quae vi opprimitur patet quod non ideo exit ut corrumpatur, sed tamen quia temere exiit, pudicitiae suae damna etiam invita sustinuit*.

[32] Benjamin Minor XLIX: Est enim Dina admirandae pulchritudinis et formae singularis, et quae intuentium oculos in sui admirationem facile trahat, et admirantium animos cito sua dilectione alliciat. Quis enim ignorat quomodo modestia verecundiae homines omnibus et commendabiles reddat, et amabiles efficiat?

[33] *Benjamin Minor* XLIX: *Unde namque est quod verecundos homines fere semper caeteris charius amplectimur, 196.0036C | nisi quod, in eis dum verecundiae modestiam modestiaeque gratiam miramur, Dinae quodammodo pulchritudine allicimur, et pulchritudinis suae magnitudine in ejus amorem captivamur? O quam singularis hujus Dinae pulchritudo*!

[34] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Dum ergo Dina mulierum formas curiose circumspicit, alias multum, alias minus pulchras nimirum invenit*.

[35] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Verumtamen tunc Dina corruptionis suae damna violentia quadam potius quam voluntate patitur, cum blandienti pravae delectationi quantum potest reluctatur*.

[36] *Benjamin Minor* LI: *Nam quoniam verecundiae venustas ab omnibus fere commendatur, laudatur, amatur, Dinam egredientem et intima sua deserentem, et quae eam humiliare consueverat infirmitatis suae memoriam cito obliviscentem, subito hominum laudes excipiunt, et eam, dum favoribus demulcent, corrumpunt.* [. . .]. *Sed quid putas causae accidit quae eam sua intima deserere, et ad exteriora vagari compulit, nisi quod saepe dum infirma nostra nimis erubescimus, unde forte alii easdem infirmitates in se sentiant, mirari incipimus, et videtur nobis quoddam solatii genus invenisse, si deprehendamus nos in nostra saltem dejectione vel socios habere? Inde fit ut incipiamus aliorum studia curiosius quaerere, nunc vultum, nunc gestum, totiusque corporis habitum frequenter circumspicere, eorum occulta ex aliorum relatu libenter addiscere*.

[37] *De laudibus Virginis Matris I*, 2: [. . .] *quia virginem natura pavidam, simplicem, verecundam* [. . .].

[38] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 6: *Virgo utique sancta, virgo sobria, virgo devota*.

[39] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 5: *Pulchra permistio virginitatis et humilitatis: nec mediocriter placet Deo illa anima, in qua et humilitas commendat virginitatem, et virginitas exornat humilitatem*.

[40] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* I, 5: *Laudabilis virtus virginitas, sed magis necessaria humilitas. Illa consulitur, ista praecipitur. Ad illam invitaris, ad istam cogeris*.

[41] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* II, 2: *His nimirum Virgo regia gemmis ornata virtutum*, [. . .].

[42] *De moribus et officio episcoporum II*, 4.

[43] *Epistola CXIII. Ad Sophiam virginem*, 5.

[44] *De laudibus Virginis Matris* II,2: [. . .] *geminoque mentis pariter et corporis decore praefulgida, specie sua et pulchritudine sua in caelestibus cognita*, [. . .].

[45] Even if the presence of certain typically Neoplatonic topics is evident, integrated in general in the thought of the twelfth century—some even speak of the effective presence of a "platonising theology" (Casey 2011, p. 91)—, we cannot confirm that St. Bernard drew his own conclusions from the translations of Greek texts that populated the intellectual panorama of the twelfth century.

[46] *Sermones in Cantica Canticorum LXXXV*, 11: *Cum autem decoris hujus charitas abundantius intima cordis repleverit, prodeat foras necesse est, tanquam lucerna latens sub modio, imo lux in tenebris lucens, latere nescia. Porro effulgentem, et veluti quibusdam suis radiis erumpentem, mentis simulacrum corpus excipit, et diffundit per membra et sensus, quatenus omnis inde reluceat actio, sermo, aspectus, incessus, risus (si tamen risus) mistus gravitate, et plenus honesti. Horum et al.iorum profecto artuum sensuumque motus, gestus et usus, cum apparuerit serius, purus, modestus, totius expers insolentiae atque lasciviae, tum levitatis, tum ignaviae alienus, aequitati autem accommodus, pietati officiosus; pulchritudo animae palam erit, si tamen non sit in spiritu ejus dolus. [. . .]. Beata mens, quae hoc se induit castimoniae decus, et quemdam veluti coelestis innocentiae candidatum, per quem sibi vindicet gloriosam conformitatem, non mundi, sed Verbi, de quo legitur, quod sit candor vitae aeternae; splendor et figura substantiae Dei*.

[47] On this question, I greatly appreciate suggestions made by one of the blind reviewers for this paper, who reminds that "modesty" or "shyness" (*pudor*), parallel to the issue of "shame" (*verecundia*), are understood as moral conditions powerful enough to generate some very evident beautiful aesthetic effects, also in the Virgin's case. He quotes, in this regard, a text by Baldwin of Ford (*ca.* 1125–1192), which I translate here and thus indicate a possible research line: "The grace of this charm is adorned by the grace of color, both white and red. The color is shameful. There is then a double modesty, the chaste modesty, and the shameful modesty. Chastity and shame are the shining lily and the red rose. Chastity affects the face with its whiteness, shame floods the cheeks with its blush. Shame is the guardian of chastity, and charm is equally its ornament" (*Tractatus VII. De Salutatione Angelica: Gratiam hujus venustatis adornat gratia coloris, candoris pariter et ruboris. Color pudor est. Est nutem geminus pudor, pudor pudicus, et pudor verecundus. Pudicitia et verecundia lilium candens et rosa rubens. Pudicitia suo candore faciem afficit, verecundia suo rubore genas perfundit. Verecundia custos est pudicitiae, et decus pariter et ornamentum ejus*) (Balduinus Cantuarensis 1855, col. 471b-c).

[48] It should be remembered that this was not the only council that had taken place in Gallic territories on the subject of images. Already in 767, under the reign of Pipin, a synod on the same subject had been convoked in the town of Gentilly (Thümmel 1999).

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Article

The Mandorla Symbol in Byzantine and Post-Byzantine Iconography of the Dormition: Function and Meaning

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Abstract: The present study examines the use of the mandorla symbol in Byzantine and post-Byzantine iconography of the Dormition. The research aims to outline the reasons for the adoption of the mandorla in the iconographic scheme of the subject as a means of visualizing the heavenly Eden and the Glory of God's presence. It traces the main stages in the development of the Dormition iconography and the creation of its principal models, highlighting the diversity of the patterns in the post-Byzantine art in the Balkans.

Keywords: Dormition of the Theotokos; Dormition iconography; mandorla; Glory of God; Byzantine art; post-Byzantine art

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1. Introduction

Between the 6th and 14th centuries, the iconographic models of some of the central feasts in the Church calendar gradually took form. Their development reflects the religious milieu of the time, the struggle against heresies, and the accompanying development of theological thought. One of these models is the depiction of the Dormition of the Theotokos, which despite the relatively quickly established basic scheme, continues to undergo late changes. One of them is the introduction of the symbol of the mandorla somewhere in the second half of the 11th century—a topic on which we will focus our attention here, due to the function of the mandorla as a visual representation of the Glory of God in its twofold meaning—spatial and luminous (Todorova 2016).

In Christian iconography, the mandorla is employed in certain iconic scenes, encompassing the figures of Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, and occasionally, specific saints. The mandorla serves to demarcate a sacred space around Christ. This separated space can be interpreted as a representation of heaven, or the "other world", as a metaphysical realm where sacred events occur, and as a symbol of the resplendent Divine Light of the Glory of God (Todorova 2013, 2020b). In some of the iconographical subjects in which it is involved, the mandorla primarily conveys a luminous connotation, as is the case, for example, in the Transfiguration of Christ, while in other subjects such as the Dormition of the Theotokos, its meaning is more spatial, as this research aims to demonstrate. While in the case of the Transfiguration, the mandorla symbol has been a part of the iconographical scheme since the beginning, in the Dormition scene, it was introduced much later, apparently following the development of theological debates. Furthermore, what is even more interesting is that the Dormition mandorla follows the dynamic character of the symbol and its ability to reflect the theological ideas of the time. It also takes on features that researchers attribute to the influence of Hesychasm on the late Byzantine art, as seen with the Transfiguration mandorla, while in the post-Byzantine period, it enjoys a similar variety in form and color (Todorova 2022a). Therefore, the aim of the present study is to outline the reasons for the adoption of the mandorla in the iconographic scheme of the Dormition of the Theotokos as a means of visualizing the heavenly Eden and the Glory of God's presence and to trace its development in Byzantine and post-Byzantine art in the Balkans.

2. The Iconography of the Dormition

Following the definitive affirmation of the Virgin Mary as Theotokos at the Third Ecumenical Council in Ephesus in 431, devotion to her spread widely, and events from her life gained a prominent place in the Church's liturgical calendar (Baryames 1977, pp. 11–13). The feast of her Dormition began to be celebrated in the 5th century (Walsh 2007, p. 2), and its final establishment on August 15th was decreed by Emperor Maurice Tiberius (582–602) at the Church of the Most Holy Theotokos in Blachernae (Pentcheva 2006, p. 12). After the end of Iconoclasm, the iconographic image of the Dormition began to appear more frequently and became especially popular in the middle and late Byzantine culture. Its importance stems from the theological need to affirm the truth of the human nature of the Lord Jesus Christ—the human, mortal body of Christ is a fundamental argument against the Iconoclastic heresy, because it proves that the divine can be imaged and those images can be venerated. The Dormition of the Theotokos, in turn, constitutes the final proof of the reality of the human nature of the Son of God (Carr 1997, pp. 114–15).

The iconography of the feast is based on numerous written sources (Salvador-González 2011, pp. 238–39), the main ones being the second homily on the Dormition of St. John Damascene and the "Pastoral letter" of Archbishop John I of Thessaloniki. Both works are based on the *Transitus Mariae* legend, attributed to St. James Brother of the Lord, as well as on the accounts of the main non-canonical sources, the latest of which date from the 6th–7th century period (Baryames 1977, pp. 14–33; Najork 2018, pp. 478–79). The classic iconographic scheme represents the Holy Virgin lying on a bier surrounded symmetrically by the holy apostles while the Lord Jesus Christ stands behind the bed, holding in His hands the soul of the Theotokos depicted as a swaddled infant and raising her towards an angel who will take her to heaven. In the 10th century, it was fully developed and widespread, as shown by several reliefs from Constantinople and isolated examples of liturgical icons from that time. The composition was elaborated in the period of 11th–12th century so as to include buildings sheltering mourning women, bishops, the holy apostles on clouds, as well as the figure of Jephonias the Jew, whose hands were cut off by an angel due to his attempt to gather the bier of the Virgin and miraculously healed after he professed Christianity. The composition was further developed in the Palaiologan period, when more episodes from a longer narrative were added, some of which show the reception of the Theotokos in heaven, whose gates are widely open above (Taft and Carr 1991, pp. 651–53). The subject of the continuity and variation of the Dormition iconography will remain, to a certain extent, unclear until comprehensive research of the type of Anna Kartsonis' study of the Anastasis iconography (Kartsonis 1986) is conducted. The present article focuses solely on the question of the appearance and evolution of the mandorla symbol in the visual scheme of the Dormition.

3. The Symbol of Mandorla in Byzantine Iconography of the Dormition

3.1. Early Examples without Mandorla

A small eulogia token from Bet She'an, Israel of the 6th century is probably the earliest known fragmentary representation of the subject (Rahmani 1993, pp. 113–14). R. Baryames also mentions a wall image from the Basilica of Holy Sion, Jerusalem from the same century, preserved due to a later sketch (Baryames 1977, p. 34, fig. 2), as well as several Western images from the 7th–9th centuries (Ibid., pp. 42–48). Four reliefs from the second half of the 10th century and two more from the 11th century demonstrate the already established iconographical scheme of the Dormition (Salvador-González 2017, pp. 192–93), in which the symbol of the mandorla has yet to find a place. The mandorla is absent from the composition not only during the 10th and 11th centuries but often even during the 12th century. However, a more thorough search reveals that as early as the second half of the 11th century, there are signs of the gradual introduction of the idea of visualizing the heavenly Eden, which in turn, paves the way for the use of the mandorla as well, and by the 12th century, images of the Dormition with mandorlas were already encountered. In a Constantinopolitan icon from the second half of the 11th century,[1] part of the collection of

the Monastery of Saint Catherine (Lazarev 1986, p. 97, tab. 324), several angels are visible in the sky, three of whom on the right carry the soul of the Virgin Mary to heaven. These angels, as well as the others on the left, are depicted waist-high, as if peering from another space, and this impression is particularly strong in the left group—the area around the figures looks like a cloud or a cavity. At the upper edge of the icon are depicted seraphim with wings intertwined above their heads, thus, forming the heavens into which the Holy Virgin will enter.

The use of "clouds" housing angelic powers was also seen a century earlier, in the iconographic programs of Cappadocian churches. For example, in the Dormition fresco in the New Church of Tokali Kilise, Turkey, dated to the second half of the 10th century, the apostles coming on clouds are depicted in a kind of medallion (Jolivet-Lévy 1991, pp. 102–3). It is interesting that the mandorla around the figure of Christ is missing here, but He is still framed by a rectangular architectural structure with a triangular roof behind Him and is accompanied by an angel (Maguire 2019, pp. 60–61, fig. 49). In the fresco from the Church of Saint Sophia in Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia (ca. 1050), which closely follows the scheme known from the reliefs, two elongated "alveoli" are already present in the upper corners, each containing six holy apostles (Salvador-González 2017, p. 222). These clouds or "cavities" in the real space in which the miracle of the Dormition takes place illustrate the apocryphal stories about the miraculous presence of all the holy apostles around the bed of the Virgin Mary, brought "on the wings of the clouds" (*Dormition of the All-Holy Theotokos and How the Undefiled Mother of Our Lord was Translated*., vers. 22–23. In (Shoemaker 2002, pp. 360–61; Panagopoulos 2013, pp. 343–51).

The subsequent inclusion of the mandorla in the iconographic scheme can be explained in the same way—the only reason for this should be the mention of the Glory of God in the apocryphal sources of the Dormition story. For example, Pseudo-Melito describes the event that most likely became the reason for the depiction of the mandorla filled with angelic powers:

> *"But the apostles carrying Mary came into the place of the valley of Iosaphat which the Lord have showed them, and laid her in a new tomb and shut the sepulchre. But they sat down at the door of the tomb as the Lord had charged them: and lo, suddenly the Lord Jesus Christ came with a great multitude of angels, and light flashing with great brightness, and said to the apostles: Peace be with you".* (Pseudo-Melito. De Transitu Virginis Mariæ Liber., XVI. In: (James 1924, p. 215).)

The manifestation of the Glory of God in the form of a blinding light that surrounds the holy apostles is also present in the story of Joseph of Arimathea:

> *"'Then the apostles laid the body in the tomb with great honour, weeping and singing for pure love and sweetness. And suddenly a light from heaven shone round about them, and as they fell to the earth, the holy body was taken up by angels into heaven' (the apostles not knowing it)".* (Pseudo-Joseph of Arimathea. De Transitu Virginis Mariæ Liber., 16. In: (James 1924, p. 217).)

The iconographic subject for the Dormition is not the only one influenced by the non-canonical literature. The Gospel accounts of the Transfiguration, Resurrection, and Ascension of Christ are also lacking in detail, which presents a significant challenge for iconographers when creating their pictorial schemes. They had to rely on additional sources, as well as the interpretations and teachings of experienced clerics, to create the visual scenes for these events. Sometimes, a successful iconographic solution includes avoiding a too narrative representation of the event in favor of a more symbolic image. This approach can also be applied in regards to the appearance of the mandorla symbol in the iconography of the Dormition.

The details of the story of the Dormition, which originate from non-canonical sources, are widely accepted in Church tradition, as evidenced by a summary made by St. John Damascene in his homily on the subject, according to how he heard the story from St. Juvenal of Jerusalem. Here, a direct connection is even made between the person of the

Theotokos and the Glory of God, which also serves as an illustration of the prerequisites for the addition of the mandorla symbol to the iconography of the Dormition:

> *" . . . The Holy Scripture inspired by God does not tell what happened in the death of the Holy Theotókos Mary, but we rely on an ancient tradition and very true that at the time of her glorious Dormition, all the holy apostles, which roamed the earth for the salvation of the nations, were assembled in an instant through the air in Jerusalem. When they were close to her, angels appeared to them in a vision, and a divine concert of the higher power was heard. And so, in a divine and heavenly glory, the Virgin gave her holy soul in the God's hands in an ineffable way . . . ".* (Saint Jean Damascène, *Deuxième discours sur l'illustre Dormition de la Toute Sainte et toujours Vierge Marie*, 18. In: (Saint Jean Damascène 1961, p. 173).)

3.2. Appearance of Mandorla without Inscribed Angelic Powers

After the first manifestations of "spatial" symbols in the iconography of the feast in the 11th century, in the 12th century, examples with a clearly defined mandorla were already observed, but the introduction of the symbol was far from widespread. For example, in the Transfiguration icon from Zarzma, Georgia, the twelfth-century reworking of its frame contains a Dormition scene in which the mandorla is missing (Eastmond 2011, pp. 73–78, fig. 5.5f). In one of the most well-preserved examples of the 12th century, the fresco from the Church of Agios Nikolaos Kasnitzi in Kastoria, Greece dated ca. 1170–1180, the mandorla and even the "alveoli" for the angels are also missing (Malmquist 1979, p. 53). The mandorla is also missing in the fresco from the Transfiguration Cathedral at the Pskov Spaso-Preobrazhensky Mirozhsky monastery, Russia, dating from the 12th century. On the other hand, the iconographic program of the Church of St. George in Kurbinovo, Republic of North Macedonia, dated ca. 1190, contains the Dormition scene in which Christ is depicted in a wide oval mandorla with a blue-green core and a white band, behind which the angelic forces are depicted (Figure 1) (Dimitrova 2016, pp. 8–9, 21). There is one more noticeable feature in this fresco as well—the iconography of the subject is related to the iconography of the Nativity of Christ due to the way the soul of the Virgin is represented. She is depicted not as a motionless image of a tightly swaddled baby but as a semi-seated infant, dressed in a looser robe and with arched legs. In addition, the position of the hands of Christ is the same as on the opposite fresco of the Virgin Hodegetria. This tendency to consciously create parallels between the iconography of the Dormition and the Nativity continued throughout the following centuries, for example, in the 13th century Dormition fresco in Sopoćani, Serbia (Maguire 2019, pp. 61–62).

In the Dormition fresco from the Church of The Panagia tou Araka in Lagoudera, Cyprus from 1192 (Figure 2), Christ is depicted taking the soul of the Virgin into a pointed monochrome mandorla placed against a blue background. The mandorla is outlined by two or three pale blue bands that disappear towards its core, which seems to be filled with clouds. A. Stilianou and J. A. Stilianou believe that the humanism of the time is clearly visible in this image, and based on its comparison with the homonymous fresco from the Church of Panagia Phorbiotissa in Asinou, Cyprus from the early 12th century, they conclude that the replacement of the restrained and alienated Christ with a more emotional and moving version of Him shows the processes in the development of the Constantinopolitan style in iconography during the Komnenian period (Stilianou and Stylianou 1997, pp. 169–70, 121).

Figure 1. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, ca. 1190, Church of St. George, Kurbinovo, Republic of North Macedonia. (Photo credit: *Pravoslavnyy Svyato-Tikhonovskiy Gumanitarnyy Universitet*).

Figure 2. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1192, Church of The Panagia tou Araka, Lagoudera, Cyprus. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

The same scheme can be found in a miniature from the late 12th century from the collection of The British Library (Figure 3). The *Harley MS 1810* Tetraevangelion, which contains the illustration, is believed to have originated from Nicaea, Cyprus, Jerusalem, or even Mount Athos. Despite the controversy over its provenance, the general consensus is that the handwriting and quality of the miniatures in the book are far above average, indicating that it is not an "ordinary" Gospel (Lowden 1997, pp. 384–85). The main feature of this miniature is that it illustrates an event that is not of a gospel nature. Along with the image of St. John the Baptist, these scenes are not commonly encountered in a Tetraevangelion. The Dormition is the third miniature in the Gospel of Luke and it reveals some typical 12th century changes in the iconographic scheme of the subject. The first feature is the depiction of Christ not in the middle of the bed but closer to its upper edge (Yota 2021, pp. 47, 126–31). Such a composition occurs in the homonymous scenes in the Church of The Panagia tou Araka in Lagoudera, Cyprus (Nicolaïdès 1996, pp. 96–104, fig. 73); the Boyana Church, Bulgaria (Grabar 1978, p. 47, fig. 4); and several Cappadocian churches.

Figure 3. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, miniature, late 12th century, *Harley MS 1810*, fol. 174r, 22.5 × 16.5 cm (page), *The British Library*, London. (Photo credit: *The British Library*).

The second feature concerns the way in which the mandorla is depicted as a symbol of the Glory of God. According to E. Yota, the mandorla in this miniature follows neither the round shape typical of monumental painting at the time nor the oval shape typical of miniatures and icons but is represented in the form of an almond. This applies to the mandorlas in the Ascension and the Transfiguration miniatures in the same manuscript (Yota 2021, p. 111). Yota cites two additional examples in addition to *Harley MS 1810* where the Dormition mandorla is oval and vertically pointed—the partially-destroyed miniature

in *Malibu Getty Ms. Ludwig II 5* from the early 13th century[2] and the fresco in the Church of The Panagia tou Araka in Lagoudera. Yota finds an explanation for this peculiarity of the mandorla in the apocryphal sources that describe how the Lord Jesus Christ comes "on clouds" to take the soul of the Virgin Mary. The account of Joseph of Arimathea quoted above describes the Lord's appearance in splendor that caused those present to fall to the ground, as happened with the holy apostles at Tabor. Based on this, Yota concludes that the mandorla in the Dormition of the Theotokos in *Harley MS 1810* replicates the shining mandorla of Christ from the scenes of His Transfiguration and Ascension. Citing various arguments, Yota is inclined to indicate the source of this iconography of the miniature as the fresco from the Church of The Panagia tou Araka, emphasizing that *Harley MS 1810* is the first case in which the Dormition scene was included in the iconographical program of a Tetraevangelion, and the reason for this is likely purely liturgical. The pointed almond-shaped type of the mandorla is one of the pieces of evidence supporting the author's hypothesis about the origin of the miniature (Yota 2021, pp. 131–35, 213–14, 252).

Regardless of whether Yota is right or not, in this particular case, it is necessary to explicitly mention another specific feature of the oval-pointed mandorla in the Dormition miniature—its emphasized spatial character. Christ is literally emerging from the middle of the blue three-layered mandorla. This effect is achieved by depicting the blue garment of the Lord in the same shade as the core of the mandorla. The folds in His garments are marked by thin white lines, as well as the separate layers of His mandola. This monochromaticity later becomes common in the depiction of angelic forces inside the mandorla, but here, it directly creates the impression of Christ passing from one space to another.

For the completeness of the study, due attention should be given to the Dormition fresco from the western wall of the nave in the Bachkovo Monastery, Bulgaria, dated ca. 1180. From an iconographic perspective, this fresco allows researchers to establish the roots of a late Byzantine art tradition that was particularly popular in Bulgaria during the Middle Ages. The interpretation of the scene follows established 11th–12th century Byzantine traditions for depicting the subject, but the main image is flanked by the images of two Syrian hymnographers—St. Cosmas of Maiuma and St. John Damascene—authors of many hymns and homilies for the Dormition of the Theotokos. The two saints hold scrolls inscribed with carefully selected quotations from their works on the subject. This artistic solution is completely in line with the Komnenian period, where the use of texts often accompanied monumental painting as their commentaries. However, A. Grabar notes that the depiction of the images of Syrian saints hymnographers around the scene of the Dormition occurred for the first time here in Bachkovo (Bakalova et al. 2003, pp. 69–70, fig. 53). Regarding the mandorla in the fresco, no conclusions can be drawn due to the poor condition of the image. Researchers such as E. Yota and A. Nicolaïdès have drawn parallels between the aforementioned examples and the fresco in Bachkovo, but today, we can only observe that the position of Christ is central to the Virgin's bed and that we cannot judge whether His figure was enveloped in a mandorla.

Growing reverence for the Virgin Mary and the intense formulation and enrichment of Mariological dogmatics in the 11th–12th centuries were likely the strongest factor that influenced the development and final formation of the iconographic subject of the Dormition of the Theotokos. As a result, in the 12th century, the scene not only spread widely in icon painting, mosaics, and monumental art but also continuously complicated its composition and increased its narrative, including more and more apocryphal details (Salvador-González 2017, p. 202). From the 13th century onwards, the subject of the Dormition began to occupy the entire western wall of the nave, incorporating many additional scenes and becoming an iconographic cycle in its own right.

3.3. Addition of Star-Shaped Geometric Forms to the Mandorla

Some of the most significant examples from the late 13th century demonstrate a new change in the symbol of the mandorla—the addition of star-shaped geometric forms. An example in this regard is the famous Dormition fresco from the Church of the Holy Mother

of God Peribleptos in Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia from 1294/5 (Figure 4), the work of the painters Michael Astrapas and Euthychius, who probably came from Thessaloniki (Velmans 1999, p. 194) and worked there together with some local masters (Lazarev 1986, p. 139, tab. 451). The two Greek artists[3] brought with them all the features of the best Byzantine traditions of the second half of the 13th century, mixed with the new stylistics of the Paleologan period, which gradually spread further and further from its capital source (Djuric 2000, pp. 54–58, 542).

Figure 4. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1294/5, Church of the Holy Mother of God Peribleptos, Ohrid, Republic of North Macedonia. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

The large fresco details the entire narrative of the Dormition of the Theotokos as it is presented in the main apocryphal sources. Without dwelling on the other details, we will only focus on the manner in which the sacred space is represented. Christ is depicted in a wide oval mandorla whose outlines follow the posture of His body bent over the bed of the Theotokos. The mandorla has a dark core, from which radially symmetrical wide dark rays emerge. These rays do not extend beyond the boundaries of the symbol. The remaining part of the mandorla is golden, and its border is marked by a wide, translucent stripe. A golden square star-like shape, rimmed with a thin white line, is depicted around the head of Lord Jesus Christ behind the halo. This combination of forms creates an impression of emphasizing the uncreated light of God's *energies* in the context of its description as "super-luminous darkness", fully in line with the growing power of the Hesychasm at that time (Todorova 2013, p. 293; Todorova 2022a, pp. 8–11).

In the background, another mandorla is depicted, large and round, with several bands of color, but paler than the mandorla of Christ. In its center are depicted the open gates of heaven, from which the angelic powers come to receive the soul of the Virgin. A total of thirteen "balloons" or "alveoli" surround the central composition of the fresco, each of these zones containing one character. Their form is sharpened, which some researchers interpret

as a visual expression of the speed of their movement—these are the shining clouds on which the holy apostles arrive to attend the Dormition of the Theotokos, as described in the apocryphal sources (Salvador-González 2011, pp. 249–50). In addition to being used in the mandorla of Christ, the same star-shaped form is used behind the Lord's halo in the Old Testament cycle, for example, in the scene with the Hospitality of Abraham. The mandorla with a dark core and wide symmetrical rectangular rays emanating from it is also common. The dark core is also present in the double mandorla (a combination of a wide circle and a narrow oval) around Christ in the Transfiguration scene. Despite the fact that the remaining mandorlas in the iconographic program of the church are mainly circular with several colored bands, the pre-"hesychastic" type of the symbol already seemed quite consolidated and ready for widespread use, as we see in many monuments in the next few decades.

3.4. The Model from the Dormition Mosaic in the Chora Monastery

The subsequent development of the subject of the Dormition during the Palaiologan period directly affected the mandorla symbol, which underwent a change in form and color and acquired new elements. One of the most important examples from this era is the mosaic from the western wall of the nave of the Chora Monastery, Istanbul, Turkey, created ca. 1315–1321 (Figure 5). Despite the current tendency towards a more detailed narrative of the subject, the earlier iconographic scheme, limited to one central episode, was used in the Chora. The triangular composition is deliberately symmetrical and based on the horizontal bed of the Holy Virgin, and its apex is located in a seraph, crowning Christ's mandorla. The mandorla is double, with a regular oval-pointed shape, colored in grayish tones. The inner mandorla is reserved only for the Lord Jesus Christ, while the monochrome images of four angels and one seraph are arranged in the outer mandorla. The only colorful objects within the mandorla are Christ Himself and the face and halo of the soul of the Virgin. The color of the mandorla casts reflections on the surrounding objects, and those parts of them that enter its space lose their normal color and become monochrome like the angels (Underwood 1966, pp. 164–68).

Figure 5. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, (detail), mosaic, ca. 1315–1321, The Chora Monastery, Istanbul, Turkey. (Photo credit: the author).

S. Makseliene notes that the same pattern was repeated in the Peribleptos Monastery in Mistra, Greece in the mid-14th century, as well as in the fresco in the St. George Chapel in the Agiou Pavlou Monastery on Mount Athos, painted in 1423. Virtually the same iconographic scheme is present in the Athos fresco, containing a complex oval mandorla with a seraph at the top, a cherub above Christ's halo, and archangels and angels on either side of Him. Makseliene associates this Athonite iconography with the sermon of St. Gregory Palamas, who, in his homily on the Dormition, describes the divine Holy Liturgy, served at the moment of the Dormition of the Virgin. In addition, the author makes a reference to Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite and his description of the celestial hierarchy due to his depiction in the iconographic scheme as one of the four bishops, as well as due to the popularity of his theology during the Palaiologan era (Makseliene 1998, pp. 51–52, fig. 39). Moreover, although the Dormition mandorla in the Chora lacks the added "hesychastic" angular forms, the hesychastic understanding of the uncreated light of God's *energies* penetrating matter is clearly visible here. In addition, the iconographic program of the church includes a fresco of the Virgin with a "hesychastic type" of mandorla, which demonstrates the current artistic trend (Todorova 2022b). According to researchers, the mosaic from the Chora Monastery is the earliest example of the monochrome depiction of angelic forces inside the mandorla—a model that later became particularly popular in Bulgaria, Romania, and Russia but not in Serbia. Additionally, it is the first time that the great seraph is seen above the top of the Christ's mandorla—a pattern that occurs only once in Serbia, in Lesnovo, but is almost mandatory in all subsequent depictions of the Dormition in Bulgaria, Athos, and Russia. Thus, the iconographic scheme of the subject established in the 14th century remained almost unchanged over the centuries, tolerating only slight variations in some minor elements (Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okounev 1931, pp. 169–70).

The Chora mosaic was executed by an outstanding artist, and every detail of the composition carefully conveys connections not only to the literary sources of the narrative but also to the theological content, both of the particular sacred event and of various other related theological themes. The color of the mandorla is of significant importance in this case. Its greyish-bluish hue visualizes the radiance of the uncreated light of God's presence. Even the absence of outlined light beams does not spoil this impression, as the artist used other methods to depict the brilliance, such as the grayish hues on the lower feathers of the seraph's wings, creating the effect of reflections of the light from the mandorla. The change in the color of the objects partially entering the mandorla also has the effect of illumination—quite deliberately, the lower part of the seraph's last pair of wings is depicted in monochrome where they have entered the outlines of the symbol. The same happens to the arms, vestments, book, and halo of one of the bishops to the left of the mandorla, as well as to the halo and vestments of the other to the right. The two angels in the upper right corner of the scene, who are waiting to take the soul of the Virgin to heaven, are also depicted in monochrome, except for their heads and halos.

The monochrome depiction of angels in the Chora mosaic is not unprecedented; it was present as early as the late 6th-century as shown by the Sinai encaustic icon of the Virgin and Child with St. George and St. Peter where two angels are portrayed in grisaille in the background (Weitzmann 1976, Figs. B.3.). This painting technique originated from antiquity and quickly became the dominant way of depicting celestial characters in Christian art, especially in moments when they were represented as dwelling in heavens. Hence, in certain iconographical scenes, the angelic powers, the Virgin Mary, etc., are depicted monochrome (Karahan 2010, pp. 102–6). In the case of the Chora mosaic, the monochrome images of angels in the mandorla demonstrates in the most direct way possible that the space inside it is invisible to human sight in the material world.

The elegant white accents on some of the lines of the objects inside the mandorla also lend it the luminosity it needs, denoting the uncreated light of God's Glory. This lighting effect demonstrates the mastery of the artist, who, by placing the white lines only on the left side of the boundary between the two mandorlas and on the left side of the halos and

vestments of the figures inscribed within them, creates the impression of a single source of light illuminating everything from the same position. The same source of light illuminates the angelic figures above to the right, which is essential to the hypothesis argued here. The oval mandorla in this mosaic has a pronouncedly spatial character, although at first glance, it is only discussed in terms of its lighting characteristics. The mandorla indicates a space that is not of "this" world. It is a *topos* of the non-material, spiritual space in which God and His angels reside. The borders of the mandorla outline the invisible in the subject, the invisible to the material eyes, to the basic human senses. Those characters who inhabit its space are monochrome and lack the colors of the material world because they do not live in it. That is why those parts of the objects that are depicted half in the material and half in the non-material space of the mandorla are colored differently—the uncreated light that evenly illuminates the celestial space is the true reason for the monochromacy of these elements.

This categorical distinction between the celestial and the terrestrial is also demonstrated by the way the light sources are positioned in the image. As previously mentioned, all the figures in the mandorla, plus the two angels in the upper right corner, are depicted illuminated from the left if we follow the white glares on them. However, only the figures inhabiting heaven are illuminated by this light source, which remains invisible to the viewer. If we follow the white glares on the illuminated parts of all other figures and objects located in the material space, we will see that they are arranged as if illuminated by a central source of light—He Who stands at the center of the mandorla, the Source of the uncreated light, shining in the place of His dwelling, penetrating all that exists in the carnal matter. A theological parallel to this iconographic solution can be seen in the description of the angels given by St. Gregory of Nazianzus:

> *"Fixed, almost incapable of changing for the worst, they encircle God, the first cause, in their dance. . . . He makes them shine with purest brilliance or each with a different brilliance to match his nature's rank. So strongly do they bear the shape and imprint of God's beauty, that they become in their turn lights, able to give light to others by transmitting the stream which flows from the primal light of God. As ministers of the divine will, powerful with inborn and acquired strength, they range over the universe. They are quickly at hand to all in any place . . . ".* (St. Gregory Nazianzus. Orationes theologicae. 28.31. On the doctrine of God. In: (Norris et al. 1991, p. 244).)

Thus, St. Gregory of Nazianzus asserts that angels reflect the pure brilliance, the pure beauty of God; therefore, in iconography they are depicted monochromatically, with monochrome or golden effects, because they reflect the light of the Prime Source.

Who stands behind the perfection of details in both artistic and theological context? Who was the author of the mosaic, who made decisions about its composition, who advised the artist on how to depict the scene of the Dormition of the Theotokos, taking place on the boundary between two worlds, and managed to do so in a way that truly visualizes her transition from mortal to eternal life, greeted by her Son and accompanied by angelic hosts? Without any doubt, the iconographic program of the church was developed with the active participation of the patron Theodore Metochites—not only the richest but also the most scholarly person of his time (Ousterhout 2002, pp. 12–14). Certainly, the decoration of the church started with the mosaics in the nave, even before the construction activities in it were fully completed (Underwood 1966, p. 15), and the artists were given freedom to work, clearly evident in their style and interpretation of the scenes. Theodore Metochites himself explained that the main purpose of the decoration of the church was "*to relate, in mosaics and painting, how the Lord Himself became a mortal man on our behalf*", but only the mosaic of the Dormition has survived from the visual narrative in the naos (Ousterhout 2002, pp. 19–21). It is impossible to know the details that interest us, such as who the authors of the artistic decoration and the multi-layered theological content were, but models created at the Chora Monastery spread exceptionally quickly in the Orthodox world.

3.5. Spread of the Model from the Chora Monastery

One direct example in this regard is the Dormition fresco from the Church of St. Peter in Berende, Bulgaria (Figure 6), from the 14th century. This is the most interesting scene from the festive cycle, whose most distinctive feature is the presence of St. John Damascene and St. Cosmas of Maiuma on both sides of the main core of the composition. The two hymnographers hold scrolls with phrases from hymns in honor of the Annunciation and the Dormition. This feature, according to A. Grabar and E. Bakalova, is mainly found in the churches in Bulgaria. Although observed in some Byzantine and Serbian frescoes and icons, it remains a distinctive feature of the Dormition iconography in Bulgarian church art in the 13th–15th centuries—Boyana (1259 AD), Kalotino (14th–15th centuries). Significantly later, from the 16th to the end of the 18th century, the two saints became mandatory components of the iconographic scheme of the subject in the Athonite churches (Bakalova 1976, pp. 38–42).

Figure 6. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 14th century, Church of St. Peter in Berende, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

The mandorla in Berende differs in shape from the one in Chora, but it is also double and uses the same colors. The outer part of the mandorla is round, surrounded by a thick light band, and bordered by a thin white line. In its dark, grayish core, the monochrome painted figures of four angels are located. Where parts of the angelic wings and halos enter the wide light band, they are completely dematerialized and only indicated by lines. The same approach is used in the overlapping of some elements with the light band of the inner mandorla, which is triangular in shape and is reserved only for Christ and the soul of the Theotokos, who are the only full-color figures in the field of the mandorla. As with the Chora mosaic, the light rays are absent here, but the white glares again play the role of a reference point for a single source of light for the entire composition, which, in this case, is found in the figure of the Son of God. Researchers note as a special feature of the composition the turning of Christ to the left (Grabar 1928, p. 192), pointing out that this is a loan from the Western art, which is also observed in Staro Nagoričane, as well as in Matejče, Republic of North Macedonia (Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okounev 1931, p. 31).

The model from the Chora Church was also transferred to Romania, as evidenced by the fresco from the Princely Church of Saint Nicholas at Curtea de Argeș. However, here, the outer part of the double mandorla was greatly enlarged to accommodate a multitude

of angels. The seraph on top of the inner mandorla falls completely within the outline of the outer mandorla; however, this does not change its coloring. The double mandorla is connected vertically to another circular mandorla, in which the Virgin ascends to heaven on a throne carried by angels. At the top, the scene is crowned with a third semicircular monochrome mandorla with four sharp rays of light emanating from it—it depicts the heavenly realm into which the Theotokos will enter. The holy apostles, present at the Dormition, are depicted being carried in clouds in the form of alveoli, as is observed in the Ohrid fresco (Figure 4) (Grecu 2011, pp. 455–56; Barbu 1986, p. 54; Mihail 1917–1923, fig. 184).

A "hesychastic type" of mandorla is employed in the Dormition from the Gračanica Monastery, Kosovo, from 1321–1322 (Figure 7). The church was painted under the direction of the painters Michael and Euthychius immediately after the completion of Staro Nagoričane. Its iconographic program features numerous innovations in the compositions, including the scene of the Dormition of the Theotokos. From a stylistic point of view, researchers believe that the decoration of this church is a true synthesis of all the experience, skill, and talent of the masters of Milutin's court atelier, inspired by the Constantinopolitan art of the Palaiologan period (Djuric 2000, pp. 150–53). As a narrative, the fresco from Gračanica closely resembles the one from Staro Nagoričane in its comprehensiveness (Figure 8). The greatest difference is visible in the form of the mandorlas in the two churches (Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okounev 1931, pp. 157–59). While in Staro Nagoričane, we see a double mandorla more modest in size, achieved by combining a circle with a five-pointed geometric form and colored in light silvery tones, in Gračanica, the round mandorla inscribes the angelic host and is combined with a double star-shaped form around Christ, obtained by overlapping four-pointed and five-pointed geometric forms. In my opinion, Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okunev are wrong that the round mandorla is missing here. It is present but much expanded to encompass the dozens of angels surrounding Christ, and only its dark core and the thick lighter blue band that frames it are visible. The apex of the star-shaped form behind Christ interrupts into the space of the semicircular mandorla at the top of the scene depicting the open gates of heaven. Between the open gates are painted monochrome angelic powers awaiting the soul of the Virgin Mary. The color of the mandorlas is greyish-silver with white splashes and a dark core of the "hesychastic type" mandorla behind the figure of Christ.

Figure 7. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, ca. 1321–1322, Church of the Holy Virgin, Gračanica Monastery, Kosovo. (Photo credit: *The Yorck Project*).

Figure 8. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, ca. 1317–1318, Church of St. George, Staro Nagoričane, Republic of North Macedonia. (Photo credit: *Tiffany Ziegler*).

4. The Symbol of Mandorla in Post-Byzantine Iconography of the Dormition on the Balkans

The changes in the mandorla symbol, caused by the general influence of Hesychastic theology on preferences towards certain iconographic themes and their interpretation, remained in Balkan Orthodox art even after the fall of Byzantium. The reasons for this were more likely to be purely artistic as there were no suitable conditions for continuing the active theological debate on Hesychasm. The importance of the Dormition of the Theotokos subject continued to be substantial, and in the post-Byzantine era, a new nuance emerged as a result of the piety towards the Virgin Mary during the times when Orthodox people fell under the rule of the Ottomans. Therefore, during this time, in the iconographic programs of the churches, a significant space began to be occupied not only by cycles of the Akathist hymn but also by other hymnographic images of the Mother of God. New subjects in which the Virgin was depicted in glory also appeared, such as the visualization of the Christmas stichera "What shall we offer Thee, O Christ", "Axion estin (It is truly meet)" and "The Virgin, Lady of the Angels".

Regarding the main Marian subject of the Dormition of the Theotokos, in which the mandorla plays a role not only as a symbolic expression of the Glory of God but also as a central element of the sacred event, it should be noted that the main feature of the symbol—the inclusion of monochrome depicted angelic forces—remains unchanged. An interesting change is observed in the color palette and form of the symbol, which takes on a considerably more geometricized appearance, especially in the patterns from Bulgaria. Systematically speaking, the main models of the Dormition iconography in the post-Byzantine era of the Balkans can be reduced to three: following the Palaiologan model from the Chora Monastery with the inscription of monochrome angelic powers into the mandorla; following the earlier iconographic scheme without angelic powers into the mandorla; and using a complicated scheme that combines scenes of the Dormition and the Assumption of the Virgin into heaven.

4.1. Following the Palaiologan Model from the Chora Monastery with the Inscription of Monochrome Angelic Powers into the Mandorla

The Dormition fresco from Church of the Holy Cross of Agiasmati, near Platanistasa, Cyprus, dated to 1494, demonstrates the persistence of the model from the Chora Monastery after the fall of Byzantium (Stilianou and Stylianou 1997, pp. 198–99). The spatial character of the mandorla is emphasized in a manner similar to the prototype: the seraph at its apex is

monochrome in the part that is inside it, while the tips of its wings, which are located in the material space of the scene, are red; also, the halo of one of the angels on the left and the halo and wing of one of the angels on the right are depicted in the same way. The iconographic program of the church, created by the unknown painter Philip "Goul", contains several more mandorlas with monochrome depicted angelic powers, even in a manner atypical for Byzantine models. For example, in the Nativity scene, the double semicircular mandorla contains two monochrome angelic figures, and three sharp asymmetrical rays emanate from it.

A monochrome angelic host is also present in the double blue oval mandorla from the scene with the 16th stanza of the Akathist hymn in the katholikon of the Saint Neophytos Monastery near Paphos, Cyprus, from the 16th century. The inner oval is reserved solely for Christ on His throne, while the outer one is densely filled with angels (Ibid., pp. 186–88, 190–91, fig. 107, pp. 372–75, fig. 222). The same manner of depicting angelic powers within the mandorla is evident in the Dormition scene from the Church of St. Archangel Michael or Panagia Theotokos in Galata, Cyprus, dated to 1514 (Figure 9). The tips of the wings of the seraph and angels, as well as a portion of the halo of the left angel, which have extended beyond the space of the mandorla, are brightly colored in red-orange. A similar mandorla is found in an icon of the Dormition from the old katholikon of the Holy Monastery of Pantokrator on Mount Athos, dating from the last quarter of the 16th century. The seraph on top of the deep blue oval-pointed mandorla is absent, but the four angels inside are depicted in grisaille, while only the candles on the candlesticks they hold and their flames are depicted in full color. The mandorla is filled with thin golden rays arranged symmetrically around the figure of Christ. The iconographic scheme follows the style of Theophanes the Cretan and differs slightly from his Dormition icon from 1546 in the Stavronikita Monastery Mount Athos, showing similarities with several other Cretan examples from the same period (Papadopoulos and Kapioldassi-Soteropoulou 1998, p. 172, fig. 89).

Figure 9. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1514, The Church of the Archangelos Michael, or Panagia Theotokos, Galata, Cyprus. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

An interesting Cretan icon from the late 15th century demonstrates the influences of Italian art at the time, as the angelic powers inscribed in the wide blue mandorla are depicted in pink. Another Cretan-style icon from the same period, but from Patmos, Greece, features an oval double-pointed triple-layered mandorla, in which the angelic powers are also mainly depicted in reddish tones (Khatzidákis 2004, p. 404, fig. 45; p. 494, fig. 138). An icon of the Dormition from the second half of the 17th century, created by Ilias Moskos, follows an established Cretan model based on the model from the Chora Monastery but with an increased Western influence. The mandorla is a wide oval with monochrome angelic powers inscribed in it and with a linearly depicted seraph at the top. The alveoli with the Holy Apostles above the mandorla are missing, replaced by rounded white clouds from which the winged heads of angels emerge (Akhimástou-Potamiánou 1997, pp. 158–59, fig. 40). A mandorla with fully colored angelic powers and without a seraph on top of it is present in a 17th-century Dormition fresco from the Monastery of Seltsou in Piges, Arta, Greece (Papadopoúlou and Tsiára 2008, pp. 121–23, fig. 17).

4.2. Following the Earlier Iconographic Scheme without Angelic Powers into the Mandorla

Simultaneously with the dominance of the Chora model, the earlier scheme without angelic powers inscribed in the mandorla continued to circulate, as shown in an icon from the second half of the 15th century from the Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopedi, Mount Athos. The blue triple-layered mandorla here is shaped as an elongated rhombus, connected in its upper part to a blue three-layered semicircle with three rays emanating from it. Thin, lighter rays are visible within the mandorla, enveloping the figure of Christ. The holy apostles are depicted, along with angels, in two symmetrical groups of cloud-like alveoli on both sides of the mandorla. Discussing the shape of the mandorla, researchers draw parallels with the frescoes from Staro Nagoričane, Gračanica, and the Church of Taxiarchis Mitropoleos in Kastoria, Greece. The connection of the mandorla with the semicircle above it resembles the fresco in the Marko's Monastery near Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia, from 1366–1371, which depicts the raising of the soul of the Virgin towards the gates of heaven. In its entirety, the iconographic scheme of the model presents the eclecticism that was typical of the work of the post-Palaiologan icon painters of the Cretan school in the mid and late 15th century (Tsigarídas and Lovérdou-Tsigarída 2006, pp. 237–43, fig. 178).

4.3. Using a Complicated Scheme That Combines Scenes of the Dormition and the Assumption of the Virgin into Heaven

In the second half of the 15th century, the Cretan iconographic school began using a complicated scheme for the Dormition subject. It is based on the Chora monastery model but includes a vertical development of the scene with the addition of a mandorla, in which the Virgin ascends to heaven, carried by angels and flanked by the holy apostles depicted in alveoli. A semicircular mandorla with the open gates of heaven, waiting for the Mother of God, is placed in the upper part. This model settled permanently not only in the art of the Cretan masters but transited through their influence to Mount Athos and the Balkan lands. An icon of the Dormition from the mid-17th century, created by an Athonite master for the Dormition Chapel of the Pantokratoros Monastery, Mount Athos, is an excellent example of the typical post-Byzantine iconography of the subject, combining the scenes of the Dormition and the Assumption of the Mother of God into heaven. The closest parallels to this pattern are an icon from the Monastery of Saint John of Rila, Bulgaria, from 1638–1639, an icon from the so-called "Macedonian school" from the Latsis Collection, and an icon from the Koutloumousiou Monastery, Mount Athos, from 1657 (Papadopoulos and Kapioldassi-Soteropoulou 1998, pp. 233–35, fig. 124).

A similar iconographic scheme was used in a Dormition icon from Cappadocia, dating from the early 18th century. The mandorla of Christ is black, with a double golden frame, flanked by two angels in the lower part and crowned by a red seraph. Above it, the oval blue mandorla of the Virgin is depicted, carried upwards to heaven by two angels. The Holy

Trinity, depicted as the "Throne of Mercy" in a semicircular black mandorla with open gates of paradise, framed by round red clouds, receives the Virgin (Drandáki 2002, p. 244, fig. 61). The same composition of the Holy Trinity is present in another 18th-century Dormition icon, probably originating from Zakynthos, Greece, and preserved in the Velimezis Collection. The mandorla is dark, with a triple border and filled with thin golden rays, while the angelic powers inscribed in it are depicted in full color. In its upper end, the symbol is flanked by monochrome cloud-shaped alveoli, bearing the holy apostles without angels. A similar large semicircular mandorla with the "Throne of Mercy" is depicted at the top of the icon, and the Holy Spirit is presented in a separate round red mandorla (Khatzidáki 1997, pp. 388–90, fig. 55).

A combination of the Dormition and the Assumption scenes is depicted in an 18th-century icon from The Church of the Parigoritissa in Arta, Greece. In the wide oval mandorla, filled with monochrome angelic powers, only the flames of the candles they carry are colored. A golden seraph is placed atop the mandorla, above which angels carry the Virgin on clouds towards heaven. The icon was produced by a local iconographic workshop that utilized established Cretan models, as evidenced by numerous parallels (Papadopoúlou and Tsiára 2008, pp. 260–63). By the end of the 17th century, the clouds permanently settled in the interpretation not only of heaven but also of the mandorla as a symbol of the Glory of God in the Dormition narrative. An icon from Argostoli, Kefalonia, Greece, dated to 1698 and preserved in the Collection of M. Cosmetatou, clearly demonstrates the amplification of these Western influences in the iconographic scheme. The monochrome mandorla of Christ has clouds at its base from which angelic figures emerge. The upper pair of angels are outside the mandorla above the seraph, again on clouds, while the holy apostles are arranged in two large groups, also carried by clouds. Clouds also enclose the heavenly space with the gates of paradise, in which the Virgin is depicted in the upper end of the scene (Khatzidákis 1985, fig. 175).

4.4. Examples with Unique Shapes and Color Schemes of the Mandorla

The post-Byzantine models of the Dormition subject in Bulgaria utilize all the three main iconographic schemes. However, there are also examples with a more distinctive shape and coloration of the mandorla, which we will focus on.

The Dormition fresco from the Church of St. Demetrius in Boboshevo Monastery, dated 1488 (Figure 10), includes a bright mandorla with inscribed angelic powers (Mincheva and Angelov 2007, pp. 31–33). G. Subotić finds a close similarity between the iconographic program of this church and the churches in Leskovec and Lešani, as well as in the stylistic features of the decoration of the Church of St. Nicholas in Kosel, Republic of North Macedonia, all made by Ohrid masters (Subotić 1980, pp. 134–41).

The Dormition fresco from the Orlitsa Cloister in Rila, Bulgaria, from 1491, contains a mandorla with inscribed angelic powers (Figure 11). The symbol is double, with an oval-pointed form and grayish color, and the angels inside it are depicted in full color. The mandorla here is intentionally dematerialized, thus, making the Lord Jesus Christ appear distant from the central scene. This impression is reinforced by the added grieving figures leaning over the Virgin's bed. Christ's mandorla is crowned by a seraph and connected to the open gates of heaven, held by two angels. The holy apostles are also present, but the alveoli in which they are usually depicted are of a peculiar shape. The main elements of the iconographic scheme resemble the composition of the fresco at Marko's Monastery, Republic of North Macedonia, and its parallels (Wratislaw-Mitrovic and Okounev 1931, pl. XV).

Figure 10. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1488, The Church of St. Demetrius, Boboshevo, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

Figure 11. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1491, Church of the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul, Orlitsa Cloister, Monastery of Saint John of Rila, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Angel Yordanov, *TerraByzantica*).

Angel powers in Christ's mandorla can also be seen in the Dormition fresco from the Ascension Church in Alino Monastery, Bulgaria, dating back to 1626 (Figure 12) (Floreva 1983, pp. 123, 172, fig. 95). The scheme follows the model of the Chora Monastery, with the mandorla being oval, wide, and composed of two parts. The outer part of the pointed oval is painted in pale tones with the monochrome figures of the four angels with lit candles in their hands. The middle part of the mandorla is particularly interesting because it represents a vertically elongated red rhombus crowned by a red seraph. This rhombus is reserved only for Christ and consists of a bright red core surrounded by a dark red stripe. Thin white rays radiate from the figure of the Lord, and some of the mourning figures, leaning over the bed of the Virgin, cover Him and His mandorla, as in the fresco from the Orlitsa Cloister.

Figure 12. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1626, Ascension Church, Alino Monastery, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Ivan Vanev, The Roads of the Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria Project, http://zografi.info/, accessed on 2 February 2023).

According to M. Kuyumdzhieva, the master of the frescoes in the western half of the church, including the scene under consideration, was the same painter (Iovan) Komnov who painted the St. Petka Church in Selnik, Republic of North Macedonia (Kuyumdzhieva 2012, 2020a). Although the frescoes in both churches were created by the same painter, the central part of Christ's mandorla in the Dormition scenes in the two churches differs. While there are similarities in the composition, the outer oval of the mandorla in Selnik is filled with monochrome angelic powers, and the inner oval has a traditional pointed shape and color scheme framed by a distinct white band (Mašnik 1994).[4]

The Dormition fresco from the Church of St. Theodor Tyron and St. Theodor Stratilates in Dobarsko, Bulgaria (Figure 13), from 1614, interprets the same iconographic scheme as in the Alino Monastery (Kuneva 2012; Kolusheva 2020). Numerous identical elements are present in the interpretation of the scene—the figure of the Virgin Mary, the decoration of her bed, the arrangement of the figures around it, the placement of the figure of Christ in the background of the bed, and the same diamond-shaped red element in the mandorla. At first glance, the main difference lies in the absence of an oval mandorla filled with angelic powers around the red rhombus, but the second reading shows that the mandorla is present in the form of a triple-layered blue arc. In other words, we also see a double mandorla here, consisting of a blue oval and a red inner element, but in Dobarsko, the oval is transformed into a semicircle that encompasses the angelic powers as in the Alino fresco, and the angels themselves are not monochrome but colorful. Thus, the main difference between the two scenes remains the absence of a seraph at the top of the red rhombus in the scene from the Dobarsko church.

The closest parallels to the Dobarsko murals were identified in the iconographic program of the Seslavtsi Monastery, Bulgaria, and recent field studies demonstrate thematic, stylistic, and epigraphic parallels with the wall paintings from the Church of the Dormition of the Theotokos in Zervat, Albania. Parallels with the iconographic programs of the listed churches can also be found in the frescoes of the Church of the Virgin, Slimnitsa Monastery, Republic of North Macedonia, from 1606/1607, where a large-scale scene of the Dormition is depicted on the western wall of the nave (Figure 14). Its composition follows

the traditions of the Palaiologan and Cretan art, showing similarities with the Athonite examples from the monasteries of Great Lavra, Xenophontos, and Dionysiou (Millet 1927, p. 132, pl. 1, p. 189, pl. 1, p. 197, pl. 2). The mandorla is double and painted in grisaille, with angelic powers inscribed in it, but its outer and inner ovals are demarcated by a red triple stripe, which separates the space around Christ from that of the angels. There is no space for a seraph at the top of the mandorla, but on both sides of the window above the mandorla, two cloud-like alveoli in red are depicted, carrying the holy (Popovska-Korobar 2015, p. 225). This type of Dormition mandorla with a red inner oval is also present in Arbanasi, Bulgaria, as well as in many examples created by the iconographers from Linotopi and Grammosta, which will be mentioned shortly.

Figure 13. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1614, Church of St. Theodore Tyron and St. Theodore Stratilates, Dobarsko, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Ivan Vanev, The Roads of the Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria Project, http://zografi.info/, accessed on 2 February 2023).

A similar rhomboid mandorla as in the fresco in Dobarsko was also used in the Dormition scene at the Dragalevtsi Monastery of the Dormition, Bulgaria, from the 16th century. It was located on the western wall, along with the Transfiguration of Christ and the Supper at Emmaus. The composition is simple, supplemented only by Jephonias the Jew and the angel, and the mandorla is composed of several color layers (Floreva 1968, pp. 26–27, fig. 42). A mandorla with a red rhomboid element is present in the Dormition fresco at the Kremikovtsi Monastery of St. George, Bulgaria, from 1493. The iconographic scheme follows the model used in the frescoes in Dobarsko and the Alino Monastery. The mandorla here is in the form of a large semicircle, framed by a white stripe and including the fully-colored figures of two angels flanking Christ, arranged within a red rhombus with three colored layers.[5] There are many similarities between the iconographic program of the Kremikovtsi Monastery and that of the Poganovo Monastery, Serbia, and their authorship belongs to iconographers from the artistic circle in Kastoria (Kostur). The Dormition fresco from the Poganovo Monastery of St. John the Theologian, created in 1499 (Figure 15), contains an oval monochrome mandorla with inscribed monochrome angelic powers and a red geometric element in the center. Christ is depicted in front of a combination of two red rhombuses, the first of which is horizontal and the one placed on it is vertical. Both

rhombuses consist of several color layers, creating a partially visible eight-pointed red star-shaped figure. Along the vertical axis, the monochrome mandorla is connected to a simple monochrome semicircle at the top of the fresco. The holy apostles are depicted in two groups on both sides of the mandorla, placed in leaf-shaped alveoli. Researchers believe that the Kastoria iconographers firmly based their work on the Palaiologan models, but added new elements to them or further developed established iconographic schemes (Kuneva 2018, pp. 26–27). Presumably, this has also happened with the interpretation of the Dormition subject in question, where the classic Palaiologan model from the Chora Monastery has received a new expounding, borrowing elements typical to the depiction of the Glory of God in other subjects such as the Transfiguration of Christ.

Figure 14. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1606/1607, Church of the Virgin, Slimnitsa Monastery, Republic of North Macedonia. (Photo credit: Ivan Vanev, The Roads of the Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria Project, http://zografi.info/, accessed on 2 February 2023).

Figure 15. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1499, Poganovo Monastery of St. John the Theologian, Serbia. (Photo credit: Ivan Vanev, The Roads of the Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria Project, http://zografi.info/, accessed on 2 February 2023).

A mandorla consisting of a large white semicircle and a red geometric element is present in the Dormition fresco from the Church of St. Nicholas in the Seslavtsi Monastery, Bulgaria (Figure 16), from 1616. The semicircle contains full-color angels holding lit candles, while Christ is depicted in a geometric figure consisting of a horizontally placed red

rhombus, framed by an ochre band, on which is placed a pointed dark red oval, framed by a black band and white line. In front of the Christ's mandorla are depicted a row of mourning figures leaning over the Virgin's bed, thus, making the Lord Jesus Christ appear distant in the background. Researchers believe that the Seslavtsi Monastery, along with the Dobarsko Church, the Zervat Church, and the Slimnitsa Monastery, were painted by masters from the same iconographic atelier, who worked in churches in Northern Macedonia, Greece, and Bulgaria in the late 16th and early 17th centuries (Gergova 2012; Kuyumdzhieva 2020b). A despotic icon of the Dormition, painted in 1637–1638 by Konstantinos of Linotopi for the katholikon of the Vellas Monastery in Kalpaki, Ioannina, Greece, contains the same elongated triple-layered rhombus with a darker core in the mandorla of Christ as used in the Dobarsko fresco, thus, demonstrating the persistence of the model (Tsámpouras 2013, fig. 585).

Figure 16. *Dormition of the Theotokos*, wall painting, 1616, Church of St. Nicholas, Seslavtsi Monastery, Bulgaria. (Photo credit: Ivan Vanev, The Roads of the Balkan Painters and Post-Byzantine Artistic Heritage in Bulgaria Project, http://zografi.info/, accessed on 2 February 2023).

Mandorlas composed of two elements, the central of which is red, are often present in the Dormition frescoes from the 17th century, even when not featuring a diamond shape or a combination of a diamond and an oval but a red pointed oval. An example in this regard is the mandorla from the fresco of the Church of St. Athanasius in Arbanasi, Bulgaria. It consists of a double pointed oval, the outer layer of which is grayish while the inner one is red. The angels are not inscribed in the oval but are fully colored and positioned in front of it. The red oval, filled with thin radial white rays, is reserved only for Christ, Who is slightly obscured by the figures leaning over the Virgin's bed. In the upper part of the composition, the Holy Virgin is depicted in an oval grayish mandorla with a red, vertically positioned rhombus with three color layers below it. The cloudlike alveoli of the holy apostles are depicted in gray and red (Gergova and Penkova 2012a). The scheme used in the frescoes of Ioannis Skoutaris, Dimitrios (II)[6], and Georgios from Grammosta in the Monastery of Prophet Elijah in Zitsa, Ioannina, Greece in 1658 is very similar, as well as in those of Skoutaris in the katholikon of the Ravena monastery in Goranxi, Albania. An oval-pointed mandorla with a red heart also appears in the fresco of Dimitrios (II) and Georgios from Grammosta in the Church of St. John the Baptist in Polilofos, Ioannina, from 1672 (Tsámpouras 2013, fig. 170α, β, 213). The Dormition fresco in the homonymous

monastery in Zervat, Albania, employs the same scheme and contains a wide oval-pointed mandorla with a monochrome outer oval inscribed with angelic powers, crowned by a red seraph, and a bright red inner oval framed by a lighter stripe, reserved only for Christ (Kolusheva 2018). The composition was made by Michael and Nikolaos (III) from Linotopi, and ten years later Michael used it again in the Dormition church in Elafotopos, Ioannina. The same scheme is used in 1639 in the Dormition fresco in the Church of St. Nicholas in Kastoria, by Nikolaos (IV) from Linotopi—the intensely red oval mandorla around Christ is surrounded by an outer oval with monochrome inscribed angelic powers.

In a fresco by the painter Parvu Parvescu (Parvu the Mute) in the Fundenii Doamnei church in Bucharest, from 1699, the mandorla of Christ is depicted as a narrow pointed blue oval combined with an outer pinkish oval containing the figures of two angels, half hidden behind the blue oval and holding it with their hands. The pink oval has a vertical connection to a semicircular triple-layered blue mandorla at the top of the scene. The core of this connection is red, and the traditional seraph is located there (Arteni 2014, p. 63).

The earlier model of the mandorla without inscribed angelic powers was used in the Dormition fresco in the Church of St. Petka in Vukovo, Bulgaria, from 1598. Here, the symbol is depicted as a simple white oval without any rays of light, resembling the shape of the mandorla from Boboshevo. In addition to the white color of the mandorla, a specific feature of this model is the winged figure of the Virgin's soul, although it should be noted that this element has parallels in a series of patterns from the late 13th and the early 14th centuries. Floreva cites the frescoes from the Peribleptos Church in Ohrid; the Church of St. Nicholas in Prilep, republic of North Macedonia; the Church of Our Lady of Ljeviš in Prizren, Kosovo; the monasteries of Vatopedi, Staro Nagoričane, Žiča, and Peć; and the churches of St. Clement and St. Demetrios in Ohrid. The appearance of this feature, which has its roots in ancient art, two centuries later in Vukovo, is interpreted by E. Floreva as a sign of the vitality and stability of the earlier iconographic models (Floreva 1987, pp. 74–75, fig. 52). A simple greenish oval-pointed mandorla was used in the fresco of the Church of St. Demetrios in Zvan, Republic of North Macedonia, from 1633–1634 (Tsámpouras 2013, fig. 41, 170γ, 502). A classical blue multilayered mandorla is present in the Dormition fresco from the small funerary Church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Pefkari, Romania, dated from the 17th century (Arteni 2014, p. 45).

The use of the third main iconographic model of the Dormition of the Theotokos, which combines the scenes of the Dormition and the Assumption of the Holy Virgin to heaven, is seen in the fresco of the Church of St. George in Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria, dated to 1616. Here, the classical subject is combined with two additional episodes of the Dormition narrative (Gergova and Penkova 2012b). The mandorla of Christ is blue, triple-layered, with inscribed colorful angelic powers, and is vertically connected to the semicircular blue mandorla of the heavens, with the gates of paradise opened by two angels. In the center of this vertical connection, the red, oval-pointed mandorla of the sitting Virgin, carried by two angels, is depicted. Thin white rays emanate from the outline of this mandorla, similar to those emanating from the figure of Christ below. The authors of the fresco are two icon painters of probable Greek origin, and the style of one of them is similar to that of the masters who painted the narthex of the Slimnitsa Monastery. Thematic similarities can be found with the iconographic programs of the Dobarsko Church, Kurilo, and Seslavtsi Monasteries in Bulgaria.[7]

This iconographic scheme was also used to depict the Dormition of the Theotokos in the Church of St. Demetrios in Arbanasi, Bulgaria, in 1621. Christ is presented in an oval mandorla with inscribed monochrome angelic powers and crowned by a seraph, above which the Virgin is ascending to heaven in a narrow oval-pointed mandorla, carried by two angels (Gergova and Penkova 2012c). The same composition was used in the Dormition fresco from the Monastery of St. Nicholas in Toplica, made by Ioannis from Grammosta in 1536–1537. The only difference is the shape of the Virgin's mandorla, as a star-shaped element with three blue layers was added around the blue oval (Tsámpouras 2013, fig. 17). The Dormition fresco in the Rozhen Monastery, Bulgaria, created in 1727

by the iconographers Nikola and Teohari, employs a similar composition (Penkova 1992). Christ's mandorla is similar to the mandorlas in Boboshevo and Vukovo and is vertically connected to the elongated oval mandorla in which the standing Virgin ascends to heaven, while the holy apostles are depicted around her, carried by clouds. The same slightly oblique oval shape of the mandorla, filled with monochrome angels and crowned with the narrow oval mandorla of the Virgin, is present in the Dormition fresco painted by Michael and Konstantinos from Grammosta in the Monastery of Divrovounion, Albania, in 1603 (Tsámpouras 2013, fig. 75). The composition was also used in the Church of the Nativity of Christ in Arbanasi from the 17th century, where the mandorla is a wide semicircle inscribed with two angels, above which the Holy Virgin ascends to heaven (Gerov et al. 2012, pp. 91–94).

The diversity of post-Byzantine models of the Dormition subject is infinite. The various local artistic traditions undoubtedly leave their mark and lead to different interpretations of both the iconographic scheme and the symbol of the mandorla within it. Wonderful examples in this regard are the Russian iconography of the subject, which is beyond the scope of the present study, as well as the heightened Western influence on late post-Byzantine art, which transforms the mandorla into clouds (Todorova 2020a, pp. 139–40). However, it is important to emphasize that throughout all stages of the development of the Dormition iconography, the changes in its visual narrative and the set of symbols it employs are directly related to the current state of Mariology and devotion to the person of the Theotokos.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, it can be inferred that the incorporation of the mandorla symbol into the iconographic scheme of the subject of the Dormition of the Theotokos is driven by the desire for detailed depiction of the literary account. First, this level of detail serves as a means of emphasizing the veracity of the sacred event. Additionally, it serves as an argument in favor of its dogmatic significance in both Christological and Mariological aspects. The mandorla is a visual denotation of the descriptions of the wondrous light of God's manifestation, accentuating the dichotomous spatiality of the event and addressing its soteriological importance. Once introduced into the composition, the symbol does not remain stagnant but dynamically reflects the theological tendencies of the time, such as incorporating elements that correspond to the Hesychastic understanding of the uncreated light of God's glory and participating in the Akathist iconography of the Theotokos.

After the fall of Byzantium, the metropolis that for centuries had disseminated artistic and theological trends to the periphery of its religious influence disappeared, leading to an incredible proliferation of models. The iconography of the Theotokos also reflected this state of affairs through its narrative lines and the morphology of the mandorla within them. The personal preferences of artists, woven into local artistic traditions and catalyzed by the socio-historical context, led not only to a new interpretation of the narratives but also to changes in the narratives themselves. The creation and multiplication of new models must be sought in the artistic practice of specific groups of masters and in the extent of their familiarity with classical models, in their sets of copies, and in their authorial choices. This process was certainly influenced by the trends in the Athonite workshops, which replaced the missing metropolis as centers for the dissemination of patterns, as well as by the free movement of iconographers over a larger territory.

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Notes

1 *Dormition of the Virgin (Koimesis)*, XI (XII?) century. Princeton Work Number 87. Available at: https://bit.ly/3HkFsgo (accessed on 2 February 2023).

2 See the image in the digital collection of the *The J. Paul Getty Museum*: https://bit.ly/2VdYcHs (accessed on 2 February 2023). More info here: (Marinis 2004).

3 Some researchers believe that there were three painters whose names were Astrapas, Michael, and Euthychius. See: (Talbot Rice 1966, pp. 205–6).

4 See more about the St. Petka Church in Selnik here: http://zografi.info/?page_id=298 (accessed on 2 February 2023).

5 See the image here: http://zografi.info/?page_id=243 (accessed on 2 February 2023).

6 The use of numbering (II) was adopted by Tsámpouras in his dissertation to distinguish between painters by the same name. The same goes for the painters Nikolaos (III) and (IV) mentioned further down.

7 See the image here and some more information about the iconographic program of the church here: http://zografi.info/?page_id=183 (accessed on 2 February 2023).

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religions

Article

Mater dolorosa—Martin Luther's Image of Mary of Nazareth: An Example in Lucas Cranach the Elder

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Abstract: Protestantism is usually thought of as rejecting the figure of Mary as a collaborator in Christ's redemption. In Luther's commentary on the *Magnificat* (1521), we can see that this doctrine would continue to evolve throughout his life, and would not always be free of apparent ambiguities. Luther extolled the figure of Mary, but at the same time he could not avoid reinterpreting her according to the presuppositions of the doctrine of justification and his theology of the Cross, and he understands the figure of Mary as a *Mater dolorosa*, as one who participates in a special way in the sorrow of her Son. Her union with the Saviour means she shares his pain. In these lines, we intend to look at the main points proposed by the German reformer in his new perspective on Mariology, and the possible influence of this change in spirituality on painting, for example, in *The Crucifixion* (1532) by Luther's personal friend Lucas Cranach the Elder, and we propose a comparison with *The Lamentation of Christ* (1502), painted before the Reformation.

Keywords: Christianity; Christology; Mariology; Martin Luther; justification; theology of the Cross; suffering; iconography; Lucas Cranach the Elder

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1. Introduction

A Catholic theologian held that the love of Mary would bring to the Christian faith "religious depth, warmth, and the ability to radiate" (Scheffczyk 2015, p. 270). Mary is—in the words of St Augustine—an *excellens membrum*, the first representative of the redeemed community, the "nascent Church" as the Vatican II text *Lumen gentium* 52–69 reminds us. "Mary's position in theology and religiosity cannot be compared to that of any saint or apostle, since no saint or apostle has as an individual person a position or significance in the salvific order" (Scheffczyk 2015, p. 280). In addition, a Lutheran author has argued that "Protestants can take over neither the structure of Catholic thought nor Catholic statements on Mariology" because of the doctrine of *solus Christus* (Borowsky 1977, pp. 9–10). In these lines, however, we summarize the main points of Lutheran Mariology, as well as the influence of the theology of the Cross, more than the *theologia gloriae* founded in the doctrine of Incarnation (we follow the theological expositions in Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84; Preuss 1954; Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49; Düfel 1968; Pelikan 1996; Tappolet and Ebneter 1962, 1996; Wright 1989; White 1998). Feminism and Ecumenism can change this perspective on the role Mary in the history of salvation (Findley-Jones 2019, 61ff.). The Lutheran ideas and their influence on painting could have had an influence on *The Crucifixion* (1532), attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder. On the contrary, the earlier *The Lamentation of Christ*, painted in 1503, shows a different and more peaceful interpretation of this fundamental moment (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 36–37; Noble 2009, pp. 163–73; Blanco-Sarto 2023, pp. 273–303). We turn to this painter because of his affinity and closeness to the German reformer, as a graphic way of exemplifying Lutheran teachings. In this article, however, we do not intend to analyze the complexities of interpreting the visual culture of the time, since this is not a study of art history but of the history of ideas. Moreover, we have to keep in mind that Cranach's intentions are at best not discernible and, more likely, debatable, since he is in the service of his patrons.

2. Mother of God

Luther's Marian Theology was developed out of the deep Christian Marian devotion on which he was brought up, and it was consequently clarified as part of his Christocentric theology and piety. The German reformer asserted dogmatically what he considered to be firmly established biblical doctrines, such as the divine motherhood of Mary, while adhering to the assumption and the immaculate conception of Mary (Findley-Jones 2019, p. 65); however, at the end of Luther's theological development, his emphasis was placed on Mary as merely a receiver of God's love and grace (see Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84, 236–37). Luther's Mariology depends on his consideration of her as the mother of Jesus, and, as a consequence, on his Christocentric piety and theology; that is, it depends directly on his Christology and Soteriology. According to the times and their spiritualities, Lutherans hold Mary in high esteem: Luther also saw her as the *Theotokos*, the Mother of God, as proposed by the Council of Ephesus (431) (see Luther 1883–2009, *Weimarer Ausgabe* (=WA) 40/III, pp. 703, 26–704, 4; 47, pp. 732, 7–13; 15–8; 21–24; 47, pp. 705, 6–14; 50–589, 21–8); however, the doctrine of *sola fides* latent in his doctrine caused him to regard the hypostatic union as completely absurd and incomprehensible to reason (Luther 1979, *Studienausgabe* (=StA) 1, pp. 360, 33–361, 4). We shall now see what Luther's re-reading of the place of Mary in Christian devotion consists of, as well as his interpretation, in 1521, of the *Magnificat*.

2.1. Luther's Mariology

It is clear that the German reformer maintained, throughout his life, a belief in the divine maternity of Mary, her perpetual virginity *(ante, in et post partum: virgo concepit, virgo peperit, virgo permansit:* WA 11, pp. 319, 32–320, 7; cf. pp. 324, 10–8; p. 49, pp. 174, 4–8; pp. 182, 30–2; pp. 183, 31–7), and her immaculate conception (*haec nostra fides; si das verlieren, amittimus salute:* sic), although the emphasis of his theology and preaching was more along the lines of considering Mary as the recipient of God's love and grace. However, he also maintained that Mary would be purified of all sin at the moment of the Incarnation (WA 46, pp. 230, 3–26; pp. 136, 4–13; 24–30; see also Gritsch 1992, pp. 236–37; Ghiselli 2010, pp. 183–84). Thus, by considering her to be fully human, he tended to see her as burdened by original sin, since only Christ has been exonerated from all sin by being God-man (see WA 36, pp. 143, 13–144, 1; 47, pp. 860, 35–8; 9, pp. 149, 1–7; 39/II, pp. 107, 7–13). On the assumption he preached that the Bible said nothing about Mary's exoneration of the death, he rejects it altogether in 1523 (WA 10/III, pp. 268, 14–20; 11, pp. 159, 13–4; cf. Bäumer 1994, p. 190). His opposition to seeing her as a mediator or co-redeemer was part of an extrapolation of his doctrine of the *solus Christus* (see Gritsch 1992, p. 238); however, Luther's consideration of the figure of Mary increased from 1524 onwards, after his reading of the *Magnificat*, and after considering the scene of Jesus lost and found in the Temple (see WA 15, pp. 415, 4–14; 17/II, pp. 19, 1–11, 17–22, 24–8; 23, pp. 8–19; 25, pp. 11–8; 26, pp. 20–7, 9).

The usual interpretation of Luther's attitude towards Mary is ambiguous but not negative, as inherited by much of Protestantism. However, when we turn to his texts, we find more than one surprise. Moreover, the strong Christocentrism of Lutheran preaching is not always to be understood in an exclusive manner, for the principle of the *solus Christus* admits interpretations that are not entirely radical nor dialectical. There is, of course, a form of Mariology that is isolated from the rest of the Christian mystery. Thus, "in Luther's theology, Mariology does not constitute a *locus* by itself, but must be related to the *loci of* Christology and soteriology" (Ghiselli et al. 1992, p. 173). In Luther's preaching, Jesus' Mother is proposed as a model for all Christians, as an archetype (*das Urbild*) and an example (*das Vorbild*). At the same time, Mary is only human and fully human, yet adorned in a special way by God's grace. Luther regards Mary as the best recipient of God's grace and mercy. When Mary utters the words, "Let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38), God's grace and mercy are best received in Mary's humility, and she then conceives by the Holy Spirit (see WA 27, pp. 230, 27–31; 41, pp. 354, 7–14).

As is logical and to be expected, Luther reinterprets Mary's role in salvation history according to his Theology of the Cross. In the *Magnificat*—he explains—it can be seen how God has looked upon a poor maiden, instead of entrusting this mission to the rich and powerful: he chooses her perhaps because he sees nothing in her. *Coram Deo*, no one can be a worthy depositary of a divine mission. Everything comes from God's grace and mercy, and not from Mary's personal worthiness (see StA 1, pp. 329, 36–43). Luther emphasizes both the gratuitous act on God's part and Mary's humility and unworthiness, as was usual in medieval Mariology. It was Mary's virtue that made her worthy in God's eyes, so there is a certain merit and exercise of freedom on her part, as she was chosen as the mother of his Son. Some authors claim that this insistence on Mary's humility is part of the pre-Reformation Luther, but later it became less important. In fact, these statements on the importance of humility appear mostly in his early commentaries on the psalms (1513–1515), although this idea will remain in his Mariology. Mary's humility—reinterpreted by *theologia crucis*—is a place created by God's external work *(opus alienum)* to build his kingdom (see Ghiselli et al. 1992, p. 174).

2.2. The Magnificat Commentary (1521)

In the commentary on Mary's hymn to her cousin St. Elizabeth, in which there are undoubtedly many Catholic traces, the reformer reminds us that God's work can be perceived by us as our own work (*opus proprium*). This work becomes evident in difficulties, which we must use to understand that we cannot work on our own. True help comes only from God, who makes the impossible possible for us. That is why we must accept humiliation and sufferings, for in them, God's power is manifested (see StA 1, 356, 25–34). Mary's humility makes her unworthiness clear: she does not aspire to honor, even though she is called to be the Mother of God. She performs the same tasks as she did before, and she was entrusted with such a privileged mission: cooking, washing, washing up... No one considers her better than before. She does not want to be different from the others, but wants to remain at their side. In Mary, greatness takes on a small appearance: "Oh, exclaims the Reformer, how simple and pure is her heart, what an excellent person!" (StA 1, pp. 341, 34–342, 1).

Therefore, there is a certain excellence in Mary that comes precisely from the secret nature of her humility, and she insists on her discretion: "True humility never knows that it is humble" (StA 1, pp. 131, 5). Humility makes us aware of our situation: of having been closer to idols than to God. We cannot separate self-knowledge from knowledge of God: we experience our sin, which makes us welcome his love and mercy. In his commentary on Psalm 51 (1538), Luther reminds us that God loves the unfortunate: he is the God of the poor whom we can approach only through suffering. God only looks and waits for us to say to him: "Help us, my God!" (WA 40/II, pp. 458, 7–459, 10). This is the paradox of the theology of the Cross, which mere reason cannot know, but which can be grasped only by simple faith *(sola fide)*. This wisdom is acquired only through poverty and need: it gives us the certainty of God's grace, even when we seem to be mired in misfortune. In the midst of doubt and uncertainty, we can be sure that God is with us (see WA 40/II, pp. 463, 8–12).

Luther dialectically opposes *humilitas* with *superbia:* God can help only the humble, precisely because they are aware that they need help. Only the humble know how to learn, because they are helpless before God and yet trust in his help. This was the attitude of Mary, who was elevated to the status of Mother of God (see WA 37, pp. 92, 15–29). As we can see, Luther imbues the figure of Mary with his doctrine of justification, seeing her, above all, as the *sorrowful Mother*. Her divine motherhood entails great suffering for her. After the Annunciation, she is regarded as an adulteress and abandoned in her helplessness: even Joseph—the reformer argues—thinks of leaving her, which would mean the immediate penalty of death by stoning for the allegedly unfaithful woman.

In public life, his mother experienced the envy and contempt of Jesus' enemies; she also had to witness the terrible death of her Son, and her grief and loneliness remain iconic. If Mary experiences all this pain, it cannot be bad, and each one of us can endure—in

Christ—such great desolation, which should not frighten us (see WA 41, pp. 363, 5–20; pp. 629, 27–35). Mary experiences a foretelling of the sufferings she will undergo in the prophecy of Simeon (cf. Lk 2:34–35), when it is suggested to her that she will have to give birth in a stable and then flee to Egypt (cf. Mt 1:18–25; 2:13–15). These sufferings of Mary are also described in Luther's commentary on the visit to the Temple when Jesus was twelve years old (cf. Lk 2:42–52): she experiences the forgetfulness and forsakenness of her own Son, when he says that she has to be "about her Father's business" (see WA 17/II, pp. 18–28; 10/I, pp. 1, 65, 5–10; pp. 63, 15–21).

Mary's suffering at the foot of the Cross is so immense that Luther, here, sees a special form of solidarity and importance (see WA 17/II, pp. 19, 34–37). Mary is the model for all sufferers who walk through this valley of tears. The suffering she undergoes for her Son are comparable to the pains of hell. It is the hardest trial that God has sent to any mortal, although she is the holiest among the saints. Luther calls it *desertio gratiae*, when she experiences this abandonment: Mary sees that God wants nothing to do with her, and sees only suffering and anguish around her (see WA 17/II, pp. 20, 31–38). Thus, she is fully human, far from being a goddess or a divine being: she works like all her neighbors and experiences in her heart the same doubts and sufferings as her contemporaries. She has to overcome pride again and again in order to attain humility, and, thus, make room for the unique action of grace (see WA 17/II, pp. 22, 16–28). Compared to the other saints and martyrs, the Mother of God suffers most of all, although these sufferings are only interior. There is no relief possible in the heart of Mary, who needed the special grace that dwells within her (see WA 17/II, pp. 21, 39–42, 10). However, she thinks that martyrs are not to pursue suffering; nor does God abandon Mary in her suffering, but comes to meet her *in* it. Then Mary utters the definitive words: "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38; see WA 52, pp. 633, 1–2).

Luther sees this as an expression of Mary's obedience and humility, and, thus, a manifestation of her declared desire to follow God's will (see WA 52, pp. 633, 2–5). The German reformer thus proposes Mary as a model for all Christians who have to suffer in this world in following God's will; she is, thus, a paradigm of how to make the best of this pain: we must not despair, but find comfort and manage our tribulations (WA 17/II, 20, pp. 39–41, 4). As a consequence, Mary plays the dual role before people that the saints do: on the one hand, she evokes fear and rejection among those who live carelessly and complacently; on the other hand, she gives comfort and consolation to those who are burdened (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 8–9). Through Mary's example, God wants to encourage repentance and to avoid conformism in one's own life. The saints, too, must have experienced pain and suffering. We cannot have a "thick skin", he reminds us. Even Mary had to struggle within herself for three days before she met Jesus again in the Temple (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 9–17). Following Mary's example, the one who suffers can obtain this consolation and confrontation, so that God works through us in this way. Even she is not spared this suffering; however, with this example, Christians can understand that they are not alone in the face of tribulation: they can learn to hope for God's help, just as the saints have done; they constitute mirrors in which they can also look at themselves (see WA 17/II, pp. 23, 25–36; pp. 27, 6–9).

3. Servant in the Faith

Mary is also an example of faith, for the message brought to her by the archangel Gabriel is not without its absurdity. She would be the first believer, the first Christian. But faith is always seen through Luther's prism of the doctrine of justification and the theology of the Cross: to be a virgin and a mother is repugnant to reason and common experience, so we have to face the Protestant principle of *sola fides*. It cannot be based on natural reason, so the Lutheran critique of the reason of the theology of the Cross applies to this exceptional case. Even the fact that a maiden of Nazareth begets the Son of the Highest is a challenge to an exclusively human reason. The only possible rationalization is to trust in the words of the archangel (see WA 17/II, pp. 399, 24–400, 4; pp. 400, 21–7). Luther defines faith in

the following words: "The true nature of faith consists in simply trusting all that is in one's heart in the word that rings in one's ears" (WA 27, pp. 74, 25–28). So, in the commentary on the *Magnificat*, he had insisted on the "darkness of faith", where there is no light and where it cannot be "seen, felt or understood" (StA 1, pp. 321, 12–4). Mary is the teacher of faith.

As explained in previous studies (we follow Gritsch 1992, pp. 235–48, 379–84; Preuss 1954; Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49; Düfel 1968; Pelikan 1996; Tappolet and Ebneter 1962, 1996; Wright 1989; White 1998), the German reformer insists on this obscurity of faith, according to his interpretation of Heb 11:1: "Faith is the foundation of things hoped for, the proof of things not seen". But now, the word of God is not understood by speculative reason, but is based on sense perception (StA 1, pp. 353, 3–14). Experience is just as important as knowledge, and Mary finds herself before the embassy of St. Gabriel: she is only a virgin who trusts in his words, and then, the miracle and the blessing of God is fulfilled. The power of God's word goes far beyond what we can perceive; even when we cannot understand his Word, it remains credible and true (see WA 34, I, pp. 365, 12–28). In the darkness of faith, God's word is a *verbum efficax*; but the darkness of faith demands the acceptance of grace against the evidence of the senses and reason. Mary trusts in the word of God and draws strength from the Spirit. Faith is the "benevolent trust in the invisible grace promised to us" (St A 1, pp. 322, 15–6).

But Mary is a being of flesh and blood, and so faith and reason struggle within her. Reason does not lessen the archangel's message, and the mother of Jesus trusts only in the divine word; faith is based only on trust in the word of God. Thus, we have only a fiducial faith, mere confidence and no rational knowledge (see WA 17/I, pp. 399, 11–5; pp. 404, 13–6), as an expression of the theology of the Cross. In Luther's interpretation, St. Gabriel asks Mary to put reason aside: she must choose between faith and reason *(unvorstandt)*, for she does not know how the angel's words are to be fulfilled. The reason lies in the incomprehensibility intrinsic to the angelic message; Mary listens, does not object and says: "let it be done to me according to your word" (Lk 1:38; see WA 9, pp. 925, 14–8). Reason must remain silent and we must ignore the light of intelligence, and then she conceives the Son of God, and, thus, God is born spiritually in us (see WA 9, pp. 925, 18–23).

She is the first believer: she is nevertheless better than any of us, although she is no exception to the common mortal for she doubts, but faith prevails: she takes this leap into the void, into the darkness, just as we should do. This new perspective can be seen as an evolution of the former Mariology. The doubts are also a moment of the act of faith, but "blessed is she who has believed" (Lk 1:45). This trust in God and in his love is born in times of difficulty, and allows us to experience God's action in our own lives and to better understand God himself. It also enables us to love others above ourselves (StA pp. 320, 2–9; 1, pp. 318, 12–6; pp. 323, 35–7). The experience sets faith in motion and, through it, Mary goes to meet Elizabeth, for St. Gabriel has told her of her cousin's condition. Other motives that lead her to undertake this journey are joy, love, humility and concern for her relative, which are born of her living faith (see WA 29, pp. 445, 1–2; 5–9; pp. 446, 11–6).

Luther's Mariology, thus, arranges faith and love together, for the latter is the product of the former: where there is faith, there is love and humility (see WA 20, pp. 452, 8–9). The reason for this is that both faith and love are brought by the same Spirit. The believer necessarily loves God and their neighbor, as Mary shows us again with her life. The experience of God's love enables the Mother of Jesus to love God above all things. In fact, she represents the purest of loves: she loves God for Himself; she does not seek her own benefit at all: "This is a high, pure and sensitive way of loving and giving glory, which fits perfectly with the beautiful and lofty spirit that Mary has" (StA 1, pp. 326, 4–10).

God's purest love is the love of the Cross, for which he wants to give us all his possessions. Mary is not concerned with the gifts she has received from God and does not take advantage of them, but simply submits to God's will. Luther uses the term *gelassen*, which is very common in his mystical theology, to describe Mary (see StA 1, pp. 327, 24–30; 1, pp. 346, 42). "How rare is a soul that is not proud of God's gifts and remains untouched in its poverty!" (WA 15, pp. 644, 1–3). Mary expresses her love of God in the *Magnificat*

in the form of thanksgiving: she thanks God because he has performed "great things" for her. It shows how God's love has a *unitive way:* God shares his love with Mary and she becomes the mother of his Son. Mary's love manifests itself in her praise, in her absolute trust in God's will and in the help she gives to her sons and daughters (see StA 1, pp. 319, 34–320, 9; 41, pp. 365, 12–18).

4. Mary in Cranach's Pictures

Cranach the Elder (c. 1472–1553) has long been known as the artist of the Lutheran Reformation. He began as a painter for Catholic patrons, and then later became a painter for Luther. There is a wealth of excellent scholarship on his relationship with Luther and on his work as a Protestant propagandist (Michalski 1993, p. 42; Ziegler 2019, p. 6). As court painter to the electors of Saxony in Wittenberg, Lucas Cranach resided at the very heart of the emerging Protestant faith. His patrons were powerful champions of Martin Luther's reform of the Church, and Cranach has justifiably been called its "official artist." Cranach created numerous painted and engraved portraits of Luther, who was his close friend, and provided woodcut illustrations for his German translation of the Bible (Newfields n.d., Related Texts). But at the same time, could not Cranach's representation of the Virgin relate to his own Catholic background or do we really think he was consulting with Luther over every placement in every painting?

In *Law and Gospel and Christ blessing the children* (1537), "Cranach approaches the Lutheran preaching and a vision of the religious set of images most linked to the Scriptures" (Ziegler 2019, p. 1; see 11–16). Both Luther and Cranach were forward in their intellectual relationship, and the artist received direct suggestions from the "German Hercules", as Dürer painted Luther (1498/1499): "The reformer's position on devotional images cannot be explicitly defined either," writes Michalski. "He rejected some devotional representations such as Veronica's cloth, but he did not reject popular types of Christological iconography such as the 'Man of Sorrows'. He clearly preferred 'historical' subjects such as the Last Supper or the Crucifixion but did not oppose continued representation of the thematic cycle of the way of the Cross, not even in the workshop of his friend Lucas Cranach. The theme thus passed only gradually into oblivion in Lutheran art" (Michalski 1993, p. 42; see also Checa 2007, pp. 17–18, 297, 531; Noble 2009; George 2012, pp. 63–4).

Let us now look at an example of the transposition of this theology to the painting of the time. Lucas Cranach the Elder's *Lamentation of Christ* (1503) (Figures 1 and 2) reflects, in the colors and the expressions of the figures, a different interpretation of this fundamental moment of the death of Christ in the Cross. To the left are the two criminals who were crucified together with Jesus (who is on the right). In the center are Mary and John the Evangelist. This is an early work of Lucas Cranach, which is now in the *Altepinakothek* of Munich, and was painted shortly after his Vienna period. What is special about this work is that the crosses are not in line but together form a closed space, in which Mary and John are central (Art and the Bible n.d., online: https://www.artbible.info/art/large/521.html, accessed on 27 February 2023). With an evident expression of sorrow, Mary is found in this picture well before the beginning of the Reformation. *Stabat Mater dolorosa:* she stands at the foot of the Cross; the proximity of the virgin to the thief on the Cross (sinner) should be considered.

Figure 1. *The Lamentation of Christ*, painted in 1503 (Figure 1, in black paint on a piece of white paper painted as a tromp l'oeil at the bottom edge of the painting, 137.8–138 × 98.3–99.3 × 0.8–1.5 cm. https://lucascranach.org/en/DE_BStGS_1416/, accessed on 27 February 2023).

At the same time, she appears next to John, the beloved disciple, who seems to act as a buffer between Mary and the Cross (divine). Was Cranach thinking about this painting or other visual influences of other painters in his circle? The colors of her clothes combine white with red and blue, which are warmer tones. In the background, a brightly colored landscape contrasts with the scene. Now it is Mary who is looking upwards, to her Son, while John is looking down at her, as if to comfort the one who had been given to him as a mother. Could the intertwined and encircled hands of both have something to do with purity? Mary's hopeful gaze seems to be directed not only at death, but also maybe at the hope of the resurrection (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 36–37; Noble 2009, pp. 163–73).

Figure 2. *The Lamentation of Christ*, detail, painted in 1503 (Figure 2, in black paint on a piece of white paper painted as a tromp l'oeil at the bottom edge of the painting, 137.8–138 × 98.3–99.3 × 0.8–1.5 cm; https://lucascranach.org/en/DE_BStGS_1416/, accessed on 27 February 2023).

We can see later that these Lutheran ideas of the theology of the Cross influenced the painting, attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, titled *The Crucifixion* (1532) (Figures 3 and 4), where the emphasis upon the recognition of Christ's sacrifice by witnesses to his death on the Cross is a clear reference to one of the central tenets of Luther's Theology. The scene is crowded with figures which are symbolically arrayed at the right and left hand of Christ. To his right, in a way which is different to the former picture, the Virgin collapses into the arms of John the Evangelist, while the grieving Magdalene embraces the Cross. The Good Thief and Longinus, the Roman spear bearer who converted at Christ's death, gaze directly at him. They are contrasted with the brutish soldiers on his left, who ignore him and cast lots

for his garments at the foot of the Cross. Cranach positioned the contemporary figures of a monk, a cardinal, and a Turk behind the Cross, among the unenlightened (Newfields n.d., Related Texts).

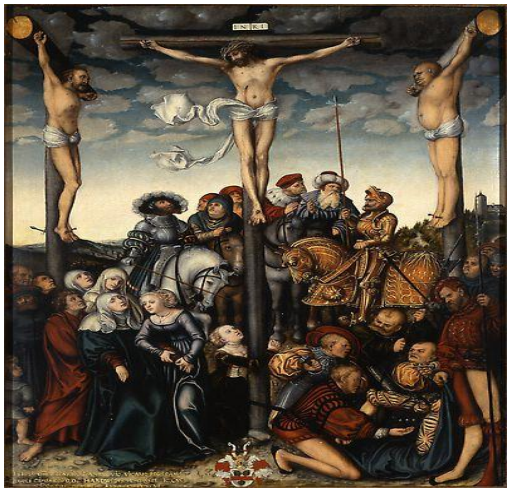

Figure 3. *The Crucifixion* (1532), painting on beech wood, 76 × 54.5 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Clowes Collection: https://lucascranach.org/en/US_IMA_2000-344, accessed on 27 February 2023).

In this rather late painting, Mary can be seen with another woman (Mary Magdalene?), dressed in blue and white, painted in rather cold tones and with a gesture of still, serene resignation. Dark blue is considered the color of sadness. The two women's hands are intertwined as if united in grief, not in the same way as she held John's hand. *Juxta crucem lacrimosa:* she appears to be fainting from pain. Mary closes her eyes as if in a reverie of suffering, while John looks—behind her—at Christ, as a symbol of his whole Gospel. There seems to be a reference more to the present death than to the later resurrection (it is not a *crux gloriosa*); as reflected in the colors and the expressions of the figures, this is a different interpretation of this fundamental moment.

In contrast, to his left, brutish soldiers ruthlessly cast lots for his garments. Behind the Cross are a monk, a cardinal, and a Turk, who represent the unenlightened—probably included as a critique of the Catholic Church and Islam. Three restless horses, facing each other, appear in the background of the scene. Here, the tensions caused by the religious crisis are manifested visually, emphasizing a central tenet of Lutheran theology: that sinful mankind can be reconciled to God only by faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Everything in this painting denotes the tension characteristic of the theology of the Cross, far removed from the peace expressed in the previous, peaceful, *Madonnas* (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 35–36; Michalski 1993, p. 42; Noble 2009, pp. 168–73; Koerner 2017, pp. 216–41; Newfields n.d., Gallery Label).

Figure 4. *The Crucifixion* (1532), detail, painting on beech wood, 76 × 54.5 cm, Indianapolis Museum of Art, The Clowes Collection: https://lucascranach.org/en/US_IMA_2000-344, accessed on 27 February 2023).

As we have seen, in the comment on the *Magnificat*, the German reformer also interpreted the issue of Mary according to his theology of the Cross. These ideas and their influence on painting can be seen, especially, in *The Crucifixion*, attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder (Figure 2). The emphasis upon the recognition of only Christ's sacrifice by witnesses to his death on the Cross is a clear reference to one of the central tenets of Luther's Theology: that sinful mankind can be reconciled to God only by faith. This work is quite different, in colors and expressions, from the former *The Lamentation of Christ*, painted in 1503 (Figure 1). Although, paradoxically, Cranach's latest representations were especially of *Madonnas*, which corresponds rather to the *theologia gloriae* of Incarnation, this painting of 1532 shows us how, for the later Luther—the theologian of the *theologiae crucis* of the death of Christ—earlier Mary was particularly exemplary of *Mater dolorosa:* she almost seems to be a different person, and the maternal attitude is changed to a suffering dismay. This last representation of the Lutheran theology seems to have helped Cranach to understand the situation better (see Rosenberg 1969, pp. 31–36; Noble 2009, pp. 170–73; Koerner 2017, pp. 266–74).

5. Conclusions

As we have seen, Luther believed to the end of his life in the perpetual virginity of the Mother of God, and that she always remained for him worthy of veneration, even if he was concerned that she might be placed on the same level as Christ. However, he finds it difficult to regard Mary as "helper and advocate" (*Fürsprecherin*) because of his Christocentrism, for this would imply her own merit and self-sufficiency; and he cannot always see her as *Fürbitterin*, or an intercessor who intercedes on our behalf with God. He asks, however, that the "Hail Mary" should continue to be recited in her honor and praise (the "full of grace" he translates as "gracious", saying that "we could not give a better name to her who is gracious and favourable", although he allows the usual translation to remain enforced). This recommendation will appear only in the catechism of Michael Agricola (1510–1557), evangelizer of Finland (see WA 10/III, p. 321; pp. 1711, 409; 10/III, pp. 321 and 325; Preuss 1954, 26ff.).

It is only natural that the reformer also honored Mary in a special way among all the saints, for Luther saw in her a model of humility: "Yes, she will put us to shame at the last day, when we look upon her as the glorious Virgin and she turns to us, our pride gone, and says to us: I have not become proud and have had more than you, empress or queen, could that have had anything in comparison to the fact that I have been the Mother of God and that the angels and the saints have exalted me, that I am the blessed and most gracious of all women? And yet I have not become proud". Using his frequent coarse language, in comparison with Mary men are "an object where the devil wipes his feet" (WA 52, p. 684). In other words, she is sinless, while we are full of pride and many other faults. As we have seen, he proposed her as a model of faith, through which justification comes to us: "Therein lies the true marvel, that the Virgin Mary believed that such things would come to pass, thereby encouraging us also to believe, for this gospel places us before a doctrine and an admonition" (WA 7, p. 189; see 17/II, p. 399).

Likewise, the German reformer saw in Mary a source of consolation for the poor who wander through this earth on pilgrimage and wander through this vale of tears in sorrow (WA 10/III, p. 433; 41, p. 363; 7, p. 569). He often allegorically relates it to the Church (WA 10/I, pp. 1 and 140; 17/2, p. 69; see Preuss 1954, p. 18), although Mary as *mater Ecclesiae* is mainly a Catholic image. In 1532, he called her *domina super coelum et terram,* and on 2 July 1537 he preached of her: "No woman equals you. You are above empresses and queens, exalted above all nobility, wisdom and holiness". In 1543, three years before his death, he affirmed Mary's holiness at the moment of the Incarnation—although it may seem contradictory to what has been said above—and affirmed that he always believed her to be free from all personal sin (WA 36, pp. 208ff.; 17/II, p. 400; 23, p. 728; 45, p. 105). The role of Mary in our salvation is, at least symbolically, important.

Mariology and devotion to Mary has, however, enjoyed an uncertain future in the various Protestant denominations, although in recent times—as a consequence of the Ecumenism and the revaluation of the role of women in social life—it has also been the subject of attention among theologians (see Scheele 2016). Some authors maintain that Christ is more important for Protestant piety, but at the same time the current Evangelical thought also sees the Church as the living body of Christ. Maybe they overlook that the veneration of the saints, especially of the Mother of God, does not diminish but rather strengthens the worship of Christ, as is shown by the prayers that the Church dedicates to Mary, the angels and the saints, which all end by glorifying Jesus Christ and the Holy Trinity (cf. Algermissen 1963, pp. 1047–49). But in this whole panorama, the influence of *theologia crucis* is definitive, and, as we have seen, these ideas and their influence on painting could be seen in *The Crucifixion* (Figure 2), attributed to Lucas Cranach the Elder, in contrast to the earlier *The Lamentation of* Christ, painted in 1503 (Figure 1). For Luther, Mary was, especially, *Mater dolorosa.*

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Article

"O Jewel Resplendent": The Virgin Mary and Her Analogues in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias*

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Abstract: Despite the lush visual imagery of the twenty-six visions that form the foundation of Hildegard of Bingen's first work, *Scivias*, the physical person of the Virgin Mary appears only once, as the Queen of the heavenly symphony in the book's final vision. The images that coalesce in the musical compositions dedicated to the Virgin in that final symphony, however, resonate throughout the rest of the work, revealing Mary's constant background presence. Moreover, analogues of traditional Marian imagery in both the text and the illustrations Hildegard designed for the work allow us to see how the Virgin exemplifies the life of the virtues from which Hildegard constructs the City of God. Finally, connections between *Scivias* and Hildegard's third work, *Liber diuinorum operum*, demonstrate that the Virgin Mary models the path of virginity that Hildegard holds up as the singular road to holy perfection for herself and the nuns under her care.

Keywords: Virgin Mary; virtues; virginity; medieval women; liturgy; medieval music; medieval art; Hildegard of Bingen; *Scivias*

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1. Introduction

St. Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) comes down to us as one of the most dynamic intellectual figures of the twelfth century. As a leader of religious women in the Rhineland, she authored extensive volumes of visionary theology; designed visual images for at least one of those; composed the largest corpus of liturgical music ascribed to a single author of the Middle Ages; wrote works in natural science and medicine; preached to religious communities throughout her region; and engaged in an extensive correspondence with people from all ranks of society, from popes and kings down to local monks and nuns. This extraordinary, interconnected body of work offers us a unique entry point into medieval intellectual life, at once rooted in tradition and recasting that tradition in startlingly innovative ways. Hildegard's Mariology exemplifies this creative range.

The best overview of Hildegard's "theology of the feminine" remains the foundational work of Newman (1997). She demonstrated that for Hildegard, the feminine can be understood at a cosmic level as the matrix for the manifestation of divinity into time. The Virgin Mary is the most concentrated focal point of a dynamic that stretches from the figure of eternal Wisdom ordering creation, through the fertile but fallen mother Eve, and then on to the Virgin Mother Church. Essential elements in this Mariology include the predestination of the Virgin (i.e., that God preordained from eternity that the Virgin would bear his Son); Mary's restoration of Eve's fallenness through the power of virginity; and the Virgin's exemplarity for *Ecclesia*, the Church, who is a Mother to the faithful in baptism and bears for them the Body of Christ in the Eucharist.[1]

Most studies of Hildegard's Mariology find their richest sources in her lyrics. She composed more liturgical music for the Virgin Mary than she did for any other single subject: sixteen pieces that survive with musical notation (including antiphons, responsories, a sequence, a song, an Alleluia verse, and a hymn), as well as several others that survive only in a textual miscellany (Hildegard of Bingen 1998). There is good reason for this: Hildegard's thought reaches its densest and most sublime in her liturgical poetry,

which summarizes her larger theological project. Hildegard's music thus provides an entry point for exploring the deeper roots of her Mariology, not only through manifest images of the Virgin but also through what Denk (2021) has called "Mariological allusion." Essentially, we can learn even more about Hildegard's views on the Virgin Mary by tracing allusions, analogues, and motifs that make the Virgin present even in the absence of explicit invocations. Denk (2021) has done this principally through musicological allusions to the wider chant repertoire, a valuable line of inquiry pioneered in recent years by Bain (2021).

This study, too, will take two of Hildegard's musical compositions for the Virgin as its springboard: the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*; and the responsory, *O tu suavissima virga*. The context in which we will explore their allusive power, however, will be the treatise in which Hildegard embedded them: her first work, *Scivias*, written 1142–1151. This book (whose title is shorthand for "Know the Ways of the Lord") consists of twenty-six visions organized into three parts and serves as a kind of *summa* or "summary" of Christian theology. The first part surveys the order of creation and its fall, both of Lucifer and the angels and of humans in Adam and Eve. The second part articulates the order of redemption, with a focus on the Incarnation, the Trinity, and the sacraments of the Church. The third part, finally, dramatically retells the stories of the first two by setting them within a vast "Edifice of Salvation," with the Virtues as our guide through salvation history and into eternity.

This study of Hildegard's *Scivias* will proceed not only from its text,[2] but also from its illustrations and music. Hildegard designed a detailed cycle of illustrations for a copy of *Scivias* produced in her monastery during the final decade of her life, which I will refer to as the Rupertsberg *Scivias*.[3] Although no extant copies of *Scivias* include musical notation for the song cycle in the work's final vision, the notation does survive in copies of Hildegard's music in two other manuscripts.[4] As Fassler (2022) has recently argued, Hildegard certainly intended that her nuns would know both the illustrations and the music when they engaged with the treatise.[5] Meanwhile, as I have argued elsewhere (Campbell 2013, 2021), the illustrations produced about two decades later function as teaching tools to refine and highlight certain aspects of the text. Interpretation of the work is dynamically strongest when it attends to all three of its modes of communication: textual, musical, and visual.

Previous studies of the Virgin Mary's place in *Scivias* have focused on the contrast with Eve (Garber 1998) and the place of the Annunciation as a model for authorizing female inspiration (Wain 2017). Wain (2017) offers a valuable critique of the ways in which many discussions of medieval Mariology rely too simplistically on the "Eva/Ave" trope to set up an oppositional parallel between Eve and Mary. She suggests that Hildegard instead sees the Virgin Mary as a model for her own intellectual fertility, positing the opening illustration of the Rupertsberg *Scivias* (which accompanies Hildegard's preliminary *Protestificatio*) as an adapted Annunciation scene, with Hildegard gestating and giving birth to the work. Garber (1998), meanwhile, draws together the architectural metaphors found in several of Hildegard's Marian lyrics with the imagery of the edifice of salvation in Part 3 of *Scivias* to suggest that Hildegard and her nuns shared with the Virgin a role as builders, not only of the physical monastery that they renewed at the Rupertsberg, but also of the life of monastic virtue. She contrasts the symbolic abstraction of Eve and Mary in much of *Scivias* with the more physically concrete personifications of the Virtues, who thus offer more relatable role models for Hildegard's nuns.

The salient historiographical issue is the extent to which the Virgin Mary could serve as a viable role model for medieval women. It is sometimes suggested that she could displace the gross misogyny that often resulted from the identification of women as "daughters of Eve." But how realistic would that displacement be if we recognize that the Virgin Mary was in many ways "an inaccessible paragon" (Wain 2017, p. 164)? In Hildegard's hands especially, the Virgin takes on cosmic proportions. We do not find Hildegard meditating on the humanly relatable aspects of the Virgin's life, such as her compassion or sorrow for her Son, that would become powerful models in later medieval spirituality. Instead, as we will see in this study, Mary appears as "majestic and impersonal" (Newman 1997, p. 166), a

radiant light shining distantly, blinding in its brilliance like the sun. But this study will also show that Hildegard mediated the Virgin's light through analogues of traditional Marian imagery. Building on the insights of Garber (1998) and Fassler (2022), it will reveal how the Virgin exemplifies the life of the virtues and through them could indeed serve as a model for Hildegard and the virgin nuns under her care. Again, in contrast to later medieval spiritual practices that encouraged interior meditation on details of the Virgin's life—even when those details, such as her reading at the Annunciation,[6] could authorize women's learning and intellectual life—Hildegard's focus for her nuns was on actively developing virtues that for her imitate the Virgin's key role in salvation history. When her nuns would join their voices in the music of the liturgy, in particular, they would be transformed into resplendent gems, "living stones" to build up the heavenly Jerusalem and take their place as the perfected work of the Church.

2. The Jewel Resplendent: The *Scivias* Symphony and the Anthropology of *Scivias* 1.4

The key to understanding the place of the Virgin Mary within *Scivias* comes in the final vision (3.13), where she appears for the only time as a human figure, the Queen of the heavenly symphony. In overall structure, *Scivias* has moved from the beginning of the world (Part 1, Vision 2) through to its end (Part 3, Visions 11–12), and this final vision is set in eternity. Later medieval authors would think of this as the beatific vision, but for Hildegard, its primary quality is the praise of beatific song. She categorizes the "harmonious music-making" (*in harmonia symphonizans*) she hears by the addressee of each pair of songs (an antiphon and responsory), going down the ranks of heaven: the Virgin Mary, the angels, the patriarchs and prophets, the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, and the virgins. As Fassler (2022) has demonstrated, Hildegard has organized this heavenly symphony according to the Matins liturgy for the Feast of All Saints (November 1), a liturgy that also informs *Scivias*' opening vision and thus frames the work's entire journey. All Saints was a special day for Hildegard, as it was on that day in 1112 that she and her companions were first dedicated to the religious life at the Disibodenberg; it is possible that she reserved that day every year for the dedication of new nuns to her monastery. The song cycle she composed for *Scivias* 3.13 synthesizes many of the themes of *Scivias*, amplifying the festal liturgy of All Saints into the pathway and goal for the virgin-nuns under her leadership and care.

The first two pieces are devoted to the Virgin Mary and, therefore, offer us interpretive keys for seeing her presence throughout the rest of the work. The first one is the antiphon *O splendidissima gemma* (*Scivias* 3.13.1a, p. 525):[7]

> O splendidissima gemma
> et serenum decus solis,
> qui tibi infusus est,
> fons saliens de corde Patris, quod est unicum
> Verbum suum, per quod creauit mundi primam materiam, quam Eua turbauit;
> hoc Verbum effabricauit tibi Pater
> hominem, et ob hoc es tu illa lucida
> materia per quam hoc ipsum Verbum exspirauit omnes
> uirtutes, ut eduxit in prima materia omnes creaturas.
>
> O jewel resplendent
> and bright, clear beauty of the sun
> that's flooded into you—
> the fountain leaping from the Father's heart, which is his single
> Word, by which he did create the primal matter of the world, which Eve disturbed.
> This Word the Father made for you

into a man, and this is why you are that shining

matter, through which that Word has breathed forth all

the virtues, just as he brought forth all creation in primal matter.

The image of sunlight refracting through and reflecting off a gemstone becomes a lens through which Hildegard glimpses the entire sway of salvation history, stretching from the *prima materia*, the primordial material at the beginning of creation, through the disturbance of that matter in the Fall, and finally to the Virgin's integral role in renewing that material as she bore the Son of God. Scripturally, the image aligns the Virgin with the twelve precious stones that adorn the walls of the heavenly Jerusalem in Revelation 21, identifying her with the end of salvation history, the new heaven and new earth. In the context of *Scivias*, meanwhile, the gemstone takes us back to the beginning of the human journey and the anthropological vision of *Scivias* 1.4 (Figure 1), where the unfallen human body is described as a bejeweled tabernacle. This vision tells the story of a representative "human form," the soul of an "Everyperson," whose voice declares the ups and downs of its struggle against the temptations of the material world. It begins with the Everyperson's conception, as their soul is quickened in the womb of their mother by the flow of divine energy, a "splendor like the dawn" from a golden quadrilateral allegorically identified as *scientia Dei*, "the Knowledge of God" (*Scivias* 1.4.9, p. 116). The iconography of this image in the Rupertsberg manuscript draws from common tropes for illustrating the nativity of Christ, with the recumbent mother in the same pose commonly used for the Virgin Mary in childbirth (Saurma-Jeltsch 1998, p. 66). The use of gold to illustrate the divine ensoulment adds further dimensions to the image, for the manuscript intentionally used gold to mark irruptions of divine activity into creation—we will see this gold return below in *Scivias* 2.1, aligned as here with the light of the dawn.[8]

Hildegard's design of the image helps the viewer–reader to make a typological connection between the Everyperson's lament for the weight of their ordeals in life in *Scivias* 1.4 (illustrated to the right of their conception, ordered from bottom to top) and their resolution in the opening lyric to the Virgin at the end of the work:

> For I should have had a tabernacle adorned with five square gems more brilliant than the sun and stars, for the sun and stars that set would not have shone in it, but the glory of the angels; the topaz would have been its foundation and all the gems its structure, its staircases made of crystal and its courtyards paved with gold. For I should have been a companion of the angels, for I am a living breath, which God placed in dry mud; thus I should have known and felt God. But alas! When my tabernacle saw that it could turn its eyes into all the ways, it turned its attention toward the North; ach, ach! And there I was captured and robbed of my sight and the joy of knowledge, and my garment was torn.
>
> (. . .)
>
> Oh, who will console me, since even my mother has abandoned me when I strayed from the path of salvation? Who will help me but God? But when I remember you, O mother Zion, in whom I should have dwelt, I see the bitter slavery to which I am subjected. And when I have called to memory the music of all sorts that dwells in you, I feel my wounds. And when I remember the joy and gladness of your glory, I am horrified by the poisons that pollute them. (*Scivias* 1.4.1, pp. 109–10)

Mother Zion's tabernacle full of light and music (which appears at the top of the right-hand column of images in the Rupertsberg illustration, the goal of the soul as she struggles to return to grace) is a type or figure of Mother Church. But as the collective Mother Zion transformed into the collective Mother Church, so the individual and archetypal—but fallen—Mother Eve transformed into the Virgin Mother Mary as temporal instantiations of the divine tabernacle. The first words addressed to Mary in *Scivias* 3.13.1 praise her as precisely the "resplendent jewel" that was supposed to be the material of the human body,

reflecting and refracting the divine light. Her body—transparent and unpolluted—was the perfect chamber for God's presence that all other human bodies, following the inheritance of Eve, had scorned and vitiated with the darkness and shadow of sin.

Figure 1. *Scivias* 1.4: Soul and Body. Rüdesheim/Eibingen, Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard, MS 1, fol. 22r. By permission of the nuns of the Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard.

This gemstone of a body draws on the construction of the heavenly Jerusalem, as noted above, and its refulgence also recalls the Transfiguration, where Jesus's "face shone like the sun" (Matthew 17:2: *resplenduit facies eius sicut sol*) and his white garment glittered (Luke 9:29: *refulgens*). As Bynum (1995, pp. 161–63) has noted, Hildegard's views on the glorified body track in late-antique traditions that contrasted its crystalline perfection with the change, decay, and death to which the fallen mortal body was subject. In her vision of the general resurrection in the next-to-last vision of *Scivias* (3.12, pp. 515–17), Hildegard sees the elect "shine with the brightness of their good works" and "became more splendid than the splendor of the sun" (*super splendorem solis repente splendidi effecti*). Casting this splendor in the hardness of a gemstone also invokes the use of gemstones as medicinal cures, as Hildegard outlines in Book 4 of her work, *Physica*. She also notes there that gemstones have their own innate power for the good: "it is the nature of certain precious stones to seek those things that are honorable and useful and to reject those that are depraved and evil for humankind, just as the virtues reject the vices and the vices cannot cooperate with the virtues."[9] Mary's "resplendent jewel" of a body thus points forward to the beatified body of the resurrection and is empowered to seek out and enact the good.

As the fallen soul yearns for that bejeweled tabernacle, she remembers too "the music of all sorts" that filled it before the Fall. Music is, for Hildegard, an essential element of both the original, unfallen creation and its redemption through Christ, the New Song. The soul in *Scivias* 1.4.1 thus laments the loss of harmony, the integrated good of original creation cast into chaos (*quam Eua turbauit* in the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*).[10] Hildegard likewise uses the antiphon's music to mark the distinction between creation and the Creator by establishing different registers for Mary's creatureliness and God's divinity.[11] The piece is composed in what is known as the second maneria, with a final or "home" tone of E, although Hildegard also indulges a penchant for stretching into the D tonal area of the first maneria while still resolving to the final E. In the first half of the antiphon, Hildegard uses the lower range of the D tonal area for Mary, stretching from the fourth below D (A) to the fifth above it (*a*). She reserves the higher range, which covers the final E to its octave *e*, for references to the divine—the Sun itself leaping from the Father's heart, with the word *saliens* ("leaping") the first to leap to the octave *e*, repeated again always in reference to Father and Word—on *quod*, the latter two appearances of *Verbum*, and both *Pater* and *hominem* (the Word-made-human).

While the musical range for references to creation (matter, Eve, and Mary) expands slightly in the second half of the antiphon (Hildegard allows it to reach up to *c* above the final), the upper third of the piece still remains out of reach until the last line. There, Hildegard draws the earthly up into the divine, as the final appearance of the word *materia* soars to the top note of *e*, while also following the same melodic contour as the phrase *ipsum Verbum* ("that Word") from the previous line (Figure 2b). This shared melody also repeats a motif that Fassler (2022, p. 107) has identified as a key "melodic cell" from earlier in the piece. That phrase opens the second line of the antiphon (Figure 2a) and is then repeated four more times across the second and third lines, serving as the musical "rays" of the sun infusing Mary's body. When it returns in the last two lines, however, it has been transposed up by a fifth, out of the lower register (where it started on D, reached to *a*, and ended on E) and into the higher one (starting on *b* for *ipsum* and *a* for *materiam*, reaching to the high *e*, and then ending on *b*). A snippet of this phrase had also appeared in the setting of Mary's *materia* at the opening of the previous line, but set still in the lower register, with a melody that is mirrored at the opening of the last line on *virtutes*. With the final leap, then, the primordial material of creation at last returns to its divine source of the Word along the same path by which the *virtutes*—the virtues and powers of divine activity—came forth, creating and sustaining, into the world, refracted through the gem-like transparency of Mary's pure material body.

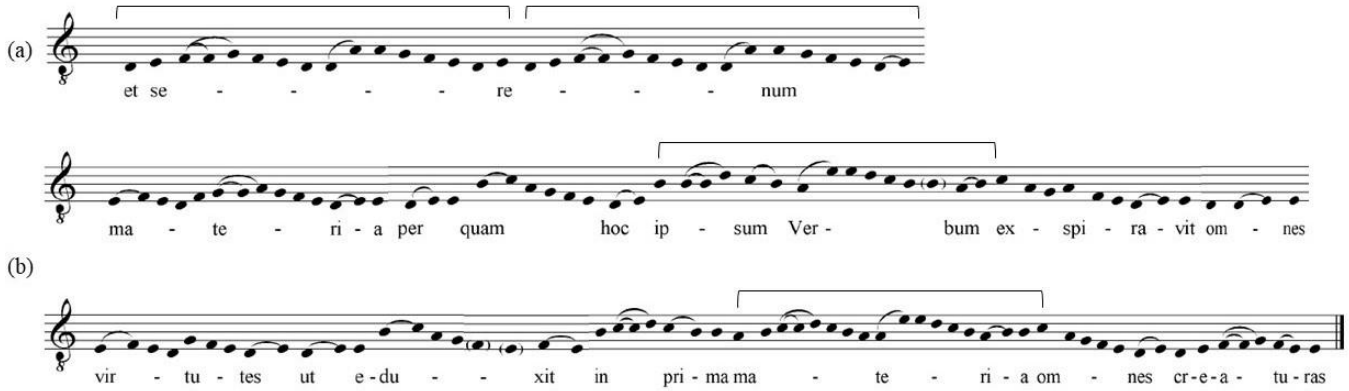

Figure 2. Phrases from *O splendidissima gemma*: (**a**) First two repetitions of phrase from line 2. (**b**) Lines 8–9, with transposed phrases from line 2 marked. Adapted according to Fassler (2022) from the transcription of Beverly R. Lomer/International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies.

The responsory that Hildegard composed as the second piece in praise of the Virgin in *Scivias* 3.13.1 leaves behind any comparison with the fallenness of Eve and focuses,

again, on the image of Mary's light, married now to another key image for the Virgin, the blooming branch (*Scivias* 3.13.1b, p. 525):[12]

R. O tu suavissima uirga
frondens de stirpe Iesse,
O quam magna uirtus est quod diuinitas
in pulcherrimam filiam aspexit,
sicut aquila in solem
oculum suum ponit:
R. Cum supernus Pater claritatem
Virginis adtendit
ubi Verbum suum
in ipsa incarnari
uoluit.
V. Nam in mistico
misterio Dei,
illustrata mente Virginis mirabiliter
clarus flos
ex ipsa Virgine
exiuit.
R. O sweetest branch,
you bloom from Jesse's stock!
How great the mighty power, that divinity
has gazed upon his fairest daughter,
as an eagle turns his eye
into the sun:
R. When Heaven's Father tended to
the Virgin's brilliance
when his Word
in her to be incarnate
he willed.
V. For in the mystic
mystery of God,
the Virgin's mind illumined wonderfully,
the flower bright
forth from that Virgin
sprung.

The piece opens with a classic image for the Virgin Mary as the branch of Jesse's stock (*de stirpe Iesse*), the genealogical lineage based on Isaiah 11:1 that stretches from King David's father (Jesse) through Mary to Christ (the flower), and which became an increasingly common motif in twelfth-century art. We will return to this image later in this essay when we consider the version of the Jesse Tree that appears in *Scivias* 3.3. Here, we want to focus on the particular spin that Hildegard gives to the idea in this responsory: the Virgin Mary becomes the sun shining on the "bright flower" (*clarus flos*) of her Son. As Barbara Newman has noted (Hildegard of Bingen 1998, p. 278), this responsory inverts a common trope for the contemplative life. Usually, the mystic's mind would be illumined as

she gazes in contemplation upon God, as an eagle points its eye into the sun. But here, God is the eagle, turning his eye to look upon the brilliant sun of the Virgin.

The musical setting of the responsory clarifies these ideas. The piece has been set in the first maneria (which nominally has the final or home note of D), but transposed up a fifth, with a final of *a*. As a result, it generally inhabits a much higher range than the preceding antiphon, as it leaves the fallen realm of creation behind to gaze solely upon the Virgin's sunlight. Lomer (2014) has noted that the highest pitch (*cc*, an octave and a third above the final) comes on the word *solem* (sun), and is repeated in the *repetendum* (the refrain) on *claritatem* (the Virgin's brilliance) and *uoluit* (God willed). As Figure 3a indicates, Hildegard uses one of her signature moves, an opening leap of a fifth, in the fourth line of the responsory, as God *in pulcherrimam filiam aspexit* ("gazed upon his fairest daughter"). This Phrase 1 (less the opening leap) then becomes the setting with variation for the next line (Figure 3b), as she expands to the highest pitch on *solem*. Phrase 1, with the expanded range and the opening leap, sets the first line of the refrain (Figure 3c), and it returns a fourth time at the end of the refrain within the setting for *voluit* (Figure 3e), framed on either side by Phrase 2, a melody developed on the words *oculum suum* ("his eye", Figure 3d). The long, melismatic setting of *uoluit* highlights another aspect of Hildegard's Mariology that is bound up with the brilliant divine light permeating this responsory: the Virgin's eternal predestination (Newman 1997, pp. 55–64). Essentially, Hildegard held that God willed from eternity that his Son would be incarnate (a doctrine known as "the eternal predestination of Christ"), and the corollary of this is that the Virgin Mary was likewise eternally willed to be the means for that Incarnation. Clear-eyed vision and foresight (or providence) dominate this sonic landscape. God himself saw in the Virgin's lightsome womb the moment when he would enter the world and restore its lost harmony.

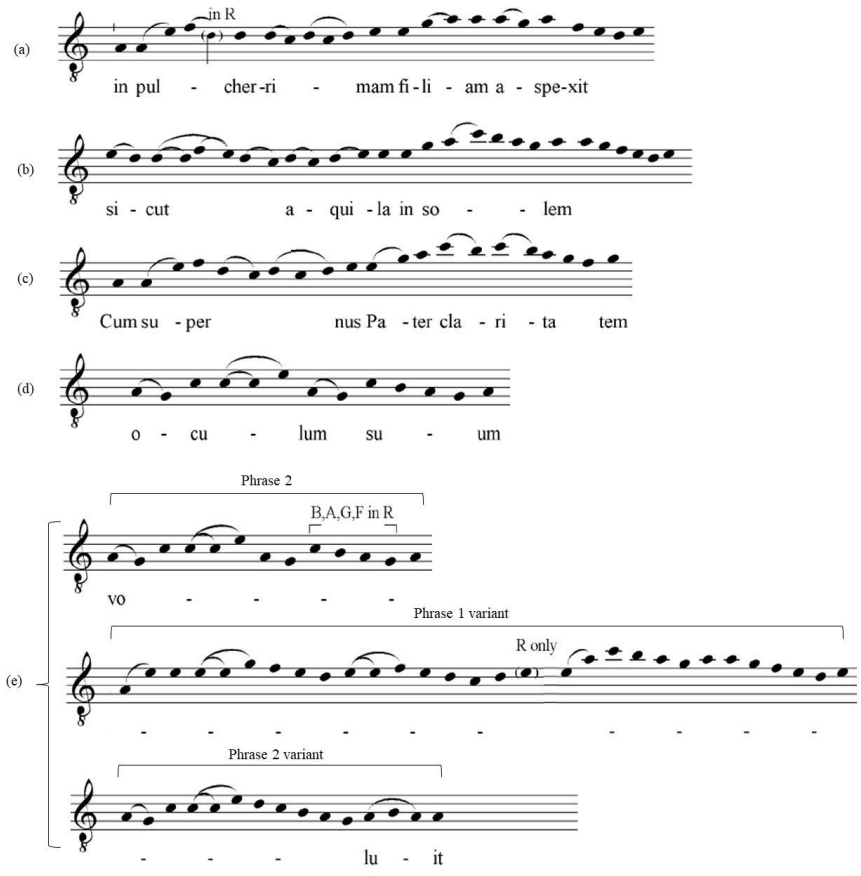

Figure 3. Phrases from *O tu suavissima virga:* (**a**) Phrase 1 from line 4. (**b**) Phrase 1 variant from line 5. (**c**) Phrase 1 variant from line 7. (**d**) Phrase 2 from line 6. (**e**) End of repetendum. Adapted from the transcription of Beverly R. Lomer/International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies.

3. *Aurora*: The Virgin's Dawn Light and the Incarnation

Mary's *lucida materia* and *claritas*, her light-filled body and brilliance, suffuse salvation history in *Scivias*. In the previous section, we looked at a vision from the first part of the work, whose visions altogether track the order of creation and its fall. The second part of *Scivias* shifts its attention to the order of redemption: the coming of Christ in the Incarnation and the establishment of the Church and her sacraments. Its opening vision (*Scivias* 2.1: Figure 4) starts again from the beginning and tells the story of creation. To illustrate this vision, Hildegard designed a set of six roundels in the central sphere, telling the story of Genesis 1. Adam's head is roused from the earth at the bottom of the sphere, and he is then offered a flower, "the sweet precept of obedience" (*Scivias* 2.1.8, p. 153), in the upper right. When he refuses the flower, he falls into the muddy darkness of sin below, his skin hardened red by disobedience. Punctuating that chaotic darkness are the stars of the patriarchs and prophets, whose dim light looks forward to the great light that bursts up from below, carrying upon its flames the golden Christ, the Redeemer coming to rescue Adam from the muck.

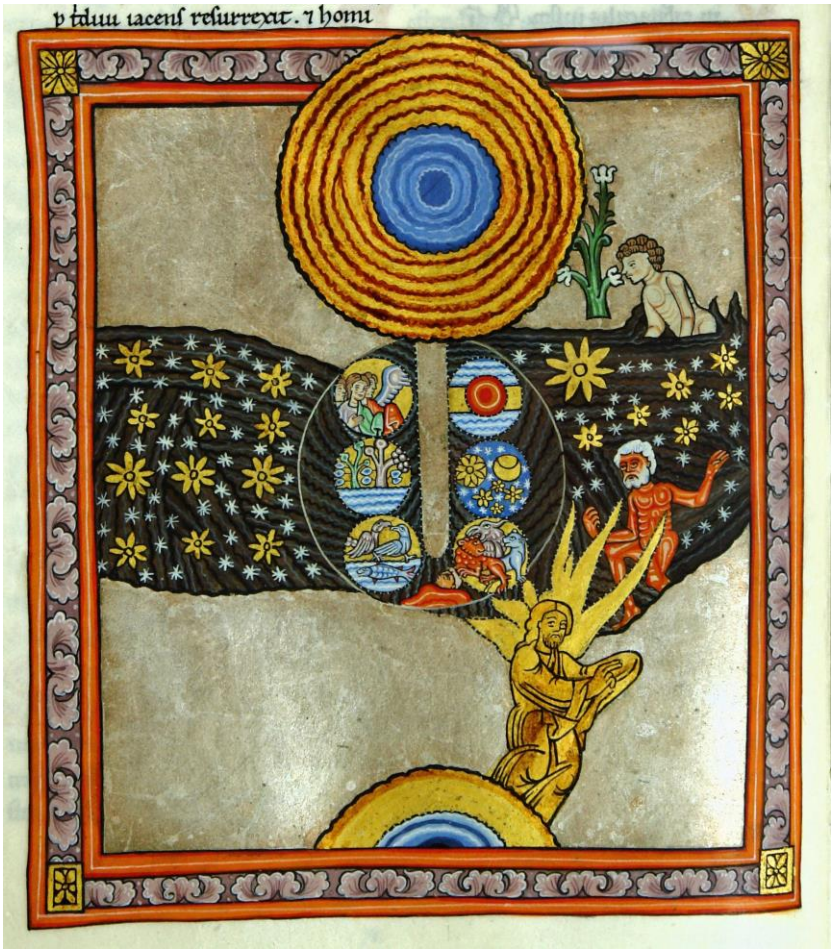

Figure 4. *Scivias* 2.1: Creation and the Redeemer. Rüdesheim/Eibingen, Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard, MS 1, fol. 41v. By permission of the nuns of the Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard.

Many commentators (e.g., Newman 1997, p. 168; Garber 1998, p. 110) have noted that the illustration's white flower that Adam sniffs is an iconographical invocation of the Virgin's symbol of the lily, commonly found in depictions of the Annunciation. The flower is also a symbol of Christ, born of the Virgin's womb atop the Jesse Tree, as described in the responsory, *O tu suavissima virga*. The flower in this vision is, moreover, one of its more startling images, as it inverts the common logic of the Fall: rather than sinning by picking and eating of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 3:6),

Adam here falls into sin because he fails to pick and eat of the flower of obedience. The visual parallel to the Annunciation, therefore, allows the viewer–reader to recognize that the Virgin's *Fiat* (Luke 1:38), her act of saying "yes" in obedience to God, corrects and supersedes Adam's failure.

That white flower, however, is not the only allusion to the Virgin Mary in this image. As noted above, the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript uses gold and silver (as well as blue for the Son) to indicate the presence of the Trinity, especially in circular forms that echo the illustration of the Trinity for *Scivias* 2.2. The gold and blue wheel at the top of the image illustrates the beginning of the vision: "blazing fire, incomprehensible, inextinguishable, wholly living and wholly Life, with a flame in it the color of the sky." Hildegard tells us this is "the Omnipotent and Living God" and "the Infinite Word . . . indivisibly in the Father" (*Scivias* 2.1.1–3, pp. 150–51). From this eternal wheel of divine fire descends a finger of silver to create the world. At the bottom of the image, however, the gold and blue wheel again emerges, pushing upward this time to propel the Redeemer into the darkness of the fallen world:[13]

> *And in the earth too appears a radiance like the dawn* [fulgor ut aurora], *into which the flame is miraculously absorbed, without being separated from the blazing fire*. This is to say that God set a great splendor of light in the place where He would bring forth His Word and, fully willing it, sent Him there, yet not so as to be divided from Him; but He gave that profitable fruit and brought Him forth as a great fountain [*magnum fontem*], so that every faithful throat could drink and never more be dry. *And thus in the radiance of the dawn the Supreme Will is enkindled*; for in the bright and roseate serenity was seen the fruitfulness of the great and venerable counsel, so that all the forerunners marveled at it with bright joy.
>
> (. . .)
>
> *And you see a serene Man coming forth from this radiant dawn, Who pours out His brightness into the darkness* (. . .). This is the Word of God, imperishably incarnate in the purity of unstained virginity and born without pain, and yet not separated from the Father. How? While the Son of God was being born in the world from a mother, he was still in Heaven in the Father. (*Scivias* 2.1.11–13, p. 154)

The Virgin Mary's presence in this golden, radiant light is allusive yet powerful, and the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*, helps to crystallize the images. In this text from *Scivias* 2.1, we find echoes of the antiphon's fourth line, of Christ the Sun and Word as "the fountain leaping from the Father's heart." The "radiant dawn" is thus the moment that brings the light of the eternal Sun into the world, the Virgin's womb that births divinity into time. The images of the fountain and the dawn, moreover, provide a very strong reference beyond the text to tie the Virgin's presence into it. Both are found in verses from the Song of Songs that had long been used as antiphons for Marian feast days, especially the Feast of the Assumption (August 15). The image of the fountain occurs in the antiphon, *Hortus conclusus*,[14] commonly used in the Matins liturgy for the Assumption, which draws on Song of Songs 4:12: *Hortus conclusus soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus* ("A garden enclosed is my sister, my bride, a garden enclosed, a fountain sealed"). The more significant image, however, is of the dawn in the antiphon, *Quae est ista*,[15] from the Office of Lauds (the liturgy sung at dawn) for the Assumption, which quotes Song of Songs 5:9: *Quae est ista, quae ascendit sicut aurora consurgens, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol, terribilis ut castrorum acies ordinata?* ("Who is she that mounts like the rising dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as an army set in array?"). These liturgical echoes would have been intimately familiar to Hildegard's nuns from their daily religious experience and would thus have informed their reading (and viewing) of *Scivias*. The golden Christ emerging at the bottom of the page would appear to them, therefore, with the same force as the Virgin emerging "like the rising dawn."

The cosmological setting of the Assumption antiphon's images of sun and moon creates yet another context by which to understand the presence of the Virgin Mary within

Scivias. As Fassler (2022) has demonstrated, the creation imagery of the six days (the "hexameron") at the center of the illustration for *Scivias* 2.1 points us back to Hildegard's vision of the cosmos in the figure of an Egg in *Scivias* 1.4. In that vision, Hildegard allegorizes the celestial bodies of sun, moon, and stars to create a map for salvation history, because the physical universe has a moral meaning for Hildegard. The sun—the great star or "globe of sparkling flame" that appears at the apex of the Cosmic Egg—is the Son of God. When Hildegard sees the sun dynamically flare up in brightness, she interprets this to mean:

> [W]hen the time came that the Only-Begotten of God was to become incarnate for the redemption and uplifting of the human race by the will of the Father, the Holy Spirit by the power of the Father brought celestial mysteries wonderfully to pass in the Blessed Virgin; so that when the Son of God too in virginal chastity showed marvelous splendor and made virginity fruitful, virginity became glorious; for the longed-for Incarnation was brought to pass in the noble Virgin. (*Scivias* 1.4.5, p. 95)

Moreover, as the sun pours its light into the moon to enkindle it, so Christ pours his light into the Church; and as the moon then distributes that light to the stars in the firmament, so the Church distributes the light of Christ in the blessed "works of piety" that constitute the work of the Church and her saints (*Scivias* 1.4.11–12, pp. 96–97). This cosmological map sets forth the broad schematic to transform the Virgin's place mediating the Incarnation's sunlight into the world into a pathway for the virgin nuns of Hildegard's monastery to ascend to their places among the heavenly choirs. The Virgin Birth "made virginity fruitful" and thus "glorious"—in the terms of *O splendidissima gemma*, the "primal matter" of creation is recreated and exalted through the Virgin's light-filled body, a virginal body to which Hildegard and her nuns now aspire. Thus far in this essay, we have seen the Virgin's light permeating salvation history, both as the dawn light of the Incarnation and as the glorified, sparkling gem of heaven, presented to us at the close of *Scivias* as a model for what human bodies were always meant to be. But what are the actual steps along that path to virginal glory?

4. The Virgin and the Virtues

The third part of *Scivias* answers this question, as Hildegard constructs a vast "Edifice of Salvation" that both recapitulates the courses of salvation history from the first two parts of the work and also maps out the pathway through the great building towards redemption and sanctification. It again opens with a vision of God enthroned and a retelling of the Fall of Lucifer, setting up a place in heaven to be filled by humankind. The doctrine of "the ancient counsel," i.e., God's eternal will to be incarnate, permeates this vision.[16] Hildegard pleads with the One Enthroned to make that counsel known to her, "how You willed Your Son to become incarnate and become a human being within Time; which You willed before all creation in Your rectitude and the fire of the Dove, the Holy Spirit, so that Your Son might rise from the Virgin in the splendid beauty of the sun [*splendida solis forma*] and be clothed with true humanity" (*Scivias* 3.1, p. 310). In this vision, moreover, she sees God clutching to his breast "what looks like black and filthy mire, as big as a human heart, surrounded with precious stones and pearls" (*Scivias* 3.1.3, p. 311). This mass of muck is fallen humanity, but "[t]hey are surrounded by ornaments," the saints, "martyrs and holy virgins like precious stones (…) so that by them the mire is surpassingly adorned, and the virtues, which so gloriously shine in God, shine also in the human body" (*Scivias* 3.1.4, p. 312). The Father holds them to his breast because "[t]he Son of God went forth from the Father's hear [*de corde Patris exiuit*] and entered into the world" (*Scivias* 3.1.6, p. 313). We see here that the language of the antiphon and responsory to the Virgin at the end of *Scivias* permeates this opening vision of Part Three—the resplendent beauty of the sun, the gemstones of holiness, and the Word from the Father's heart.

The main characters of Part Three, however, are not so much Christ and his Virgin Mother in themselves, as they are the Virtues. They, too, were present in *O splendidissima*

gemma: the pathway by which the *prima materia* reached the heavenly register was laid out by "the Word breathing forth all/the virtues." For Hildegard, the Virtues are manifestations of divine power into the world. They are divine ideas that God shares with humanity, to assist us as we grow into holiness and reach out towards heaven. As we shall see, they are also analogues for the Virgin Mary herself: if she was the eternally predestined vehicle for God's entry into the world, then the Virtues are her allies and her alter egos.

A total of thirty-five personified Virtues populate the Edifice of Salvation in *Scivias*, but we will narrow our look to those that appear in two of the visions in Part Three: The Tower of Anticipation of God's Will (*Scivias* 3.3: Figure 5) and The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity (*Scivias* 3.8: Figure 6). Fassler (2014) has demonstrated that Hildegard drew upon these two groups of Virtues when creating her sung morality play, *Ordo Virtutum*,[17] thus "staging" the play within the "allegorical architecture" of *Scivias*. Indeed, *Ordo Virtutum* is intimately bound up with the treatise (a shortened, generalized version of the play, the *Exhortatio Virtutum*, in fact appears after the fourteen chants devoted to the heavenly choirs in *Scivias* 3.13.9), and was almost certainly intended as a way for Hildegard's nuns to enact through regular performance the virtuous journey to which *Scivias* exhorts them (Fassler 2022). We touched earlier in this essay on one of the other points of contact between the two works: the lament of the fallen soul of "Everyperson" from *Scivias* 1.4 (which provided one of the key connections to *O splendidissima gemma*) also informs the laments of the fallen Soul (Anima) in the play (Fassler 2022, p. 23). These connections strengthen the conclusion that the Virtues were the practical models by which Hildegard's nuns could imitate the splendid light of the Virgin.

Figure 5. *Scivias* 3.5: The Tower of the Anticipation of God's Will. Rüdesheim/Eibingen, Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard, MS 1, fol. 139r. By permission of the nuns of the Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard.

The Tower of Anticipation of God's Will in *Scivias* 3.3 (Figure 5) is in the northeastern quadrant of the Edifice of Salvation. Upon the Tower appear five Virtues (from left to right): Celestial Love (*celestis amor*), Discipline, Modesty, Mercy, and Victory. The vision describes each Virtue's dress and disposition in detail and records a short speech that each one makes. These five Virtues are constitutive of salvation's story, both as a history writ large and as a personal journey for each soul. Their order is progressive: both of those stories begin with desire for salvation (heavenly love), are trained in discipline and modesty, and then brought through mercy to victory. At this stage in the Edifice of Salvation, they precede the Incarnation in terms of the temporal structure of salvation history, and so Hildegard maps their historical journey onto God's relationship with the Hebrews, beginning with the Covenant with Abraham. As Fassler has noted, the Virtues here are thus "anticipatory

by location" (because they originate in the Old Testament) "but revelatory and fulfilling by direction and gaze" (Fassler 2022, p. 169), as each one faces other parts of the Edifice.

Figure 6. *Scivias* 3.8: The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity. Rüdesheim/Eibingen, Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard, MS 1, fol. 178r. By permission of the nuns of the Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard.

The Virtue in this Tower that is most revealing of the Virgin Mary is Mercy (*Misericordia*), the fourth from the left in the illustration. She turns her gaze toward the pillar of the Word of God and holds at her breast a picture of Jesus Christ, because "I [God] put My Son on the breast of Mercy when I sent Him into the womb of the Virgin Mary" (*Scivias* 3.3.8, p. 349). Meanwhile, the banderole behind her declares a verse from the Canticle of Zechariah: "Through the depths of the mercy of our God, in which the Dayspring from on high has visited us" (Luke 1:78). Mercy's speech then echoes the appeal to justice for the powerless and poor from the other Canticle from the first chapter of Luke, the Magnificat of Mary: "I stretch out my hands always to pilgrims, and the needy, and the poor and weak, and those who groan" (*Scivias* 3.3, p. 343).[18] When we turn to Hildegard's elaboration on the figure of Mercy in *Scivias* 3.3.8 (pp. 348–49, in the voice of God), we find once again the sunlight from the music of *Scivias* 3.13.1: "those who disdained God while they were in sin will find Him shining on them like a gentle sunbeam [*radius solis*] when Mercy is

brought to them from Heaven." Mercy, "a fruitful mother of souls saved from perdition," is "hung about with a yellow cloak, for she is surrounded by the shining sun, the sign of My Son, [. . .] lighting up the world by the sanctification of the Church." Here, too, we find the Virgin's *materia*, for "Mercy also appears in womanly form because, when virginal matter [*virginea materia*] was enclosed in feminine chastity, sweetest Mercy arose in the womb of Mary." In this vision, Hildegard's nuns find that in embracing Mercy, they engage in that work of sanctification that leads to Victory, as the Virgin Mary's womb led to victory in Jesus.[19]

The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity (*Scivias* 3.8: Figure 6) is a much more substantial site of contact between the Virgin and the Virtues, and the reason should be obvious from its name. Situated in the southwestern quadrant of the Edifice of Salvation (and thus opposite the Tower of *Scivias* 3.3), this is the place of the Incarnation, where the Virgin's light thus shines out upon the building. With the Tower of the Church (*Scivias* 3.9) appearing alongside it, this is the place where Hildegard's nuns, as members of the Body of Christ, would commit themselves to the work of salvation and sanctification, with the Virtues as their guides. The text and illustration of *Scivias* 3.8 work together to invoke two key Marian images: the Tree of Jesse (mapped onto a ladder that recalls both Jacob's Ladder and the Ladder of Humility in ch. 7 of the Rule of St. Benedict); and the iconographical pose known as the *sedes Sapientiae*, "the Seat of Wisdom" (Fassler 2014, 2022).

Seven major Virtues are arrayed along the outside of the pillar. The first is Humility at the top right, with a golden crown (for she is the Queen of the Virtues); second, Charity (*Caritas*) below her, in blue with a gold stole; third, Fear of the Lord, "non-human in form" and "covered with eyes all over her body;" fourth, Obedience at the bottom right, with silver bindings around her neck, wrists, and ankles. Faith is the fifth virtue, appearing to the left of the pillar near its top, dressed in the same crystalline white highlighted with light blue as Humility and Obedience;[20] sixth is Hope, at the middle left of the pillar, gesturing to the Crucifix that appears before her; and seventh is Chastity, at the left foot of the pillar, the dove of the Holy Spirit over her head and a child—Innocence—in her lap. The lucent figure at the very top of the pillar, meanwhile—depicted in episcopal robes of silver—represents the Grace of God, the divine power that quickens all the other virtues. Indeed, one could say that often, where other theologians would use the term "grace" to describe God's sanctifying power given to humans, Hildegard is wont to use the term "virtue" (Newman 1997, pp. 58–61).

For the power that builds up the faithful in their works of sanctification comes from these virtues. In the illustration for *Scivias* 3.8, four additional, anonymous virtues are shown climbing up and down the steps of the pillar, "for in God's Only-Begotten the lucent virtues [*lucidissimae uirtutes*] descend in His Humanity and ascend in His Divinity." These virtues help the faithful to build the Body of Christ out of the red stones they carry, which "are the winged and shining deeds [*lucida opera*] people do, with [the virtues'] help, to win salvation" (*Scivias* 3.8.13, pp. 435–36). As has long been recognized (e.g., Liebeschütz [1930] 1964, pp. 51–55; Dronke 1991; Fassler 2022, p. 165), this image hearkens back to the second-century *Hermae Pastor* (*Shepherd of Hermas*), a very influential work in the development of Christian visionary allegory, yet also rare to access in the Latin tradition of the twelfth century. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Hildegard knew the work and drew upon its Ninth Similitude, of the tower built of living stones (the Church), carried to it by virginal virtues (Hilgenfeld 1873, pp. 114–60; trans. Lightfoot 1898, pp. 460–81). By incorporating the image into this vision of the Pillar of the Savior's Humanity, Hildegard aligns this construction with the work of the Virgin Mary's body, a gleaming gemstone that releases the light of the Incarnation into the world.

The seven main Virtues are drawn from several sources: first, we have the three theological virtues from 1 Corinthians 13:13: faith, hope, and charity or love (*caritas*); second, we have a core set of virtues for the monastic life, as outlined in the Rule of St. Benedict (RB 1980): humility (the focus of RB ch. 7, which outlines twelve steps for the virtue); fear of the Lord (the first step of humility in RB ch. 7, as well as the seventh gift

of the Holy Spirit); and obedience (the focus of RB ch. 5). Finally, we have chastity, the companion of the virginity that is the particular hallmark of the female religious life of Hildegard and her nuns. Moreover, Hildegard explicitly links these seven Virtues to the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, "for it was by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit that the glorious Virgin conceived the Son of God without sin, sanctified by these holy virtues" (*Scivias* 3.8.14, p. 436). This leads her to consider the canonical list of these seven gifts, from the Vulgate tradition of Isaiah 11:1–3: "And there shall come forth a branch out the root of Jesse; and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of piety; and the spirit of the fear of the Lord shall fill him." Hildegard's lengthy exegesis of these verses (*Scivias* 3.8.15, pp. 436–39) elegantly interweaves the seven gifts with the seven virtues of her vision, and thus squarely situates them within the Scriptural context of the Tree of Jesse.

Hildegard also invokes the image of the Virgin as "the branch from the root of Jesse" in the responsory, *O tu suavissima virga* (discussed above), thus drawing the virtues of *Scivias* 3.8 into the symphonic synthesis at the end of the work. Fassler (2022, pp. 190–96) has elaborated on the iconographical tradition that informs this "Sonic Jesse Tree," especially as it was incorporated into the *Ordo Virtutum*. The imagery of Mary as the branch and her Son as the flower permeates many passages, not only in *Scivias*, but throughout Hildegard's oeuvre; a complete catalogue is beyond the scope of this study. What we will note here is that Jesse Tree imagery appears also in the anthropological vision of *Scivias* 1.4, which we saw earlier was the matrix for the gemstone imagery of Mary's body in the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*. In that vision, the infant is quickened in the mother's womb, "just as the earth opens and brings forth the flowers of its use when the dew falls on it."[21] Thereafter, the soul and its powers (*vires*) "give vitality and viridity to the marrow and veins and members of the whole body, as the tree from its root gives sap and viridity to all the branches" (*Scivias* 1.4.16, pp. 119–20). In the network of imagery that Hildegard creates in *Scivias*, the Virgin Mary's branch for Christ's flower is the model for every human person.

Hildegard's use of another type of Marian iconography—the *sedes Sapientiae*—in the illustration for *Scivias* 3.8 refines this universal anthropology to provide Marian models specifically for religious women. In this tradition, the Virgin is depicted enthroned (and usually crowned), holding in her lap for presentation the Christ-child, Wisdom incarnate, with his hand usually raised in blessing. Two of the Virtues in particular invoke this iconography: the first, Humility, at the top right; and the seventh, Chastity, at the bottom left. Humility appears crowned and holding Christ in her lap; according to the vision text, this is an image of Christ shining brilliantly upon a mirror, indicating that Humility "stands in the heart of the sacred temple in blessed and shining knowledge" (*Scivias* 3.8.18, p. 442)—a description that aligns her especially with the *sedes Sapientiae* tradition. The image of Chastity is even more starkly Marian, because of the Holy Spirit's dove hovering over her head, overshadowing her like it overshadowed the Virgin in the Annunciation (Luke 1:35). Moreover, as Fassler (2022, p. 245) observes, Humility's crown and Chastity's sceptre appear again on the head and in the hand of the Virgin enthroned in heaven in *Scivias* 3.13 (Figure 7).

Humility is the foundational virtue for the monastic life as sketched in the Rule of St. Benedict; in the words of her speech in *Scivias* 3.8.1, "Whoever wishes to imitate me and be my child and embrace me as a mother and carry out my work, let him start at the foundation and gradually mount upward from virtue to virtue." Chastity, meanwhile, is the crown of this sequence of virtues: "I am free and not fettered," she declares, "for I have passed through the pure Fountain Who is the sweet and loving Son of God" (*Scivias* 3.8.7, p. 428). Hildegard expands on this speech later when explaining the meaning of Humility's crystalline tunic: "she is enwrapped in the garment of innocence, which shines in the bright light of the Fountain of living water, the splendid Sun of eternal glory" (*Scivias* 3.8.24, p. 446). This is, of course, the same fountain that leaps from the Father's heart and the same Sun that beams into the Virgin's womb in *O splendidissima gemma*. When

Hildegard incorporates chastity into the sequence of the Holy Spirit's gifts in the Tree of Jesse, she links it to piety, "since this virtue arose in supernal piety" (*Scivias* 3.8.15, p. 439). Invoking the contrast between Eve and Mary, she continues:

> And so, in the branch that came forth from Jesse, the virtues of this Flower put forth buds. The first woman had fled from these virtues by consenting to the counsel she heard from the serpent, and the whole human race fell in her and was cut off from supernal joy and glory; but the blossoming of this branch uplifted the human race in knowledge through piety to the holiness of salvation.

The Pillar of the Savior's Humanity is a tree of virtues along which Hildegard's nuns can climb, ascending the branch of the Virgin Mary's humility and chastity, to escape their fallenness as daughters of Eve and to reach the flower of Christ and his salvation.

Figure 7. *Scivias* 3.13: The Symphony of the Blessed. Rüdesheim/Eibingen, Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard, MS 1, fol. 229r. By permission of the nuns of the Benediktinerinnenabtei St. Hildegard.

5. Conclusions: The Virgin(s) and the Symphony

After interweaving the seven Virtues on the Pillar of the Savior's Humanity with the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit on the Jesse Tree in *Scivias* 3.8.15, Hildegard immediately

turns to a verse from the Song of Songs (2:3) that transforms the virtue of Chastity into the bridal figure of Virginity. This is one of those moments in Hildegard's works where Virginity becomes an all-encompassing figure, connecting the Virgin Mary with the soul of the virgin nun into a single concept:

> Therefore, O Virginity, which by the ardent enkindling produced the greatest fruit, which shone in the star of the sea and fights the savage darts of the Devil and despises all shameful filth, rejoice in celestial harmony and hope for the company of angels. How? The Holy Spirit makes music in the tabernacle of Virginity; for she always thinks of how to embrace Christ with full devotion. (*Scivias* 3.8.16, p. 440)

This music, of both the Virgin's womb and the virgin nuns' daily liturgical service, brings us back to the celestial symphony that closes out *Scivias* 3.13 (Figure 7). As discussed earlier, Fassler (2022) has demonstrated that this vision is organized according to the Matins liturgy for the Feast of All Saints. That liturgy is composed of three subunits called Nocturns, each of which includes four responsories interspersed amongst its readings. The last set of four are proper to All Saints, but the first eight are borrowed from other feasts or the Common of the Saints to create a hierarchy: the Trinity, the Virgin Mary, the angels, John the Baptist, the apostles, the martyrs, the confessors, and virgins. Hildegard follows this same hierarchy, beginning with the Virgin Mary (and with John the Baptist joined by the patriarchs and other prophets) in *Scivias* 3.13.1–7. In the illustration for the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript, you can see each of these seven subjects depicted in one of seven circles.

Missing from the *Scivias* symphony, however, are any pieces devoted to the subject of the first All Saints responsory, the Trinity. Hildegard did indeed compose an antiphon for the Trinity (*Laus Trinitati*), as well as a responsory and a variety of antiphons devoted to individual persons of the Trinity. None of them are included in *Scivias*; but the illustration for the heavenly symphony fills this lacuna. As I have argued (Campbell 2013, 2021), the Rupertsberg manuscript uses a particular set of colors to illustrate the Trinity, based on the vision in *Scivias* 2.2. The background of heaven in the *Scivias* 3.13 image is created from panels of these three Trinitarian colors: gold, silver, and blue. This is Hildegard's beatific vision, suffused with beatific sound and calling her nuns to join with the ranks of all the saints.

Fassler (2022, p. 244) also connects the seven roundels of these heavenly choirs with the six roundels depicting the Genesis creation in *Scivias* 2.1 (Figure 4), arguing that the symphony is "a new creation." The relationship, therefore, between the first roundel (containing the Virgin Mary) and the seventh roundel (holding the order of virgins) can be understood as the arc from the beginning of creation to its ending. Alongside the Virgin's gemstone body, a key image of the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*, is the identification of the Virgin with *prima materia*, primal matter. As Hildegard writes in another of her Marian lyrics, the sequence, *O virga ac diadema*, "O branch, God foresaw your blossoming on the first day of his creation" (Hildegard of Bingen 1998, p. 131). If Mary's virginal blossoming provided the model for original creation and her womb was the matrix for the new creation, then the vowed virginity of Hildegard's nuns, singing in the celestial symphony, blossoms at its culmination.

Hildegard strengthens this parallel in the ecclesiological interpretation of the hexameron found in the second part of her final large work, the *Liber diuinorum operum* (*The Book of Divine Works*: LDO 2.1.17–49: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, pp. 287–347). Although she wrote this commentary almost two decades after *Scivias*, she was likely designing the illustrations for the Rupertsberg *Scivias* manuscript at the same time as she was writing the largest and most comprehensive commentary on Genesis penned by a premodern woman. In the allegorical mode of her interpretation, she "tracks the distinct 'days' of Church history [. . .], from the apostolic ministry of the first and second days to the persecutions of the third, the establishment of sacred and secular authorities in the sun and moon on the fourth day, and the culminating development of monastic orders on the fifth. The creation of humankind on the sixth day recapitulates the Church's 'edificatio,' and the seventh day's

rest spirals back to the fullness of Christ" (Campbell 2019, p. 32). One of the innovations of Hildegard's commentary, when compared to standard models before her like the works of St. Augustine, is that she embraces the seventh day for her own place in the Church, rather than reserving it for the eternal Sabbath at the end of time. Moreover, certain textual echoes bind this commentary more closely to the visions of *Scivias*.

The choir of Virgins is the seventh of the *Scivias* symphony, and their roundel appears in the center of the lower matrix of five choirs in the manuscript illustration. Hildegard's exegesis of Isaiah 11:1–3 (*Scivias* 3.8.15, p. 437) had already linked the gifts of the Holy Spirit upon the Tree of Jesse with the seventh day of creation: "The Holy Spirit is said to have rested on the Flower in a sevenfold manner, as God created all things through His Word in the Holy Spirit and on the seventh day rested from His work." But in the LDO, Hildegard pushes the connection further. When she begins her allegorical interpretation of Genesis, she intentionally paraphrases the first day of physical creation as that of *prima materia*, the same "primal matter" from the antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*, a verbal echo that presages what is to come: the beginning of the Church (her first day) at the moment of Christ's Incarnation, when God sent his Son "into the world through the golden gate of the Virgin, in the cloister of her modesty" (LDO 2.1.18: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 290).

When we reach the seventh day of creation and Hildegard sees the establishment of the Church perfected and shining, the Virgin Mary again appears: "For my Son, who is my seventh work, proceeding from the Virgin's womb through humanity, accomplished all these things with me in the Holy Spirit" (LDO 2.1.48: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 346). We see here how Hildegard allows the cycle of creation, from beginning to perfection, to constantly circle around the Incarnation, with the Virgin's womb as its center-point; as she says elsewhere, "as on the seventh day [God] rested from his every work and then established humankind to take up the work, so too in the Virgin's womb he made his Son to rest, and to him he committed his every work" (LDO 3.4.3: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 398). On the seventh day of the Church's creation, meanwhile, we find that work perfected, as God declares:

> I blessed and hallowed this seventh day with the salvation of souls, as I sent my Son to be incarnate in the Virgin's womb. And I blessed and hallowed it, for in that, my day, I was greatly pleased—that is, in those who, as the blooms of roses and lilies, freed from the yoke of the law and with me as their only inspiration, began freely to constrain themselves. (LDO 2.1.48: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, pp. 345–46)

These "blooms of roses and lilies" are, in fact, the order of virgins, like Hildegard's own monastery. They are the ones who shine in the Church's perfection, the Church's seventh day. The phrase comes from a responsory for the first nocturn of Matins on the Feast of the Assumption, which describes the Virgin Mary as a dove flying over a stream on a spring day, surrounded by the flowers.[22] Hildegard had heard it in a vision before: in *Scivias* 2.5, the voice from heaven uses those same words (*flos rosarum et lilium conuallium*) to describe the radiant figure of Virginity (*Virginitas*) held to the breast of the Church. "Surrounded by the variety of the virtues" (*Scivias* 2.5.6, p. 205), Virginity labors for spiritual perfection with her company, the order of virgins, who are "the noblest perfection of churchly religion" (*Scivias* 2.5.5, p. 204). As she describes the work of these virgins, Hildegard singles out several virtues by name—the very same ones that we saw were Marian analogues in *Scivias* 3.8. These women have "preserved their virginity in radiant humility" and they "grasp the purity of innocence which is adorned with the beautiful splendor of chastity" (*Scivias* 2.5.6–7, p. 205). As a result of this life of virginal virtue, Hildegard sees them standing in this vision "brighter than the sun, all wonderfully adorned with gold and gems." Gleaming now like the Virgin's body in *O splendidissima gemma*, they raise their voices in a new song of praise (*Scivias* 2.5.7, pp. 205–6).

The hallmark of Hildegard's treatment of the feminine figures of salvation history—Eve, Mary, the Church, and virgins as the Church's perfection—is that she can so frequently subsume them into singular symbols of femininity, where all can be simultaneously present.

As Schmidt (1981) has noted, one way of connecting Mary and the Church is through the common concept of *materia*, and in the *Scivias* antiphon, *O splendidissima gemma*, the *prima materia* involves Eve too. This is what makes the Virgin Mary a compelling model for Hildegard's nuns: despite the seemingly vast chasm that separates them as finite individuals from the cosmic figure of the Mother of God, their shared femininity and—more importantly—virginity gives them access to the same cosmic pathway towards glorification. The Virgin's ideal provides guides along that path, in the form of Virtues that Hildegard not only sees in her visions but had her nuns enact in the interconnected settings of the *Scivias* and *Ordo Virtutum*. When they practice those virtues, they open their bodies to the divine light and climb the pillar of the Savior's humanity to ascend into the perfection of the heavenly symphony.

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Notes

1 Several of these points are also addressed in Schmidt (1981) and Clark (2002).

2 English quotations will be adapted from Hildegard of Hildegard of Bingen (1990), with Latin references from Hildegardis Bingensis (1978); in-line references will be given in the form Part.Vision.Chapter followed by page numbers from (1990), e.g., (*Scivias* 1.1.1, pp. 67–68).

3 Wiesbaden, Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek RheinMain 1, which has been missing since 1945; it is preserved in a series of black-and-white photographs from the 1920's and a hand-painted facsimile produced at the Abtei St. Hildegard, Eibingen, in the 1920's and 1930's; images for this article were graciously supplied by the Abtei St. Hildegard from the later color copy.

4 Dendermonde, Sint-Pieters- en Paulusabdi ms 9 (**D**), available online: https://www.idemdatabase.org/items/show/160/ (accessed on 1 January 2023); Wiesbaden, Hochschul- und Landesbibliothek RheinMain 2, aka Riesencodex (**R**), available online: https://hlbrm.digitale-sammlungen.hebis.de/handschriften-hlbrm/content/titleinfo/449618 (accessed on 1 January 2023).

5 Although many of the ideas in this study have percolated in my work for nearly a decade, it has been stimulated in the final analysis by Fassler (2022) and can be seen as a response and complement to it.

6 For a good recent overview, see Miles (2020).

7 Latin text Hildegardis Bingensis (1978, p. 615), adapted following the musical setting in Fassler (2022, p. 106); the translation, as well as much of the following analysis, is adapted from my own for the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies: http://www.hildegard-society.org/2014/09/o-splendidissima-gemma-antiphon.html (accessed on 28 February 2023).

8 I have argued (Campbell 2013, 2021) that the image of the Trinity for *Scivias* 2.2 provided the iconographical key of gold, silver, and blue for appearances of the Trinity and its persons throughout the rest of the manuscript, with evidence that the Father is represented in gold and the Holy Spirit in silver; however, there is equally compelling evidence for the reverse, with the Father as silver and the Holy Spirit as gold—see Salvadori (2019) and Fassler (2022, pp. 93–94).

9 Hildegard von Bingen (2010, p. 229): "quoniam natura eorundem pretiosorum lapidum queque honesta et utilia querit, et prava et mala homini respuit, quemadmodum virtutes vitia abiciunt, et ut vitia cum virtutibus operari non possunt."

10 See Flynn (2007) for a concise summary of Hildegard's views on this.

11 The musical notation survives in D, fol. 154r-v; and R, fol. 466vb. Transcriptions of the piece can be found in Fassler (2022, p. 109) and by Beverly R. Lomer for the International Society of Hildegard von Bingen Studies: http://www.hildegard-society.org/2014/09/o-splendidissima-gemma-antiphon.html (accessed on 28 February 2023).

12 Latin text from Hildegardis Bingensis (1978, p. 615), adapted according to musical phrasing, with markings added for the *repetendum* (refrain) and verse. The musical versions of this responsory in the manuscripts (D, fol. 156v; R, fol. 468r) add in a setting of the doxology; the refrain would have been repeated after the verse, then the doxology, and then a final repetition of the refrain. The translation is adapted from my own at http://www.hildegard-society.org/2014/10/o-tu-suavissima-virga-responsory.html (accessed on 28 February 2023).

[13] Words set in italics represent Hildegard's initial description of the vision, which is later repeated, one section at a time, with explication.

[14] CAO 3137; Available online: http://cantusindex.org/id/003137 (accessed on 31 January 2023).

[15] CAO 4425; Available online: http://cantusindex.org/id/004425 (accessed on 31 January 2023).

[16] For this same idea in the thought of Duns Scotus, see the essay of Kunka (2022) elsewhere in this special issue of *Religions*.

[17] For the text and an English translation of the *Ordo Virtutum*, see Dronke (1994, pp. 147–84).

[18] The response of the chorus of Virtues to Mercy in the *Ordo Virtutum* reinforces this echo of the Magnificat: "O laudabilis mater peregrinorum, tu semper erigis illos, atque ungis pauperes et debiles." ("Matchless mother of exiles, you are always raising them up and anointing the poor and the weak.") (Dronke 1994, pp. 170–71).

[19] Intriguingly, the figure of Victory here, though grammatically feminine in the text, is described as dressed in armor, and the illustration of her arms utterly obscures any feminine features. However, as Fassler has shown (2014 and 2022), when Hildegard transfers this figure into her play, *Ordo Virtutum*, she uses melodic echoes of the Marian antiphon, *Ave regina caelorum*, to align Victory with the Virgin. Such "gender bending" was, in fact, a fairly common feature of twelfth-century women's spirituality—see Newman (1995).

[20] Saurma-Jeltsch (1998, p. 174) notes that the illustration omits the red chain around Faith's neck that is mentioned in the text (*Scivias* 3.8.22, p. 445), while her hand gesture (her left index finger extended) references her confession that "God is One" (*Scivias* 3.8.5, p. 427).

[21] Although the image of the dew upon the flower is absent from the Marian lyrics in *Scivias*, it is a common trope in Hildegard's vocabulary, both in her music (e.g., verse 6 of the hymn *Ave generosa*: Hildegard of Bingen 1998, p. 122) and in her other works (e.g., *LDO* 3.2.13: Hildegard of Bingen 2018, p. 378).

[22] *Vidi speciosam sicut columbam ascendentem*, CAO 7878; Available online: http://cantusindex.org/id/007878 (accessed on 31 January 2023).

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Article

Hortus Conclusus—A Mariological Metaphor in Some Renaissance Paintings of the Annunciation in the Light of Medieval Liturgical Hymns

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Abstract: This article seeks to shed light on the doctrinal meanings of the closed garden included in some Renaissance paintings of the Annunciation. To justify the iconographic interpretations that we will give of these paintings, we will base them on the analysis of many medieval liturgical hymns that poetically designate the Virgin Mary through the metaphorical expression *hortus conclusus* (closed garden) with which the Husband or Bridegroom requisites the Wife or Bride in the *Song of Songs*. We will divide our article into two parts as a strategy for analysis. First, we will analyze an extensive series of fragments of liturgical hymns that repeatedly praise Mary through this biblical metaphor. In the second part, we will examine some artistic representations of the Annunciation that, in the Italian Renaissance, depict a closed garden in the scene. From this double comparative analysis, textual and iconic, we will conclude that, in direct and essential correlation, those hymnic texts and those paintings clearly illustrate that the *hortus conclusus* is an eloquent symbol of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity, as well as the excellence and fullness of her supernatural virtues and privileges.

Keywords: Annunciation; Virgin Mary; divine motherhood; perpetual virginity; Mariology; liturgical hymns; Renaissance art

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1. Introduction

To justify various crucial Mariological dogmas, the Church frequently resorted to interpreting some Old Testament texts as explicit prophetic references to the Virgin Mary. This is especially evident in the dogmas of her virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity, which several Old Testament passages foretell clearly, according to the millenary, consistent interpretive tradition of the Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches. Among those precursors biblical texts, we are interested in highlighting in this article the quote from the *Song of Songs*, in which the Bridegroom or Husband (*Sponsus*) praises the Bride or Wife (*Sponsa*) in these lyrical terms: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus.* (Song 4, 12). "A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; A spring shut up, a fountain sealed."[1]

We have explained in another article (Salvador-González 2023) the interpretations given to this passage of the *Song of Songs* by some Church Fathers and medieval theologians, such as Proclus of Constantinople,[2] Hesychius of Jerusalem,[3] John of Damascus,[4] Ambrose of Milan,[5] Jerome of Strido,[6] Just of Urgell,[7] Isidore of Sevilla,[8] Ildephonse of Toledo,[9] Paschase Radbert,[10] Peter Damian,[11] Hugh of Saint Victor,[12] Honorius of Autun,[13] Bernard of Clairvaux,[14] Peter of Blois,[15] and Bonaventure of Bagnoregio.[16]

Now, based on that millenary, coherent patristic, and theological tradition, numerous medieval writers composed countless antiphons, chants, and liturgical hymns in Latin using with poetic variations the metaphor *hortus conclusus*, and other expressions alluding to flowering and enclosure to extol Mary's perpetual virginity and her virginal divine motherhood.

In this order of ideas, in the second section of this article, we will present an abundant series of fragments of medieval liturgical hymns that refer to the perpetual Virgin Mary through the *hortus conclusus* metaphor or other similar poetic expressions. We will give the pieces of hymns in chronological order, grouping them by centuries, to better perceive the eventual evolution of the conceptual variants given by hymnographers to these metaphorical proclamations.

Similarly, in the third section, we will analyze the iconography of ten paintings of the Annunciation depicted by some Italian Renaissance artists that in various ways illustrate the Mariological symbol *hortus conclusus*.

This double analysis of hymnic texts and visual images will allow us to infer to what extent we could justify the eventual direct relationship between those hymns and those images.

2. The *Hortus Conclusus* in the Medieval Liturgical Hymnography

We have found many hymns and liturgical chants that developed and poetically strengthened various tropes derived from the Biblical figure *hortus conclusus* and other analogous metaphorical expressions throughout the Middle Ages. Now, to better appreciate the eventual evolution in medieval hymnographers' treatment of these metaphors, we will present these fragments of hymns in chronological order, grouping them by centuries.

Hymns from the 11th–12th century

From an approximate date between the 11th and 12th centuries, we have only found the *Hymnus 98. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem*, which addresses Mary requesting her protection in the following terms:

Enclosed, irrigated garden, abundant in crops,

Pure, sealed source that floods the river

Source that springs, inexhaustible, that exudes goodness,

I ask you, merciful Virgin, grant me your protection.[17]

12th-century hymns

From the 12th century, we have documented these two hymns:

The *Hymnus 326. De conceptione sanctae Mariae virginis* pleads for the protection of the mother of God with these verses:

Oh, Mary, enclosed garden,

port of the world that is shipwrecked,

appease us [before] who made you

his chosen mother.[18]

The *Hymnus 516. De sancta Maria* praises the Virgin with these lyrical concepts:

Hail, blooming garden of the Sun,

Star of the sea, safe harbor,

The best draught always.[19]

13th-century hymns

From the 13th century, we have found these three hymns:

The *Hymnus 260. De sancta Maria* celebrates the perpetual virginity of the mother of God the Son with these short verses:

Garden blooming by the blow of the south wind,

Closed door before and after [delivery],

Road impassable for men.[20]

A few stanzas later, the *Hymnus 260* pleads for the saving help of the Virgin with these warm statements:

Star of the sea, calm the sea,
So that the storm does not envelop us
nor the wild storm,
but you lift us up
to the heavenly palace
Our consolation,
Oh, merciful Queen of heaven.[21]

The *Hymnus 524. Prosa de beata Virgine* celebrates the perpetual virginity of Mary in these rhetorical figures:

Closed door, fountain of the gardens,
compartment that keeps ointments,
perfume container.[22]

The *Hymnus 136. De Beata Maria Virgine* extols the perpetual virginity of the mother of God with these lyrical metaphors:

1a. Hail mother of the Lord
double-scented flower,
single mother virgin
1b. Sealed fountain of grace,
garden of modesty,
You are designated as a closed door.[23]

Hymns of the 13th–15th centuries

From some imprecise date between the 13th and 15th centuries, we have found these two hymns alluding to the subject under study:

The *Hymnus 49* greets the virginal mother of God, helper of Humanity, in the following way:

Oh saving
port of the poor
flourishing
And closed garden,
The sun was born from you
You give birth to God as a virgin.[24]

The *Hymnus 186* expresses several concepts relatively similar to those of the preceding *Hymn 49*, singing the universal protection of the mother of the Savior with this outstanding stanza:

Mary, flower of wonderful
Beauty,
And tower of the fortress
Of the prisoners,
Garden of delights,
Harbor for the shipwrecked,
Through you the supreme Son was born.[25]

14th-century hymns

From the 14th century, we have documented these fourteen hymns:

The *Hymnus 593. Ad eandem [beatam Virginem Mariam]* greets the mother of the Redeemer with these eloquent analogies:

Hail, glorious
well of living waters,
graceful light,
fountain of delights,
Virgin artery of forgiveness,
seal of virginity,
Hope of our conscience,
Mother of the Saviour.[26]

The *Hymnus 472. Ad nonam* qualifies the Virgin Mary with these poetic figures:

Closed and pleasant garden,
Always full of all the flowers,
To whom singularly the south wind
Gently breathed.[27]

The *Hymnus 541. De sancta Maria* greets the perpetually virgin Queen of Heaven through these warm compliments:

Illustrious advocate,
Garden of the Trinity,
Empress of Heaven,
temple of deity,
shining sky star
With great clarity,
Please be for me, Madam.[28]

The *Hymnus 548. Ad vesperas. Hymnus* exalts the virginal mother of God, whose protection it pleads in every trial, with these moving verses:

Wife, sister, dowry, and daughter
of the supreme Creator,
who begets the Father, born of her offspring,
the first among the virgins,
blooming garden, source of sweetness,
great hope of the world,
hear the cry of your children,
fountain of mercy
consoling the orphans,
grant us the gifts of grace
and add us to the chorus
of the heavenly host.[29]

The *Hymnus 507. Oratio, quae dicitur crinale beatae Mariae virginis* praises the ever-virgin Mary, begging for her saving help, with this vibrant stanza:

Oh, Mary, closed door,
Enclosed garden, comfort us
You, who are the first of the virgins,
born of a line of kings,

Take us to Paradise.[30]

In the long *Hymnus 5. Hortulus Beatae Virginis Mariae*, entirely devoted to the metaphor *hortus conclusus*, its author Konrads von Haimburg (Conradus Gemnicensis) celebrates Mary's perpetual virginity and her divine virginal motherhood with these ingenious stanzas:

1. Oh, Mary, Paradise,
Garden of joy,
Full of all the goods,
An undivided source,
And a quadruple river irrigates you
With the gifts of grace.
[. . .]
4. You are the closed garden
that the Supreme architect of the universe,
planted with flowers.
This favorite [Son] of yours,
Who has his head covered in dew,
Is not excluded in any way.[31]

In a new stanza, the hymnographer Konrads von Haimburg assumes the role of Christ to address the Virgin with these poetic expressions:

7. Entering you, who were dedicated
For me as a virgin, daughter.
My sister, wife,
I will pick the lilies
hidden in your garden
Delicate with the breath of the south wind.[32]

Finally, in a new stanza, Konrads von Haimburg insists on similar tropes, stating:

8. The garden of your chest
Blown by the south wind of the [Holy] Spirit
Will sprout with flowers.
God, hidden and veiled
With the veil of your body,
Will germinate in you.[33]

The *Hymnus 53. De conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis* sings to the ever-virgin Mary, mother of the Saviour, with these verses:

Sealed fountain, enclosed garden,
An indication of this is the fact that
the present birth of Mary
is the destruction of death,
which [Mary], being the port of salvation,
starts life.[34]

The *Hymnus 12. De conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, in *Pars 3. Nocturne. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae*, addresses the mother of God as follows:

This is that sealed fountain,
The closed garden, breathed

From Heaven by the breath of the south wind,

With whose covering shadow she conceived.[35]

The *Hymnus 59. In Annunciatione Beatae Mariae Virginis* glorifies the virginal mother of the divine Redeemer with these epithets:

4a. Rejoice, earth, that through the dew

You conceived the Savior

At the same time with joy.

4b. Fountain of the gardens, enclosed garden,

Distilling honey, port of life,

Open Heaven's gate.[36]

The *Hymnus 83. De beata Maria Virgine* greets the Queen of Heaven with this stanza:

You are the sun

Star of the sea,

Enclosed garden,

Harbor of life,

Virgin Mary.[37]

The *Hymnus 58. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis* glorifies the mother of God with these lyrical effusions:

The name of the mother is a star of light

Or an alabaster jar for scents

Very soft for the sense,

The body of God, the castle of the Word

The closed garden, the rake of the Father

That produces optimal fruit.[38]

The *Hymnus 90. Jubilus de singulis membris Beatae Mariae Virginis* extols the power of help and protection of the ever-virgin Mary, by expressing:

You are the star of the sea

healthy medicine

Of bodies and hearts,

You are the sealed source, the closed garden,

The path of peace, the port of life,

The refuge of the poor.[39]

Probably from the 14th century is also the *Hymnus 531. Alia sequentia*, which offers these brilliant lines about the virginal mother of God:

Blooming garden, pleasant to the sick,

sealed source of purity,

That gives the currents of grace.

Throne of the true Solomon,

To whom the King of glory

Adorned with the illustrious gifts of heaven.[40]

15th-century hymns

We have documented these ten hymns from the 15th century on the subject under analysis.

The *Hymnus 600. Laudes Mariae* repeatedly praises the virtues and supernatural attributes of the ever-virgin Mary with these splendid rhetorical figures:

Queen of mercy,
Called Mary,
designated in antiquity
With various modes:
You are rod, you stem,
you sealed virgin,
You bed, you bedchamber,
You gifted spouse.[41]

Then this *Hymn 600* goes on to express with even greater brilliance this splendid string of poetic tropes:

You [are] temple, you chamber,
you closed door
You ship, you anchor
you called star
You sun, moon, balm,
armed army,
you shining dawn,
You proven gem.
You fountain, garden, plantain,
raised cedar.
You palm, you olive tree,
planted cypress,
most chosen myrrh,
burning bush;
You glass window
irradiated by the sun.[42]

The *Hymnus. 515. De sancta Maria* sings the perpetual virginity and the divine virginal motherhood of Mary with these brief but dense verses:

You are the door that became accessible only to the Lord,
the garden in which the divinity was hidden,
the star, which brought the Sun into the world.[43]

The *Hymnus 21. Historia de Domina in sabbato. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae* eulogizes the sublime perpetual virginity of the mother of God with these illustrative rhymes:

You are the garden of aromas,
What delights the beloved,
The sweet source of charismas
That sweetens affection.
You are the enclosed garden
Blossomed by the breath of the south wind,
The placid sealed fountain,
The port in storms.[44]

The *Hymnus 24. Centinomium Beatae Virginis. Secunda Pars. Capitulum quartum* sings the perpetual virginity of Mary with these concepts:

As [Solomon in *Song of Songs*] himself said,
You are the enclosed garden
that germinates various
herb species,
with which a beautiful matter
is done,
by which the flood of the mind
Is repelled.[45]

The *Hymnus 38. Abecedarius XIII* praises the ever-virgin Mary with these eloquent words:

You are the flowery garden
that produces delights,
and shines with the various
flowers of virtues.[46]

Several stanzas later, it follows:

You are designated as the garden
ventilated by grace,
that provides the wonderful fruit of heaven,
please give us the remedy
to the wretched,
and to the defeated
in the darkness of purgatory.[47]

The *Hymnus 50. Rosarium* exalts the virginal mother of God with this stanza:

Oh Mary, closed garden
And little casket (?) from the garden,
From which a flower [Christ] grew for us,
whom you cared for diligently,
And who, when he was tormented on the cross,
Absolved all wrongdoing.[48]

The *Hymnus 14. In Nativitate Domini Nostri* sings of the virginal mother of God by these poetic words:

Seed of Zion, root of David,
Enclosed garden, which he entered
The heavenly splendor of the Father.[49]

The *Hymnus 100. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem* praises the ever-virgin Mary with these idyllic analogies:

Pure sealed source,
Enclosed and fenced garden,
Full of sacred fruit
And fertilized with perfumes.[50]

Finally, the *Hymnus 113. De Beata Maria Virgine* sings to the always virginal mother of God and helper of humanity with these lyrical metaphorical figures:

Hail, venerable
mother of mercy,
admirable Mary

form of holiness,
incomparable flower,
virginity garden,
ineffable splendor,
Temple of the deity.[51]

As a summary

From what we have been able to see in this second section, all the medieval liturgical hymns we have brought here focus on designating the Virgin Mary through the well-known metaphors "closed garden" and "sealed fountain" (*hortus conclusus*, *fons signatus*), with which the Bridegroom praises the Bride in *Song of Songs*. Now, although the various hymns given assume these two biblical metaphors with different approaches and expressive modes, all unanimously agree in interpreting both metaphorical expressions as clear references to Mary in two of her exclusive privileges: her virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity (*virgo ante partum*, *virgo in partu*, *virgo post partum*: virgin before childbirth, virgin in childbirth, virgin after childbirth).

On the other hand, from the comparative analysis of the verses and stanzas presented here, one can deduce that many of these hymns relate the concepts *hortus conclusus* and *fons signatus* to the eastern *porta clausa* (closed door) of Jerusalem temple foretold by the prophet Ezekiel (Ez 44:1–4) during the exile of the Jews in Babylon. Such relationship is wholly coherent since, as we have shown in other works (Salvador-González 2020b, 2021d, 2021e), this Ezekiel's *porta clausa* is also an eloquent metaphor of the perpetual virginity and virginal divine motherhood of Mary in the Christian exegetical tradition.

In addition, many hymns analyzed here highlight Mary's privilege as virginal mother of God when they state that she is the fertile "closed garden" that, irrigated by heavenly dew and receiving the breath of the south wind (that is, when fertilized by the Holy Spirit), produces an admirable heavenly fruit (sometimes, it also says a flower), which is Christ, the Savior. For this reason, some hymns say that Mary is the "closed garden" in which the deity was hidden, or they designate her as the "garden of the Trinity" and the "temple of the deity".

In a similar way, many fragments of the hymns exposed here associate the closed garden with the exclusive virtues of Mary: The Virgin is the flowery or flourishing *hortus conclusus* that, like an exuberant garden of delights, produces, preserves, and is filled with the flowers and perfumes of the Virgin's virtues, especially her purity, her charity, her goodness, her sweetness, and her mercy.

As if that were not enough, several of these liturgical hymns take advantage of the homophony between the words *hortus* (garden, orchard) and *portus* (port, harbor), to highlight the mercy, the help, the protection, and the consolation that Mary grants to human beings (navigators and shipwrecked), thanks to her sublime privilege of being the Mediatrix, Helper and Co-redemptrix of Humankind.

3. An Iconographic Analysis of Some Renaissance Paintings of the Annunciation with a "Closed Garden"

We will now analyze chronologically ten representations of the Annunciation painted by some Italian artists of the 14th and 15th centuries that include an enclosed "garden" in their scene. It is convenient to specify that the iconographic motif of the *hortus conclusus* is not limited to the images of the Annunciation but also extends to other Marian representations, among them, the iconographic type of *The Virgin of Humility*. On the other hand, we have chosen ten significant representations of *The Annunciation* of the Italian Renaissance to better focus the research on a relatively homogeneous country and era. However, we do not mean by this that these ten paintings we have chosen are the only ones–and not necessarily the most important ones–on the subject; considering that, together with those from Italy, we could have studied other *Annunciations* painted by artists from Flanders, France, Spain

or Germany. Even without leaving Italy, we could have analyzed other equally relevant *Annunciations,* such as the one already mentioned by Fra Angelico in the altarpiece of San Giovanni Valdarno, c. 1430–1432, that of Benedetto Bonfigli (c. 1445) from the Thyssen Bornemisza Museum in Madrid, or two others by Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation with Two Donors*, 1450, from the Galleria d'Arte Antica in Rome, and *The Annunciation with Two Angels*, 1450, from the Church of San Lorenzo in Florence.

Fra Angelico (c. 1396–1455) painted six different versions of the Annunciation: the first three on altarpieces (today preserved in museums in Madrid, San Giovanni Valdarno, and Cortona), two more as fresco murals in the Convento di San Marco in Florence–we will soon analyze the most important of them–and one more on a small table that is one of the many scenes that make up the *Armadio degli Argenti*, which we will also analyze later.

From the outset, it is interesting to note that, in almost all these representations of the Annunciation, Fra Angelico brought to light, with greater or lesser emphasis, the theme of the *hortus conclusus*. The only exception is the small fresco mural in the Convento di San Marco because the painter staged the episode in a bare, cramped convent cell. In turn, in his *Annunciation* of the altarpiece in the Prado Museum in Madrid, the artist, despite having included in the composition a flowery garden through which Adam and Eve wander, leaves in suspense the enclosure of the *hortus conclusus*; however, this could be subtly suggested by the thick forest that closes the garden at the bottom of the scene.

The Annunciation from the Museo Diocesano di Cortona, c. 1433 (Figure 1) is the third representation of this Marian episode that Fra Angelico shaped as an altarpiece, after the first, preserved in the Prado Museum, c. 1426, and the second, housed in the Museum of Santa Maria delle Grazie Basilica in San Giovanni Valdarno, c. 1430–1432. In this third version of Cortona, the painter makes a narrative and compositional approach quite like the two previous versions of Madrid and Valdarno, with more remarkable similarities to the latter. In fact, after changing the vanishing point in a linear perspective, the Cortona's *Annunciation* resembles Valdarno's in these four elements: the representation of the house like a loggia open towards the flowery garden and covered by a flat roof; a similar bust of the prophet Isaiah in the tondo over the central column; the resplendent dove of the Holy Spirit flying over the head of the Virgin, without the usual ray of light descending from above; an analogous scene of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden in the upper left corner of the composition, to illustrate the antitheses between Eve and Mary, and between Adam and Christ, who is being conceived in Mary's womb at the final moment of the Annunciation.

Figure 1. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, c. 1433. Museo Diocesano di Cortona.

However, the most relevant detail for our interests is the wooden fence that, although small (almost imperceptible), closes the garden in the median plane, to signify the Mariological metaphor *hortus conclusus*. The cultured Dominican friar Fra Angelico put up this fence enclosing the garden to signify the dogmas of the divine virginal motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity, so unanimously proclaimed by some theologians and composers of medieval liturgical hymns, many of whose stanzas we exposed in the second section.

To better manifest the mystery of the supernatural human conception/incarnation of God the Son in the virginal womb of Mary, Fra Angelico has made the dialogue between the two protagonists visible through several inscriptions in gold letters that flow from their mouths. Gabriel's speech appears in two separate lines: the upper line, curving upwards, expresses *Sp[iritu]s S[anctus] sup[er]ve[n]iet i[n] te*; the lower line, descending rectilinearly, enuncia *virt[us] Alti[s]si[mi] obu[m]brabit tibi*. Mary's response, *Ecce ancilla Do[mi]n[i fiat mihi secundum] v[er] bu[m] tuum*, appears in the middle line with its letters inverted from bottom to top: with this rather naive reversal of the statement of Mary, Fra Angelico intends to make the ignorant faithful understand that God can read it from the heavenly heights.

In the large fresco of *The Annunciation*, c. 1440–1450, painted in the first-floor corridor of the Convent of San Marco in Florence (Figure 2), Fra Angelico re-enacts the Marian episode in a house shaped like a vaulted loggia. Inside this classical setting, Gabriel and Mary dialogue with reverent attitudes: the angel respectfully announces the heavenly message to the Virgin; she humbly accepts the divine design like the submissive "slave of the Lord." Surprisingly Fra Angelico does not incorporate any symbolic feature of the godhead in this fresco, not including either the (more or less aniconic) figure of God the Father, the beam of light (God the Son), or the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 2. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, c. 1440–1450. Convento di San Marco, Florence.

However, in front of his other *Annunciations*, Fra Angelico depicts in this fresco with a strong emphasis the wooden fence that encloses the flowery garden of the Marian abode. In that way, this erudite Dominican friar wants to highlight the profound Mariological meanings of the *hortus conclusus*, according to the firmly established theological tradition.

Therefore, it is outstanding that the commentators we know of this work (Pope-Hennessy 1952; Argan 1955; Berti 1966; Baldini 1970; Bonsanti 1984; Guillaud and Guillaud 1986; Hood 1993; Bartz 1998, 50; Zuccari et al. 2009) leave unexplained with patristic and theological arguments the Mariological meanings of this *hortus conclusus*, proclaimed by countless medieval liturgical hymns.

In *The Annunciation*, c. 1451–1453, which is one of the scenes that decorate the *Armadio degli Argenti* in the Museo del Convento di San Marco in Florence (Figure 3), Fra Angelico sets the composition according to a rigid monoaxial symmetry, in which characters, architectural elements and components of the natural landscape are perfectly balanced.

In this geometric setting, the angel Gabriel, with his right knee on the ground and his left index finger pointing heavenward to indicate the celestial origin of his message, communicates the divine plan to the humbly kneeling Mary. This is specified in the message *Ecce concipies et paries filium, et vocabis nomen eius Iesus* (Lk 1:31) ("Behold, you will conceive and give birth to a son whom you will name Jesus"), inscribed in a band at the bottom of the painting. To highlight the prophetic background of this announcement by Gabriel, the artist places the prophecy of Isaias on the upper edge of the painting: *Ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium, et vocabit nomen eius Emmanuel* (Is 7:14) ("Behold, a virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him Emmanuel.")

It is interesting to note that, right on the axis of the compositional symmetry, the painter reveals, through the doorless entrance, a garden whose enclosing wall appears in the background. Once again, the erudite Dominican painter Fra Angelico highlights this *hortus conclusus* to illustrate that in the event of the Annunciation, two fundamental Mariological dogmas are condensed: Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity.

Figure 3. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation*, c. 1451–1453. A scene from the *Armadio degli Argenti*, Museo Convento di San Marco, Florence.

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1469) painted this *Annunciazione delle Murate*, 1443, from the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (Figure 4) for the convent of the *suore murate* (enclosed nuns) in Florence. The artist has represented here Mary's humble house in Nazareth as a splendid palace to symbolize the particular Mariological and Christological meanings we have highlighted in other articles (Salvador-González 2021a, 2021b). Escorted by angels in the upper left corner, God the Father sends towards the Virgin the fertilizing ray of light (symbol of God the Son), in whose wake the Holy Spirit's dove flies. In the middle of the room, the archangel, holding a lily stalk in his left hand, kneels reverently before Mary, while a second angel stands with another lily stalk on the door lintel on the left side. The standing Mary listens to the celestial announcement, humbly showing her submission like the "slave of the Lord" by lowering her head and putting her right hand on her breast.

Figure 4. Fra Filippo Lippi, *L'Annunciazione delle Murate*, 1443. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

It is relevant to note that Lippi wants to highlight in this painting the double enclosure of the garden (*hortus conclusus*), perceivable through the three arches: the first enclosure is a low white wall in the mid-ground; the second one, more strong and high, is the heavy wall stretching out on both sides in the background, with a wide door under a triangular pediment.

Megan Holmes (1999, pp. 239–40) has rightly suggested that both walls of the garden may allude to the *suore murate* (enclosed nuns) for whom the painting was intended. Nonetheless, it seems clear that the cultured Carmelite painter who was Fra Filippo Lippi decided to make visible with both closing walls of this garden the Mariological symbolisms we have explained following the long-lasting doctrinal tradition embodied in the numerous medieval liturgical hymns we have exposed.

Therefore, it is pretty disappointing that most commentators on this outstanding painting by Lippi (Marchini 1979; Ruda 1993; Christiansen 2005; Fossi and Pinci 2011) have forgotten to mention the *hortus conclusus*, or, if mentioned, to justify documentarily its deep dogmatic meanings. Instead, in her well-documented monograph on Fra Filippo Lippi, Megan Holmes (1999, pp. 239–40) is, as far as we know, the only one who, when

commenting on this painting, alludes to the Marian symbolism of the *hortus conclusus*, although without justifying it through primary sources.

Domenico Veneziano (1410–1461) framed this *Annunciation*, c. 1445, from the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK (Figure 5), with a relatively symmetrical composition (with a marked offset to the left), which is quite reminiscent of the compositional approach given by Fra Angelico in the just analyzed panel of the *Armadio degli Argenti*. Although housed today in an English museum in Cambridge, this small painting by Domenico Veneziano is a scene from the predella of the famous *Pala di Santa Lucia de' Magnoli* (also called *Sacra conversazione coi santi Francesco, Giovanni Battista, Zanobi e Lucia*), c. 1445, preserved today in the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence. In this small panel at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Domenico Veneziano—as did Fra Angelico in the panel just analyzed—stages the episode in a sizeable porticoed patio. Kneeling on the ground with a lily stem in his left hand, the archangel points his right index finger up to indicate the heavenly origin of the message he is addressing to Mary. Standing on the right side of the painting, she shows her obedience to God's will, bowing her head and crossing her hands on her chest.

Figure 5. Domenico Veneziano, *The Annunciation* (predella of the *Pala di Santa Lucia de' Magnoli)*, c. 1445. The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, UK.

Even if avoiding the physical or symbolic representation of the godhead—God the Father, God the Son (the ray of light), and the Holy Spirit (the dove) are absent in this panel—Veneziano highlighted the dogmatic meanings of the biblical metaphor *hortus conclusus*. That is why he places in prominent centrality, at the back of the scene, a wooden door, with a heavy security bar—an explicit reference to Ezekiel's *porta clausa*, whose Mariological and Christological meanings we have explained in other articles (Salvador-González 2021e, 2021d, 2020b)—that closes the flowery garden in the central corridor.

Furthermore, Benozzo Gozzoli (1420–1497), in *The Annunciation* that is part of the predella of the famous altarpiece *La Madonna della Cintola*, c. 1445, from the Vatican Pinacoteca (Figure 6), reflects the same dogmatic meanings of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity symbolized by the metaphor *hortus conclusus*. For this reason, in the foreseeable context of the dialogue between the two protagonists of the episode, the painter places the Virgin in the portico of a symbolic palace, while the angel Gabriel is in the nearby garden. It is important to emphasize here that this garden is enclosed (not to say walled) by a high marble wall, which shows the enclosure and impassability of this symbolic Marian garden.

Figure 6. Benozzo Gozzoli, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445. A scene of the predella of the *Madonna della Cintola altarpiece.* Pinacoteca Vaticana.

Fra Filippo Lippi poses *The Annunciation* (*L'Annunciazione Doria*), c. 1445–1450, from the Galleria Doria-Pamphilj in Rome (Figure 7), with some compositional novelties: for example, the inversion of the position of the two protagonists, with Gabriel on the right side and Mary on the left, the double stem of lilies, one carried by the angel, the second in a vase on the floor. While Gabriel, beginning to kneel before the Virgin, greets her reverently, she turns her head toward the angel, raising her open right hand in a gesture of unconditional obedience to the will of the Most High. Behind Mary's back, her impollute marriage bed stands out, a bed whose Mariological and Christological meanings we have shed light on in other articles (Salvador-González 2021c, 2020a, 2019).

Figure 7. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation* (*L'Annunciazione Doria*), c. 1445–50, Galleria Doria-Pamphilj, Rome.

However, the most interesting for our purposes is the exuberant enclosed garden seen through the opening in the center of the painting. Once again, the cultured Carmelite friar that was Fra Filippo Lippi visualized through the symbol of this enclosed garden the dogmatic meanings of the divine virginal motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity, and even her sublime virtues and supernatural privileges, on which many of the liturgical hymns analyzed here insist.

Zanobi Strozzi (c. 1412–1468) stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1453, from the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Figure 8) on the outside of a building, whose "courtyard" is enclosed by a high wall. Still descending from heaven with his colorful wings outstretched and

almost about to touch the ground with his feet surrounded by clouds, Gabriel blesses the Virgin while carrying a lily stem in his left hand. Seated under a baldachin-balcony, Mary expresses her obedience to God's design by the gesture of crossing her hands on her chest. The painter depicts the presence of the godhead through the fertilizing beam of light (symbol of God the Son) and the dove of the Holy Spirit.

Figure 8. Zanobi Strozzi, *The Annunciation*, c. 1453, The Philadelphia Museum of Art, PA.

It suits our purposes to highlight in this painting the high wall that closes off the vast courtyard (an analogy of "garden"). It sounds evident that, through this high wall, Strozzi seeks to communicate the idea of the *hortus conclusus*, as a symbol of Mary's virginal divine motherhood, her perpetual virginity, and the fullness of her sublime virtues and privileges, as the medieval liturgical hymns celebrate.

Alessio Baldovinetti (1427–1499) stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1457, from the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Figure 9) in the vaulted portico of a Renaissance palace, to whose dogmatic meanings we have already drawn attention. With his arms crossed on his chest, the angel Gabriel begins to kneel before the Virgin, who stands up after rising from her seat due to the unexpected arrival of the heavenly messenger. She expresses her unconditional acceptance of the divine will with the gesture of raising her right hand and humbly lowering her head and eyes. Apart from the foreseeable compositional and narrative details in this Marian scene, it is interesting to highlight the high marble wall that closes the garden surrounding the palace. It seems evident that the intellectual author of this painting wants to convey the Mariological symbolism of this *hortus conclusus*, with the multiple doctrinal projections that medieval liturgical hymns gave to this eloquent metaphor.

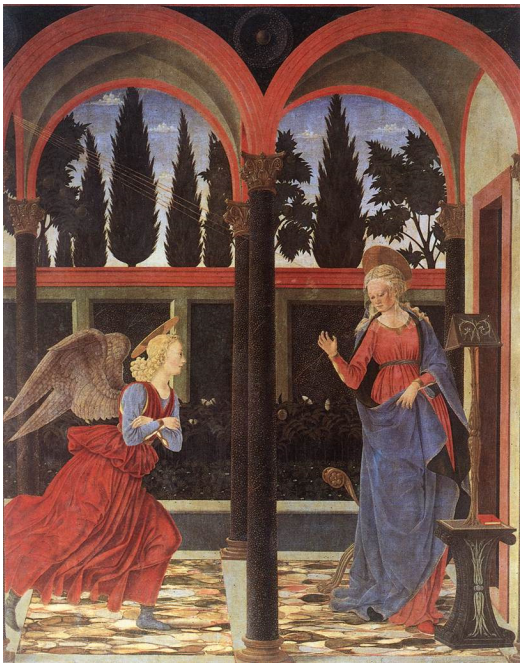

Figure 9. Alessio Baldovinetti, *The Annunciation*, c. 1457. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510) shapes the *Cestello Annunciation*, 1489–1490, from the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Figure 10), with some impressive narrative novelties, primarily through the highly expressive gestures and attitudes of both protagonists. Even if it would be beneficial to interpret this bodily expressiveness, however, we are more interested in emphasizing the simple garden enclosed by a low white wall that one can see through the door before an extensive landscape of a river and a town. Undoubtedly, Botticelli brings in this *Cestello Annunciation* a fine example of *hortus conclusus* to underline its Mariological meanings, following the poetic tropes expressed by many medieval liturgical hymns.

Figure 10. Sandro Botticelli, *The Cestello Annunciation*, 1489–1490. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

That is why it is surprising to note that, as far as we know, none of those who have commented on this outstanding painting (Schneider 1911; Argan 1957; Mandel 1967; Horne 1986, 1980; Meltzoff 1987; Lightbown 1989; Grömling and Lingesleben 2000; Magaluzzi

2003; Cecchi 2005) has highlighted this *hortus conclusus* and, even less, has justified its true Mariological meanings from primary sources of Christian doctrine. A partial exception to this embarrassing silence is Ronald Lightbown (1978), who, when analyzing this *Cestello Annunciation* in his monograph on Botticelli, does mention the enclosed garden without any further doctrinal explanation.

4. Conclusions

We could synthesize the main results of this double analytical survey over texts and images through these four brief conclusions:

1. Numerous medieval liturgical hymns repeatedly insist on extolling the Virgin Mary, designating her through the biblical metaphor *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) and *fons signatus* (sealed source)—its correlative twin expression in *Song of Songs*—or even with other relatively similar rhetorical figures, such as *porta clausa* (Ezekiel's closed door) or *florens hortus* (flowering garden), emphasizing both its enclosure and its splendid fecundity.
2. For more than a millennium, countless Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches unanimously interpreted the biblical expression *hortus conclusus* as an eloquent symbol of the Virgin Mary in her double privilege as the virginal mother of God and perpetual virgin. Although we have not analyzed it, because it was not the objective of the current article, this ancient patristic and theological tradition constituted the legitimizing doctrinal source in which medieval hymnographers got inspiration and arguments when writing the liturgical hymns alluding to the analyzed biblical metaphor.
3. Some paintings of the Annunciation from the Italian Renaissance show a garden—or an equivalent domestic space—enclosed by a fence or a wall. In this sense, it seems logical to conjecture that the different intellectual authors of these paintings, who coincide in including this enclosed garden in the representation of the decisive episode of the Annunciation, want to transmit through this metaphorical figure the conceptual content shared by all of them: the one expressed by the millenary doctrinal tradition on the Mariological meanings of the biblical trope *hortus conclusus*. We deliberately use the term "intellectual author of the painting", because, except for the few privileged ones, such as Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi or Lorenzo Monaco, who, due to their position as clerics, had a vast theological culture, most artists lacked it. That is why it is logical to suppose that, when executing important commissions of Christian art, artists of a lesser cultural level would have at their side an ecclesiastic or scholar who would indicate to them the characters, situations, attitudes, dresses, attributes, objects, and symbols that they should include in the religious scene to be represented.
4. Therefore, this double analysis of liturgical texts and pictorial images allows us to infer that both hymnographers and painters, based on the same millenary patristic and theological tradition, assume the metaphor of the *hortus conclusus* as an expressive Virgin Mary's symbol in her double privilege of virginal mother of God and perpetual virgin, as well as in the excellence and fullness of her supernatural virtues and attributes.

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Notes

1 Song of Songs 4,12. American Standard Version (ASV). https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Song+of+Songs+4%2C12&version=ASV (accessed on 21 September 2022).

2 Proclus Constantinopolitanus, *Oratio VI. Laudatio sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae*. PG 65, 758.

3 Hesychius Hierosolymitanus, *Sermo V. Ejusdem de eadem* [*de sancta Maria Deipara Homilia*]. PG 93, 1460–1461, y 146.

4 Iohannes Damascenus. *Homilia II in Nativitatem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 691.

5 Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De Institutione Virginis et S. Marie virginitate perpetua. Liber Unus*. PL 16, 321, and 335–336.

6 Hieronymus Stridonensis, *Epistola XLVIII, Seu Liber apologeticus, ad Pammachium, pro libris contra Jovinianum*, 21. PL 22, 510.

7 Justus Urgellensis, *In Cantica Canticorum Salomonis. Explicatio Mystica*, 91. PL 67, 978.

8 Isidorus Hispalensis, *De ortu et obitu Patrum*, 111. PL 83, 148.

9 Ildefonsus Toletanus. *Liber de virginitate perpetua S. Mariae adversus tres infideles. Caput X*. PL 95, 93–99; *De Partu Virginis*, PL 96, 214–15.

10 Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Matttheum. Liber II, Caput 1*. PL 120, 106.

11 Petrus Damianus, *Sermo* XLVI. PL 144, 760–61; Petrus Damianus, *Carmina et preces. LXI. Rythmus de S. Maria virgine*. PL 145, 938.

12 Hugo de S. Victore, *De Bestiis et aliis rebus Libri Quatuor. Liber Quartus. De Proprietatibus et Epithetis rerum serie litterariae in ordinem redactis. Caput II*. PL 177, 138–39.

13 Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi exponuntur Cantica Canticorum. Caput IV.* PL 172, 492.

14 Bernardus Claravaellensis, *Sermones sobre El Cantar de los Cantares. Sermón 47*, 3–5. In *Obras completas de San Bernardo. Edición bilingüe promovida por la Conferencia Regional Española de Abades Cistercienses*, vol. V. *Sermones sobre El Cantar de los Cantares*, Madrid, La Editorial Católica, Col. BAC, 1987, 619.

15 Petrus Blesensis. *Sermo XXXVIII. In Nativitate Beatae Mariae*. PL 207, 673.

16 Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV*: Q IX, 695b–698b.

17 Hortus conclusus, perfusus, messis abundans,
Fons illibatus, signatus, flumen inundans,
Fons saliens, indeficiens, stillans bonitate,
Praesidium, pia virgo, tuum tribui precor a te. (Hymnus 98. AHMA, 15, 125)

18 O Maria, clausus hortus,
Naufragantis mundi portus,
Placa nobis, qui te fecit,
Matrem sibi quam elegit. (Hymnus 326. Mone, 1854, 12). This Hymn is also included in AHMA, 5, 47, where it stands with the entry Hymnus 2. Dew conception Beatae Mariae Virginis. In I. Vesperis. Antiphonae.

19 Ave solis florens hortus,
stella maris, tutus portus,
optatus semper potus. (Hymnus 516. Mone, 1854, 298)

20 Florens hortus austro flante,
porta clausa post et ante,
via viris invia. (Hymnus 260. Mone, 1854, 53)

21 Placa mare maris stella,
ne involvat nos procella
et tempestas valida,
Sed ad coeli palatium
nostrum tu solatium
subleves, o pia
coeli regina. (Hymnus 260. Mone, 1854, 53)

22 Porta clausa, fons hortorum,
cella custos unguentorum,
cella pigmentaria. (Hymnus 524. Mone, 1854, 310)

23 1a. Ave, mater Domini.
Flos odoris gemini,
Virgo mater unica,
1b. Fons signatus gratiae,
Hortus pudicitiae,
Sera clausa diceris. (Hymnus 136. AHMA, 10, 104)

24 O salutaris
Miserorum portus,

Ortus
Et conclusus hortus,
Ex te sol exortus,
Virgo deum paris. (Hymnus 49. AHMA, 1, 86)

[25] Maria, flos mirae
pulchritudinis,
Et reorum turris
fortitudinis,
Deliciarum hortus,
Naufragantium portus,
Per te summi natus exortus. (Hymnus 186. AHMA, 1, 170)

[26] Ave gloriosa,
viventium aquarum
puteus lux gratiosa,
fons delitiarum,
virgo vena veniae,
signaculum pudoris,
nostrae conscientiae
spes, mater salvatoris. (Hymnus 593. Mone, 1854, 407)

[27] Hortus clausus et amoenus,
omni flore semper plenus,
quem totum singulariter
auster perflavit suaviter. (Hymnus 472. Mone, 1854, 187)

[28] Advocata inclita,
hortus trinitatis,
imperatrix coelica,
templum deitatis,
stella coeli fulgida
summae claritatis,
esto mihi, domina. (Hymnus 541. Mone, 1854, 333)

[29] Summi sponsa creatoris,
soror, dos et filia,
parens patris, nata prolis,
virginum primaria,
florens hortus, fons dulcoris,
mundi spes eximia,
Audi planctum filiorum,
fons misericordiae,
consolatrix orphanorum,
dona praesta gratiae
ac adscribe nos ad chorum
coelestis militiae. (Hymnus 548. Mone, 1854, 343)

[30] O Maria, clausa porta,
clausus hortus, nos conforta,
tu de stirpe regum orta,
paradiso nos reporta.
virginum primitiae. (Hymnus 507. Mone, 1854, 271). This hyms is also included in AHMA, 3, 25, with the entry Hymnus 2. Crinale Beatae Mariae Virginis.

[31] 1. O Maria, paradisus,
Voluptatis hortulus,
Plenus cunctis bonis,
Rigat te fons indivisus,
Quadruplexque rivulus
Gratiarum donis.
[...]
4. Summus orbis architectus,
Quem plantavit floridum,
Hortus es conclusus.

Iste tuus praedilectus
Caput habens roridum
Nusquam est exclusus. (Hymnus 5. AHMA, 3, 30)

[32] 7. Intrans ad te dedicata
Mihi virgo, filia.
Soror mea, sponsa,
Austro flante delicata
Horti tui lilia
Colligam absconsa. (Hymnus 5. AHMA, 3, 30)

[33] 8. Pneumatis austro perflatus
Hortus tui pectoris
Floribus vernabit.
Latens Deus et velatus
Velo tui corporis
In te germinabit. (Hymnus 5. AHMA, 3, 30)

[34] Fons signatus, clausus hortus
Hujus est indicium,
Quod Mariae praesens ortus
Mortis est exitium,
Quae, cum sit salutis portus.
Vitae dat initium. (Hymnus 53. AHMA, 4, 40)

[35] Haec est ille fons signatus,
Hortus clausus et perflatus
A supernis austro flante,
Quo concepit obumbrante. (Hymnus 12. AHMA, 5, 58)

[36] 4a. Gaude, terra, quae per rorem
Germinasti salvatorem
Simul cum laetitia;
4b. Fons hortorum, clausus hortus,
Favus stillans, vitae portus,
Porta coeli pervia. (Hymnus 59. AHMA, 9, 51)

[37] Tu solaris
Stella maris,
Clausus hortus,
Vitae portus,
Virgo Maria. (Hymnus 83. AHMA, 9, 69)

[38] Nomen matris lucis astrum
Vel odoris alabastrum
Sensu suavissimum,
Corpus Dei, verbi castrum,
Hortus clausus, patris rastrum,
Fructum ferens optimum. (Hymnus 58. AHMA, 15, 86)

[39] Tu, Maria, stella maris,
Medicina salutaris
Es corporum et cordium,
Fons signatus, clausus hortus,
Via pacis, vitae portus,
Pauperum refugium. (Hymnus 90. AHMA, 15, 110)

[40] Florens hortus, aegris gratus,
puritatis fons signatus,
dans fluenta gratiae.
Thronus veri Salomonis,
quem praeclaris coeli donis
ornavit rex gloriae. (Hymnus 531. Mone, 1854, 318)

[41] Regina clementiae,
Maria vocata,
diversis antiquitus

modis nominata:
tu virga, tu virgula,
tu virgo signata,
tu lectus, tu thalamus,
tu sponsa dotata. (Hymnus 600. Mone, 1854, 411)

42 Tu templum, tu camera,
tu porta serata,
tu navis, tu anchora,
tu stella vocata,
tu sol, luna, balsamum,
acies armata,
tu aurora rutilans,
tu gemma probata.

Tu fons, hortus, platanus,
cedrus exaltata.
tu palma, tu olea,
cypressus plantata,
myrrha electissima,
arbor inflammata;
tu fenestra vitrea
sole radiata. (Hymnus 600. Mone, 1854, 411)

43 Tu porta, quae soli domino patuit,
hortus, in quo deitas latuit,
stella, quae solem saeclis attulit. (Hymnus 515. Mone, 1854, 297)

44 Hortus es aromatum
Delectans dilectam,
Dulcis fons charismatum
Dulcorans affectum.

Austro flante floridus
Es conclusus hortus,
Fons signatus, placidus,
In procellis portus. (Hymnus 21. AHMA, 5, 74)

45 Ut idem retulit
hortus conclusus es,
Diversas proferens
herbarum species,
Quibus conficitur
pulchra materies,
Per quam repellitur
mentis proluvies. (Hymnus 24. AHMA, 6, 81)

46 Es hortus floridus
pollens deliciis
Virtutum floribus
splendescens variis. (Hymnus 38. AHMA, 6, 132)

47 Perflatus gratia
hortus describeris
Fructum mirificum
quae praebes superis,
Nobis remedium
qui donet miseris,
Et purgatorii
vinctis in tenebris. (Hymnus 38. AHMA, 6, 133)

48 Hortique arcola,
Qua flos nobis est exortus,
Quem fovisti sedula,
Qui, cum fuit cruce tortus,
Absolvit piacula. (Hymnus 50. AHMA, 6, 161)

[49] Germen Sion, radix David,
Clausus hortus, quem intravit
Splendor patris coelitus. (Hymnus 14. AHMA, 10, 69)

[50] Fons signatus illibatus,
Hortus clausus et vallatus,
Fructu sacro cumulatus.
Et pigmentis fecundatus. (Hymnus 100. AHMA, 15, 132)

[51] Ave, venerabilis
Mater pietatis,
Maria mirabilis,
Forma sanctitatis,
Flos incomparabilis,
Hortus puritatis,
Splendor ineffabilis,
Templum deitatis. (Hymnus 113. AHMA, 15, 139)

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Article

The Virgin Mary and Sainte-Foy: Chant and the Original Design of the West Façade at Conques

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Abstract: Using the evidence of Aquitanian chants, this article explores the possibility that a twelfth-century relief panel of the Annunciation today in the interior of Conques was originally designed for the West facade, where it completes the composition of the divine plan of Salvation. This hypothetic reconstruction also uncovers the important role of the patron saint, Sainte-Foy, and how she is promoted as second after Mary and efficacious intercessor.

Keywords: chant; responsory; sequence; Virgin Mary; Sainte-Foy at Conques; relief sculpture

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1. Introduction

The monastery of Sainte-Foy at Conques emerges mystically from the soft clouds of the light fog spreading in the valley of the Ouche river in the early fall. The Romanesque building marks a site with a long history. The monastery was founded in the early ninth century; it was originally dedicated to Christ, the Virgin, and St. Peter (J. Bousquet 1992, pp. 273–345; Desjardins 1879, pp. 580–81, No. 1; Vergnolle et al. 2011). But when two monks stole the relic of Sainte-Foy from the city of Agen and brought them to Conques in 866, the site added a new patron: Santa Fides (Holy Faith) (J. Bousquet 1992, pp. 254, 277). The monastic community invested in the charisma of the recently acquired relics, displaying them in an innovative and provocative way (Taralone 1978, 1997; Dahl 1979; Fricke 2015, pp. 149–212; Hahn 2012, pp. 117–33; Dale 2019, pp. 95–103).

They placed the cranium in a seated figure, carved out of yew wood (Figure 1). For a head, the effigy sports a fifth-century male face made in repoussé gold; it could well have come from a pagan idol (Figure 2). The dissemblant bricolage thus shows the mature body of a ruler, with a face of a man, laying claims to be the authentic effigy of the thirteenth-year old virgin because it contains a piece of her body: the cranium. The relic is kept hidden and invisible in the recesses of the anthropomorphic container. A small compartment opens in the back, where the upper segment of the skull of Fides is placed, wrapped in a Byzantine silk and resting on a silk cushion (Figure 3) (Fricke 2015; Foletti 2018; Pentcheva 2021a, 2022).

The newly assembled statue is a Majesty: a figure seated on a backless throne. This is the earliest extant sculpture in the round in the Latin West. It offers a model for what would be produced in great numbers in the later centuries as the Maestà or *sedes sapientiae* statues of the Mother of God (Forsyth 1972). These visual associations between the female virgin-martyr and the Theotokos are not haphazard. The liturgy for the women saints is modelled after the Assumption of Mary, celebrating the saint as she rises and gets accepted in the celestial courts (Grier 2006, pp. 103–5; Pentcheva 2023). The *imitatio Mariae* is the principle at work in the fashioning the virgin-martyr. The chance survival of the Majesty of Sainte-Foy preserves concrete evidence of how images of female martyr saints emulate the enthroned Mary. The statue of Sainte-Foy predates these *sedes sapientiae*, but in its inspiration, it follows the sixth-century icons of the Theotokos as Maria Regina.

Figure 1. The front side of wood core of the statue of Sainte-Foy, late ninth century, yew wood. Reproduced with permission of La Société des Lettres de l'Aveyron, Rodez, France.

Figure 2. Gilded statue-reliquary of Sainte-Foy, late ninth century, Photographs: Erich Lessing/Art Resource.

Figure 3. Back side of the wooden core of the statue of Sainte-Foy with a cavity for the deposition of the relic of the skull. Reproduced with permission of La Société des Lettres de l'Aveyron, Rodez.

A new wave of artistic activity spread at Conques in the last quarter of the tenth into the eleventh centuries. Sainte-Foy's miraculous healing of the gouged eyes of Gilbert in 983 stimulated this development. The golden effigy acquired more gems and cameos, additional repoussé gold sheathing, and prominent filigreed frames. The throne expanded with an imposing high-back and arm rests. The crown was further embellished with filigree, enamels, pearls, and jewels. In the same period, the monastery began to consolidate its land possessions, and continued to grow, building a surplus that was used in the course of the eleventh century to construct a new church. The first phase was likely completed in the second quarter of the eleventh century. But the base, cut into the steep slope, was compromised; this instability damaged the arches and vaults. As a result, a complete overhaul became necessary. The church was rebuilt in 1075–1115 (Vergnolle et al. 2011, pp. 75–77; Barral i Altet 2018, pp. 19–33, 54–60).

While the monastery continued its dedication to the powerful trio of Christ, the Virgin and St. Peter, the site became increasingly identified with Santa Fides. Numerous miracles were attributed to her power that invested in her relics and in her golden *imago*.

The West façade greets the faithful coming to Conques. It is here that a new relief sculpture was unveiled 1105–1115 (Figure 4) (J. Bousquet 1997; Kendall 1989, 1998; Wirth 2004, pp. 199–202, 235–60; Williams 2008; Huang 2014; de Mondredon 2015; Castiñeiras 2018). The program of the tympanum features the Last Judgment, giving prominence to Christ. Mary and St. Peter approach from the left, leading the procession of the elect to heaven (Bonne 1984, pp. 226–56). Sainte-Foy appears on the left in a wedge between the middle and lower registers. This special segment of the composition functions like a corner stone, supporting the narrative edifice and in fact, initiating the dynamic of Salvation (Bonne 1984, pp. 243–51; Pentcheva 2023). Sainte-Foy's prayer gives rise to a spiral; it starts with the rise of the dead from their tombs, the weighing of their good and evil actions, and the entry of some into paradise; and then the advance of the procession of the elect on the upper register led by Mary (Bonne 1984, pp. 226–28; Franze 2021; Pentcheva 2023). As

Sainte-Foy lifts from her throne and falls in proskynesis, she beseeches the Lord on behalf of her servants. Sainte-Foy is the beginning of this ascending spiral, the alpha, which connects with Mary as the omega at the end point of this ascent to the divine. So, although Sainte-Foy is relegated to a lower and side position, she holds an important role in engendering the spiral of salvation. Fides is presented at Conques as a partner and helper to the Theotokos.

Figure 4. Tympanum with the Last Judgment, west façade, Sainte-Foy at Conques, 1105–1115. Photo: Boris Missirkov for "EnChanted Images".

This article explores the interaction between the Virgin and Sainte-Foy on another relief at Conques, the Annunciation. This panel is currently in the interior of the church (Figure 5). I will argue that its original location was on the exterior, set in the blank wall below the tympanum of the West façade, between the two doors. The analysis draws on new evidence coming from the chants sung for the major feasts of Mary at Conques. The inscription on the scroll of the Annunciation relief quotes a phrase used in several chants, thus it serves as a memory prompt asking the viewer to recall these songs. Chants have rarely been explored in connection with relief sculpture. What this article uncovers is how these songs give voice to the medieval images. They stage dialogues that develop the characters of the liturgy. Conques seems to have invested in these linkages between reliefs and chants. The tympanum on the West façade offers another example. The inscription *Hoc signum crucis erit in coelo cum* on the horizontal bar of the Cross is an excerpt from a responsory for the Feast of the Cross on 14 September (Bouché 2006; Pentcheva 2022).

Figure 5. Relief panel of the Annunciation, 1105–1115, north arm of the transept in the interior of Sainte-Foy at Conques: Photo: Manuel Cohen.

2. The Annunciation Panel, the Inscription, and Medieval Chants

The efflorescence of Conques was short-lived from the end of the tenth century to 1115. By the second quarter of the twelfth century, the monastery fell out of favor with the leaders of the Reconquista and could never again pull itself out of the backwater (J. Bousquet 1992, pp. 313–16). The silver lining of this loss of status is that Conques never updated its look for lack of funds and thus preserved its Romanesque art. Its treasury was spared the ravages of the revolution. When in 1837 Prosper Mérimée visited the site in his capacity as General Inspector of the newly created bureau of Historical Monuments; he found the church fascinating but in disrepair and wrote a report to the Ministry of the Interior soliciting help for its restoration (Mérimée 1838). He also placed Conques on France's first list of historic monuments. The government support rescued Conques subjecting it to a heavily restored state in the second half of the nineteenth century. Some sections were practically built anew like the towers of the West façade, which had remained unfinished since the Middle Ages (Barral i Altet 2018, pp. 40–49). A much more problematic part was the trumeau: the blank wall between the two doors (Figure 4). Even before Mérimée's visit, this section had lost its original sculpture, replaced by a Gothic statue of Sainte-Foy (Figure 6). Conques has another relief panel featuring the Annunciation, which appears to be contemporary with the West tympanum of 1105–1115. The illustrated travelogue of Taylor, Nodier, and de Cailleux from 1835 shows this relief in the interior in the North cross-arm (Figure 7). The panel has remained there to this day (Figure 5) (Nodier et al. 1835, pp. 266, 268). Was this its original location? Can a chant from the Aquitanian repertoire help us uncover its mystery place within the original Romanesque program?

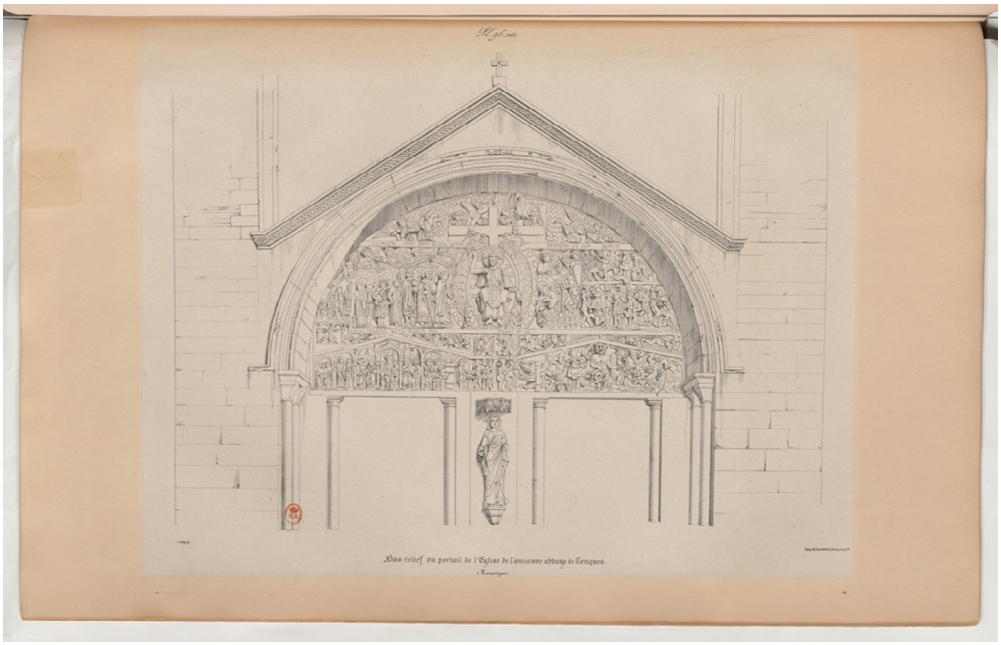

Figure 6. Sculpture on the West Façade at Conques, after Charles Nodier, Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor, and Alphonse de Cailleux, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France. Languedoc*. Paris: P. Didot, 1835. vol. 1, part 2, p. 268.

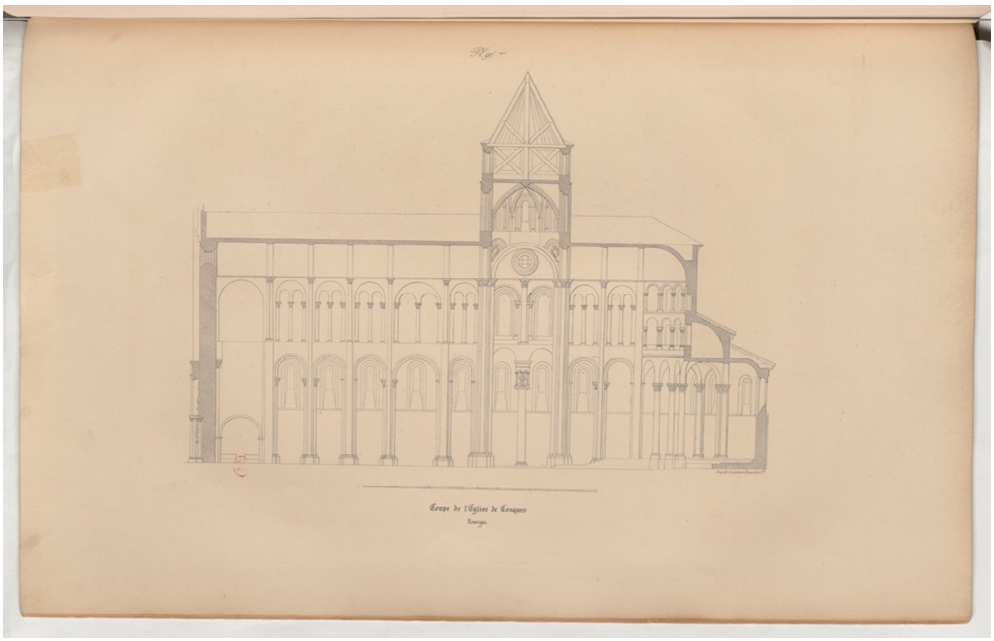

Figure 7. Cross-section of the interior at Conques; the Annunciation panel is in the northern cross-arm after Charles Nodier, Isidore-Justin-Séverin Taylor, and Alphonse de Cailleux, *Voyages pittoresques et romantiques dans l'ancienne France. Languedoc*. Paris: P. Didot, 1835. vol. 1, p. 266.

The panel stands six meters above the floor of the Northern transept arm. The masonry around it shows signs of disturbance just above the widow sills, suggesting that the upper portion of the pier, the arches, and the relief attached to this segment of the wall were brought together at a later stage. But the most recent survey of the architecture has insisted on the authenticity of this relief's location without offering more evidence. They just state that the relief fits nicely in the pilaster of the north wall of the transept and connects well with the corbel (Vergnolle et al. 2011, pp. 90–93, 127–29; Sauerländer 2004, pp. 402–3). But

any careful craftsman in charge of the relocation of the Annunciation to the interior would do their best to diminish the traces of such a displacement. Earlier studies have suggested another location. In 1942 Abbé Rascol proposed that the Annunciation originally graced the trumeau of the West façade, underneath the tympanum (Figure 8) (Rascol 1942–1945; A. L. Bousquet 1947). The measurements of the Annunciation panel are: 2.1 m height, 1.35 m width, and 0.35 m depth. The trumeau wall is 3.50 m height and 1.40 m width, a size that can comfortably shelter the Annunciation panel and elevate it a 1.40 m above the ground level (Rascol 1942–1945; Bernoulli 1956, pp. 54–55). I return to this older hypothesis because it offers a much richer semantic and experiential dynamic for viewing the narrative images on the West façade and a deeper anchoring of the reliefs in the architectural fabric, making Mary a true gate, while simultaneously catapulting Sainte-Foy to prominence. In the process of analysis, I bring to the fore new evidence from liturgical texts sung at Conques.

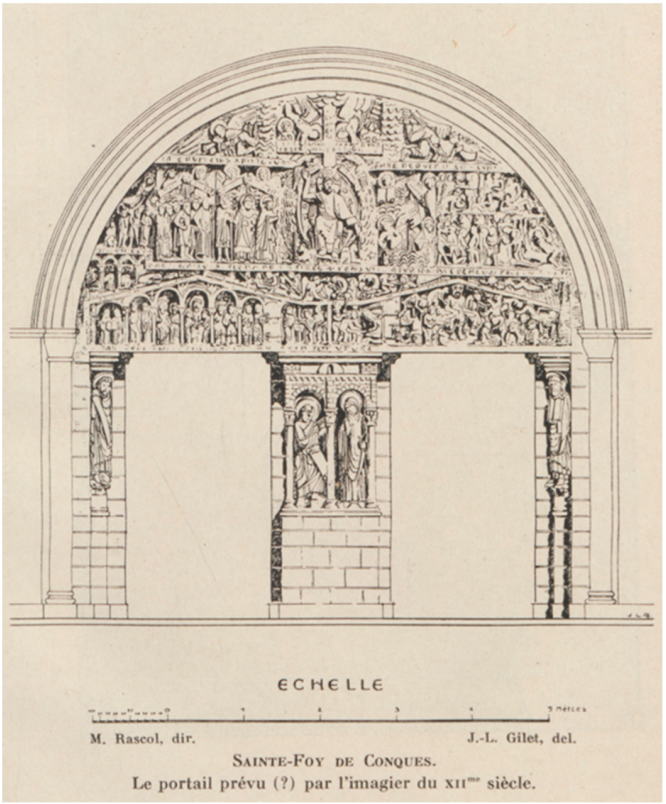

Figure 8. Abbé Rasol's Reconstruction of the West Façade after (Rascol 1942–1945, p. 460).

The Annunciation group is dated to the first quarter of the twelfth century based on the paleography of the lettering on the inscribed scroll carried by Gabriel (Favreau and Michaud 1984). The archangel and Mary are sheltered under the two arches of a beautiful Romanesque arcade (Figure 9). The celestial messenger's voice is exteriorized visually in the unrolling scroll inscribed with the words: "[missus] e[st] Gabriel angelus a D[eo]," "the angel Gabriel is sent by God" (Lk 1:26) (Favreau and Michaud 1984). Mary greets him with modesty and reserve: her palm held in front of her chest communicates a surprise, a halt, and a thought process that will eventually result in the question of how would this conception of the divine logos be possible when she knows no man? Her other hand holds a spindle: a symbol of her continuous pious work. She spins the temple curtain, a metaphor for the body of Christ, which will be rent apart at the Crucifixion (Constas 1995; Constas 2003). A subtle hierarchy is introduced, Mary is ever so slightly elevated, making the angel having to ascend to her. She is the figure that directs and arrests the movement. The lively composition combined with the large size of the figures grab the attention of the viewer.

Figure 9. Annunciation Panel, closeup, 1105–1115. Photo: Manuel Cohen.

3. The Responsory *Missus est Angelus*

The inscription on the scroll of the angel [*missus*] *e*[*st*] *Gabriel angelus a* [*Deo*] is both a quote from Luke (Lk 1:26) and a phrase developed in several chants. My analysis will focus on two genres: a responsory and a sequence. The phrase appears as an antiphon and responsory that features in Aquitanian MSS and is sung for the first Sunday of Advent (Cantus n.d., chant ID Nos. 003792, 003794, 601975, 007170). I have selected the responsory version in the gradual from the monastery of St. Gerald in Albi (Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 776, fols. 3rv, 1050–1075) (Figure 10) (Cantus n.d., chant ID. Nos. g03235, g03235a).

Figure 10. *Missus est angelus* responsory in Paris, BnF MS Lat. 776, fols. 3rv, 1050–1075. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

Although this is a variant attested only in this source, MS Lat. 776 contains a repertoire that is closely related to Conques; it is the only other place that lists the prosa *Candida tu quia* originally created for the vespers responsory of the Office of Sainte-Foy (Pentcheva 2021b). MS Lat. 776 thus helps us fill out an important lacuna about the music for the liturgy at Conques. The responsory *Missus est angelus Gabriel a Deo in civitatem Nazareth ad virginem Mariam* tells the story of the Annunciation and carries the words of Marry's acceptance:

> [Respond]: *Missus est angelus Gabriel a deo in civitatem Nazareth ad virginem Mariam desponsatam Joseph et dixit ad eam: 'Spiritus sanctus superveniet in te et virtus altissimi obumbrabit tibi. Ideoque et quod nascetur ex te sanctum vocabitur filius dei dixit autem Maria:*
>
> [Refrain] *'Ecce ancilla domini fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum alleluia.'*
>
> [Verse]: *Novus mihi est sermo tuus quomodo intrasti ad me januis clausis Gabriel archangele quomodo virginis virum non cognosco et judicis paries filium quomodo qui ante me fuit ex me procedit conturbat me vox tua interpreteris mysterium angelorum et dixit angelus sum prior Maria et missus sum de caelo ut annuntiem tibi verbum non dedigneris partum non me interroges de secreto mihi est enim creditum quia paries filium dei redemptorem mundi.*
>
> [Refrain] *'Ecce ancilla domini fiat mihi secundum verbum tuum alleluia.'*
>
> [Respond] The angel Gabriel was sent by God to the city of Nazareth to the virgin Mary who was married to Joseph and he told her: "The Holy Spirit would come over you and the energy from the highest will overshadow you. Consequently, what would be born from you will be holy, and he will be called Son of God. Mary then said:
>
> [Refrain] "Here is the servant of God, let it be to me according to your word, Alleluia."
>
> [Verse] This speech is new to me, how did you enter [my place] as the doors are locked, Gabriel Archangel? Since I am virgin and know no man, you somehow judge that I will give birth to a son, who had been before me [and] who would proceed from me? You voice perturbs me, could you interpret the mystery of the angels! The angel said "Mary, I am a superior angel and was sent from heaven in order to make this announcement to you; do not reject the command; do not question the birth; you have to trust me about the secret for it is true that you will give birth to the Son and Redeemer of the World.
>
> [Refrain] "Here is the servant of God, let it be to me according to your word, Alleluia."

The responsory captures the dialogue between the divine messenger and the Virgin. The angel never truly addresses the concerns of Mary. She asks him how she will preserve her virginity through motherhood and how she would give birth to a baby that precedes her. But Gabriel does not assuage her worries. He just warns her that she should not reject the command and should believe in what the word says. The refrain repeats Mary's utterance with which she accepts the command.

The music stresses the importance of accepting unquestioningly the divine command. The melody is composed in a *G* mode that combines the authentic and the plagal (Figure 11). So, the ambitus reaches to upper *G* and dips even a note below the usual limit of mode 8 to *C*. At the beginning both the angel and the Virgin are introduced with a dramatic leap. For Gabriel, the leap is of a fourth and is set between *est* and the beginning of *angelus*. For Mary, it is a leap of a fifth, *G-d* set at *ad* [*virginem*]. These leaps thus draw attention to the distance traveled and the surprise of the sudden divine message. The exalted status of Mary is marked by the high *E* [*ad virginem*], the first in the composition; it identifies the moment Gabriel finds himself before Mary. This high *E* is not reached again until Mary's words of acceptance, and more specifically the apex at *E* identifies the word 'servant'-*ancilla*.

The choice of high *E* on *ancilla* creates an inverted magnitude, that the lowest status of the servant is exalted, that humility leads to glorification. In the subsequent component (the verse of the responsory) the apex is reached (*g*) with the question Mary poses "how" *quomodo*. Her anxiety is communicated in the shrill, high pitch of this *g*. She is vexed for there is no logic of how she can preserve her virginity before God and still bear a child. Her anxiety unsettles the composure of the angel. The melody rises again to *g* when he attempts to answer her: *et dixit* "and he said." But even more dramatic is the shrill *g* on the following '*non*.' With this *non,* the Archangel introduces a series of commands to the Virgin to stop questioning. The excessively long melismatic, sustained *g* on *non* expresses a range of emotions: annoyance, impatience, vexation, warning, and soliciting. Gabriel pressures Mary to accept the will of God without further questioning.

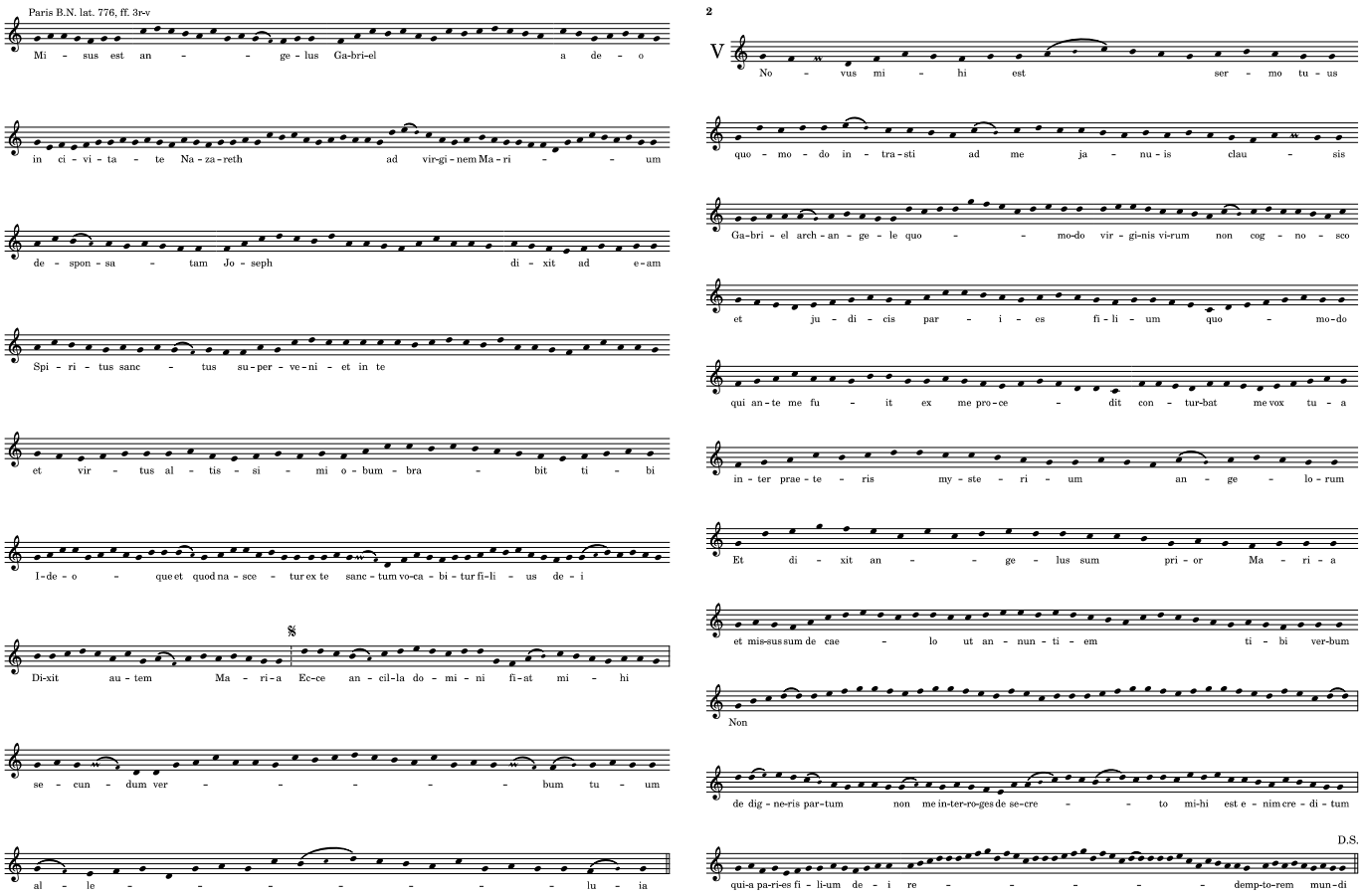

Figure 11. *Missus est angelus* responsory from Paris, BnF MS Lat. 776, fols 3rv. Transcription: Laura Steenberge.

The *missus est* responsory in MS Lat. 776 captures the anxiety and tension in the Annunciation. It ultimately suppresses these feelings with the way the refrain re-instates Mary's unconditional submission to the divine order. That this responsory was performed at Conques is also attested by another Annunciation relief carved in the capital of a colonette in the Southern gallery of the nave (Figure 12) (Fau 1956). The archangel here also carries a scroll with the phrase *Sp[iritus] S[an]c[tus] [superveniet in] t[e]* (Lk 1:35), "The Holy Spirit will descend over you," which is also featured in the *Missus est angelus Gabriel* responsory.[1] The consistency with which inscriptions are excerpts from chants suggests that the narrative reliefs at Conques are rooted in the liturgical songs and function as their visual re-singings (Fassler 2000, p. 423).

Figure 12. Historiated Capital of the Annunciation, Southern Gallery of the Nave at Conques: Photo: Miguel Novelo for "EnChanted Images".

Moreover, the text of *Missus est angelus Gabriel* responsory plays with the image of the closed doors. When the poem presents the astonishment of Mary, she asks the divine messenger how he entered her house given that the doors were closed. The question relates both the physical doors of the house as well as the metaphorical doors of virginity. If we imagine the Annunciation relief back on the west façade, then the memory of the responsory would have juxtaposed the vision of the closed doors with the reality of the church façade and its double gates. The physical doors become an entry into the mysteries of the virginal motherhood of Mary and Salvation.

4. The Music of *Salve Porta* at Conques

Just like *missus est angelus Gabriel* responsory the second chant this analysis focuses on—the sequence *Salve porta*—also builds a possible linkage with the west façade (Cantus n.d., chant ID No. ah53108). A line of *Salve porta* is quoted on the scroll of the Archangel. It is assigned for the feasts of the Annunciation, Advent, and Purification (Presentation in the Temple) (Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 1118, fols. 167rv). Sequences are elaborate chants that introduce the readings from the New Testament in the liturgy. This genre expands the narrative of Scripture with new poetry. Sequences use as model melodies untexted melismatic alleluias. Thus, these chants translate divine visions chanted beyond the register of human language, marked by the angelic word alleluia into the intelligibility of human speech (Fassler 1993, pp. 38–57; Fassler 2019; Iversen 2007; Iversen 2010, pp. 127–59; Kelly 2011). The phrase [*missus*] *e*[*st*] *Gabriel angelus a* [*Deo*] forms the third line of the *Salve porta* sequence: *cui missus [est] Gabriel archangelus miram retulit a Deo*.

Just like MS Lat. 776 for the *missus est* responsory, so too the *Salve porta* sequence needs to be analyzed in the version that was likely performed at Conques. While the office of Sainte-Foy composed at Conques has survived (Paris, MS Nouv. Acq. Lat. 443 and MS Lat. 1204), we do not possess other liturgical MSS from this monastery that record the annual liturgical cycle (Huglo 1971, 2009; Pentcheva 2021b, 2022, 2023). In order to understand how major feasts were celebrated at Conques, we need to draw on the examples from St. Martial at Limoges. Its collection gathers MSS representative of the liturgy in Aquitaine and the Marches; it even collected a *libellus* of the Office of Sainte-Foy. My analysis draws in particular from Paris, BnF MS Lat. 1118, dated to 987–996 from Sant Sadurni de Tavèrnoles (Figure 13) (Collamore 2006; Huglo 1971). MS Lat. 1118 has a rich collection of sequencies,

which attracted the composer Adémar of Chabannes (989–1034) to this MS. Ademar worked at Saint-Martial in Limoges in 1028–1029, where he was tasked with the writing of a new liturgy celebrating the patron saint as an apostle. He found inspiration in the music of the sequence collection of MS Lat. 1118. So, when he left Saint Martial in 1029, he stole this MS and brought it with him to St. Cybar in Angoulême. He only returned it back to St. Martial in 1033 (Grier 2006).

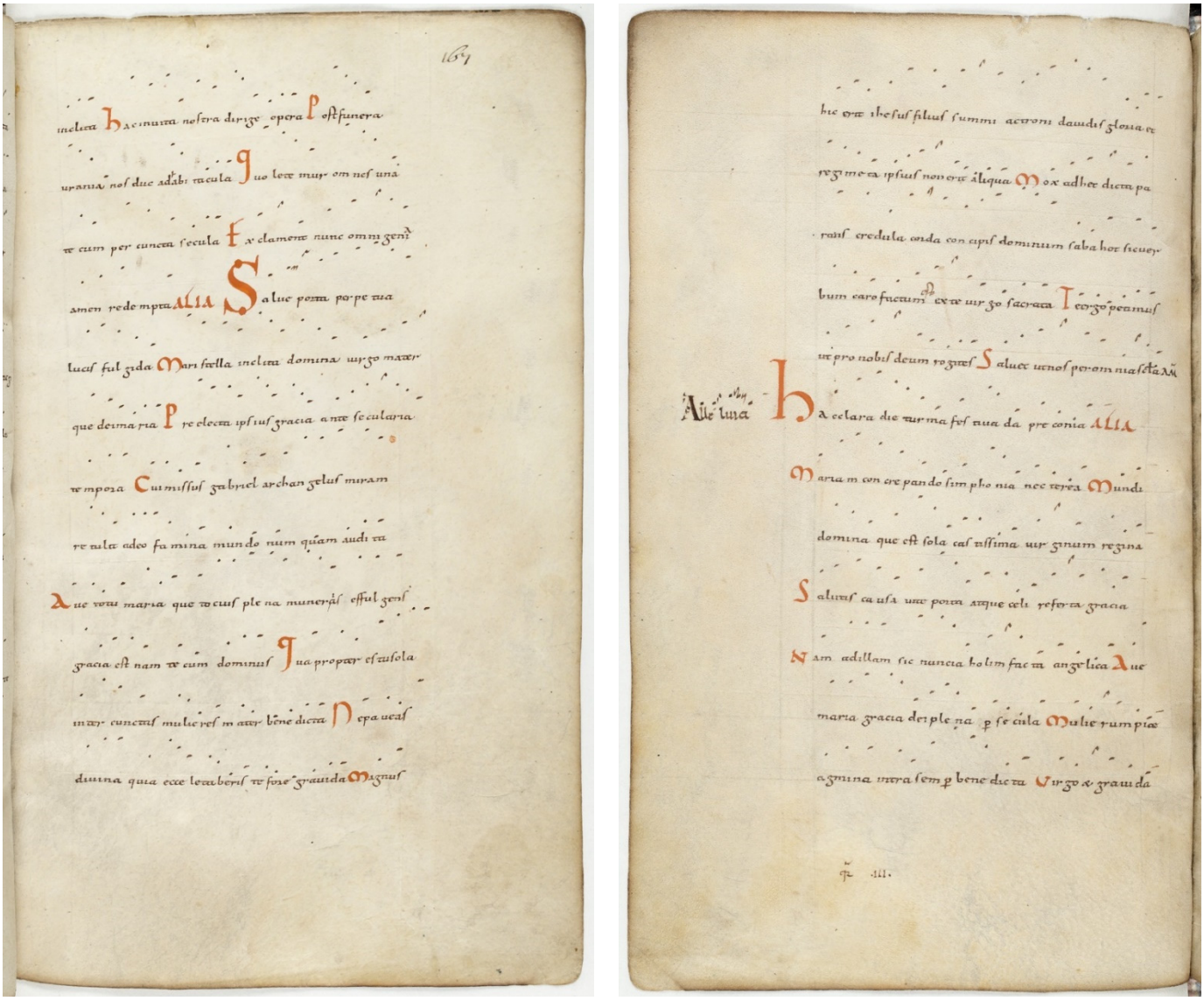

Figure 13. Salve porta sequence in Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 1118, fols. 167rv. Monastery of Sant Sadurní de Tavèrnoles, Catalonia, 987–996. Photo: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

The sequence *Salve porta* appears on fols. 167rv; it takes the line from Luke's gospel (Lk 1:26) and expands it into a mini-dialogue, teaching salvific economy. It finishes with a direct intercession to Mary to help humanity:

1. Salve porta perpetua lucis fulgida,

2a. mari stella inclita domina, virgo materque Dei Maria

2b. pre-electa ipsius gracia ante secularia tempora

3a. cui missus Gabriel archangelus miram retulit a deo femina mundo num quam audita.

3b. Aveto tu Maria quae totius plena muneris effulgeris gracia est nam te cum dominus

4a. qua propter es tu sola inter cunctas mulieres mater benedicta,

4b. ne paveas divina quia letaberis te fore gravida.

5a. Magnus hic erit Ihesus filius summi ac throni davidis gloria et regi meta ipsius non erit aliqua

5b. mox ad haec dicta parans credula corda concipis dominum sabaot sic verbum caro factum est ex te virgo sacrata.

6. Te ergo petimus ut pro nobis Deum rogites/salve ut nos per omnia saeclam, amen.

1 Greetings gleaming eternal gate of light,

2a star of the sea, renown mistress, virgin and mother to God, Mary

2b you were pre-selected before the times for His [God's] grace.

3a The Archangel Gabriel, sent by God, surprised this chaste woman with what she now heard:

3b 'Hail, you Mary, who are filled with all gifts, and who shines with grace, for God is now with you.

4a You and only you among all women are now a blessed mother]

4b do not be afraid, for you will rejoice in being divinely pregnant

5a for your son will be the great Christ of the Davidic throne,

there would be no one of such glory and authority after Him.

5b As the [Virgin] was presently taking heart in what he was saying, he added further: 'you would conceive the Lord Sabaoth, so the logos will become incarnate in your body, o hallowed virgin.'

6 You, indeed, we beseech so that you would intercede with the Lord on our behalf, save us, so that we [can live] in eternity!"

The holy event unfolds before the faithful as chanted lines, stirring the imagination to conjure up the conversation between the modest, resplendent Virgin and the ceaselessly moving divine messenger.

This sequence is composed in a G mode that combines both the authentic 7 and plagal 8 (Figure 14). And it relies on the paring of melodic phrases, known as double cursus. For instance, lines 2ab share the same melody, and similar paring appear in lines 3ab, 4ab, and 5ab. The first and the last line, framing this piece exist outside this symmetry. The double cursus is a characteristic feature of Aquitanian chant (Roederer 1974; Kelly 1974, 1977; Grier 2006, pp. 154–56). The phrase, inscribed on the scroll "*missus est Gabriel archangelus a Deo*" (line 3a) is a melody that is sung to both the verse about Gabriel being sent and to *Aveto tu Maria*. The shared melody pairs the Archangel and Mary, but also the angelic action with the speech. It is also here that the melody explores the lower range of the plagal mode, descending to *E*, literally inscribing descent of the divine in Mary. The music picks up and reaches the highest tones—*f g f*—an octave above at [*throni Davidis*] and at *Dominum* [*Sabaoth*]. Thus, marking the divinity and omnipotence of Christ as sonic brightness. The sequence finishes with a prayer for Mary's intercession.

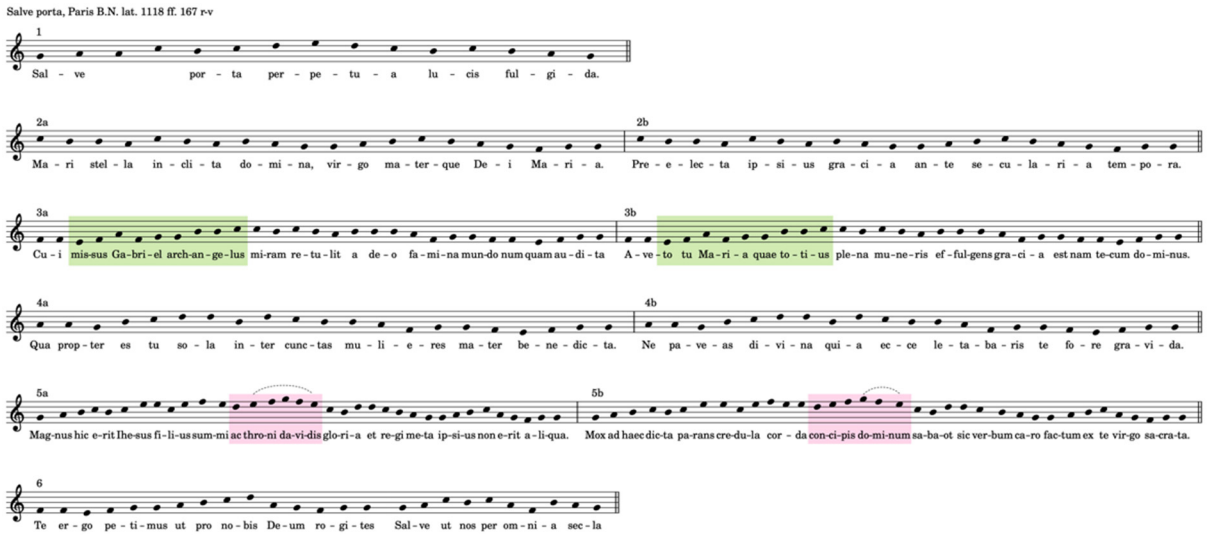

Figure 14. *Salve Porta* sequence from Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 1118, fols. 167rv. Transcription: Laura Steenberge.

5. Hypothesis for Placing the Annunciation Panel at the West Facade

The weaving of melodic material acquires visual sharpness if we envision this panel on the West facade. The sequence opens with the greeting and the metaphor of the Virgin as a gate—-*porta perpetua* where the melody rises to *e* at *perpetua*, communicating a sense of ascent, enabled by Mary. This height is not reached again until the incarnation of Christ: *filius summi*. So, Mary as the gate the *porta perpetua lucis fulgida* is brightness and Salvation introduced aurally.

The relief echoes this vision by setting the main protagonists at the center of the double arched doorway. Do the carved arches in the relief find a meaningful correspondence in its current interior location in the Northern transept (Figure 5)? The binary composition is repeated in the pair of windows below and above the sculpted group, but windows are not gates. Similarly, the crescendo built in the music at the *throni Davidis* and *dominum Sabaoth* becomes powerful and explicit only when the Annunciation relief re-joins the Christ in Majesty on the West façade (Figure 15). There, growing and blossoming above, the glory of the Lord becomes apparent.

If we imagine the relief of the Annunciation at the trumeau of the West façade, then the two open gates, framing the sculpted Annunciata Virgin, transform the poetry's metaphor into a reality and a lived experience. By walking through the doors of the church, the faithful can find Salvation in the body of Mary. Moreover, the Theotokos's figure in the trumeau communicates with the other representation of Mary in the tympanum above, where she leads the procession of the saved towards Christ in Majesty. The Virgin is thus the bridge and doorway to beatific life.

In addition to the *missus est* responsory and sequence, other music performed at Conques for the Marian feasts lends further support for uniting the Annunciation with the Christ in Majesty tympanum on the West façade (Huglo 1971, pp. 132–40). Another sequence *Claris vocibus inclita* has lines that state: *caelicis terrea tu iungis divinis humana/ paradisiaca per te nobis patet ianua*, "You join earthly things to heavenly, human to divine, through you the heavenly gates lie open to us" (Paris, BnF MS Lat. 1118, fol. 166v) (Fassler 2010, p. 391).[2] The unity in duality, of human and divine, achieved through Mary's incarnation of the logos, has blasted open the gates of paradise. The linkage of the Annunciation with the Last Judgment on Conques' façade offers the visual equivalent to this poetry.

Figure 15. Reconstruction of the West façade with the Annunciation relief on the trumeau and the prophets Isaiah and John the Baptist on the jambs. Photo: Manuel Cohen. Photoshop: Jessica Chen Lee.

The theological significance Mary as the gate to Salvation is played out visually on another contemporary facade. The Porta Francigena in Santiago de Compostela places the Annunciation in relation to both Christ the Judge and the Fall of Eve. The precise design of the composition is hard to reconstruct given the damages of time, but the overall structure suggests a ring: starting with Creation and humanity's fall to the Incarnation of the logos and from there to the Judge at the End of Time and a return of the blessed to paradise. Mary in the Annunciation forms the gate of Salvation (Prado-Vilar 2021).

The double arch containing the angel and Mary on the relief mirrored in the two gates on the West facade show paired forms. These twins lead to the vision of union in Christ in the tympanum above (Figure 15). The spiral showing the ascent of the blessed to Christ in the tympanum at Conques has a parallel in another line of the same sequence *Claris vocibus inclita* sequence (Figure 4). The line reads: *post funera uranica nos duc ad habitacula/ quo laetemur omnes una tecum per cuncta saecula*, "After death, lead us to heavenly dwellings/ where we all will be glad to be one with you through all ages" (Paris, BnF MS Lat 1118, fol. 167r). Salvation is imagined as an ascent, where all players become one with the leader: Christ. Mary leads the faithful to him. She is the *porta caeli* because she had given birth to the Savior. And through her humility she has been glorified and transformed in the greatest intercessor for humanity. The Virgin is envisioned as a ladder to heaven (Dell'Acqua 2020, pp. 278–80). If we place back the Annunciation relief on the West façade at Conques, then Mary of the Annunciation will serve as the door and the first step of the ladder to heaven.

6. The Prophets Isaiah and John the Baptist

The same Auvergne master who carved the Annunciation and the tympanum, also did the two figures of the prophets Isaiah and John the Baptist, which appear today in the jambs of the Northern wall of the transept (Figure 5). Isaiah carries an open scroll with the words: *Dixit Isaias virga de radice Jesse* (Is. 11:1) "Isaiah said a shoot from the root of Jesse" (Favreau and Michaud 1984, pp. 28–29, No. 13). It prophecies about the birth of Christ from the royal and priestly Davidic and Abrahamian roots (Fassler 2000; Fassler 2010, pp. 26–27, 392–93). This message is further solidified by the sprouting staff he carries in his hand. He introduces the beginning of the salvific economy. John the Baptist, standing at the opposite end, closes the narrative arc by foretelling the Crucifixiion: *Johannes ait: Ecce Agnus Dei*, "John said 'This is the lamb of God.'" (Jn 1:29) (Favreau and Michaud 1984, pp. 29–30, No. 14). The reference here is to the Passion of Christ, whose willing sacrifice wipes out the past sins of humanity. Both inscriptions were sung during the feasts of the Virgin (Nativity and Purification) and Advent and Epiphany of Christ, thus through the inscribed words, the images become fully embedded in the annual festal performances (Cantus n.d., chant ID nos. 602492 and 006575).

The Annunciation and the two prophets become the mise-en-scene for the celebration of the Savior's coming into the world and His taking on a human body. These images introduce the beginning of the Salvific economy. If we imagine them back on the West façade, then the tympanum above offered the concluding vision at the end of time. This semantic completeness is a compelling reason to re-unite the tympanum with the Annunciation grouping. This sense of fulfillment is also announced visually by the facial similarity between John the Baptist and Christ (Rascol 1942–1945, p. 457). The prophet, if brought back to the façade would have stood on the jamb on the right. His face mirrors that of Christ in the tympanum above. The visual linkage articulates that one voice—-the Lord's—-speaks through all the prophets, and all these inspired utterances ultimately result in the vision of the Majesty of Christ (Pentcheva 2020; Kessler 1994). John the Baptist is thus a *persona Christi*. Set closer to the faithful the right jamb, he enables them to recognize the face of Christ in his own countenance.

7. The Female Figure behind Mary and the Sainte-Foy the Patron Saint at Conques

The third figure behind Mary at the Annunciation is another important reason for reuniting the Annunciation group with the tympanum on the West façade. So far scholars have identified it as a servant (Figure 16) (Deschamps 1941, p. 178; Rascol 1942–1945, p. 455). She is almost impossible to see well in her current location in the North transept, as the panel is too high up on the wall. Her facial features mirror those of Sainte-Foy in proskynesis in the tympanum (Figure 17). At the Annunciation, Fides is slipping a gift—-a ball of incense—-into Mary's hand, so that her intercession for the sinful-but-repentant humanity could receive the Virgin's support and bring about Christ's blessing. If we envision the Annunciation on the trumeau of the West façade, then Sainte-Foy acquires her rightful place at the entry to her sanctuary, spelling out her special intercessory power. Her prayer, which can bend Christ's ear, is the true magnet attracting the faithful from distant lands to come to her charismatic sanctuary. And her role is carefully coached, never to compete or exceed that of Mary, but to be a helper in the Virgin's plea for humanity.

Figure 16. The Annunciation with the third figure, identified here as Sainte-Foy, showing at the back, 1105–1115. Photo: Manuel Cohen.

Figure 17. Tympanum of the West Façade at Conques, 1105–1115. Detail showing Sainte-Foy in prayer. Photo: Boris Missirkov.

As mentioned earlier, Mary leads the *choros* of saints to Christ in the tympanum of the West façade (Figure 4). What is the place of Sainte-Foy in this dance/chant of Salvation? Her gift to Mary in the trumeau secures the Virgin's favor. And all faithful passing through the gates into the church would see her special gesture. But it is in the tympanum above that her *fideles* would recognize the power of their patron's prayer (Figure 16). She is in proskynesis before God. The Lord's blessing hand shows the pardon she can obtain from Him. This episode initiates the grand spiral of the Resurrection and Salvation. As the spiral climbs, the narrative of the saved picks up in the middle register. Here the saved rise up from their squatting positions; the second figure from the left is likely Sainte-Foy, pivoting to join the procession towards the Savior, led by Mary (Bonne 1984, pp. 226–28; Pentcheva 2023). Sainte-Foy is at the beginning of the spiral, closest to the mortals lying in their tombs. She is the first spiritual force that ensures their entry into the right path towards salvation. Mary leads the blessed, but it is Sainte-Foy, who begins the faithful's spiral ascent into eternal life.

Santa Fides' prominent role in Salvation is also marked in the portable altar given by Pons, the bishop of Roda-Barbastro to abbot Begon III in 1100 (Garland 2006). The Deesis

shows Christ in the center, Mary at his right and Ste. Fides rather than the usual John the Baptist on His left. Sainte-Foy re-shapes the intercessory dynamics, directly occupying the side of Christ and mirroring what the Virgin does. Sainte-Foy is the local magnet, she appears as the reciprocal partner to the Theotokos, and like her, she is sharing in the intimacy of Christ's love.

8. Conclusions

Conques develops a subtle hierarchy that could only be fully appreciated if we restore the Annunciation panel back to the West façade (Figure 15). The monastery preserves its original dedication to the trio of Christ, Mary, and the apostle Peter, but it elevates Sainte-Foy to a position second after the Virgin. Thus, the site becomes a place of Deesis, where the local Sancta Fides joins Mary as the second intercessor. The female saint draws inspiration from the Virgin, but never overshadows the Mother of God. The same prudence is exhibited in the tympanum on the West façade (Figure 4). Sainte-Foy initiates the spiral of Salvation, but Mary heads the procession returning to Christ. Similarly, in the large Annunciation panel, the Mother of God is the main protagonist; she interrogates the Angel. Sainte-Foy stands in the shadows, behind the Theotokos (Figure 16). But she secures the most important prize: the salvation of her servants purchased with the precious gift of a ball of incense.

By recognizing the origins of the inscriptions in the signature chants sung for major feasts of Mary such as the responsory and sequence using the phrase "*missus est angelus Gabriel a Deo*," this analysis uncovers the deeper nuances of the Annunciation. The responsory *Missus est angelus* skillfully uses mode 7 to probe into the disturbing and paradoxical divine order given to Mary. She initially hesitates and questions the validity of virginal motherhood. Her doubts vex the angel, pushing him to burst out in a high-pitched extremely melismatic *non*, warning Mary to stop interrogating and to submit to the divine will. The responsory thus probes a hitherto little discussed aspects of the Annunciation: that of Mary's doubt and of its disquieting effect on the celestial messenger.

The *missus est Gabriel angelus a Deo* also features in the sequence *Salve porta*. The latter opens the possibilities of envisioning the relief panel on the exterior, West façade (Figure 15). The song gives prominence to the seduction in the divine message. The archangel paints the glorious vision of the son Mary will conceive; he will be elevated on the Davidic throne. Composed again in a *G* mode, this chant explores the higher range to amplify the splendor of the prophetic vision. The brilliance of the future quells Mary's mind. The coordination of the apex of the composition with the throne of David and the conception of Christ finds visual confirmation and fulfillment in the tympanum of the West façade. Here the awe-inspiring Ruler of All has come in glory to judge the world. The Annunciation longs to belong to the West façade, there it will anchor the beginning of divine economy and serve as the gate leading to Salvation. In addition, it will also remind visitors of the patron Sainte-Foy, working tirelessly in the shadows of Mary to procure the salvation of her faithful servants.

This subtle hierarchy placing Sainte-Foy immediately after Mary can also be read in a prayer to Fides recorded in the Winchester psalter (London, British Library, MS Lat. Cotton MS Nero C. IV, 1150, fol. 138v) (Haney 2015).

Prayer of Sainte-Foy

Holy and blessed Fides, precious virgin, glorious martyr, honor of the heavens, ornament of paradise, pearl of celestial Jerusalem, bride of Christ, sweet and lovely friend of God, who renounced corporeal pleasures, because you desired, thirsted after, and longed for Christ so much that you did not stop at anything until through your martyrdom you discovered him as grace, so now you have, hold, and see the one you desire, and draw joy in effortlessly communing [with him] face to face. You have found pleasure in him, and have embraced him, and [have found] a throne under the shadow of the one you desire, and his fruit ['benefit,' but also 'pleasure'] on your sweet neck. He has your delicate voice

and your pretty face as his ornament. He commands you as a servant, exalts you as a queen, protects you as a daughter, and crowns you as friend, certain as death, pleasure became yours. And in whatever ways, you would always exchange it reciprocally for the souls [i.e., you will rely on your strong bond with the Lord in order to save souls], and therefore on account of the indissoluble bond [with Christ] your selfless love (charity) is a more complete happiness, exuding the odor of eternal life. Therefore, we pray to you, glorious and celestial lady Fides, who among the virgin saints is [second] only to the incomparable and divine Mother of God Maria, marked with almost as many signs of miracles. Extend a helping hand over us, sinners, in our present life, and obtain forgiveness of our sins [through prayer] before the most pious Savior, whom in your earthly life your strove to please and in whom you place your desire for comprehension now that you are forever among the angels [in heaven]. And in the Last Judgment when the Judge will come, appease his anger with your holy prayers, so that we are deemed worthy to be liberated from the fires of Gehenna and linked to the fellowship of saints (Bolland 1866).[3]

The efficacy of Sainte-Foy issues from her intimacy with Christ, she is paradoxically His lover, servant, queen, and daughter. Now in the heavenly courts, she stands face to face with Christ, and this direct access bestows power to her intercession. She is second to the Mother of God, having performed almost as many miracles as the Theotokos. Sainte-Foy is also described here as exuding the scent of salvation; her perfume recalls the ball of incense she gives to Mary. The fragrance of salvation is a metaphor of sacrifice, for just like incense produces scent by the burning of its material body (the resin), so too the physical corpus of the saint is destroyed in order for divine *virtus* to begin flowing in the relics (Harvey 2006; Pentcheva 2010; Nees 2016; Robinson 2020; Cox-Miller 2009, 2015).

Prayer is another medium through which medieval art announces it audiovisual mode of communication. The monumental sculptures were never silent. The inscriptions they carried were quotes from the liturgy, which jolted the memory of the viewers to recall chants and prayers. The images became ensouled in these remembered songs. By uncovering this hitherto overlooked bond between monumental sculpture and liturgical chant, I suggest that music legitimized these images. If pagan idols were silent, Christian images purposefully drew on liturgical chants to ensure a continuous voice. These medieval songs not only developed the liturgical characters of sacred history, but they demanded from the viewer to lend their breath to the images. In this synergy between audio-spectator and images the inscriptions became voiced, reanimating sacred history in repeated ephemeral re-singings.

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Notes

1 I thank Vincent Debiais who ian email correspondce confirmed this deciophering of the Latin text. This isncription is not in (Favreau and Michaud 1984).

2 For the content of the chants in Paris, BnF MS Lat. 1118, see https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/source/123795 (accessed on 14 December 2022).

3 Sancta et benedicta Fides, virgo preciosa et martyr gloriosa, honor caeli, decus paradisi, caelestis Hierusalem margarita, Christi sponsa, dulcis ac dilecta Dei amica, quae postpositis saecularium voluptatum illecebris, Christum tantum concupisti, sitisti, desiderasti, nec unquam desiisti, donec per martyrii gratiam ipsum invenisti, nunc habes, nunc tenes, nunc vides, quem desiderasti, visoque sine fastidio satiaris. In illo delectaris, illum amplexaris, sub umbra illius, quem desiderasti, sedes, et fructus ejus dulcis gutturi tuo, illi vox tua dulcis et facies tua decora. Ipse tibi imperat ut ancillae, sublimat ut reginam, fovet ut filiam,

coronat ut amicam, valida ut mors, vestra fuit dilectio. Et quomodo majorem hac dilectionem haberetis, quam ut pro invecem animas poneretis, et ideo indissolubili modo nexa, totiusque felicitas plena vestra est caritas, spirans odorem aeternae vitae. Oramus ergo te, inclita et caelestis femina Fides, quam post incomparabilem et deificam Dei Genetricis Mariam pene omnibus sanctis virginibus miraculorum praeferunt insignia, ut nobis peccatoribus in presenti vita subvenias, atque apud piisimum Redemptorem tuum, cui in hac vita placere studuisti, et in quem nunc et semper inter angelos cernere cupis, peccatorum nostrorum veniam impetres, et in supremo judicii die venturi Judicis iram tuis sanctis precibus in maximam lenitatem ac bonitatem contra nos miseros convertas. Quatenus ab aeternis gehennae incendiis liberati, et Beatorum consortio conjuncti tecum faeliciter aeternare mereamur in caelis. Amen (Bolland 1866).

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Article

Marian Devotion on the Camino de Santiago during the Middle Ages

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Abstract: This article presents the theological basis of Marian devotion on the medieval Camino de Santiago and its manifestation in the form of Marian advocacies (Virgen Peregrina, Virgen del Camino). The presence of the cult of the Virgin Mary on the pilgrimage route to Compostela, closely linked to the Jacobean tradition from the very beginning, grows out of the main Mariological trend in the Middle Ages, expressed in the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas. However, a special relationship must be sought in the Mariology of the Hispanic–Mozarabic rite, which created the spiritual climate for the Compostela pilgrimages in the first centuries of their existence.

Keywords: Thomism; Mariology; Camino de Santiago; medieval pilgrimage; cult of saints; Mozarabic rite

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1. Introduction

The notable presence of Marian devotion in the twelve centuries of pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela to venerate the remains of St. James the Great in the *Finis Terrae* of Western Europe is palpable and significant (Rucquoi 2018; Greenia 2018; Mróz and Mróz 2013; Mróz et al. 2022). It has given rise to abundant bibliographies throughout these centuries, to which pilgrims, scholars and also theologians of great prestige have contributed. Some of them, such as Robert Plötz, refer to a curious "competition" between the Mother of Christ and the apostle (Plötz 1997, p. 174). For this German expert, there are two key questions on this subject, summarized as follows: What happened in the Hispanic lands and, above all, along the Way of St. James that caused the competition between the Virgin Mary and the Apostle? How and in what way did they leave traces in the historical testimony?

2. The Presence of the Marian Cult in Medieval Camino

On the Way of St. James, there are numerous temples dedicated to the mother of Jesus, just as—to a lesser extent—others are dedicated to saints and can be visited in that kind of devotional altarpiece that is contemplated by those who walk this spiritual and human journey. It is of vital importance to give value to the intermediate sanctuaries on the Camino; many of them are, in turn, the objects of regional or national veneration, especially when we observe the increase in the number of pilgrimages divided into sections (Tanco Lerga 2010, p. 61; Gonzalez and de la Calle 2020). Some saints—such as Saint Millán, with his life related to Bishop Braulio of Zaragoza and his *Glosas Emilianenses*, completed around 994—are a good example of this (Tanco Lerga 2011, pp. 31–53). It is no coincidence that the first written testimony we have of a pilgrim on the French Way, Bishop Godescalco, left a copy of a book in the monastery of San Martín de Albelda in 950 (La Rioja, then part of the kingdom of Pamplona and near Nájera). It was logically handwritten, and was a Marian treatise written by Saint Ildefonso of Toledo, which he would collect on his return from the cathedral of Compostela the following year on his return to his seeing of Le Puy in France. It also shows that, in the land of Mary, as Spain is known, devotion

to the Mother of Jesus, who, according to the tradition, visited St. James around year 40 in Saragossa, had an influence in the first millennium of Christianity in fostering Marian devotion. The study of the role of the Virgin in the Reconquest—first in Andalusia and then in the Christian kingdoms as the Reconquest progressed—is very interesting, first in Covadonga from 918 onwards and then in so many invocations of victories and spiritual struggle, such as the knightly Santiago, protector of faith, popularly known as Santiago Matamoros after the battle of Clavijo. The Virgin and Saint James the Apostle, although not exclusively—there are San Millán and the Victoria crosses and other signs of protection in the struggle to restore faith—represent the symbols to which the fighters for the Christian faith in reconquering Spain took refuge.

In the second millennium, following the Marian spread promoted by the monasteries, mainly Benedictine and Cistercian—St. Bernard is very emblematic—devotion to Mary is widespread throughout the pilgrimage to Santiago. Pilgrimage centers such as Le Puy, Rocamador, and Monserrat, and hospitals named after the Mother of God, such as Roncesvalles, are very present along the Camino on the different routes that pilgrims choose from their homes to reach Compostela. In the burials of pilgrims who died with their "boots on", in addition to the motifs attributed to their *santiaguera* condition, we see insignia of Marian devotion sewn or attached to the tunics and attire proper for their purpose (Pugliese et al. 2013). Those who go on pilgrimages to Galicia have many allusions in medieval Hispanic literature and, to a lesser extent, in the Romance languages that were also incipient in other nations, which justify their popular roots. *Loores de Nuestra Señora*, Gonzalo de Berceo in the background; and the *Cantigas del rey Sabio*, with the *Virgen Blanca* from Villalcázar de Sirga, serve as examples in this respect. It is worthy to underline that the *Cantigas* are a reflection of the oral tradition of the people, so they are of great interest as a source of miracles and legends of the Camino.

To take a starting reference to this mutual relationship between the Marian and the Jacobean, we can turn to the Liber Sancti Jacobi, a masterpiece relating to the pilgrimage with its five books, not all by the same author, but which do highlight the overall movement of the Jacobean pilgrimage at a time of splendor, such as the first third of the 12th century (Moralejo et al. 1993, p. 634). As is well known, between 1120 and 1124, the first archbishop of Santiago, Diego Gelmirez, asked a group of theologians and intellectuals of his time for a compilation of texts, completed by contributions from different pens until their definitive writing, which we have to place around 1160. The aim of the group of authors was to show that it was the Cluniac pope Calixtus II (1119–1124) who wrote the text in his own hand and has given the five books of the work the name *Codex Calixtinus*.

Already in Book I, the author emphasizes the preponderant role of Mary in the history of Salvation: "The clouds rained down on the Just One when the apostles preached him to the world. He opened the earth when the Virgin Mary received Him. The earth bore the fruit of the Saviour when the Virgin Mother of God gave birth to Christ who saved the world from the ruin of sin" (Moralejo et al. 1993, p. 33). In the Miracles attributed to St. James, the Book refers on several occasions to Mary's salvific role, as in the case of the man who committed suicide at the instigation of the devil and was resurrected with the help of Mary. Book II of the Codex describes twenty-two miracles, including the one mentioned above and the one worked by the Apostle who punished—in an exemplary manner—an innkeeper from Pamplona who swindled a French pilgrim from Poitou who was making the pilgrimage to Compostela with his wife who had died in the capital of Navarre and their two children. The author calls some of the miracles as examples, because their aim is to exemplify or teach good behavior on the pilgrimage.

In the great miracle of St. James—number XVII of Book II of the *Codex Calixtinus*, which is attributed to the pen of St. Anselm of Canterbury—the pilgrim narrator, who has been made to change his journey from the Way to Santiago to that of Rome, has a vision of the Virgin narrated in these words: "Thus", says the narrator, "compelled by him we came to Rome, where by the church of St. Peter the Apostle there was a green and spacious place in the plain of the air, to which innumerable multitudes of saints had come for an assembly.

The Venerable Lady Mother of God and ever-virgin Mary presided over it, and many great men were seated to the right and left of them. I stood gazing at her with a heavy heart, for I had never seen such a beautiful creature in my life. She was not tall, but of medium height, with a beautiful face and a delightful appearance. The holy Apostle, my most pious advocate, immediately appeared before her, and before all, he cried out how the fallacy of Satan had defeated me. And she immediately turned to the demons and said: Ah, you wretches, what were you looking for in a pilgrim of my Lord and Son, and of James his loyal one?" (Moralejo et al. 1993, own translation).

Book V of *Codex Calixtinus* describes the routes and stages of the pilgrims in the era of splendor, the 11th and 12th centuries of the Romanesque and Cluny, the Gregorian reform that replaced the Hispanic rites in many aspects, and in which Sancho III the Great of Navarre (1004–1035) played a preponderant role in orchestrating the Reconquest and uniting of the Christian peninsular kingdoms. The author of Book V declares in the first person: "I have limited myself to enumerating these towns and the aforementioned journeys so that pilgrims on their way to Santiago may foresee, with this information, the necessary expenses for their journey" (Moralejo et al. 1993, p. 507). Further on, after describing the rivers, he says: "I have described these rivers so that pilgrims on their way to Santiago may avoid drinking in unhealthy ones and may choose the good ones for themselves and their horses". The author of the book—according to many authors, the French cleric and priest of Parthenay, Aymeric Picaud—when speaking of the Navarrese, especially in the northern pilgrimage area, quotes a list of Basque words used by the natives of that mountainous area near Roncesvalles, which brought back such bad memories of Charlemagne's defeat in 778, including the name of the Virgin: "God is called Urcia; the Mother of God, Andrea Maria; the bread, orgui; the wine, ardum; the meat, aragui; the house, echea; the owner of the house, iaona; the lady, andrea; the church, elicera; the presbyter, belaterra; the wheat, gari; the water, uric; the king, ereguía; Santiago, Iaona domne Iacue".

2.1. Marian Shrines on the Way of St. James

Book V of the *Codex Calixtinus* lists places of religious tradition and devotion to the saints exposed along the way, with the relics that are essential for Eucharistic celebrations and the object of great popular veneration as well as social and cultural references. Many of these milestones along the route had temples, sanctuaries and hermitages related to Mary.

One example is the dedication of large cathedrals on pilgrimage routes. To stick to the French Route in Spain, we can observe the dedication of the cathedrals of Pamplona (*Santa María la Real*); Logroño (*Santa María de la Redonda*); Burgos (with the same Marian title); *Santa María la Blanca in* León—another of the great Spanish cathedrals—and many other Marian shrines. A specialist and promoter of pilgrimage initiatives, Jesús Arraiza, wrote an enlightening book on the Marian presence on the Way of St. James, entitled *Por la ruta jacobea con Santa María* (Arraiza Frauca 1993).

The author lists nearly two hundred temples, sanctuaries and hermitages on the French Route in Spain and on the route from Oviedo to Santiago via Lugo that have the Virgin Mary as their main patron saint (Roszak 2018). In the pages of this book, we find, among many others: *Santa María de Roncesvalles, Santa María del Perdón* in Asträin, *Santa María de Eunate*, *Santa María la Real* (Rocamador) in Sangüesa, *Santa María de Los Arcos*, and in the short space of four kilometers—Estella and Ayegui—three images of great importance: El Puy, Rocamador and Irache of medieval origin and with a clear Jacobean connotation. In La Rioja, *Santa María la Real* de Nájera stands out. The lands of Burgos, such as *Santa María de la Calle* in Redecilla; *Santa María* de Oca; and *Santa María del Manzano* in Castrojeriz; are very rich in these dedications to the Virgin. In the Palencia area, there are *La Blanca* de Villalcaázar de Sirga; Santa María del Castillo in Frómista; the *Virgen del Camino* in Carrión de los Condes. Jesús Arraiza continues with other devotions, such as in León—in addition to the cathedral dedicated to the aforementioned *Virgen Blanca*, the *Virgen Peregrina* in Sahagún; *Nuestra Señora del Camino* in the village of La Virgen del Camino; *Nuestra Señora*

de la Majestad, which presides over the cathedral of Astorga; the *Virgen de la Encina*—a Jacobean enclave in Ponferrada if ever there was one; and the great chapel of the *Quinta Angustia* in Molinaseca; Galicia welcomes the pilgrim with the Marian temple of *Santa María la Real* in Cebreiro and continues with *La Merced* in Sarria, *Virgen de las Victorias* in Portomarín; and many others to culminate in Santiago with several venerated images, such as *La Peregrina, Virgen del Portal, la Corticela* and Virgen del Camino.

On the way to Oviedo and Lugo, we can see *Santa María de Arbas*, *Virgen de las Nieves* in the Pajares pass; *Virgen del Carmen* in Mieres del Camino; *la Balesquida*, Virgen del Rey Casto and *Virgen del Socorro* in Oviedo; *Nuestra Señora del Fresno* in Grado, *Virgen del Viso* in Salas and *Santa María la Real* in Obona. In Cangas de Narcea there is *Virgen del Acebo*; in Pola de Allande, *Virgen del Avellano*; in Fonsagrada, *Virgen de la Fuente* and in Lugo, *Virgen de los Ojos Grandes*. Jesús Arraiza, with photographs and descriptions included, describes two hundred sanctuaries, churches and hermitages on the Camino Frances. Many of these milestones, as on other routes, have devotional brotherhoods attached to them that provide help and collaboration to the ecclesiastical leaders of these enclaves. Many of them offer a Christian welcome and generous hospitality to pilgrims.

2.2. Studies on Marian Devotion on the Camino de Santiago

The Marian bibliography on the Pilgrim's Way is very varied and extensive. I would like to highlight the work of the couple María Cuende and Darío Izquierdo, who have several titles on the subject under the title *La Virgen María en las rutas jacobeas* (The Virgin Mary on the Jacobean Routes). One of them, which I know was very well received, was on the presence of the Virgin Mary in Portugal during the pilgrimage (Izquierdo and Cuende 2005). The series began with a study of the French Way (Cuende and Izquierdo 1997) and has served, as in the case of Jesús Arraiza's book, to awaken scientific and informative interest in the subject. Juan José Cebrián collected a repertoire in Galicia. The pairing of Mary and the Pilgrim's Way to Santiago has given rise to initiatives of great significance in recent years of the revival of the pilgrimage. By way of example, the Castilian–Leonese exhibitions of the "Ages of Man" have always offered samples of Marian images along the way. On other occasions, specific exhibitions have been held with great success, which have served to publicize and enhance the value of images, both in Spain and abroad. Various national studies, the treatment of which goes beyond the scope of this article, serve as a reference for those who wish to look into this extraordinary world of Marian devotion on pilgrimages and especially on the Pilgrim's Way to the apostolic tomb in Compostela.

Special mention should be made of the Marian invocation of the *Virgen Peregrina*, who is venerated in different places. The Galician city of Pontevedra has her as its patron saint with a basilica that is much frequented by her devotees, but also by the pilgrims who pass through this part of the Portuguese Way. In Sahagún, there has been a special cult of the Pilgrim Virgin who have occupied a place of honor in the Benedictine monastery, which is now in a sacred museum. La Rioja, in the town of Leiva, also has an image with the attire of a pilgrim, a large hat, a staff and a sash. In Zúñiga (Navarre), the Pilgrim Virgin is also prayed to in a similar way.

The holy Dominican founder, Domingo de Guzmán (13th century) and pilgrim to Santiago, a Spaniard from Burgos and a great promoter of the Holy Rosary, would be very happy if the litany of the Rosary included the protection of pilgrims to the Virgin, that is, Holy Mary, Queen of pilgrims, pray for us.

3. Theological Background of Camino Piety: Medieval Mariology in Its Two Characteristics

The manifestations of devotion and veneration in a particular epoch of history find their justification in the Mariology prevalent at the time. The way in which the mystery of Mary's life was presented and the attention paid to certain themes became the motif for many manifestations of art, imagery and prayers, which were also created on the Way of St. James and formed the identity of the pilgrim (Huzarek 2014, 2021; Roszak and

Seryczyńska 2020). The medieval pilgrim and his imagination and his way of experiencing the pilgrimage route to Compostela may have been influenced by two main theological currents associated with the Way of St. James. On the one hand, it was the synthesis of Thomas Aquinas, which, over time, became a classic study and reached many of the faithful through sermons. On the other hand, due to the peculiarities of the Spanish context, one can try to discern theological influences going back to the Hispanic–Mozarabic rite in pilgrims walking to Santiago.

3.1. Thomistic Mariology in the Christocentric Perspective

St. Thomas presents his reflection on the Blessed Virgin Mary not in isolation from Christology, but as a kind of preparation for it, contemplating Her as via *Christi*—as a path to Christ. Therefore, all theological justifications concerning Mary have a Christological background in Aquinas (Mróz and Roszak 2011, p. 202).

The main Mariological theme in the Thomistic view is the motherhood of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which Thomas presents in the spirit of the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon, which emphasizes the belief in the singularity of the person of Christ: the human and divine natures exist in the one hypostasis of the Word. This means that there is only one divine act of Christ's being, and thus Mary's motherhood is *vere et naturalis*, not merely symbolic (Dabrowski 2002; Thomas Aquinas, *Compendium Theologiae*, cap. 222). Aquinas advocates a way of doing Mariology in which the person of Mary and her true divine parentage become the center of gravity of all the other mysteries of her life, and thus in their relation to Christ as the Savior (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.29. a2c). He therefore considers her motherhood in the context of a proper grasp of the mystery of the Incarnation (Stancati 2009, p. 26), hence recalling his birth from the Father before the ages and his birth in time.

Aquinas therefore sees in Mary's motherhood the key to understanding her role also in relation to the Mystical Body of Christ, which is the Church. For she is not limited to a single event, but becomes a model for Christians (and the Church) of how Christ is born in the life of faith. Certainly, this theme is present in the multiple manifestations of art on the Way of St. James, where reverence towards Mary is linked to her divine motherhood: it reminds us that the pilgrim life is also the formation of Christ in each of the faithful. She gives birth to the Son who is the Light of the World, but by extension Mary is also *lux* in her attitude towards God—as resounds in the sermon of Thomas' *Lux orta*, full of Old Testament allusions and delivered on the occasion of the birth of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

A second strand of Thomistic Mariology is the emphasis placed on Mary as a 'dialogical woman', which Thomas Aquinas considers in the context of the scene of the Annunciation (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.30, a.4c). For Mary, dialogue with God is the foundation of her witness: she carries it out in order to become a more confident witness to this mystery. Mary's dialogue does not stop at an exchange with the divine messenger; it is a commitment made in a spirit of obedience (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, III, q.30, a.1c). The Mother of God's spoken fiat is an indication of the importance of the cooperation of a free creature in the work of redemption, and comes from a rational consideration of the word received. Mary as a free person, as Aquinas depicts her, points to the path that God proposes to man. The mystery of the Annunciation shows that Mary first becomes a disciple of the Lord and a person of faith, and only then, as a consequence, the physical Mother of Christ: He must be "conceived" by faith first in her heart rather than in her body.

What draws attention—also in the context of other scholastic mariologies—is the Trinitarian context. It is expressed, among other things, by Aquinas' commentary on Psalm 17, in which he calls the Virgin Mary 'the way to Jesus Christ' (*via Christi est Virgo Beata*) because her Son himself is the way to God (*via Dei est ipse Christus*). It is through Mary that Christ 'came' to humanity, and this is where her special ministry (ministerium) lies. For the Christian, it is an indication to take the path like Mary, for she is the *dux itinerantium*—the guide towards Christ. It is thus a journey of grace, during which man can count not only

on natural light, but on all the colors of the light of grace, as indicated by the Marian title *mater gratuita colorum*. It involves her accepting the will of the Father, which she fulfills in the spirit of her own mediation in the work of salvation, which is obviously incomparable to the mediation of Christ.

This spiritual mediation is analyzed by Thomas in the light of the miracle at the wedding at Cana, which, in his view, reveals two characteristics of Mary: piety (*pietas*) and mercy (*misericordia*). It is her ability to see those in need and to identify with them, and this is due to her identification with Christ (Thomas Aquinas, *In Ioannem*, cap. II, lect.1). Mary helps to find a solution for those people who do not see where to look. Mary presents their requests in a simple, simpliciter way, without unnecessary complexity. She begins to act, not at the last minute, but by being close to other people, she initiates action at the right moment. She shows herself to be caring and preventive when it comes to the welfare of other people by helping especially those who often try to hide their shortcomings and do not acknowledge them. Such mediation of Mary's mercy is possible because she is 'as close to Christ' as possible—which is what piety is supposed to lead towards. All these qualities are undoubtedly revealed in the worship of Mary on the pilgrimage routes: she teaches a mercy and piety that manifests itself not in spiritual closure, but in openness to fellow pilgrims and to the key issue of closeness to Christ through the sacraments.

It is still worth highlighting the theme of 'Mary's holiness', which Thomas discusses in detail, especially in a negative way—that is, by pointing out what Mary was free from. Undoubtedly, Thomas adopts the perspective of St. Paul, who speaks of the sin that has cast a shadow over all humanity. Nevertheless, in the case of Mary, he wishes to emphasize that her motherhood does not mean giving up her daily life—her vocation as a woman, wife and mother—in order to become God's chosen instrument. All the gifts of the Holy Spirit are in her—through which the greatness of the human being who follows the will of God and accepts his grace is shown. It is freedom from sin and the ability to act deservedly, freely responding to the good that is set before man.

By that means, the term 'full of grace' has a twofold sense for Aquinas—being linked to her participation in the grace of Christ as the Head. First, it is 'immunity from sin' and perfection of the virtues; second—redundancy of grace and being a *mediatrix* of grace for other people (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, q.27, a.5, ad 1), but always in relation to the source of grace, which is Christ.

3.2. Virgin Mary in Medieval Mozarabic Tradition

For a study of the Mariology evident on the Camino de Santiago in the form of works of art and euchology, it is worth noting the Marian devotion witnessed in the Hispanic–Mozarabic rite (Ibañez and Mendoza 1990; Roszak 2015; Ihnat 2019). It is about celebrating the liturgy according to the original custom that developed in the Iberian Peninsula from the first days of the evangelization of that country (Ihnat 2016). Despite the Arabization that began in 711, with the crossing of Gibraltar by Arab troops, the rite developed during the Visigothic period remained present and was a source of identity for Christians living in a culture increasingly distant from their faith (Pinell 1998). Many Christians from the south, particularly from Andalusia, migrated towards the northern kingdoms of Spain, bringing their piety, growing out of the Hispanic rite and the theology of the Visigothic period, especially St. Isidore, St. Leander or St. Ildefonso of Toledo (Ferrer Grenesche 2008; Porosło 2021), by maintaining the cult of St. James, who in time became the patron saint of the Reconquista. Nevertheless, it is important to note the very presence of a number of Marian feasts, which only later found their way into the Roman liturgy.

Mozarabic Mariology developed three fundamental themes related to Mary's role in the work of salvation, which became the main lines of Mariological systematization in the Middle Ages. On the one hand is the theme of Mary's virgin motherhood.

In the Hispanic liturgy, the designation of Mary as 'always Virgin', as well as her Immaculate Conception, appear in many Mass forms (Aldazabal 1990). At the same time, the need to place Marian reflection in the context of Christ's mission is emphasized (Garrido

1962). This, in turn, translates into reading Mary through the lens of her mission in the work of redemption. She is the advocate of inclusion in the church; she becomes the mediatrix leading to Christ, and so it is per Mariam that the Christian vocation is realized. It is noteworthy that the Mariology of the Hispanic Rite focuses on the notion of 'mission' and 'vocation', introducing a significant dynamic reflected in the forms of following Mary in the lives of Christians.

A distinctive feature of Hispanic prayers is the conviction that Mary's faith is a 'resting place' for Christ, who wishes to meet humanity in this way. This means that Visigothic or Mozarabic Mariology seeks to combine two traditions: both the Western one, with its emphasis on the physicality of motherhood (focus on the 'body'); and the Greek one, preferring to speak of Mary's spiritual quality (focus on the 'soul') (Girones 1970, p. 464). The idea was to emphasize that *mente et ventre concepit*, *virgo spiritualiter et corporaliter*. Mary is not only the mother of the 'physical' Christ, but also of his Mystical Body, and therefore the mother of the Church (Ibáñez 1974).

What is noteworthy is that it was important for the Hispanic theologians creating the euchology of the Mozarabic rite to see in Mary the way in which God accomplishes his saving intentions (Janini 1987). This is done not 'in spite of' human choices, but through the free decisions of creatures. The key remains her consent and commitment (Ibáñez 1975).

4. Conclusions

The two-pronged analysis undertaken—of the presence of forms of Marian devotion in the contemporary Camino de Santiago, but also of the theological origins of these foundations—has shown the influence of many theological themes debated in the Middle Ages on the concrete manifestations of Marian devotion among pilgrims to Compostela. The influence of both Western and Eastern Mariology can be seen, which is not surprising given that the Camino became a route for the exchange of many theological ideas, manifesting forms of piety brought from their own countries. In the future, it would be worthwhile to reach out for research that could show how local traditions from many European countries formed Marian devotion on the Camino de Santiago.

In the representations of the Virgen del Camino or Virgen Peregrina, it is not so much the divine motherhood of Mary that is revealed, as her role in the history of salvation. It is to point to Mary as the way to Christ, and as a model of responding to God's call in the midst of life's journey. Marian statues on the Way of St. James make not only the condition of *homo viator* or *homo peregrinus* visible, but Mary's mediation of mercy towards the Church to bring about an encounter with Christ—the meaning of every pilgrimage in Christian theology (Roszak 2022). Apart from that, what is emphasized in the mystery of the Virgin is the gifts of grace (*gratia plena*) with which God has adorned her (Ferrer Grenesche 2019). In this way, her obedience of faith that brings Christ to the people seems to be the central Mariological truth on the Way of St. James (Ferrer Grenesche 2012).

Marian devotion on the Way of St. James is therefore not a 'foreign body' but a logical consequence, not only of the history of the apostolic mission of St. James—as evidenced by the cult of the Virgen del Pilar—but of the sense of pilgrimage (Mróz et al. 2019). Seeing Mary on the road, the pilgrim becomes aware of his or her vocation and call (Seryczyńska 2019), and at the same time that he or she is not going alone but is accompanied by the intercession of the Mother of God. Being on the road ceases to be a mere description of a physical condition and begins the perspective of a soteriological interpretation of the pilgrimage experience (Roszak 2019; Doburzyński 2021; Oviedo 2022).

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Article

The Eternal Plan of the Father and the Immaculate Conception of the Mother: The Foundations of an Objective Mariology in the Theology of Blessed John Duns Scotus

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Abstract: This article explores selected aspects of the Mariology of Blessed John Duns Scotus, a medieval Franciscan philosopher and theologian. Even though the Subtle Doctor did not develop a theological synthesis as mature as that of St. Thomas Aquinas, his observations continue to provide a relevant source of inspiration for a more in-depth look at Franciscan protological and soteriological concepts. Duns Scotus earned his place in the history of theology as a eulogist of the mystery of the Incarnation and defender of the truth about the Immaculate Conception. In fact, what he had accomplished laid the necessary foundation for the dogmatic ruling on that matter in 1854. The article begins by presenting the scholar's view of the relation between creation and Redemption from the standpoint of Christ's perfect mediation. The Marian Doctor was an advocate of emphasizing the objectivity of Redemption, although he himself stopped short of the "threshold" of the mystery of the Father with respect to the Mother of the Son of God, the most perfect Mediator—also for the Virgin Mary. In the end, the Subtle Doctor did not draw all the possible conclusions from his theological vision of creation and salvation history. Next, the article outlines the perspective of God's eternal plan. Blessed John Duns Scotus's theology reveals a vision of history in which everything is directed toward the fulfilment of God's eternal plan: the very plan of which St. Paul wrote very forcefully yet subtly and to which St. John Paul II often referred. The interpretation of that plan is the foundation of an "objective Mariology". Finally, the author addresses the question of the freedom of both the Creator and His creation from the perspective of the Creator's plan and in accordance with the Marian Doctor's assumptions. An analysis of Duns Scotus's Mariology reveals its depth and innovative character and, at the same time, certain limitations which—in his time—were mentally unsurmountable.

Keywords: John Duns Scotus; medieval theology; God's eternal plan; the dogma of the Immaculate Conception; Virgin Mary; free will

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Dignare me laudare Te, Virgo Sacrata;
da mihi virtutem contra hostes Tuos.[1]

1. Introduction

Among the most prominent and influential thinkers of the Middle Ages was Blessed John Duns Scotus (d. 1308), a Franciscan friar from Scotland (Kośla 2011; Łopat 2011, pp. 450–66). The close of the thirteenth century saw a clash between two currents in philosophy: Thomism and Augustinianism. While a great number of solutions were adopted from Thomism, it was Augustinianism that determined the general stance of theology for the years to come. This process is believed to have been initiated by the Franciscans, and Duns Scotus was the main "architect" behind the new doctrine, hence its name: Scotism. As for Duns Scotus himself, he "also merited the title *Doctor Subtilis* on account of the acuity of his intellect and the brilliance of his philosophical and theological doctrine, which he generously shared in his teaching at universities in Paris and Oxford

and, above, all, in his many writings" (Łopat 2022, p. 74).[2] These writings constitute a rich philosophical and theological legacy that represents the accomplishments of a remarkable thinker who was capable of listening to predecessors and contemporaries alike.

While Scotism and Thomism shared many of their arguments, St. Thomas Aquinas (d. 1274) and Duns Scotus differed in their overall outlook on reality. In Aquinas's view, the world was comprised of general truths and conceived of as a rational and necessary creation, whereas Scotus focused on individual, specific beings and conceived of the world as partially irrational and created in freedom. A juxtaposition of the Subtle Doctor's ideas with St. Thomas's comprehensive theological vision reveals fundamental differences in their perceptions of the created world and in their very theologies. As Bartnik (2001, p. 276) notes, "while St. Thomas was characterized by his metaphysical and systematical genius, Scotus excelled with his brilliant dialectical and critical thinking" (see Lohfink and Weimer 2010, pp. 367–68). In that regard, many similarities can be observed between Scotism and St. Augustine's concepts. In a sense, the bishop of Hippo provided an outline of what Scotus would later, in his unique manner, develop and justify dialectically, transposing St. Augustine's suggestions into a subtle scholastic system. Within that system, he placed faith above reason, intuition above abstraction, and the individual above the community. Even more importantly, he asserted the primacy of the will over the intellect, which must have had many implications for the vision of reality that he adopted: a vision which differed from the ancient models while retaining a typically Christian character. In fact, Duns Scotus created a system of thought that was to "become in the following centuries a fixed point of reference for a broad speculative current, one increasingly more capable of winning agreement among the Minors" (D'Onofrio 2008, p. 435). His followers continued to develop his ideas, albeit with varying success.

Scotus earned his place in the history of the development of Catholic dogmas with his contribution to the acceptance of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary. It was he who maintained that accepting "the Immaculate Conception as a free theological opinion formalizes the idea that will permit the Western theology to adopt it. Mary was redeemed by Christ's cross, in anticipation of Her Son's merits" (Sesboüé 2001, p. 507).[3] This is why "in the Franciscan tradition, he is venerated as the Doctor of the Immaculate Conception. Indeed, he should be credited with finding a theological solution to the previously unsolvable problem of reconciling the dogma of the universality of Christ's redemption with the doctrine of the preservation of Mary from original sin" (Łopat 2022, p. 74). It should also be noted that the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin of Nazareth, which would only be dogmatized in 1854 by Pius IX,[4] had had a long history of its own.[5] In his beatification homily, St. John Paul II referred to John Duns Scotus as "the cantor of the incarnate Word and defender of the Immaculate Conception of Mary" (John Paul II 1993, n. 3). Furthermore, on the Solemnity of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary in 1988, he stated that "one could say that the dogma of the Immaculate Conception is a marvelous doctrinal synthesis of the Christian faith" (John Paul II [Jan Paweł II] 1999, p. 285). What makes the Subtle Doctor's proposed approach to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin of Nazareth so innovative? As Father Stefano Cecchin OFM rightly emphasizes, "one cannot understand Scotus's thinking by reading selected passages alone, without having an integral vision of all his doctrine (Cecchin 2015, p. 99).

In order to understand the Mariological ideas presented by Duns Scotus, and more specifically, the spirit of his Marian doctrine, it is necessary to consider integrally the entire theological vision that emerges from his writings. This article attempts to capture a holistic perspective of Blessed John Duns Scotus's theology. It begins by presenting the scholar's view of the relation between creation and Redemption from the standpoint of Christ's perfect mediation. Then, it outlines the perspective of the eternal plan devised by God who is good and makes everything good (cf. Gen 1:31, RSVCE). Finally, the author addresses the question of the freedom of both the Creator and His creation from the perspective of the Creator's plan and in accordance with the Marian Doctor's assumptions.

2. The Concept of a Complete Theological Vision

To fully understand the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary as conceptualized by the Marian Doctor, it is necessary to take into account his groundbreaking philosophical and theological solutions. Duns Scotus rejects the concept of God as a motionless mover who acts in a world created out of necessity and without freedom, which was the model developed by Greco-Arabic philosophy. In its place, he proposes the vision of God as an intelligent being who always acts with freedom, without necessity or external compulsion.[6] Along his journey toward the adoption of the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception lies the correct understanding of the concept of "necessity". Scotus was convinced that "after the Incarnation, there is no longer any reason to consider God and creation in terms of 'necessity' as was typical of the deterministic 'sensation' of reality that characterized Greek culture" (Cecchin 2015, p. 100). In the Subtle Doctor's view, the Incarnation is the *summum opus Dei*.[7] As such, it complements and renews the work of creation. According to Cecchin (2015, pp. 100–1), "the reason is that—following the theology of predestination in Paul's Christological hymns—since Christ is 'before all things' (Col 1:17–18), the reason for His Incarnation and for the universality of redemption does not necessarily stem from the fact that 'all men sinned' (Rom 5:12) but rather from logical arguments". This is due to the fact that Christ as the universal mediator, "the first-born of all creation" (cf. Col 1:15), reveals in history a specific manifestation of the Triune God's love.

Duns Scotus considers the Holy Trinity to be the "Highest Good": persisting in absolute freedom, it desires to act beyond Itself and include others in Its inner love. According to Cecchin (2015, p. 101), "since God loves in the most ordered way, and the center of His love is the One who is in the bosom of the Father, that is, the Word (Jn 1:18), in His love ad extra, all is oriented toward the Word as well. Any creature finds the meaning of its existence in the Word, and it does so even before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4)". The Marian Doctor is fascinated by the profundity of Paul's texts on the election of all creatures in Christ and on their destiny. This universal predestination takes place in the love of the Creator who, since the very beginning, has planned the Incarnation.

The perspective presented by Blessed John Duns Scotus is certainly compelling, especially if one considers the fact that in the general opinion of thirteenth-century thinkers, the reason behind the Incarnation was the "necessity" of redeeming the fallen man, and the truth of which St. Paul the Apostle had written and which Scotus revealed—that the Incarnation is a manifestation of God's free love—went largely unnoticed. Ultimately, then, it is not the sin of the beginning, which took the form of original sin in Adam's descendants, but the love of the Triune God expressed in the purpose, life, mission and sacrifice of "the first-born of all creation" (cf. Col 1:15) that forms the foundation of the Incarnation of God's Son.

The Redemption accomplished by Christ is universal in its scope because it responds to the universality of sin. Thus, since sin is universal, the possibility of being redeemed must be universal, too: "For St. Thomas Aquinas, Mary could not have escaped this necessity, either, for 'if the soul of the Blessed Virgin had never incurred the stain of original sin, this would be derogatory to the dignity of Christ, by reason of His being the universal Savior of all'[8]" (Cecchin 2015, p. 102). The Subtle Doctor, however, believed otherwise. Following St. Paul's ideas, he recognized that "God, in an ordered fashion, 'before the foundation of the world' (Eph 1:4), desired happiness for those elected, notwithstanding any merit or offense attached to those who were to be elected" (Cecchin 2015, p. 102). A special place among those elected is reserved for the Virgin Mary, Mother of God's Son, first in the order of grace, for she is "full of grace" (Lk 1:28). This primacy of the Immaculate Virgin follows from the primacy of Christ, "the first-born of all creation" (cf. Col 1:15), of whom Mary is the Mother.

The Franciscan school attaches great importance to the primacy of Christ.[9] Even St. Francis of Assisi placed "Christ in the very center of his theological intuitions, for it is only He who can explain the Triune God and perfectly unite creation with the Creator" (Warchoł 2015, p. 117; see also Ambrożkiewicz 1992, pp. 18, 86–87, 89; Pompei 1995, pp. 772–75).

Blessed Duns Scotus equates the primacy of Christ with the absolute beginning—in the aspect of creation—of Redemption and the renewal of creation.[10] In his view, "there is no reason for predestination, even on the part of the predestined, that is prior to predestination itself. For condemnation, however, there is a reason that is prior not to the very action of God, for in such case, He would be passive, but prior to the very act of condemnation, which contains in itself its cause".[11] Duns Scotus's intuitions would later be explored in more depth and expanded upon in the ideas of St. Maximilian Maria Kolbe (d. 1941) (see Manelli 2009, pp. 71–118).

The Subtle Doctor says that "as others needed Christ so that, through His merit, their sins already contracted might be remitted, so She needed a Mediator who would protect Her from sin".[12] The Mystery of the Incarnation also reveals that Christ, too, as the Redeemer, wanted to "need" the Virgin Mary in accordance with His Father's eternal plan. According to Łopat (2022, p. 76), "since John Duns Scotus considers the Incarnation to be God's work ad extra par excellence, the first, so to say, in ordine intentionis, to which all other things that God is guided by are related and subordinated, then in consequence, he believes that the woman who worked so closely with the Redeemer in the fulfillment of this miraculous plan must have occupied a special place in the eternal purpose of the Incarnate Word. John Duns Scotus strongly emphasizes that Christ and His Mother are tightly bound together in one eternal act through which God determined 'in advance' the Incarnation of His Son".

An important aspect of the manner in which Scotus interprets the mystery of the Immaculate Conception[13] is the notion—probably found in the writings of St. Paul—of the most perfect Mediation that is fulfilled in the Incarnate Son of God, born of the Virgin Mary. In his view, "Christ was the most perfect Mediator and, as such, He must have exercised the highest degree of mediation with respect to another person. However, He would not have been a perfect Mediator and Redeemer if He had not preserved [His] Mother from original sin . . . Therefore, since He Himself was the most perfect Mediator for His Mother, what follows from this is that He must have preserved Her from original sin . . . Therefore, through His death, Christ mediated in favor of His Mother so as to merit the absolution of not only the sins which She might commit but also the original sin which She might contract".[14]

3. The Good God's Eternal Plan

The Apostle of the Nations acknowledges that he has received grace in order to "preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things" (Eph 3:8–9). Elsewhere, he confesses, most likely speaking of himself: "I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven . . . And I know that this man was caught up into Paradise . . . and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter" (2 Cor 12:2–4). An object of great interest from theologians and attention from pastors is the mysterious plan so often mentioned by St. Paul,[15] St. Peter[16] or the author of the Letter to the Hebrews.[17] Pope St. Leo the Great (d. 461) taught that "the providential Mercy of God, having determined to succour the perishing world in these latter times, fore-ordained the salvation of all nations in the Person of Christ" (Schaff 2007, p. 145). St. John Paul II also referred to that plan when he wrote: "The *divine plan of salvation*—which was fully revealed to us with the coming of Christ—is eternal. And according to the teaching contained in the Letter [to the Ephesians] and in other Pauline Letters (cf. Col. 1:12–14; Rom. 3:24; Gal. 3:13; 2 Cor. 5:18–29), it is also *eternally linked to Christ*. It includes everyone, but it reserves a special place for the '*woman*' who is the Mother of him to whom the Father has entrusted the work of salvation[18]" (John Paul II 1987, n. 7; emphasis added). In fact, it is impossible to separate the mystery of Mary's Immaculate Conception from the Triune God's eternal reasons.[19] What is the mystery plan that continues to be fulfilled and, in God's design, precedes the creation of things? How is it interpreted by Blessed John Duns Scotus?

The Subtle Doctor begins with God's love, which in his mind should be considered the beginning and cause of all predestination. Creatures exist without necessity, and the reason for their existence is the Creator's free act of love. According to Warchoł (2015, p. 119), "the only rationale behind the outward action of the Divine will is God's love that yearns to communicate with other beings. It is unthinkable that any being could influence God's will in the act of predestination". The next step toward an understanding of the issues raised in this paper is the simple conclusion that "the predestination of Christ is not only not rendered necessary by human sin; rather, even creation itself is a consequence of that predestination, since the world was created for the purpose of receiving the Word, who is distinguished from the other divine persons precisely inasmuch as he is characterized, unlike the Father and the Spirit, by embodying the perfect relationship of divine love for creatures" (D'Onofrio 2008, p. 448). The work of Redemption is an additional task for the Incarnate Word of God, who—by descending from the Father—restores to humanity and to the world wounded by Adam's sin their proper orientation toward the renewal of "all that God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old" (Acts 3:21).

Another important consideration is that Christ's predestination "has as an integral element the eternal preservation of Mary from original sin. She was predestined to be the mother of Christ and therefore received this special privilege in order that reconciliation might be the work of a mediator who had no element of enmity against the Father" (D'Onofrio 2008, p. 448). Therefore, Duns Scotus's teaching reveals that the Mother's privilege is a consequence of the Son's primacy and of the fact that He is destined to become the absolute mediator between the good Creator and His creation, which—through disobedience—fell into sin.[20]

4. The Creator's Eternal Plan and the Freedom of Creation

Blessed John Duns Scotus addresses the question of freedom and its relationship to reason in his characteristic fashion. In his opinion, freedom is a fundamental characteristic of the will. However, as Benedict XVI (2010) notes, "unfortunately, in later authors, this line of thinking turned into a voluntarism, in contrast to the so-called 'Augustinian and Thomist intellectualism'". God's freedom cannot contradict either truth or goodness, for this would contradict His perfection. In its original form, the Scotist vision is free from such extremes and errors. As Benedict XVI (2010) emphasizes, "for Duns Scotus a free act is the result of the concourse of intellect and will, and if he speaks of a 'primacy' of the will, he argues this precisely because the will always follows the intellect", with which it finds a common purpose in truth and goodness.

In the spirit of St. Francis of Assisi, the Subtle Doctor liked to contemplate the mystery of the Passion of the Savior "as the expression of the loving will, of the immense love of God who reaches out with the greatest generosity, irradiating his goodness and love" (Benedict XVI 2010).[21] It was not only Christ's cross on Calvary but also the mystery of the Holy Eucharist that revealed His love. Duns Scotus held great reverence for the Eucharist and saw it "as the Sacrament of the Real Presence of Jesus and as the Sacrament of unity and communion that induces us to love each other and to love God, as the Supreme Good we have in common" (Benedict XVI 2010).[22] There, the original love from which all was created and in which man was redeemed is a goal both for humanity in general and for all individuals. In that love, the ultimate union is to be attained with God, who on Earth, by being born of the Virgin Mary, became food for all those who believed His words.

Out of all people, the Virgin of Nazareth was filled most completely with Divine love (see Lk 1:28). In the interpretation of Her person and Her appointed place in God's eternal plan, the Subtle Doctor followed the principle according to which one may "ascribe to the Holy Virgin all the attributes and prerogatives that appear the most perfect, as long as they do not contradict the testimony of the Holy Scriptures and the declarations of the Magisterium of the Church" (Łopat 2022, p. 78).[23] This brings to mind the famous syllogism "*potuit, decuit, ergo fecit*"[24] that has been wrongly attributed to Duns Scotus.[25] Despite the misattribution, Scotus did in fact apply this principle—inherited from his mentor William

of Ware (d. 1305)—to the mystery of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary: "With his irresistible dialectical force, John Duns Scotus was able to 'neutralize' the objections typically raised against the doctrine of Mary being freed from original sin, which were in essence limited to two arguments: (1) that the passing down of original sin inevitably affected all men as descendants of Adam; and (2) that Christ's redemptive work has a universal significance which even His Mother could not 'escape,' so that She also had to be freed from original sin to achieve salvation" (Łopat 2022, pp. 78–79). With regard to the "neutralization" of the above objections, Scotus's notion of the priority of the individual over the community was an important factor.

In the Subtle Doctor's thought, Mary is connected to the mystery of the Holy Trinity that acts in the world and to the eternal plan of salvation that God freely willed and joined with the Incarnation of His Son: "God's plan of Christ's absolute predestination . . . also included the predestination of Mary, through whom, in accordance with that same and only plan, the Word of God was to assume a human nature" (Warchoł 2015, p. 124). Mary is the true Mother of the Incarnate Son of God; she became Her as a virgin and remained a virgin. The grace of the Immaculate Conception is linked to the grace of Her Divine motherhood, which in turn stems from Her constant virginity. The freedom of the Immaculately Conceived Virgin Mary expresses itself to the fullest extent in Her fiat to God's plan and is most certainly linked to Her vow of virginity (Lk 1:34).[26] This subject, however, is so broad that it needs to be addressed in a separate paper.

5. Conclusions

The Mariology of Blessed John Duns Scotus must be considered through the lens of all his theology and against the background of all his epistemological and ontological assumptions. While it does not represent a fully mature synthesis, it is nevertheless a historically important step that enabled theology to develop in a more appropriate direction. The solutions proposed by Blessed John Duns Scotus were ground breaking for his time and remain valid today. In fact, they may help overcome today's issues (such as restricting the autonomy of theology under the pretense of "scientific" correctness, pursuing theology in a fragmentary manner that does not take into account its complete vision based on events in the history of salvation, or ignoring the revealed notion of God's hidden designs that continue to be fulfilled until the Final Judgment).

The Subtle Doctor's theology reveals a vision of history in which everything is directed toward the fulfilment of God's eternal plan: the very plan of which St. Paul wrote very forcefully yet subtly and to which St. John Paul II often referred in his teaching. This plan also provides a foundation for the development of an "objective Mariology", which aims to decipher God's intentions for the Virgin of Nazareth and for Her real, objective participation in the work of Redemption accomplished by Her Son. In Scotus's view, the work of the Incarnate Redeemer, although subsequent in time, precedes the work of creation in the sense that everything exists in order to find its fullness in Christ, "the first-born of all creation" (Col 1:15).

What John Duns Scotus had accomplished laid the necessary foundation for the dogmatic ruling on the matter in question. The Subtle Doctor was an advocate of emphasizing the objectivity of Redemption, although he himself stopped short of the "threshold" of the mystery of the Father with respect to the Mother of the Son of God, the most perfect Mediator. In the end, the Marian Doctor did not draw all the possible conclusions from his theological vision of creation and from his soteriology, such as the conclusion that the Creator's designs concerning His free decision to affect the Incarnation of His Son suggests that He would also need to prepare His Son's Mother. After all, did the Creator not reveal His plan in the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15)? The Marian Doctor associated the privilege of the Immaculate Conception of the Redeemer's Mother with Her prior Redemption, which she must have attained by virtue of being a descendant of the house of Adam. Is the Creator, however, not free in his eternal designs and in their fulfilment in time? What is there to be redeemed in the Immaculate Conception? Blessed John Duns Scotus himself

could not have reached such conclusions, since his deliberations were too tightly bound by the paradigms of scholastic theology, even though they are not dogmas of the faith of the Catholic Church. From the perspective of the present state of theology, one can see certain limitations in the views outlined by the Subtle Doctor. At the same time, however, his intellectual achievements and rich spiritual legacy warrant a more in-depth reflection.

It is clear that Blessed John Duns Scotus built upon the assumptions made by his predecessors to construct his own method for the interpretation of such truths of the faith as the universality of the Redemption accomplished by Christ or the universality of original sin and its consequences for humankind. Resisting the temptation to simplify or reject these truths, he demonstrated how they can be reconciled with the truth of the Immaculate Conception of the Redeemer's Mother. Brilliant for their time, his solutions now demand further development and "objectivization" in the light of personalism and an objective Mariology that refers to the eternal plan of God the Father. When analyzing Scotus's ideas from the perspective of, for instance, the "Marian dogmas" and the growing awareness of who Mary is in God's eternal plan and what Her role is in the work of Redemption, one can see the breadth of his ideas and, at the same time, certain limitations that he inherited from the style of argumentation characteristic of the scholastic school of his time. Nevertheless, his subtle intellect and his ability to build upon the findings of his contemporary—or slightly earlier—theologians enabled him to defend the privilege bestowed upon the Mother of the Redeemer of humankind.

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Notes

1 "Allow me to praise thee, O sacred Virgin./Against thy enemies give me strength".

2 "His works were all connected with his teaching at the universities: commentaries on works of logic and on Aristotle's *On the Soul* and *Metaphysics*, *Disputed Questions* and *Quodlibetal Questions*, the treatise *The First Principle* (or *The First Principle of All Things*), and the *Theoremata*. Then, fundamental for his theological teaching, there were the several editions of his commentary on the *Sentences*; the gigantic *Oxford Work* (*Opus Oxoniense*), a true summa of theological thought, also cited as *Ordinatio*; finally the *First Reading* (*Lectura prima*) and the more summary *Notes on the Parisian Lectures*" (D'Onofrio 2008, pp. 435–36). See also John Duns Scotus, *Opera Omnia*, Wadding-Vivès edition (Duns Scotus 1891–1895).

3 See John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. III, d. 3, q. 1 (Duns Scotus 1933, pp. 17–54); *Opus Parisiense*, l. III, d. 3, q. 1 (Duns Scotus 1933, pp. 223–35).

4 In the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (*Ineffable God*) announcing the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary (8 December 1854), Pius IX pronounced that "the most Blessed Virgin Mary, in the first instance of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege granted by Almighty God, in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, the Savior of the human race, was preserved free from all stain of original sin" (Pius IX 1854).

5 "The Immaculate Conception would remain the subject of a long-standing debate among Latin theologians. During the Carolingian Renaissance, Paschasius Radbert, abbot of Corbie (c. 790–860), was the first to claim that Mary 'knew no corruption that derived from the first origin.' The Greek feast of the Conception of the Virgin Mary was transposed to the West in the mid-eleventh century and became widely adopted across Europe in the twelfth century . . . The great scholastic theologians, however, would remain conflicted. Anselm of Canterbury, St. Bernard and then St. Thomas would reject the Immaculate Conception as being incongruent with the universality of original sin, with Thomas concluding that Mary had been cleansed of original sin through grace in her mother's womb . . . Bonaventura, on the contrary, would echo a more moderate current in the Franciscan school, and the idea that Mary had been redeemed by being preserved from sin rather than being cleansed of it would be expressed as early as the thirteenth century . . . In 1439, the Council of Basel arrived at a definition of the Immaculate Conception, which must have required admirable unanimity from its advocates, and established a solemnity for all the Church on December 8. The definition was expressed using terminology which is remarkably similar to that which Pius IX would use in 1854. The above council, however, was deemed 'schismatic' on account of its conciliarist arguments and had had no

communication with the pope for two years; consequently, the text holds no value from the standpoint of the magisterium" (Sesboüé 2001, pp. 507–8).

6 See John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. I, d. 40, q. un., n. 4 (Duns Scotus 1950–).

7 John Duns Scotus, *Opus Parisiense*, l. III, d. 7, q. 4 (Duns Scotus 1933, p. 14). See also John Duns Scotus, *In III Sententiarum*, d. 32, q. un., n. 6 (Duns Scotus 1891–1895, vol. 15, p. 430).

8 Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologica* III, q. 27, a. 2 ad 2 (Aquinas 1947).

9 For more information on this subject, see Commodi (2021, pp. 125–75).

10 "Christ would not have come as Redeemer, nor would He have adopted a corporeal form that is susceptible to suffering, if man had hot sinned, for there would not have been any necessity in that regard"—John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. III, d. 7, q. 3 (Duns Scotus 1933, pp. 5–6).

11 John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. I, d. 41, q. un., n. 40 (Duns Scotus 1950–).

12 John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. III, d. 3, q. 1 (Duns Scotus 1933, pp. 35–36).

13 For a detailed study on this subject, see Adams (2010) and Ingham (2019).

14 John Duns Scotus, *Lectura in III librum Sententiarum*, d. 3, q. l (Duns Scotus 1950–).

15 Rom 16:25–27; 1 Cor 2:4–10; Eph 1:4–6, 7–10, 2:10; Col 1:26–27; 2 Tm 1:9–10.

16 1 Pt 1:18–21.

17 Heb 4:3.

18 Footnote 19 of the encyclical (John Paul II 1987) reads as follows: "Concerning the predestination of Mary, cf. Saint John Damascene, *Hom. in Nativitatem*, 7, 10: *S. Ch.* 80, 65; 73; *Hom. in Dormitionem* 1, 3: *S. Ch.* 80, 85: 'For it is she, who, chosen from the ancient generations, by virtue of the predestination and benevolence of the God and Father who generated you (the Word of God) outside time without coming out of himself or suffering change, it is she who gave you birth, nourished of her flesh, in the last time . . . '"

19 Eph 1:4; 1 Pt 1:1–5.

20 See John Duns Scotus, *Opus Oxoniense*, l. III, d. 3, q. 1 (Duns Scotus 1933, pp. 22–23). See also Manelli (2021, pp. 441–42).

21 See also John Duns Scotus, *Ioannis Duns Scoti Tractatus de primo principio*, c. 4 (Duns Scotus 1941).

22 See also John Duns Scotus, *Reportata Parisiensia, In IV Sent.*, d. 8, q. 1, n. 3 (Duns Scotus 1891–1895, vol. 24, pp. 9–10); Denzinger (2009), n. 1651.

23 See John Duns Scotus, In *III Sententiarum*, d. 3, q. l, n. 5 (Duns Scotus 1891–1895, vol. 14, p. 165).

24 This can be translated as "he was able to do it, it was appropriate, so he did it".

25 For more information on that subject, see Rosini (1994, p. 80, footnote 16) and Veuthey (1988, p. 83).

26 See John Duns Scotus, In *IV Sententiarum*, d. 30, q. 2 (Duns Scotus 1891–1895, vol. 19, p. 278); *Opus Oxoniense*, l. IV, d. 30, q. 2, n. 5 (Duns Scotus 1950–).

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Article

The Vase in Paintings of the Annunciation, a Polyvalent Symbol of the Virgin Mary

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Abstract: This article tries to highlight the deep doctrinal meanings underlying the vase that is often included in artistic depictions of the Annunciation. This apparently banal everyday object has been deliberately placed there in a prominent position to symbolize the Virgin Mary in her condition as the virginal mother of God the Son, and the bearer of all virtues to the highest degree. As methodological resources to justify our iconographic interpretations of that symbol in these images, our study is based on the analysis of texts by several Church Fathers and medieval theologians, as well as numerous liturgical hymns, which for more than a millennium agreed to designate the Virgin Mary as a "vase", "vessel", and other types of containers. Thus, this ancient patristic, theological and hymnographic tradition legitimizes our iconographic interpretation of the "vase" included in fifteen paintings of the Annunciation produced by artists from Italy, Flanders and Spain during the 14th and 15th centuries.

Keywords: Mariology; Marian iconography; Mary's divine motherhood; Annunciation; theological sources; doctrinal symbol

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1. Introduction

Before undertaking the exploration in the patristic-theological and liturgical writings that constitute the essential core of this article, it is useful to draw attention to a symptomatic fact: in the famous *Lauretan Litanies*, a set of invocations and supplications directed in honor of the Virgin Mary, there are three that acclaim her as *Vas spirituale* (Spiritual Vessel), *Vas honorabile* (Vessel of honor) and *Vas insigne devotionis* (Singular vessel of devotion). Indeed, it is surprising that the Church has officially legitimized this triple designation of Mary as a "vessel" or "vase", additionally qualified as "spiritual", "of honor" and "of devotion". What could be the doctrinal bases that would justify this strange triple reference to a vase or vessel to signify the Virgin?

Bearing in mind that these Litanies of Loreto began to take shape in various parts of Christianity as early as the 7th century, until they were almost completely expanded during the 12th century, it seems reasonable to conjecture that they were gradually structured, inspired by the exegetical doctrine that, as we will see later, many Church Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers had been producing since the 4th century around the metaphor of the vase or vessel as a symbol of the Virgin Mary.

On the other hand, from the 13th century and, above all, from the 14th, many artistic representations of the Annunciation include in the scene a vessel or vase in which a stem of lilies frequently stands.

In view of the apparent correlation between these texts and these images, we will try to explain the possible doctrinal meanings that the vase could have in the context of the Annunciation to Mary. It is not in vain that the History of the Salvation of Humanity begins in this decisive Marian episode, when the human conception/incarnation of God the Son, coming into the world as a man to redeem the fallen humankind, takes place at that moment.

Now, to achieve a correct iconographic interpretation of this vase in the images of the Annunciation, we need to investigate the primary sources of Christian doctrine—especially

in the patristic and theological writings, and in the liturgical prayers and hymns—, which are the primary sources that inspire and support the works of Christian art.

On the other hand, we must point out a linguistic precision: since all texts in primary sources that we have found on this subject use the Latin word "*vas*", which means "vase", "vessel", "jar", and other forms of "container", in our article we will translate it almost always, for terminological simplicity, as "vase" or "vessel".

2. Analyzing Some Patristic-Theological and Liturgical Texts

In this section, we will begin by exposing some exegetical texts of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians that praise the Virgin symbolically designating her as a vessel or an especially valuable vase. In the second part of the section, we will present numerous fragments of medieval Latin liturgical hymns that allude to Mary as a vessel or some other similar container.

2.1. Some Interpretations of Fathers and Theologians Designating Mary as a Vase

Without pretending to be exhaustive, we will present some testimonies from the Church Fathers and medieval theologians who interpret this metaphor of the vase referring to the Virgin from a Mariological perspective. We will first mention some texts of the Greek Patrology, before exposing other similar quotes from Latin Church Fathers and theologians.

Towards the middle of the 4th century, the influential St. Athanasius (295–373), Bishop of Alexandria, in a sermon on the Virgin and her cousin St. Elizabeth, praises Mary for her incomparable greatness, superior to all other greatness, for having been the domicile of the Word of God. He then praises her for being "the ark of the Covenant" covered with gold, an ark which keeps the golden vessel containing the true manna, which is the flesh of Christ in which the godhead of God the Son resides. St. Athanasius establishes here the parallelism—later assumed by many other Christian thinkers—between the ancient Ark of the Covenant, containing the vessel of manna, and the new ark/Mary, whose womb contained the new manna/Christ (the manna in essential relationship with the Eucharist). St. Athanasius of Alexandria is even more explicit in this symbolic allusion to the vessel in a homily on the Virgin, stating: "this glorious and virginal jewel remained totally immaculate: this vessel, which contained the Most High God, was not stained according to heaven, nor was it profaned."[1]

Some three decades later, St. Epiphanius of Salamis (310–403) in an apologetic book against heretics reproaches them for attacking this incorrupt Virgin who deserved to be the domicile of God the Son, who was the only one among the infinite number of the Israelites who was chosen to become the containing vessel and the habitation of her divine Son.[2] In another passage of this apologetic treatise, St. Epiphanius corroborates that Mary was the true mother of God the Son, from whom he received flesh (human nature) and to whom she gave birth, perpetually preserving her virginity; she is his mother so that the body of God the Son was received from her, and the wonderful vessel of her body received no stain.[3]

In the first half of the 6th century, the exquisite Byzantine hymnographer St. Romanos the Melodist (c. 485/90–c. 555/62) states in a hymn that the Holy Scriptures call Jesus the manna and the vessel that contains it, others call him the flower that sprouted from the root (of Jesse), while his mother Mary is called a flower, a stem, a door closed forever, who gave birth as a virgin and after childbirth remained a virgin in perpetuity (Cantor 1979). As you can see, Romanos the Melodist prefers to slide towards Christ the symbolic parallelism of the vessel of manna, instead of doing it directly towards Mary, of whom he highlights her virginal divine motherhood, which is what the symbol of the vessel referring to the Virgin means.

Probably around the same 6th century, an anonymous Greek writer assumes several similar ideas in a homily on the Annunciation. After specifying that the angel Gabriel was sent to the most chaste Virgin Mary, whom he honored with the greeting "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with you" (Lk 1, 28), he praises her as the full of grace, because she is the vessel

and the receptacle of supracelestial joy, since she gestated the Creator of the universe in her entrails.[4]

Towards the end of the 6th century or the beginning of the 7th, Theotecnos, bishop of Livias, in his well-known and prescient writing on Mary's Assumption to Heaven, declares that no one should distrust the miracle that the most holy body of the Mother of God remained virginal and incorrupt, since that was what was convenient for the one who had been the spiritual ark that contained Aaron's budded dry rod and the manna (that is, Christ) (Theotecnos 1979). A few lines later, he goes on to say that Mary is the ark, the vessel, the throne and heaven, for which she deserved to see the glory of God face to face. It is interesting to note that Theotecnos, as many other Christian thinkers will do later, uses here the simile of the "ark" as a synonym for "vessel", in the sense that, just as the ancient Ark of the Covenant contained the tables of the law, the manna and the flowered rod of Aaron (all objects directly linked to God), with even greater reason the Virgin Mary can be designated as an "ark", for having been a "vessel" or "container" that housed (conceived, gestated, and gave birth) to God the Son incarnate as a man.

In the second half of the 7th century or in the first decades of the 8th, St. Germanus, Patriarch of Constantinople (c. 634–733/40), in a sermon on the Presentation of Mary to the temple, extols her with these praises: "God save you, urn forged with pure gold, and containing the sweetest sweetness for our souls, which is the manna [Christ]."[5] In another homily on the Annunciation, he expresses similar praises, noting: "God save you, full of grace, urn all of gold containing the manna, and tabernacle really made of purple."[6] In his third sermon on the Dormition of the Virgin, Germanus of Constantinople imagines Jesus telling his dying mother Mary that death will not boast with her, because she conceived him in her womb, and was made the vessel containing God the Son, so neither death nor darkness would affect her. With these sentences, St. Germanus of Constantinople indistinctly shuffles the metaphorical figures "urn", "tabernacle", "vessel"—all of them container instruments of a sacred nature and function—as alternative symbols to designate Mary, who, as the Mother of God the Son incarnate, contains/houses/protects the divine Christ in her entrails.

In the first half of the 8th century, the famous apologist St. John Damascene (675–749), in his second homily on the Nativity of Mary, praised her with these lyrical terms: "God save you, urn, vessel made of gold, secret of every vessel, and with which the whole world received for itself the manna, that is, the bread baked with the fire of divinity."[7] In his first homily on Mary's Dormition, the Damascene insists on praising the Virgin with these words:

> God save you, candelabrum, golden and solid vessel of virginity, whose wick is the grace of the Spirit, and the oil of that holy body, which was assumed from your immaculate flesh; from which Christ [was born], light that knows no sunset; which you kindled to everlasting life for those who once sat in darkness and in the shadow of death.[8]

Again, the Damascene moves between the synonyms "urn", "vessel" and even "candelabrum" to metaphorically designate Mary as "container" or "sustainer" of the deity.

Around the middle of the 9th century, the fine Greek-Byzantine poet St. Joseph the Hymnographer (c. 816–886) proclaimed in a canticle in honor of the Virgin: "Oh, Mary, the purest tabernacle of the Word, purify my heart from all evil affections, and, the vessel of the divine Spirit, make this world praise you and magnify you, who are the worthiest of all praise."[9]

Perhaps around the same decades, George of Nicomedia (9th century), in his fifth sermon on the Presentation of Mary to the Temple, affirms that when her parents took her to the temple at the age of three, they were carrying this supreme and cleanest vessel of the treasure of grace, the spotless vessel, the receptacle of light, from which the rays of salvation (Christ) shone for the whole world.

Analogous to these Greek-Eastern interpretations, we now present another selection of exegetical statements by Latin writers who coincide in interpreting the metaphors under study.

In the second half of the 6th century, the Italian poet St. Venantius Fortunatus (c. 530–c. 607/9), Bishop of Poitiers, praises the Virgin in a hymn in her honor with these verses:

> Image of the model, decorum on all vessels,
> and gleaming mass of the new creature.
> Pure candelabrum, containing the lamp of the Word,
> To whom the Maker carved a form so superior to the stars,
> Gracious beauty that adorns the holy Jerusalem,
> Vessel standing in front of the temple in honor of God.[10]

Around the middle of the 7th century, St. Ildefonsus (607–667), bishop of Toledo, in an apologetic book on the perpetual virginity of Mary, after stating that "Certainly her virginity is always incorrupt, always whole, always unharmed, always inviolate", asserts that "This woman is the vessel of sanctification, the eternity of the virginity [the perpetual virginity], the mother of God, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, the singularly unique temple of her Creator."[11]

In the second half of the 11th century, the Benedictine St. Anselm of Aosta (1033–1109), Archbishop of Canterbury, in a prayer imploring the love of Mary and of Christ, praised the Virgin with these poetic concepts:

> The hall of universal propitiation, the cause of general reconciliation, the vessel and the temple of life and of the salvation of everybody, I certainly collect your merits, when I review your benefits singularly on me, a little man, which the world that loves enjoy, and claim enjoying being his.[12]

In a hymn in honor of the Virgin St. Anselm proclaims:

> The heaven of heaven, the house of God,
> The vessel of mercy.
> But it exists for you prone
> and completely easy.[13]

In the first half of the 12th century, St. Amadeus, bishop of Lausanne (c. 1110–1159), in his third homily on the conception and incarnation of Christ, designates the Virgin Mary as "the most precious and holiest vessel in which the Word of God was conceived."[14]

At the beginning of the 13th century, the distinguished Franciscan thinker St. Anthony of Padua (1195–1231) expressed in a sermon in honor of the Virgin Mary:

> Blessed Mary is called a "vessel" because she is "the bedchamber of the Son of God, the special shelter of the Holy Spirit, the triclinium of the Holy Trinity." That is why she says in the book of Wisdom: "He who created me rested in my tabernacle". (24, 14. In Nocilli 1995, p. 157)
>
> This "vessel" of Mary was an admirable work of the Most High Son of God, who made her more beautiful than all mortals, holier than all saints: in her "the Word became flesh and came to dwell in our midst". (John 1:14)[15]

Approximately half a century later, the also Franciscan St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1217/21–1274), an influential theologian and philosopher who, due to his pure mysticism, was known as the Seraphic Doctor (*Doctor Seraphicus*), brings some similar concepts in his fourth sermon on the Annunciation. After quoting St. Bernard of Clairvaux, who said that the Virgin Mary had been blessed by God with a supreme sanctification at her birth and in her later life, immune from all sin, St. Bonaventure points out:

> This was well symbolized in the last chapter of Exodus, in the figurative tabernacle, when Moses is told: *You shall anoint the tabernacle and its vessels*; and goes on to say later. *And when all these things were finished, a cloud covered the tabernacle of*

> *the testimony, and everything was filled with the glory of the Lord*. This tabernacle is the Virgin Mary, and the vessels are the receptacles of the virtues. The Son of God anointed them when, sanctifying the Virgin, he filled her with grace, and after sanctifying her, he covered her with his shadow and protected her with glory, so that neither in soul nor in body part remained that was not full of the grace of the Deity.[16]

In his Sermon 5 in honor of Mary, St. Bonaventure states: "That is why the flesh of the Virgin is designated as *the purest vessel*, because in her flesh neither sin reigned, nor did the flesh rebel against the spirit, nor did the flesh retard the spirit; and for that reason she was not only pure, but the purest."[17] In another Marian sermon, the Seraphic Doctor insists on similar concepts about the Virgin symbolized as a vessel, with a series of ingenious disquisitions that it is not possible to comment on in this brief article. As a synthesis of the approach of the Franciscan master in this last sermon, we can only present this quote:

> But the royal maiden [Mary] was an *admirable vessel* because of her *matter*; because of its *form*, and because of its *content*. Because of the matter it was an admirably *precious* vessel; because of its shape it was an admirably *beautiful* vessel; but because of its contents it was an admirably *abundant* vessel.[18]

2.2. Invocations to the Virgin Mary as a Vase in Some Medieval Liturgical Hymns

As expected, this solid and multi-secular exegetical tradition established by the Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches, by unanimously interpreting the metaphor of the "vase" as a clear symbol of the Virgin Mary, will take shape too in the Middle Ages in countless devotional prayers and liturgical hymns. We will now give some examples of these liturgical testimonies.

In this regard, we are fortunate that from 1853 to 1922 the conspicuous German historians Franz Josef Mone, Guido María Dreves and Clemens Blume compiled, transcribed and published in critical editions many of these Latin liturgical hymns in two monumental collections of indispensable reference. A pioneer in this field was Franz Josef Mone, who between 1853 and 1855 collected and edited many hymns in the three volumes of his collection *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi*: the first of them, dedicated to God (Mone 1853); the second, to the Virgin Mary (Mone 1854); the third, to the saints (Mone 1855). For this reason, in our article we will consider the second volume, dedicated entirely to Mary.

Immediately after Mone, Guido Maria Dreves edited between 1886 and 1898 the first 28 volumes of the impressive collection *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi* (AHMA 55 volumes in all), the next 22 volumes of which he published from 1898 to 1907 alone or co-authored with Clemens Blume. Blume then continued this collection until 1922 with its last 5 volumes.

Thus, these two great collections of medieval liturgical hymns serve us to compose the sequence of stanzas that we present below, in which Mary appears designated as "vase", "vessel", "container", "urn", or some other analogous type of receptacle. We will cite these liturgical hymns with the numbering and the title with which they appear catalogued in the collections *Hymni Latini Medii Aevi* (Mone 1854) and *Analecta Hymnica Medii Aevi* (AHMA). On the other hand, we will present these stanzas in chronological order, grouping them by centuries, to try to appreciate any possible evolution in the symbolic treatment applied to Mary over the centuries.

2.2.1. Hymn of the 10th Century

From the 10th century, we have only been able to document *Hymnus 3. De nativitate Beatae Mariae Virginis*, which in one of its stanzas poetically expresses the role of Mary as Mother of the Redeemer, stating:

> Merito debuerat
> Benedicta scribi,
> Qua deletus fuerat
> Morbus primi cibi,

Deus hanc voluerat,
Ut maneret ibi,
Vas generale suis.
vas speciale sibi.
(Hymnus 3. AHMA 2, Dreves 1886, 123)

Deservedly should
Be blessed to the scribe
The one with which
The sickness of the first meal [Adam and Eve's apple]
would be eliminated,
God would like that
She stayed there
As a general vessel for yours,
And as a special vessel for him.

2.2.2. Hymn of the 11th Century

From this century, we have only found, in reference to the analyzed subject, *Hymnus 68. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis*, which in brief verses praises the mother of God as follows:

6a. Genus regale,
Vas spiritale.
6b. Templum virginale,
Donum speciale.
(Hymnus 68. AHMA 9, Dreves 1890, 56)

6a. Royal lineage,
Spiritual vessel.
6b. Virginal temple,
Special gift.

2.2.3. Hymns of the 10th–12th Centuries

From an uncertain date in the interval between the 10th and 12th centuries, we have found *Hymnus 82. De Beata Maria Virgine*, which acclaims in these terms the favorite of the divine Trinity, the mother of God the Son:

11a. Tu vas imbutum nectare
Virtutum, sine compare
Tu trinitatis templum.
11b. Tu aequitatis semita,
Humilitatis orbita,
Munditiae exemplum.
(Hymnus 82. AHMA 9, Dreves 1890, 68)

11a. You are the vessel full of nectar
Of the virtues, you are the incomparable
Trinity Temple.
11b. You are the path of equity,
The orbit of humility,
The example of purity.

2.2.4. Hymns of the 12th Century

Dated from the 12th century, we have found these two hymns.

Hymnus 145. De Beata Maria Virgine exalts the Virgin with various symbols, among them that of the "vessel", when pointing out:

7a. Porta clausa, fons hortorum,
In qua sedit rex coelorum
Nulli viro pervia.
7b. Nardus spirans, flos odorum,
Odor floris, vas decorum,
Cella pigmentaria.
(Hymnus 145. AHMA 10, Dreves 1890, 110)

7a. Closed door, source of the orchards,
In which the King of heaven sat,
And it is not passable for any male.
7b. Nard exhalant of smell, flower of smells,
Smell of flower, honorable vessel,
Aroma cell.

Hymnus 150. De Beata Maria Virgine praises the mother of God the Son, designating her as a "vessel" of various kinds and qualities, saying:

4a. Dextra Dei vas politum,
Vas purgatum, vas ambitum
Castitatis circulo.
4b. Ut prophetae praedixere,
Vas electum continere
Deum matris gremio.
(Hymnus 150. AHMA 10, Dreves 1890, 113)

4a. Vessel polished by the right hand of God,
Purified vessel, vessel circled
by the circle of chastity.
4b. As the prophets foretold,
The chosen vessel contains
To God in the mother's womb.

2.2.5. Hymns of the 13th Century

Dating from the 13th century, we have found the following four hymns alluding to the subject under study:

Hymnus 5. In Adventu pleads with the mother of the Redeemer in these warm stanzas:

8a. O Maria, vas pudoris,
Nostri mater salvatoris
Hac in die tu Messiae
Servos reconcilia;
8b. Ut quos ipse jam redemit
Et cruore suo emit,
Prece tua nos ad sua
Reducat palatia.
(Hymnus 5. AHMA 8, Dreves 1890, 14)

8a. Oh, Mary, vessel of modesty,
mother of our Savior,
On this day reconcile your servants
With the Messiah.
8b. So that he leads to his palaces
by your prayers
those whom he has already redeemed
And he ransomed with his blood.

Hymnus 365. De beata Maria virgine extols Mary for her virginal divine motherhood that way:

> Rubus urens,
> Non comburens,
> Vas signatum,
> Vas ditatum,
> vas imbutum
> melle et balsamo:
> non te laedit,
> dum procedit
> sol de stella,
> rex de cella,
> virginalis sponsus
> de thalamo.
> (Hymnus 365. Mone 1854, 58)

> Burning bush,
> that is not consumed,
> Sealed vessel,
> Enriched vessel,
> Vessel full
> of honey and balm:
> It doesn't hurt you
> as long as the sun
> proceeds of the star,
> the king [leaves] the royal hall
> and the virginal husband
> [comes out] of the nuptial bed.

In the *Hymnus X. Psalterium Beatae Mariae Virginis, auctore Edmundo Cantuariensi. Secunda Quinquagena*, its author, Edmund of Canterbury, celebrates the Virgin as the mother of the Redeemer in these expressive terms:

> Ave, per quam
> fit Deo subdita
> Gens aeterno
> tormento dedita,
> Per te gentes
> salvavit perditas
> Calceata
> carne divinitas,
> O vas deitatis.
> (Hymnus X. AHMA 35, Blume, Dreves 1900, 141)[19]

> Hail, by whom
> the human people,
> Delivered to torment,
> became a subject of God,
> For you, O vessel of the Deity,
> The Deity
> coated with flesh
> saved the lost people.

Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Secunda Quinquagena sings to the mother of God the Son with these poetic concepts:

Ave, verbi vas arcanum
Mundo ferens caeli granum,
Cuius odor reddit sanum,
Cuius sapor ius profanum
Prorsus tollit, quod per manum
Primae matris hausimus.
(Hymnus I. AHMA 36, Blume, Dreves 1901, 20)

Hail, arcane vase of the Word,
That brings to the world the grain of heaven,
whose smell heals,
Whose taste completely removes
the profane right we extracted
By the hand of our first mother [Eve].

2.2.6. Hymns of the 12th–15th Centuries

Datable approximately to some imprecise date of this long interval of three centuries, we have found two hymns:

Hymnus 101. De Beata Maria Virgine, c. 12th–13th centuries, applauds the excellence of the Virgin thus:

Tu vas mannae sanctioris,
Vas dulcoris et honoris
Habens privilegium.
(Hymnus 101. AHMA 8, Dreves 1890, 81)

You are the vessel of the holiest manna,
the vessel of sweetness and honor,
who has privilege.

Hymnus 53, datable to some dubious date between the 13th and 15th centuries, celebrates Mary's virginal divine motherhood with this lyrical stanza:

Pudoris signaculum,
Servans illibatum
Et quem virgo concipit,
Virgo parit natum.
Non decet vas flosculi
Esse defloratum,
Neque inde tollere
Matris coelibatum.
(Hymnus 53. AHMA 1, Dreves 1886, 92)

Preserving immaculate
the seal of virginity,
The Virgin gives birth to a Son,
Whom she conceives while a virgin.
It is not convenient that the vase of the little flower
be deflowered,
Nor that, therefore, it is removed
The celibacy of the mother.

2.2.7. Hymns of the 14th Century

Dated to the 14th century we have found numerous hymns alluding to the subject.
An untitled hymn acclaims Mary with these metaphorical figures:

Ave sidus clarissimum,
templum dei sanctissimum,
virtutum vas mundissimum,
Maria mater Christi.
(Untitled hymn. Mone 1854, 108)

Hail, very clear star,
the Holiest Temple of God,
the clean vase of virtues,
Mary, the mother of Christ.

Hymnus 401. Ave Maria commends the Virgin through these terms:

Gratia plena te perfecit
spiritus sanctus, dum te fecit
vas divinae bonitatis
et totius largitatis.
(Hymnus 401. Mone 1854, 111)

The Holy Spirit perfected you
Like the full of grace, while he made you
The vessel of divine goodness
And of total generosity.

Hymnus 465. De gaudiis beatae virginis Mariae celebrates the glory of the mother of God the Son with this stanza:

Gaude splendens vas virtutum,
cujus pendens est ad nutum
Tota coeli curia,
Te benignam et felicem,
Jesu dignam genitricem,
venerans in gloria.
(Hymnus 465. Mone 1854, 176)

Rejoice, splendid vessel of virtues,
From whom all heavenly curia
is pending at the slightest sign,
Worshiping you in glory
Like the benign and happy
Worthy mother of Jesus.

Hymnus 325. Conceptio beatae Mariae virginis exalts the divine motherhood of Mary by stating:

Aurora lucis oritur,
conceptio recolitur
Mariae, quae verbigenae
Vas est provisae gratiae.
(Hymnus 325. Mone 1854, 7)

The dawn of light is born,
the conception of Mary is considered,
who is the vessel that begets the Word
who provided the grace.

Hymnus 2. Crinale Beatae Mariae Virginis pleads for the repairing help of the Virgin with these lyrical verses:

Gaude schola disciplinae,
Glossa legis, fons doctrinae,
Vas coelestis medicinae,
His, quos culpae pungunt spinae,
Funde medicamina.
(Hymnus 2. AHMA 3, Dreves 1888, 24)

Rejoice, school of discipline,
Gloss of the law, source of the doctrine,
Vessel of heavenly medicine,
To these, whom the thorns of guilt pierce,
Produce medicines.

Hymnus 5. De Beata Maria Virgine et Sancto Johanne evangelista celebrates the mother of God the Son with these inspired praises:

Salve, mater Salvatoris,
Vas electum, vas honoris,
Vas coelestis gratiae,
Ab aeterno vas provisum,
Vas insigne, vas excisum
Manu sapientiae.
(Hymnus 5. AHMA 3, Dreves 1888, 117)[20]

Hail, mother of the Savior,
Chosen vessel, vessel of honor,
Vessel of the heavenly grace,
Vessel prearranged from eternity,
Insigne vessel, vessel chiseled
By the hand of Wisdom.

Hymnus 49. De Beata Virgine Maria glorifies the Virgin with these imaginative compliments:

O regina regni Dei,
O coelestis vas diei,
Verbi Dei felix aula,
Coeli melos et coraula.
(Hymnus 49. AHMA 4, Dreves 1888, 38)

Oh, Queen of the kingdom of God,
Oh, vessel of heavenly day,
the happy throne room of the Word of God,
the song and the choir of heaven.

The Hymnus 34. De sancta Anna. In 1 Nocturno. Antiphonae applauds the birth of the Virgin Mary with these verses:

Hinc nascitur de gratia
Vas juste plenum gratia,
Pro cujus abundantia
Mensuram transit copia.
(Hymnus 34. AHMA 5, Dreves 1892, 106)

From here the vessel just full of grace,
is born by grace
for whose abundance
Pass the measure abundantly.

Hymnus 86. De Beata Maria Virgine glorifies the mother of the Savior with these eloquent metaphors:

1a. Salve, stella, mundi lumen,
Salve, cella celans numen,
Salve, decus gloriae;
1b. Splendor rerum et cacumen,
Vas sincerum, pons, et flumen
Aromatum gratiae.
2a. O coelestis figuli
Vas desiderabile,
2b. Vas medelae saeculi,
Vas decens, vas utile,
3a. O Maria, gratia
Plena sancti spiritus,
3b. Dux in via praevia,
Lux praefulgens coelitus.
(Hymnus 86. AHMA 9, Dreves 1890, 70)

1a. Hail, star, light of the world
Hail, cell that hides the Godhead,
Hail, honor of glory;
1b. Splendor and summit of things,
Sincere vessel, bridge and river
Of the aromas of grace.
2a. Oh, desirable vessel
Of the celestial modeled [Christ].
2b. World Medicine Vessel,
Convenient vessel, useful vessel,
3a. Oh Mary, full
Of the grace of the Holy Spirit,
3b. Guide on the previous path,
Light that shines the heavenly.

Hymnus 89. De Beata Maria Virgine celebrates the virginal divine maternity of Mary with these eloquent metaphors:

4a. Tu puella sola prolem,
Sola paris stella solem
De Jacob egrediens;
4b. Tu figulum contra ritum
Concepisti, vas politum,
Vas laesuram nesciens.
(Hymnus 89. AHMA 9, Dreves 1890, 73)

4a. You are the only virgin who gives birth,
The only star that gives birth to the Sun,
Which proceeds from Jacob;
4b. You, clean vessel,
Vessel that knows no injury,
You conceived a child against the norm.

Hymnus 91. De Beata Maria Virgine highlights the virginal divine motherhood of Mary through these expressive symbolic figures:

2a. Summi regis palatium,
Thronus imperatoris,

Sponsi reclinatorium,
Tu sponsa creatoris.
2b. O pauperum solatium,
Remedium languoris,
Dignum Dei sacrarium,
Vas aeterni splendoris.
(Hymnus 91. AHMA 9, Dreves 1890, 74)

2a. Supreme King's Palace,
Emperor's Throne,
husband's kneeler,
You are the wife of the Creator.
2b. Oh, consolation of the poor,
Remedy of the weakness,
worthy tabernacle of God
Vase of eternal splendor.

The Hymnus 73. From Gaudiis Beatae Mariae Virginis commemorates the divine motherhood of Mary, whose saving help it begs in these verses:

Gaude, florens virgo Jesse,
Ecce Deus fecit esse
Florem et amygdalum,
Vas insigne plenum melle,
Omne malum procul pelle,
Aufer omne scandalum.
(Hymnus 73. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 100)

Rejoice, flourishing Virgin of Jesse,
Behold, God made you to be
flower and almond,
Distinguished vase full of honey,
Throw away all evil,
Eliminate all scandal.

Hymnus 103. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem extols the Virgin with these praises:

Ave, Jesse flos pudoris,
Pia proles, vas honoris,
Fons dulcoris, stilla roris.
(Hymnus 103. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 129)

Hail, modest flower of Jesse,
Pious offspring, vessel of honour,
Source of sweetness, drop of dew.

Hymnus IX. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis, auctore Engelberto Admontensi. Oratio praeambula ad secundam Quinquagenam expresses the sublimity of the Mother of God with these lyrical verses:

O vas mellis expers fellis,
Cinnamomo et amomo
Nomen habens dulcius,
Post tuorum unguentorum
Vel odorem vel dulcorem,
Fac, ut currem citius.
(Hymnus IX. AHMA 35, Blume, Dreves 1900, 135)[21]

O vase of honey devoid of gall,
who has a sweeter name
than cinnamon and balm,
make me run faster
after the smell or after the sweetness
of your ointments.

2.2.8. Hymns from between the 14th and 15th Centuries

Related to the topic we are studying, we have found these three hymns written between the 14th and 15th centuries:

Hymnus 52. Salutationes Beatae Mariae Virginis sings to the virginal mother of the Son of God with these eloquent metaphors:

Salve, nostri vas salutis,
Arca vere, vas virtutis,
Vas coelestis gratiae;
Vas ad unguem levigatum,
Vas decenter fabricatum
Manu sapientiae.
(Hymnus 52. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 69)

Hail, vessel of our salvation,
Ark truly, vessel of virtue,
Vessel of heavenly grace;
vessel levigated with the greatest care,
decently made vessel
By the hand of Wisdom.

Hymnus XIV. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Tertia Quinquagena praises the mother of God with these expressive verses:

Ave, virgo virginum,
mater salvatoris,
Vas electum Domini,
titulus amoris,
Vas Dei altissimi
nostri redemptoris,
Angelorum domina,
sponsa creatoris.
(Hymnus XIV. AHMA 35, Blume, Dreves 1900, 216)

Hail, Virgin of virgins,
Mother of the Savior,
Chosen vessel of the Lord,
love title,
Vessel of the Most High God
Our Redeemer,
Lady of the angels,
Creator's Wife.

An untitled hymn, from around the 15th century, states:

Ave, virgo, vas ornatum,
Soli Deo vas sacratum,
Lingua mea te laudabit,
Os extollet, cor cantabit.
(Untitled hymn. Mone 1854, 249)

Hail, Virgin, ornate vase,
sacred vessel only for God
my tongue will praise you,
my mouth will praise you, my heart will sing to you.

Hymnus 522. De Beata Maria, datable to the 15th century, enounces:

Salve, mater Salvatoris,
Vas electum creatoris,
Decus coeli civium;
Salve, virgo benedicta,
Per quam terra maledicta
Meruit remedium.
(Hymnus 522. Mone 1854, 307)

God save you, mother of the Savior,
Creator's chosen vase,
Honor of the heavenly citizens;
God save you, blessed Virgin,
For whom the earth cursed
He deserved remedy.

2.2.9. Hymns of the 15th Century

As expected, most hymns we have found related to our topic date from the 15th century.

Hymnus 507. Oratio, quae dicitur crinale beatae Mariae virginis proclaims the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with these suggestive metaphorical figures:

Vale, urna, manna, merum,
panem coeli portans verum,
Qui conservat cor sincerum
Et in finem est dierum
Omnibus sufficiens.
(Hymnus 507. Mone 1854, 269)

Be well, urn, manna, pure wine,
That you carry the true bread from heaven,
that keeps the sincere heart
And it's enough for everyone
At the end of time.

Hymnus 509. Deliciae Mariae virginis hails the immaculate mother of God with these warm notions:

Salve, tantae puritatis
Vas, ut regem majestatis
De supernis traheres,
Gabriele nuntiante
Inaudita post et ante
Nuntia susciperes.
(Hymnus 509. Mone 1854, 280)

Hail! vessel of such great purity,
As for you to bring from heaven
To the King of majesty [Christ],
And with Gabriel's announcement
receive some good news
Never heard before or after.

Hymnus 510. Ad beatam Mariam virginem praises the Virgin with these lyrical tropes:

Ave, vas sinceritatis,
Lux lucens in tenebris,
Ave stella claritatis,
Luna sine nebulis.
(Hymnus 510. Mone 1854, 284)

Hail, vessel of sincerity,
Light that illuminates in the darkness,
Hail, star of clarity,
Moon without fog.

Hymnus 511. Salutationis beatae Mariae virginis celebrates the mother of the Son of God with these illustrative metaphors:

Ave, vas clementiae,
gratiae piscina,
Radix innocentiae
Stella matutina,
Palmaque victoriae,
vitae medicina,
vitis abundantiae,
Coelorum regina.
(Hymnus 511. Mone 1854, 289)

Hail, vessel of mercy,
grace pool,
root of innocence,
Morning Star,
And palm of victory,
medicine of life,
vine of abundance,
Queen of heaven.

Hymnus 525. Sequentia de beata virgine Maria rejoices the greatness of the mother of God the Son with this eloquent figure:

Tu auri vas solidum,
Vas ornatum fulgidum,
Quod decore praeeminet.
(Hymnus 525. Mone 1854, 312)

You, solid vase of gold,
Ornate and shining vase,
Which stands out for its beauty.

Hymnus 539. Ad eandem [Mariam] glorifies the Virgin with these imaginative metaphors:

Apellaris maris
Fulgens stella, cella
Regis, legis
Novae speculum;
Tu vasculum
Aromaticum,
Coeli tripudium.
(Hymnus 539. Mone 1854, 329–30)

You are told shining
Star of the sea, room
of the King, mirror
Of the new law;
you are
the aromatic little vase,
The favorable omen from heaven.

Hymnus 601. Hortus rosarum Dei genitricis Mariae praises and supplicates the Virgin in these warm verses:

Tu panis vas et olei,
Columna nostrae fidei,
Nos dulcora sine mora
Poli roris cellula.
(Hymnus 601. Mone 1854, 415)

You are the container of bread and oil,
the column of our faith,
Sweeten us without delay
with the abundance of heavenly dew.

Hymnus 604. De laudibus beatae virginis Mariae proclaims the saving help of the mother of God in this stanza:

Vas electum Creatoris,
medicina peccatoris,
Super choros angelorum
Exaltata, spes lapsorum.
(Hymnus 604. Mone 1854, 421)

Creator's chosen vessel,
sinner's medicine,
exalted above the choirs of angels,
hope of the fallen
Oh, vessel of honey, exempt from gall,
Which has a sweeter name
That cinnamon or amomo:
make me run faster
After the smell and the sweetness
Of your ointments!

Hymnus 607. Laus Mariae acclaims the excellence of the virtues of and the divine motherhood of Mary with these verses:

Vas decoris et honoris,
Vas coelestis gratiae,
Templum nostri Redemptoris,
Forma pudicitiae.
(Hymnus 607. Mone 1854, 426)[22]

Vessel of virtue and honor,
Vessel of heavenly grace,
Temple of our Redeemer,
form of modesty

Ulrich Stocklins von Rottach (Udalricus Wessofontanus), in his *Hymnus 45. Abecedarius 5*, calls for the saving aid of the virtuous Mother of God the Son with these expressive words:

Vas coelestis gratiae
Vasque pietatis,
Semper omni specie
Carens foeditatis,
Onus et tristitiae
Nostrae gravitatis
Oleo laetitiae pelle
Cum peccatis.
(Hymnus 45. AHMA 6, Dreves 1889, 148)

Vessel of heavenly grace
And vessel of mercy,
always lacking
of all forms of ugliness,
expel the load of our gravity
of sadness
with the oil of joy
with the sins.

Ulrich Stocklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 17. Acrostichon super Ave Maria*, requests the protection of the merciful Mother of the Savior with this stanza:

Ave, mater gratiae,
Mater pietatis,
Vas misericordiae,
Vas divinitatis,
Evae prolem respice,
Fons benignitatis,
Mundans nos a crimine
Nostrae pravitatis.
(Hymnus 17. AHMA 6, Dreves 1889, 49)

Hail, mother of grace.
Mother of mercy,
vessel of mercy,
Vessel of Deity,
Look at the offspring of Eve,
Source of kindness,
clearing us of crime
of our wickedness.

Again, Ulrich Stocklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 25. Laudatorium Beatae Virginis Mariae. Pars tertia. Ad Primam*, extols the merciful mother of God, whose saving help he beseeches in those moving verses:

Salve, vas clementiae
Ac benignitatis,
Vas coelestis gratiae,
Vas divinitatis,
Da misericordiae
Manum tribulatis,
Per donum laetitiae
Et prosperitatis.
(Hymnus 25. AHMA 6, Dreves 1889, 95)

Hail, vessel of mercy
And kindness,

Vessel of heavenly grace,
Vessel of Deity,
Give to the troubled
the hand of mercy,
Through the gift of joy
And prosperity.

Once again Ulrich Stocklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 25. Laudatorium Beatae Virginis Mariae. Sexta pars. Ad Nonam*, celebrates the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with these poetic expressions:

Salve, vas mirabile
Minime extensum,
Tamen ineffabile
Verbum es immensum
Continens, id nobile
Carmen sic expensum
Tibi acceptabile
Sit velut incensum.
(Hymnus 25. AHMA 6, Dreves 1889, 104)

Hail, admirable vessel
minimally extended,
And yet ineffable,
You are the one that contains
To the immense Word, this noble
Poem so carefully weighed
be acceptable to you
Like incense.

Lastly, Ulrich Stocklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 25. Laudatorium Beatae Virginis Mariae. Septima pars. Ad Vesperas*, commends the privileged dignity of the mother of the Lord, whose intercession before her divine Son requests in these terms:

Gaude, vas mirabile,
Continens immensum
Verbum nec sensibile
Hominis per sensum,
Melos istud sedule
Tibi sic impensum
Mihi placet frivole
Dominum offensum.
(Hymnus 25. AHMA 6, Dreves 1889, 108)

Rejoice, admirable vessel,
which contains the immense
Verb not perceivable
By the sense of man,
This song is for you
carefully vehement
And please me frivolously
To the offended Lord.

Hymnus 13. In Nativitate Domini Nostri sings of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with these illustrative expressions:

6a. Vas insigne, vas probatum,
Templum Deo dedicatum,
In quo Deus clausit natum,
Sicut docet litera.
6b. Templum intus adornatum
Talem habet principatum,
Quod non fuit violatum
Et parit puerpera.
(Hymnus 13. AHMA 10, Dreves 1891, 17)

6a. Insigne vessel, proven vessel,
Temple dedicated to God,
In which God shut himself up at birth,
As the [Holy] Scripture teaches.
6b. Ornate temple inside
Has such principality,
that was not raped
And gives birth as a parturient.

Hymnus 137. De Beata Maria Virgine praises the divine motherhood of Mary with these affectionate metaphors:

1a. Ave, mater genitoris.
Via vitae, vas decoris,
Lilium munditiae,
1b. Stella maris, sol splendoris,
Veri virgultum amoris,
Paradisus gratiae.
(Hymnus 137. AHMA 10, Dreves 1891, 105)

1a. Hail, mother of the Father,
Path of life, vessel of decorum,
lily of purity
1b. Star of the sea, sun of splendor,
Stem of true love,
paradise of grace

Hymnus 48. De Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. Ad Vesperas extols the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with these illustrative verses

Ut infractum perforatur
Radio vas vitreum,
Nec in partu reseratur
Conclave virgineum,
Et chaos tartareum.
(Hymnus 48. AHMA 11, Dreves 1891, 36)

Just like the vase
is pierced without breaking
by the ray of light,
That way the closure of virginity
doesn't open at birth
And the emptiness of hell.

Hymnus 94. Acrostichon super "Ave Maria" glorifies the Virgin as the beloved mother of God through these poetic analogies:

Summus artifex omnium
Te providet, vas nobile,
Vas dignum, vas egregium,
Vas gratum, vas laudabile,
Vas cunctis venerabile.
(Hymnus 94. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 118)

The Supreme Creator of the universe
organizes you in advance, noble vessel,
Worthy vessel, egregious vessel,
Pleasant vessel, laudable vessel,
Venerable vessel for all.

Hymnus 110. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem exalts the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with these poetic symbolic expressions:

Verbi patris atrium,
Vas provisum carum,
Pneumatis palatium,
Trium personarum
Simplex hoc triclinium.
(Hymnus 110. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 138)

Atrium of the Word of the Father,
dear vessel arranged in advance,
Palace of the [Holy] Spirit,
This is the simple triclinium
Of the three [divine] Persons.

The Hymnus 36. In Conceptione Virgnis Mariae Beatae. Ad Vesperas sings of Mary as the virginal mother of God the Son through these vivid rhymes:

1. Ave, fluens mella,
Trinitatis cella,
Melos et laus oris,
Flos fragrantis floris.
2. Alvo senectutis
Conceptae virtutis
Vas et lucis via,
Genitrix Maria.
(Hymnus 36. AHMA 16, Dreves 1894, 44)

1. Hail, flowing honey,
Trinity Room,
Song and praise of the mouth,
Flower of fragrant flower.
2. From the womb of old age
Conceived of virtue,
Vessel and path of light,
Mother Mary.

2.2.10. Hymns with No Documented Date

We have also found these three hymns, whose dating we could not specify:
Hymnus 597. Laudes Mariae applauds to the Virgin with these delicate verses:

O Maria, maris stella
plena gratiae,

mater simul et puella,
vas munditiae.
(Hymnus 597. Mone 1854, 409)

Oh, Mary, star of the sea
Full of grace,
Mother and at the same time virgin,
Vessel of purity.

Hymnus 42 exalts the Virgin for her eximious virtues that way:

O vas deitatis,
Tu fons pietatis,
Manans largiter.
(Hymnus 42. AHMA 1, Dreves 1886, 87)

Oh, vessel of divinity,
You are the source of mercy,
That you flow with abundance.

Hymnus 90. Jubilus de singulis membris Beatae Mariae Virginis begs for the protective assistance of the mother of God with these expressive verses:

Vas repletum cunctis donis,
Patens malis atque bonis,
Dans pacis beneficia,
In hoc vase me conclude,
Dulcis mater, nec exclude
A tua grata gratia.
(Hymnus 90. AHMA 15, Dreves 1893, 111)

Vase full of all gifts,
available for the bad and the good,
that you give the benefits of peace,
enclose me in this vase,
sweet mother, don't exclude me
of your grace.

3. An Iconographic Analysis of Some Pictorial Annunciations with Vase

After this extensive exploration of patristic, theological, and liturgical texts related to the metaphor of the "vase" as a symbol of Mary in her privileged condition as the virginal mother of God, and the sublime holder of virtues and supernatural privileges, it is now time to analyze some artistic images of the Annunciation that include a vase, vessel or container in its scene. Such an iconographic analysis is necessary to try to determine whether there is any relationship between these doctrinal texts and these images.

Among the multiple representations of the Annunciation from the 14th and 15th centuries that we could choose for the iconographic analyses around the symbol of the "vase", we have chosen fifteen important works painted by artists from Italy, Flanders and Spain, perfectly representative for the topic at hand.

In collaboration with his brother-in-law Lippo Memmi, Simone Martini (1284–1344) elaborates the altarpiece of the *Annunciazione con i Santi Ansano e Margherita*, 1333 (Figure 1) with a still quite medieval approach. You can see this medieval treatment above all in the central panel, since the figures of the angel Gabriel and Mary are cut out on an abstract background of gold leaf, omitting all scenic elements, except for the throne where the Virgin sits and the vase with the stem of lilies placed on the ground. Kneeling reverently before the enthroned Mary, Gabriel offers her an olive branch with his left hand as a sign of peace, while pointing his right index finger towards heaven to indicate the origin of the message

he is announcing to her. This heavenly message guarantees Mary the supernatural privilege of being the mother of God the Son incarnate preserving her virginity, thanks to the power of the Most High who "will cover her with his shadow": *virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi* (Lk 1, 35. *Biblia Sacra* 2005, p. 1011). Such is the meaning of the introductory greeting of the angel *Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum* (Lk 1, 27. *Biblia Sacra* 2005, p. 1011), which appears written in golden letters in the inscription that comes out of the angel's mouth and reaches up to Mary's ear. The Virgin shows her unrestricted obedience to the design of the Most High as "slave of the Lord" (*ancilla Domini*) by humbly bowing her head, placing the right arm on her chest.

Figure 1. Simone Martini (with Lippo Memmi), *L'Annunciazione con i Santi Ansano e Margherita*, 1333. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Apart from that eloquent gesture of Mary, it is interesting to highlight in this altarpiece the large vase from which several flowered lily stems emerge. Now, we have shown in other articles that the stem of lilies in the artistic images of the Annunciation is a symbol of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary, in the sense that the stem represents the Virgin, while the flower (the lily) represents her divine Son Jesus. We have justified such an iconographic interpretation based on the ancient and concordant tradition of the Church Fathers and medieval theologians when interpreting three texts from the Old Testament: Isaiah's prophecy about the flowering of a stalk sprouting from the root of Jesse (Is 11, 1–2) (Salvador-González 2013); the miraculous flowering of Aaron's dry rod (Salvador-González 2016), and the phrase from the *Song of Songs* in which the Bridegroom declares to be "the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys" (Song 2, 1) (Salvador-González 2014).

From this interpretive perspective, the close relationship/continuity between the stem (the Virgin) and the vase where it stands allows us to affirm the symbolic identity, doubly reinforced, of Mary as stem and as vase. As if that were not enough, the shape of an inverted uterus that this vase presents in this altarpiece further reinforces this symbolic identification of Mary as a vessel or vase, which so many Fathers, theologians and hymnographers

brought to light in perfect agreement for more than a millennium. In addition, the clear protagonist position of this vase, isolated in the center of the altarpiece scene, as an element that connects Gabriel and Mary, reinforces the conjecture that the intellectual author of this *Annunciation* had in mind the Mariological symbolism of the metaphor of the vase, according to the unanimous patristic-theological exegesis and the countless invocations of medieval liturgical hymns.

That is why it is surprising that the commentators we know of this altarpiece, such as Maria Cristina Gozzoli (1970), Marco Pierini (2002), Enrico Castelnuovo (2003), Pierluigi Leone de Castris (2003) and Pietro Torriti (2006), have not documented the Mariological symbolism of this vase in primary sources.

For the rest, everything that we have explained in this altarpiece by Simone Martini about the continuity/identity between the vase and the stem of lilies as two symbols of the virginal divine maternity of Mary applies to all images of the Annunciation that we will analyze in this article. Therefore, we will not repeat these explanations in each of the tables that we will analyze.

Andrea di Bartolo Cini (c. 1360–1428) performs his *Annunciation Diptych*, c. 1383, from the Budapest Museum of Fine Arts (Figure 2), with two compositional details similar to Simone Martini's *Annunciation*. The first is that di Bartolo also places the angel kneeling before the seated Virgin, although distancing himself from Martini by incorporating Mary in a stylized house in the form of a porch. The second and most important detail—copied from Simone Martini—is to place a large vase with stems of lilies on the floor as a narrative-symbolic link between the Virgin and the angel, who also, as in the case of Martini, carries an olive branch in the left hand. Thus, given the solid patristic-theological tradition and the abundant liturgical hymnody around 1383 (probable date of execution of this painting), it is very likely that the intellectual author of this Budapest diptych was inspired by the multiple exegetical texts referring to the vase as a symbol of Mary.

Figure 2. Andrea di Bartolo, *Diptych of the Annunciation*, c. 1383. Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest.

For the rest, Andrea di Bartolo adds the surprising detail of representing the godhead not with the usual figure of God the Father like an adult man, but through the little head of Christ as a child, surrounded by a mandorla of cherubs at the top of the left panel. Such an unusual detail of the little head seeks to illustrate that the Annunciation episode concludes with the human conception/incarnation of God the Son in Mary's womb at the very moment that she accepts the divine plan announced by Gabriel.

Robert Campin (c. 1376–1444)—helped, according to experts, by his workshop assistants—places *The Annunciation* of the *Mérode Triptych*, c. 1427–1432, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 3), inside an elegant bourgeois room, equipped with exquisite furniture and precious domestic utensils. Despite their apparent insignificance, many of these everyday objects—a vase with stems of lilies, a cauldron of water, a towel, candlesticks with or without candles, books—condense several interesting doctrinal meanings, interpreted by some historians with variable accuracy.

Figure 3. Robert Campin's workshop, *The Annunciation*, central panel of the *Mérode Triptych*, c. 1427–1432. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the intellectual author of this *Annunciation* "complemented" the conventional ray of light coming from the (here invisible) Most High with the figure of Christ like a tiny naked child carrying a cross on his shoulder: as already said commenting on the previous painting by Andrea di Bartolo, this figurine of the child Jesus illustrates the thesis of the immediate human conception/incarnation of God the Son when the Virgin declared her absolute obedience to the plan of the Most High at the conclusion of the Annunciation event.

Without stopping now to interpret the other symbols, we are interested in highlighting in this *Mérode Annunciation* the porcelain vase with its stem of lilies, placed on the table right in the center of the composition, fully visible (with no other overlapping objects), and as a narrative-symbolic link between Gabriel and Mary. It is reasonable to infer that the

intellectual author of this *Mérode Annunciation* has arranged this vase with great visual relevance to evidence its Mariological symbolism according to the concordant interpretations of the Fathers and theologians, and the acclamations of the liturgical hymns.

For these reasons, it seems strange that, apart from Patricia Platgett-Lea (2022), none of the commentators we know of this *Mérode Triptych* has documented the Mariological symbolism of the splendid vase depicted here. You can see such an omission in Max J. Friedländer (1924, pp. 61–66; 1967, pp. 36–41), David M. Robb (1936, pp. 500–25), Millard Meiss (1945, pp. 178–79), Meyer Schapiro (1945, pp. 182–87), Erwin Panofsky ([1953] 1966, pp. 142–43, 164–67, 304–5), Margaret B. Freeman (1957, pp. 130–39), Théodore Rousseau (1957, pp. 117–29), Charles Ilsley Minott (1969, pp. 267–71), Carla Gottlieb (1970, pp. 65–84), Martin Davies (1972, pp. 257–60), Lorne Campbell (1974, pp. 638–45), Barbara G. Lane (1984, pp. 42–45), Shirley Neilsen Blum (1992, pp. 46–47), Châtelet (1996, pp. 93–113), Stephan Kemperdick (1997, pp. 77–104, 181–86), Felix Thürlemann (2002, pp. 65–76), and Kemperdick and Sander (2009, pp. 150–52), to name just a few of the leading experts.

The Sienese painter Sassetta, whose real name was Stefano di Giovanni (c. 1400–1450), depicted *The Annunciation*, c. 1437–1444, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 4), originally as the central pinnacle of the reverse of the double-sided altarpiece painted between 1437 and 1444 for the Franciscan church of Borgo San Sepolcro in Arezzo. Although it has suffered many deteriorations and repaintings, and has even been cut down in size—which explains why both protagonists, especially the angel, are cut—, we are interested in highlighting the vase with the lily stems: fully exempt and prominently placed between Gabriel and Mary it conveys all Mariological meanings already explained.

Figure 4. Sassetta, *The Annunciation*, c. 1437–1444. Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399/1400–1464) stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1434–35, central panel of the *Triptyc of the Annunciation*, in the Musée du Louvre in Paris (Figure 5), in a luxurious living room plenty of refined furniture and utensils, open to the outside through the large windows at the back and on the right side. In this elegant setting, the angel Gabriel, clad in a precious embroidered cope, begins to kneel before the seated Virgin, who, surprised by the appearance of the unexpected visitor, interrupts reading the book she is holding open with her left hand, while slightly turning her head towards the heavenly messenger.

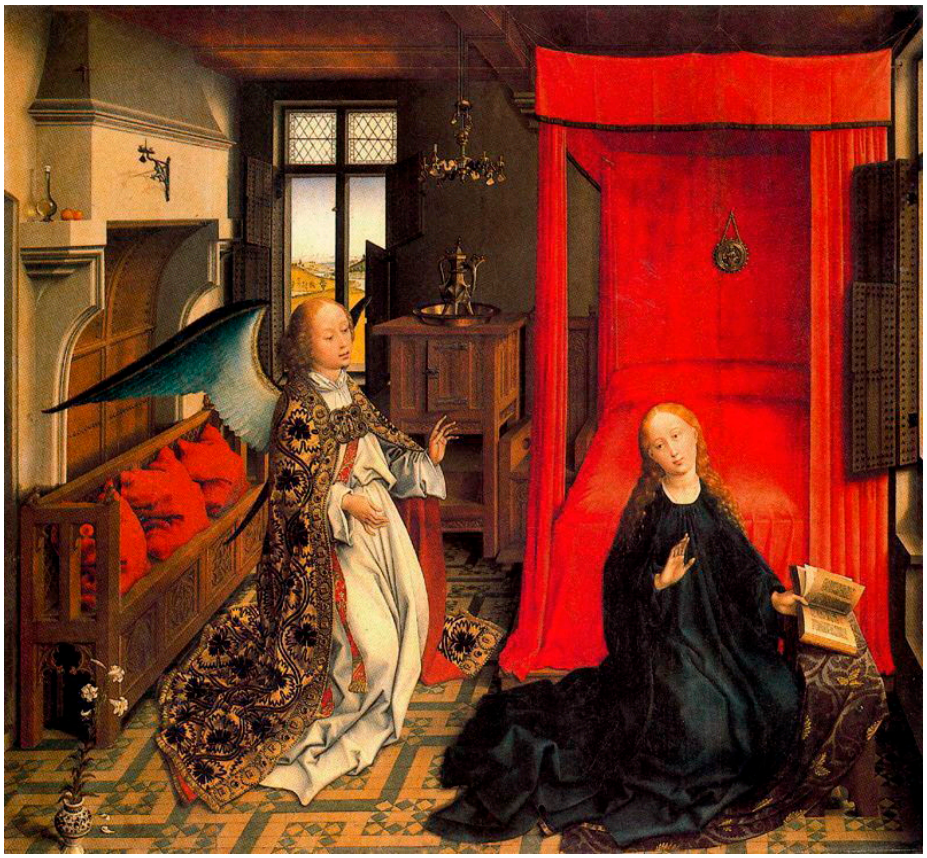

Figure 5. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Annunciation*, c. 1434–1435, central panel of the *Triptyc of the Annunciation*, Musée du Louvre, Paris.

In that living room, van der Weyden has surprisingly placed a neat marriage bed to illustrate its profound dogmatic meanings that we cannot detail here, since we have already explained them extensively in other works (Salvador-González 2019, 2020a, 2021d). The angel has entered this living room by the closed door—barely visible on the left side, suggested by its jamb—without opening it, a closed door whose Mariological and Christological symbolisms we have elucidated in another study (Salvador-González 2020c).

However, more than these two connoted symbols and other no less significant elements present in this painting, we are now interested in underscoring the three vessels that appear in it: the vase with the stem of lilies placed on the ground in the foreground, the crystal vessel with water placed on the ledge between the fireplace and the door, and the pitcher of water from the ewer located on the sideboard attached to the back wall. In this regard, it does not seem necessary to repeat now that these three vessels, each in its own way, symbolize the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and the fullness and sublimity of her virtues and supernatural privileges, as many Fathers, medieval theologians, and liturgical hymnographers unanimously manifested for more than a millennium.

That is why it is surprising that the commentators we know of this *Annunciation* by van der Weyden have not justified, based on primary sources, the Mariological symbolism

inherent in these three vessels. Erwin Panofsky ([1953] 1966, vol. I, pp. 250–56), Martin Davies (1972), Odile Delenda (1987, pp. 33–36), Châtelet (1999a, p. 43; 1999b, pp. 97–99), and Dirk De Vos (1999, pp. 98, 195–99), among others, incur in that omission.

Stefan Lochner (c. 1400/10–1451), in representing *The Annunciation*, in two panels of the closed *Magi Altarpiece*, 1440, from the Cologne cathedral (Figure 6), opts for a relatively conventional composition: the angel beginning to kneel in the left sector, carrying a herald's staff and showing a wide phylactery with the message of the Most High; the Virgin kneeling to the right before a kneeler on which she has her prayer book open. Nevertheless, the painter surprises us with some other symbolic details, such as the closed book placed on the platform in the foreground in the right angle, or the open piece of furniture, on which we cannot stop now. We just intend to highpoint once again the voluminous vase from which a lily stem emerges in the center of the scene, as a narrative-compositive link between the heavenly messenger and the *Annunziata*.

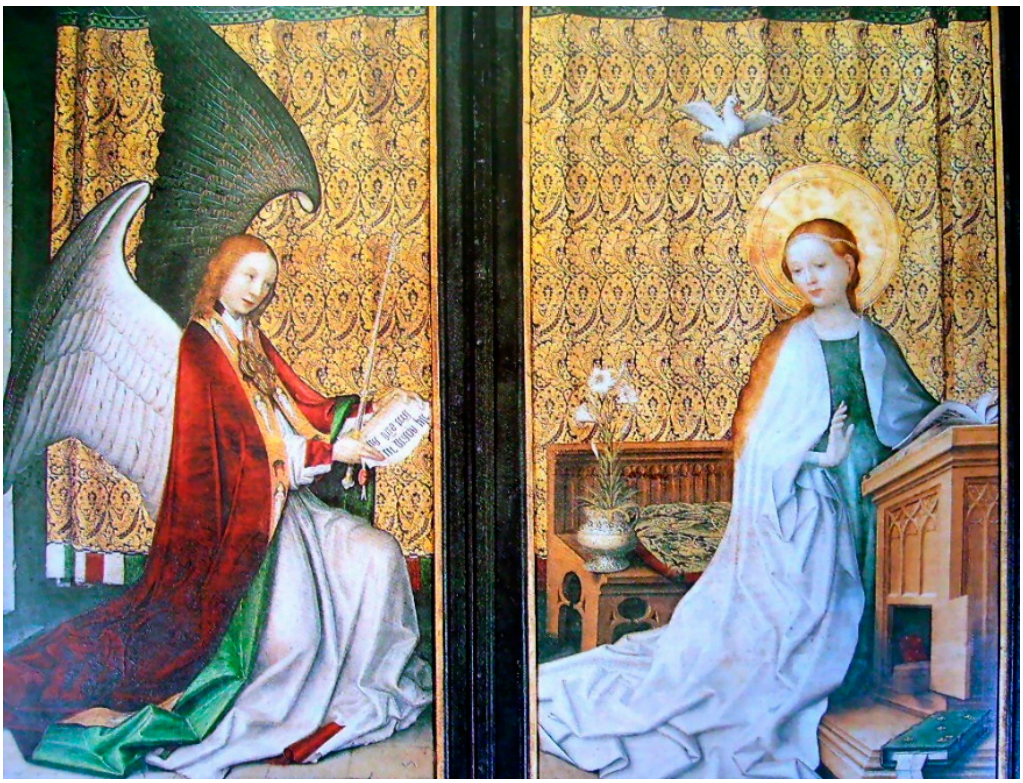

Figure 6. Stefan Lochner, *The Annunciation*, two panels of the closed *Magi Altarpiece*, Cologne cathedral, 1440.

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1489) structures with great originality *The Martelli Annunciation*, c. 1440, from the Martelli Chapel in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence (Figure 7). From the outset, he stages the episode in an ostentatious and complex Renaissance palace, with a long perspective. In addition, he surprisingly adds two other angels as companions of the archangel Gabriel, who fill the left half of the composition, while in the right half he places Gabriel and Mary.

Without dwelling now on interpreting the doctrinal meanings of the house of Mary shaped as a palace, which we have explained in other articles (Salvador-González 2021a, 2021c), nor those of the closed garden (*hortus conclusus*) that one can see in the intermediate planes, we are interested in emphasizing a very significant detail: after placing the stem of lilies in the hand of the genuflected Gabriel, Lippi includes in the very foreground—as a linking element between the heavenly messenger and the Virgin—a transparent glass vase, half full of clear water.

Figure 7. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Martelli Annunciation*, c. 1440. Cappella Martelli, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence.

It seems completely evident that the cult Carmelite monk who was Fra Filippo Lippi has introduced here in a leading role that brilliant glass vase to symbolically signify Mary as the virtuous mother of God the Son, drawing inspiration from the numerous patristic-theological testimonies and medieval hymns on the symbol of the "vase", which Lippi seems to know firsthand, given his careful ecclesiastical training and his practical life as a friar.

Therefore, it is surprising that the commentators we know on this *Martelli Annunciation*, such as Giuseppe Marchini (1979), Jeffrey Ruda (1993, pp. 163–65, 428), Megan Holmes (1999), and Glossi and Pinci (2011), have avoided to explain with convincing documentary arguments the Mariological symbolism of this exceptional glass vase.

In the *L'Annunciazione delle Murate*, c. 1443 (Figure 8)—originally painted for the Suore Murate convent in Florence, and today at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich—Fra Filippo Lippi places the episode inside a luxurious Renaissance palace, with elegant marble arches, pilasters, and entablatures.

In that sumptuous palace, open onto a walled garden (*hortus conclusus*), the archangel Gabriel, bearing a large stem of lily in his left hand, kneels reverently before his heavenly Sovereign. Behind Gabriel, a second angel appears through the door with another stem of lilies. The Virgin remains standing, modestly lowering her head and her eyes, while placing the right hand on her chest in an attitude of humble obedience in accepting the divine plan announced by Gabriel.

In the upper left corner of the painting, the Most High, surrounded by angels, opens his hands to send towards the Virgin the fertilizing beam of light—symbol of God the Son, as we have shown in other articles (Salvador-González 2021a, 2021c)—, in the middle of whose wake appears the Holy Spirit flying in the form of a white dove.

Apart from these foreseeable elements at the time in these representations of the Annunciation, it is worth underlining in this work the bulky glass vase located in the foreground, which contains roses and other flowers. Undoubtedly, the erudite Fra Filippo Lippi wanted to illustrate through this crystalline vase with flowers the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and the fullness of her virtues and supernatural attributes, draw-

ing inspiration from the centuries-old exegetical tradition of Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers, which he must have known perfectly, due to his condition as well-trained Carmelite friar.

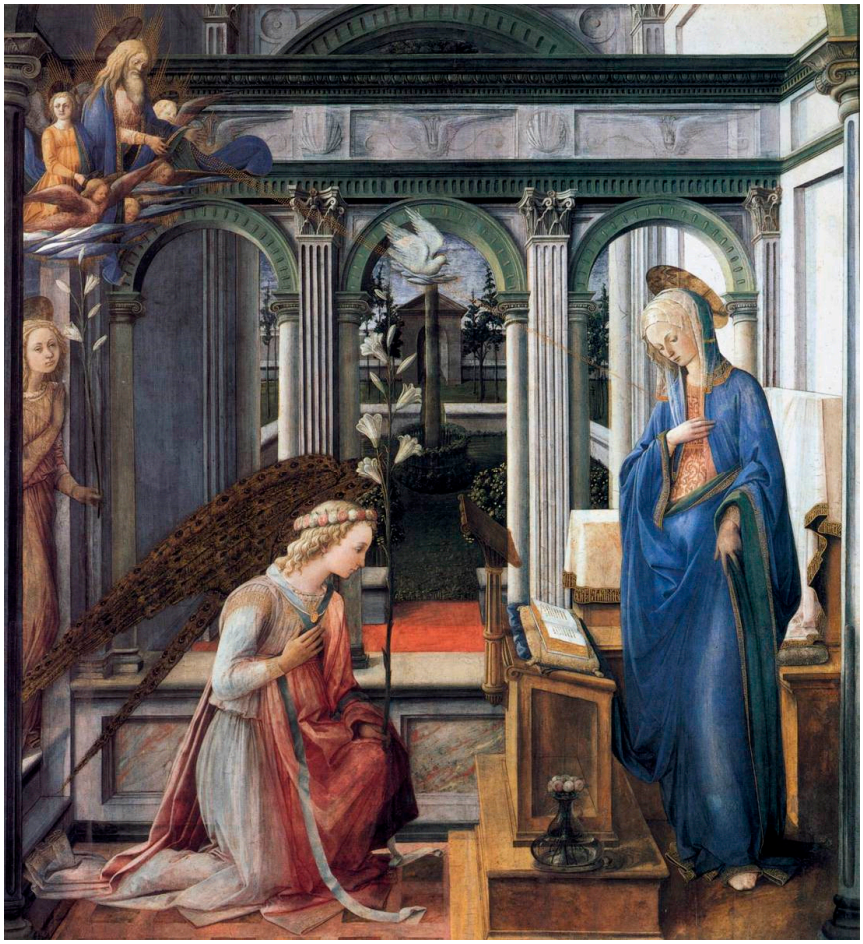

Figure 8. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Murate Annunciation (L'Annunciazione delle Murate)*, 1443. Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

Fra Carnevale, stage name of Bartolomeo di Giovanni Corradini (c. 1429/25–1484), places *The Annunciation*, c. 1448, from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (Figure 9) in the narrow arcaded courtyard of a monumental palace, which reveals a distant landscape in the background through the open door in the wall. In the foreground of that courtyard, the angel, who carries in his left hand a long stem of lilies, kneels reverently before his heavenly Lady, while she, standing, places her right hand on her chest, as if wondering if she is the very recipient of the design of the Most High. Once again, it is important to highlight in this painting the huge vase full of roses and other flowers, as a link between both protagonists. It seems evident that Fra Carnevale placed this great vase here as an eloquent symbol of Mary as the virginal mother of God and the sublime model of all virtues, in perfect harmony with the centuries-old exegetical tradition of Fathers, theologians and hymnographers, which he undoubtedly knew for his status as a learned Dominican friar.

Rogier van der Weyden stages *The Annunciation* on the left wing of the *Altarpiece of the Adoration of the Magi* (*St. Columba Altarpiece*), painted around 1450–1456 for the high altar of the parish church of St. Columba in Cologne, and today in the Alte Pinakothek from Munich (Figure 10), in a comfortable bourgeois room in Flanders. The painter places the angel standing here blessing Mary, who prays on her knees before a book, while extolling her with his initial greeting AVE GRATIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM, made visible in an epigraphic inscription that comes out of his mouth towards the ear of the Virgin.

Figure 9. Fra Carnevale, *The Annunciation*, c. 1448. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

Figure 10. Rogier van der Weyden, *The Annunciation*, left wing of *The St. Columba Altarpiece*, c. 1455, Alte Pinakothek, Munich.

In addition, van der Weyden introduces several symbolic elements in this painting, such as the large, canopied marriage bed, the closed door through which the archangel has entered without opening it, and the fertilizing ray of light coming from the Most High that passes through the crystals of the window without breaking or staining them. We have explained the doctrinal symbolism of this ray of light in another article (Salvador-González 2020b). However, without reiterating here the doctrinal meanings of these and various other symbolic details of this painting, which we have already analyzed in other works, we are now interested in highlighting the metal vase that contains the lily stem in the foreground between Gabriel and Mary. In such leading circumstances, it is undeniable that this shiny vase, with its complementary lily stem, constitutes a clear symbol of Mary as the virginal mother of God, as the incomparable possessor of all virtues, and the holder of some exclusive divine privileges: this is confirmed by the already explained patristic and theological texts, and the hymnic acclamations that designate the Virgin as "vase", vessel, ark, urn, or other analogous expressions alluding to some valuable container.

Therefore, it is unfortunate that the commentators we know of this important *Annunciation* by van der Weyden do not justify the Mariological symbolism of that vase based on primary sources. You can find such an omission in Max Julius Friedländer (1924, 1967), Erwin Panofsky ([1953] 1966, vol. I, pp. 203–4, 249–51, 284–88), Martin Davies (1973, pp. 268–70), Odile Delenda (1987, p. 54), Paul Philippot (1994, p. 40), Châtelet (1999a, pp. 112–17; 1999b, pp. 97–99, 195–200), Dhanens and Dijkstra (1999, pp. 35–36), Dirk De Vos (1999, pp. 276–84; 2002, p. 83), Kemperdick and Sander (2009, pp. 96, 100–1), and Campbell and van der Stock (2009, p. 351).

Hans Memling (c. 1433/40–1494)—or, according to other experts, a presumed disciple of Rogier van der Weyden, whose design the disciple would have used to execute this painting—organizes the scene of *The Clugny Annunciation*, c. 1465–1470, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 11) in an elegant bourgeois residence, equipped with precious furniture, through whose window a large walled garden can be seen.

The painter places the two protagonists of the episode in this splendid setting. Dressed in luxurious clerical clothing embroidered in gold, and carrying a herald's staff in his left hand, the Archangel Gabriel announces the divine plan to the Virgin. Kneeling on her prie-dieu, Mary extends her right hand over the book of hours, as in a gesture of swearing before the Bible, to show her compliance with the will of the Most High. More than the eloquent elements of the bed and the closed door (*porta clausa*), whose dogmatic meanings we have already explained in other studies, it is convenient to highlight again the shiny metallic vase that, standing out in the foreground, holds the stem of lilies upright.

It seems indisputable that the intellectual author of this painting includes this vase in such a prominent position as a symbol of Mary in her condition as virginal mother of God, and as the exalted holder of sublime virtues and supernatural privileges. For this reason, it is shocking that none of the commentators that we know of this *Clugny Annunciation* have documented the Mariological meanings of this vase. In this surprising silence fall, among others, Max Julius Friedländer (1967), Martin Davies (1973, pp. 271–72), Odile Delenda (1987, pp. 54–57), De Vos (1994), Dhanens and Dijkstra (1999, p. 47), Châtelet (1999a, p. 124), and Alfred Michiels (2007).

Dirk Bouts (1410–1475) poses *The Annunciation*, c. 1475–1487, from the Muzeum Czartoryskich in Krakowie (Poland) (Figure 12), with a certain originality regarding conventional models. He places the Virgin sitting on the floor, instead of kneeling on a prie-dieu or sitting on a seat, which are the most common positions for her in representations of the Annunciation. In addition, he reverses the usual position of both protagonists, now placing the Virgin on the left of the scene, and on the right the angel, who carries the herald's staff in his left hand. Dirk Bouts repeats here the attitude of Mary placing her right hand on the prayer book, as if in an attitude of confirming the will to tell the truth in an act of official oath through the gesture of pronouncing the oath after placing the right hand on the Gospel.

Figure 11. Hans Memling or Rogier van der Weyden's workshop, *The Clugny Annunciation*, c. 1465–1470. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

However, now ignoring this and other significant details in this painting, we are interested in highlighting the vase carrying a large stem of lilies that, located at the back of the scene on a piece of furniture between two cushions, constitutes the visual center and axis around which the figures of Gabriel and Mary counterbalance. By placing this vase in such a relevant situation, it seems logical to think that the author of this painting wanted to emphasize its strong symbolic charge, in line with the already explained approaches of the Fathers, theologians and medieval liturgical hymnographers.

Aelbrecht (or Albert) Bouts (c. 1452–1549), son of the painter Dirk Bouts, stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1480, from the Cleveland Museum of Art (Figure 13) within an elegant Gothic chapel or small private temple, as revealed by its tracery windows and ribbed vault. In this regard, the artist represented here the humble house of Mary in Nazareth shaped like a splendid temple to illustrate certain Mariological and Christological symbolisms that we cannot explain in this article, since we have already explained them in other works (Salvador-González 2017, 2020d, 2020e, 2020f, 2021b).

Figure 12. Dirk Bouts, *The Annunciation*, c. 1475–1487. The Muzeum Czartoryskich, Krakowie.

In this ambiance of ecclesial intimacy, the angel Gabriel, covered with a luxurious embroidered cope, and carrying the herald's sceptre, points his right hand at the Virgin indicating that she has been designated by the Most High to become the virginal mother of his divine Son. Mary manifests her unrestricted obedience to the will of God the Father by holding the book of hours in her left hand and raising her right hand over it, as if to take an oath on the Bible.

Now, among the various objects of this refined furniture, it is convenient to emphasize the transparent glass vase that in the foreground in the lower right corner holds a pair of lily stems. In this regard, the hypothesis sounds reasonable that the author of this *Annunciation* has considered the underlying Mariological meanings under this gleaming glass vase, according to the already explained interpretations of the Fathers and theologians, and the acclamations of the liturgical hymns on the Mariological metaphor of "vase" or vessel.

Figure 13. Aelbrecht Bouts, *The Annunciation*, c. 1480. The Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland.

Hans Memling brings in *The Annunciation with angelic attendants*, 1482, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Figure 14), a quite original approach. He continues to introduce here the usual conventions of the 15th century Flemish painters. For this reason, he stages the Marian episode in a luxurious bourgeois residence with precious furniture and fine utensils, among which a clean marriage bed stands out in the middle of the living room, and dresses the Archangel Gabriel with a sumptuous cope, making him also wear the herald's staff in his left hand.

Aside from these predictable elements in the 15th century Flemish iconography, Memling presents two major novelties in the treatment of the Virgin Mary: first, because, while standing, she begins to bend her knees and fall backwards, as if she were fainting; second, because at her side are two angels, companions of Gabriel, one of whom holds her by the arm to prevent her from collapsing, while the other grabs the lower end of her long tunic, as in the gesture of a page or as a bridesmaid lifting the long train of a queen or a bride at the marriage ceremony. In addition, Memling represents the Virgin with a swollen belly, as a sign of advanced pregnancy (which is in accordance with her fainting), as if to illustrate that at the concluding moment of the Annunciation—when Mary declared her unrestricted obedience to the plan of the Most High—the immediate human conception/incarnation of God the Son occurs in the virginal womb of Mary.

Figure 14. Hans Memling, *The Annunciation with angelic attendants*, 1482. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.

However, we will not dwell now on the undoubted symbolism that the marriage bed, the closed door on the left edge of the painting, and the fainting and pregnancy of the Virgin have in reference to the virginal divine motherhood of Mary.

Instead, we are interested in stressing the polyvalent Mariological symbolisms offered by the two vessels that appear in this painting: the ceramic vase with the stem of lilies placed on the floor in the foreground, and the glass vase or bottle with water placed on the sideboard attached to the back wall. Memling thus adopts a duplication of vessels like the one used by Rogier van der Weyden in his already analyzed Louvre *Annunciation*, with the difference that the latter put a glass vessel and a metallic jug in the Paris one, while Memling puts a bottle or glass vessel in that of the Metropolitan. In any case, with these two very different vases—a ceramic vessel with the stem of a lily, and a glass vessel with water—Memling illustrates the already explained Mariological meanings of the "vase" as a simultaneous symbol of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary, and the fullness of her sublime virtues and exclusive privileges, as manifested in full agreement by innumerable Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers for more than a millennium.

Therefore, it is surprising to note that the commentators we know of this *Annunciation* by Memling, including Barbara G. Lane (1984, p. 75), Dirk De Vos (1994, pp. 304–6) and Charlotte Wytema (2016), have not documented in primary sources the profound theological meanings of the "vase" symbol. In contrast, Shirley Neilsen Blum (1992, pp. 44–48, 46) refers to a phrase of St. Amadeus of Lausanne to explain only one of the various Mariological symbolisms inherent in the metaphor of the "vase", in addition to the fact that this holy bishop of Lausanne refers to the ray of light that passes through the glass without breaking it.

Pedro Berruguete (c. 1450–1503) stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1496–1500, from the Miraflores Charterhouse in Burgos (Figure 15) in a palace, framed by a doorway on whose jambs two of its sculptures represent Adam and Eve, alluding to the Original Sin that God the Son—whom Mary is conceiving as a man at that instant—comes to redeem. The angel Gabriel, clad in a luxurious cope, begins his announcement with the salutation inscribed on the phylactery that floats in front of him. Kneeling before a large prayer book, the Virgin, turning slightly towards the angel, expresses her unreserved obedience to the will of the Most High, opening her hands in a gesture similar to that of a priest officiating at Mass.

Figure 15. Pedro Berruguete, *The Annunciation*, c. 1496–1500. Miraflores Charterhouse, Burgos.

Now ignoring the meanings of several objects and characters—the prophets and the First Fathers sculpted on the jambs of the portal—, we are now interested in stressing the transparent glass vase that, with its lily stem, stands out prominently in the intermediate plane in the center of the scene. It seems reasonable to suppose that Berruguete has focused on this resplendent vase here for its essential Mariological meanings, in accordance with the patristic, theological, and liturgical testimonies on the metaphor of the "vase" as a symbol of the virginal mother of God, and in addition a sublime model to all virtues. Furthermore, it is strange that the commentators we know on this painting by Berruguete (García Felguera 1985; Nieto Alcaide and de Ayala 1990) say nothing about the doctrinal symbolism of that vase.

4. Conclusions

From the triple series of comparative, intertextual, inter-iconic and textual-iconic analyses, that we have done so far, we can infer the following conclusions:

1. For more than a millennium, many medieval Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches agreed to interpret the metaphor of the "vessel" or "vase" (*vas*) as a symbol of the Virgin Mary in her virginal divine motherhood, and the exalted sublimity of her virtues and supernatural attributes. For all these writers, just as the sacred "vessels" or "vases" in the Bible—the vessel of manna, the Ark of the Covenant (containing the tables of Ten Commandments, the Aaron's rod and the vessel of manna) or the golden candelabrum—contained something directly linked to God/Yahweh, so too Mary was, with even more reason, the sacred "vase" par excellence. In fact, while the biblical vases contained physical objects related to the deity (the tables of the law, the manna, the flowered rod of Aaron), the Virgin, on the other hand, contained in her womb (by conceiving, gestating, and giving birth to) God the Son himself when incarnating as a man.
2. Because of the virginal divine motherhood symbolized in the vase that contained and brought the flesh (*caro*) and the human nature to God the Son, many Fathers and theologians expanded the Mariological projection of this symbol, considering Mary as the "vase" that contains all virtues to the highest degree, especially chastity (virginity), and some exclusive supernatural privileges, such as her power of help and intercession in favor of Humanity.
3. Inspired by the unanimous patristic and theological tradition on the Mariological metaphor of the vase, countless medieval liturgical prayers and hymns repeatedly adopted the idea of Mary as a vase, in the double projection designed by the Fathers and theologians: as a vessel containing and giving flesh to the Son of God in his supernatural human conception/incarnation; and as a vessel that contains and preserves all virtues to the highest degree.
4. In addition, due to the imaginative freedom that poetic licenses allow, these liturgical hymns—following, moreover, the trajectory marked out by the Fathers and theologians—expanded the panoply of those metaphorical "vessels" or receptacles of the sacred, by adding other variably large containers, such as "ark of the covenant", "golden vessel of manna", "golden urn", "golden candelabrum", "ointment knob", "box (or cell) of aromas", "temple", "king's room", "throne room", or "triclinium of the Trinity".
5. Based then on the firm tradition—consolidated by many Fathers and theologians, and by an innumerable *corpus* of liturgical hymns—that considered the Virgin Mary as a sacred "vase", many artists who in the 14th and 15th centuries represented the episode of the Annunciation included almost always a "vase" or vessel in a prominent place of the scene.
6. In this regard, it is important to point out that those vases painted in the *Annunciations* bring together two very significant details. First, they almost always contain the usual stem of lilies, except in a few cases, such as in the analyzed *Annunciation Martelli* by Fra Filippo Lippi. And, since the flower of the lily (as we have shown in other articles) is a symbol of God the Son incarnate, while its stem is a symbol of Mary conceiving God the Son as a man, it seems evident that this "vase" assumes the same Mariological and Christological signs of the lily stem placed on it. For this reason, such vase also symbolizes the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and the supernatural human conception/incarnation of God the Son in the Virgin's womb. The second noteworthy detail is that these painted "vases" in the *Annunciations* are almost always bulbous in shape, with a spheroidal belly and a long, narrow neck. To put it another way, they resemble an inverted human uterus, which reinforces the idea that they are symbols of Mary virginally conceiving the incarnate Son of God. Thus, the vase (the uterus), the stem (the Virgin conceiving and giving birth) and the flower of the lily (Christ) constitute, as a splendid poetic ensemble, a perfect metaphorical sequence of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and the supernatural human conception/incarnation of God the Son.

7. We do not pretend to say that all medieval and Renaissance artists who represented these *Annunciations* had the necessary theological culture to be fully aware of the Christological and Mariological meanings inherent in the "vase" they were painting. As artists, they were required to know in depth the secrets of their job, without needing to be—except for some painters of high religious and humanistic culture, such as Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi, Fra Carnevale, Fra Bartolomeo, and Lorenzo Monaco—experts on doctrinal issues or even classical culture. Faced with this clear aporia, two possible explanations stand out. In the best case, the artist (especially in commissions of great relevance and social prestige) could have had at his side a mentor, an intellectual author or iconographic programmer who dictated the guidelines for the characters, scenes, attitudes, attributes, objects (natural and symbolic) that the artist should include in the scene to be painted. The second possible explanation—perhaps the most common—is the fact that, when representing the theme of the Annunciation, the artist "copied"—in the sense of imitating with greater or lesser originality—the compositional-narrative structure consolidated as a model of this iconographic theme thanks to the solutions provided by some influential great artists. Naturally, the common artist could always "dress up" this conventional prototype by adding some variations or details of his own invention.
8. Whatever the doctrinal and humanistic culture of the different painters, it seems evident, in any case, that the masterminds of these *Annunciations* prominently placed a "vase", or vessel (almost always with a stem of lilies on their scene) as a *visual metaphor* capable of fully illustrating the *textual metaphor* of the sacred "vase" with which many Church Fathers and theologians and innumerable medieval hymns symbolically designated Mary as the virginal mother of the incarnate Son of God, and as the exalted holder of the most sublime virtues and exclusive supernatural privileges.

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Notes

1 Athanasius Alexandrinus. *Sermo de descriptione Deiparae*. PG 28, 955–58. PG refers to the collection of Greek Patrology Migne (1857–1867).

2 Epiphanius Constantiensis. *Adversus Haereses, Liber III, Tomus II. Haeres 38*. PG 42, 707–8.

3 Epiphanius Constantiensis. *Adversus Haereses, Liber III, Tom. II. Haeres 38*. PG 42, 714–15.

4 Greek anonymous writer or St. Gregory Thaumaturgus. *Homilia II. In Annuntiationem sanctae Virginis Mariae*. PG 10, 1155–56.

5 Germanus Constantinopolitanus. *In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae. Sermo I*. PG 98, 307.

6 Germanus Constantinopolitanus. *In Annunciationem SS. Deiparae*. PG 98, 322.

7 Joannis Damascenus. *Homilia II In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 690.

8 Joannis Damascenus. *Homilia I In Dormitionem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 695.

9 Josephus Hymnographus. *Mariale. Theotocia Ex Paracletica Graecorum*. PG 105, 1287.

10 "Figmentum figuli, super onnia vasa decorum,Atque creaturae fulgida massa novae.Candelabrum pulchrum, verbi capiendo lucernam,Quam formam sculpsit tam super astra faber,Ornans Jerusalem sanctam, speciosa venustas,A facie templi vas in honore Dei." (Venantius Fortunatus. *Miscelanea. Liber VIII.Caput VII. In laudem sanctae Mariae Virginis et matris Domini*. PL 88, 281). PL refers to the collection of Latin Patrology Migne (1844–1864).

11 "Et hujus certe virginitas semper incorrupta, semper integra, semper illaesa, semper inviolata. [. . .] Haec femina sanctificactionis vas est, aeternitas virginitatis est, mater Dei est, sacrarium sancti Spiritus est, templum singulariter unicum factoris sui est". (Ildefonsus Toletanus. *Liber de virginitate perpetua S. Mariae adversus tres infideles. Caput X*. PL 96, 95).

12 "Tu aula universalis propitiationis, causa generalis reconciliationis, vas et templum vitae et salutis universorum, nimirum contraho merita tua, cum in me homunculo vili singulariter recenseo beneficia tua, quae mundus amans gaudet, gaudens clamat esse sua." (Anselmus Cantuariensis. *Oratio LII Ad Sanctam Virginem Mariam. Cum meditatione et laude meritorum ejus*. PL 158, 954).

13 "Coelum coeli, domus DeiVas misericordiae.Pronum vero tibi constat,Et omnino facile." (Anselmus Cantuariensis. *Hymni et Psalterium de Sancta Virgine Maria. Hymnus I in laudem S. Deiparae*. Pl 158, 1047).

[14] "Libet, charissimi, in sancta solemnitate gaudiorum adhuc paulisper immorari, et de praefata conceptione aliquid quaerere; libet ipsum divinum agalma ipsum pretiosissimum, et sanctissimum vas, in quo Dei Verbum conceptum est, apostrophando interrogare." (Amedeus Lausannensis. *Homilia III. De incarnatione Christi et Virginis conceptione de Spiritu Sancto*. PL 188, 1318).

[15] Anthonius Patavinus. *Sermone per l'Annunciazione della Beata Vergine Maria*, I, 109–14. In (Nocilli 1995, p. 157).

[16] "Hoc autem bene figuratum fuit Exodi ultimo in isto tabernaculo figurali, ubi dicitur Moysi: *Unges tabernaculum cum suis vasis;* et post hoc sequitur: *Postquam autem omni perfecta sunt, operuit nubes tabernaculum testimonii, et gloria Domini implevit illud.* Tabernaculum istud est Virgo Maria; vasa sunt receptacula virtutum; haec omnia Dei Filius unxit, quando eam sanctificans, implevit gratia; post etiuam sanctificationem ipse eam operuit, qui eam obumbravit et adimplevit gloria, ut nihil remaneret, nec in anima, nec in carne, quod non esset Divinitatis gratia plenum." (Bonaventura de Balneoregio. *Sermones de B. Virgine Maria. Sermo IV*, 1: Q 9, 672a).

[17] "Ideo enim caro Virginis *vas purissimum* nuncupatur, quia in carne eius nec peccatum regn avit, nec caro spiritui rebellavit, nec caro spiritum retardavit; et ideo non tantum fuit pura, sed purissima." (Bonaventura de Balneoregio. *Sermones de B. Virgine Maria. Sermo V*, 1: Q 9, 654a).

[18] "Fuit autem puella regia *vas admirabile* ratione *materiae*, ratione *formae*, ratione *rei contentae*. Ratione materiae fuit vas mirabiliter *pretiosum*; ratione formae fuit vas mirabiliter *speciosum*; sed ratione rei contentae fuit vas mirabiliter *copiosum*." (Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *Sermones de B. Virgine Maria. Sermo IV*, 1: Q 9, 714a).

[19] This hymn is also included, with the title *Hymnus 8. Serum beatae Mriae V*., in AHMA, 36, Blume, Dreves 19, 242.

[20] This hymn is also included, with the title *Hymnus 524. Prosa de Beata Virgine*, in Mone, 1854, 309.

[21] This hymn is also included, with the title *Hymnus 605, De sancta Maria*, in Mone, 1854, 424.

[22] This hymn is also included in AHMA 10, 106.

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