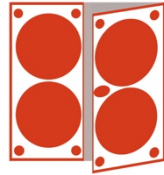




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In copertina: Chartres, Portail Royal (foto di Fabio Scirea)

Iconographic Interpretation of the Temple as a Theological Symbol in Images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th Centuries

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Abstract

This article seeks to highlight the essential symbolic Christian meanings hidden in some textual metaphors of the Old Testament, such as *templum Dei*, «house of Wisdom», *aula regia*, *Sancta Sanctorum*, «tabernacle», «altar», «ark».

To make our approach clearer: first of all, we will analyze some exegesis offered on these metaphorical terms by certain Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches; second, we will analyze some pictorial images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th centuries that include a temple or chapel in the scene.

From this double analysis of texts and images, it will be possible to conclude that the temple painted in those images constitutes a visual metaphor that illustrates the Christological and Mariological meanings brought to light by the Fathers and theologians when interpreting the aforementioned Old Testament textual metaphors.

Keywords: *Templum Dei*; Virgin Mary; Annunciation; Christ's incarnation; Divine maternity.

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1. Introduction

The frequent attendance of the primary sources of Christian thought has been bringing us for a long time some surprising findings in various doctrinal spheres. One such discovery is the abundant and coincidental series of exegetical texts with which for more than a millennium numerous Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches unanimously interpreted the Old Testament metaphors *templum Dei*, «abode of the Most High», «house of Wisdom», *aula regia*, *Sancta Sanctorum* or «sanctuary», «tabernacle», «altar», «ark», and other similar metaphorical expressions related to spaces of worship. The most surprising finding, in this case, is not only the extraordinary abundance of exegetical comments produced during such long centuries on these topics but above all the unrestricted concordance with which the different Eastern and Western Christian thinkers interpret these metaphorical expressions according to a double and complementary Christological and Mariological projection. All agree in interpreting these metaphors as graphic symbols of the human incarnation of God the Son in the virginal womb of Mary, as well as of the virginal divine maternity of Mary.

This abundant, multi secular, and concordant series of exegesis will soon become an increasingly unbroken doctrinal tradition in support of its double Mariological and Christological scope. On the other hand, it was entirely foreseeable that this exegetical tradition referring to the textual metaphors of the aforementioned sacred spaces would eventually become visible in some way in the artistic representations of the Annunciation, a Marian event in which the incarnation of the Son of God became real. In this sense, in the 14th and 15th centuries, not a few images of the Annunciation will include as a scenery a transparent form of temple or chapel when presenting the Nazarene house of the Virgin Mary¹. Those special Annunciations that include a temple are precisely the cultural products in which the figure of a painted temple becomes a visual metaphor that allows putting in light the expressed textual metaphors meant in the terms *templum Dei*, *domus Sapientiae*, and the other similar expressions allusive to the sacred spaces that we mentioned before.

This article aims to make a brief and partial approach to this interesting iconographic theme. To better grasp it, we will divide it into three parts. In the first one, we will present a small selection of exegetical comments from Greek-Eastern Fathers on the topic under study. The second will deal with some analogous exegeses produced by Latin Fathers and theologians. In the third part, we will analyze iconographically a few images of the Annunciation that include a painted temple in the 14th or 15th centuries.

¹ More or less in this same order of ideas, the prestigious iconographer Louis Réau expresses: «Le décor de la Salutation Angélique s'est transformé au cours des siècles. D'après l'Évangile de Luc et les Apocryphes, la scène se passe dans la maison habitée à Nazareth par Joseph et la Sainte Vierge. Si les textes sont peu explicites, ils sont unanimes sur ce point. Cependant l'art chrétien n'en a longtemps tenu aucun compte. Au lieu de localiser l'apparition de l'Ange dans la 'chambre de la petite maison de Marie', comme l'imagine le Pseudo-Bonaventure, les artistes ne se font aucun scrupule de la transporter dans un palais ou dans une église, soit même sous un portique ou en plein air au milieu d'un jardin». Réau 1957: 185-186.

2. Greek-Eastern exegeses on the metaphor templum Dei

In the context of the Greek-Eastern Church St. Ephrem of Syria (c. 307-373) seems to be the first thinker who, in the second half of the 4th century, interprets the *templum Dei*, the *Sancta Sanctorum* or the aula regia as symbols of the Virgin Mary, in whose virginal womb God the Son built a house in which to live. Thus, in a hymn on the Nativity of Jesus, Ephrem affirms that «She [Mary] is a royal hall for you [Christ], oh Son of the King [God the Father], and the *Sancta Sanctorum* for you, oh [heavenly] Priest»². And in another song St. Ephrem adds that Mary is the pure temple, in which God stayed, because she was the one in whom the mystery of God becoming man was fulfilled³.

Almost a century later Cyril of Alexandria (c. 370/373-444) takes up the thesis that, after «Wisdom [God] built his house»⁴ and a truer tabernacle (the temple built in Mary's womb), the divine Word that is in the bosom of God the Father descended into her and became man⁵.

About the same time St. Proclus of Constantinople († 446/448) argues that the Holy Spirit formed a living temple in Mary so that the Highest abased himself to take the form of a servant, and the virginal womb of Mary gestated such a great mystery by a divine dispensation⁶. Furthermore, in another sermon in praise of Mary, Proclus describes her as a «secret tabernacle of innocence», «sanctified temple of God», «golden altar of holocausts»⁷.

A couple of centuries later St. Modest of Jerusalem († 634) states that the expression «temple of God» is an eloquent symbol of Mary as Mother of the divine Son, because she was converted by God in her own home, in the shelter of God the Son. He lived in her without restriction, became incarnate in her by the power of the Holy Spirit, and, made child, He who is God inseparable from his Father and the Holy Spirit, remained nine months in the womb of Mary⁸.

² *Aula regalis illa est per te, o Regis Fili; et Sancta Sanctorum per te, o summe Sacerdos!* Ephraem Syrus, Hymni de Nativitate, 17, 5 (Alvarez Campos 1970: 492).

³ *Maria templum est purum, in quo divertit Deus, aeternus heros; et ibi expletum est mirabili modo Mysterium per quod homo Deus factus est et Adamus a Patre filius appellatus est.* Ephraem Syrus, Carmina Sogita, 1, 38 and 40 (Alvarez Campos 1970: 517).

⁴ Cyril of Alexandria assumes here, as many other East and West Fathers and theologians will do later, the expression of Proverbs *Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum* (Prov 9,1).

⁵ *Postquam «Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum», ut scriptum est, ac verius tabernaculum, id est templum illud ex Virgine sibi extruxit, descendit in ipsam incomprehensibili ac divina ratione qui est in sinu Dei ac Patris sui Deus Verbum, et homo factus est.* Cyrillus Alexandrinus, Commentarius in S. Joannis Evangelium. Liber Quartus, IV, 3 (PG 73: col. 615).

⁶ *Quandonam vero caro secundum substantiam Deo immutabiliter unita est, praeterquam heri? quando sancta quidem Virgo suum uterum commodavit: Verbum autem per aurem insiliit; ac Spiritus Sanctus vivum efformavit templum; Altissimus in servi se formam exinanivit; ac demum divinae istud dispensationis mysterium uterus virginalis portavit.* Proclus Constantinopolitanus, Oratio III. De Incarnatione Domini nostri Jesu Christi, 1 (PG 65: col. 707).

⁷ *Quibus laudum praeconiis incontaminatum exornabo castimoniae characterem? Est haec penetrale innocentiae sacrarium; est sanctificatum Dei templum; aureum altare holocaustorum.* Proclus Constantinopolitanus, Oratio VI. Laudatio sanctae Dei genitricis Mariae (PG 65: col. 754).

⁸ *In domo autem Dei et Patris illa excepta est cum exultatione et ineffabili gaudio, quae a Deo facta est habitaculum Filii sui, qui in ipsa incircumscripse habitavit, et ex ea incarnatus ex Spiritu sancto, et factus infans novem menses mansit in utero, qui est Deus a Patre suo et Spiritu sancto inseparabilis.* Modestus Hierosolymitanus, Encomium in Dormitionem Sanctissimae Dominae Nostrae Deiparae semperque Virginis Mariae (PG 86-2: col. 3285).

Towards the end of the 7th century or the beginning of the 8th, St. Germain of Constantinople (c. 650/660-c. 730/733) greets the Virgin as the sacrosanctly built, immaculate and most pure palace of God, the Highest King, adorned with his magnificence, and that now is constituted in the regal hall of the Lord and in his holy temple, not made by human hand and resplendent with beauty, in which the Word of God became incarnate to reconcile men with God the Father⁹.

In those same years, St. Andrew of Crete (c. 660-c. 740) extols the Virgin calling her «magnificent temple of divine glory», «palace of the King of sacred construction», «marriage-bed in which Christ married human nature with his divine nature»¹⁰.

A few years later St. John Damascene (675-749) praised Mary for being «the temple, house of the Lord most purely manufactured, of which David says: Holy is your temple, admirable in justice, of which Christ, building for himself the temple of his body, converted mortals into temples of the living God»¹¹.

3. Latin exegetical comments on the metaphor *templum Dei*

In a way, analogous to what happens in the Greek-Eastern Church, also in the sphere of the Latin Church numerous exegetical comments coincide in considering the textual metaphors *templum Dei*, *aula regia*, *palatium Dei*, *tabernaculum*, or similar expressions alluding to sacred spaces, as clear symbols of the Virgin Mary in her condition as Mother of the incarnate Son of God. From among the copious series of Latin exegeses with that Mariological and Christological projection, we now select a few examples of textual quotations and authors.

Thus, by the middle of the 4th century, St. Zeno of Verona (c. 300-371/372) states that, eventually, the Son of God, disguising his divine majesty and leaving his heavenly seat, settled his reals in the temple of the predestined Virgin Mary, to be engendered in her as a man, of whose nature He lacked¹².

⁹ Ave, sacrosancte aedificatum, et immaculatum purissimumque Dei, summi Regis, palatium, ejusdem (Dei Regis) magnificentia circumornatum, omnesque hospitio recipiens ac mysticis reficiens delicias; quod nunc in aula Domini, in sancto nempe illius templo, fundaris; in quo non manufactus, et vario decore nitens, situs est spiritalis sponsi thalamus; in quo Verbum, errantem (humanam stirpem) revocare volens, carnem sibi desponsavit, ut eos qui voluntate propria extorres facti fuerant, (Patri) reconciliaret. Germanus Constantinopolitanus, *In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae. Sermo I* (PG 98: col. 306).

¹⁰ Ave, vere benedicta, ave, illustris, ave, magnificum divinae gloriae templum: aves, molitionis sacrae Regis palatium: ave, thalame, in quo Christus humanam sibi naturam desponsavit. Andreas Cretensis, *Oratio V. In sanctissimae Deiparae Dominae nostrae Annuntiationem* (PG 97: coll. 894-895).

¹¹ Ave, templum, purissime fabricata domus Domini, de qua David ait: Sanctum est templum tuum, mirabile in justitia; ex qua sibi Christus corporis templum exstruens, templa Dei vivi mortales effecit. Iohannes Damascenus, *Homilia II In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae*, 7 (PG 96: col. 690).

¹² Etenim Deus Dei Filius, tempore constituto, dissimulata interim majestate, ab aetherea sede profectus, in praedestinatae virginis templum sibimet castra metatur, quibus latenter infunditur in hominem gigniturus, ibidemque salvo quod erat meditatur esse, quod non erat. Zeno Veronensis, *Tractatum Sancti Zenonis episcopi veronensis Liber Secundus. Tractatus VIII. De Nativitate Domini II* (PL 11: coll. 413-415).

Some decades later St. Ambrose of Milan (c. 340-397), in the apologetic context of his firm confrontation against the Arians¹³, asks how we could ponder how great was the grace of Mary's virginity. She deserved to be chosen by Christ to be the corporeal temple of God, in which He inhabited the fullness of the divinity¹⁴.

Towards the end of the 4th century or the beginning of the 5th, St. Maximus of Turin († c. 420) proclaimed Mary as a worthy dwelling place for Christ, not according to the laws of physical nature, but by the original grace of the Holy Spirit. In his view, Mary mysteriously gestated as in the tabernacle of her womb the priest, Christ the God, priest and host, God of the resurrection and priest of the oblation¹⁵.

Several decades later St. Peter Chrysologus (c. 380-c. 450/451) notes that Mary gestated God in her womb as in a virginal temple, which means that she acquired the honor of being a mother without losing the glory of virginity¹⁶. Perhaps at the same time the poet and hymnographer Caelius Sedulius (5th century) wrote these lyrical verses in honor of the Virgin:

The house of the modest chest [of Mary] / suddenly became the temple of God: / conserving her virginal integrity, without intercourse / she engendered a son with the Word¹⁷.

Five centuries later¹⁸ St. Peter Damian (1007-1072) affirms that, since Humanity's redemption was impossible if Christ had not been born of the Virgin, the Virgin needed to be born in which the Word of God would become incarnate. Therefore, it fitted that the King of heaven should first build a house – «Wisdom has built his house», in which He deigned to have his lodging when He descended to earth, a house that eternal Wisdom has built for itself in a way that it was worthy to receive it and to procreate it from the womb of her immaculate flesh¹⁹.

¹³ In direct opposition to the Arians, who denied the divine nature of Christ, St. Ambrose is one of the strongest defenders of this Christological thesis, established as the official dogma of the Church in 325 by the first Council of Nicea.

¹⁴ *Quid autem loquar quanta sit virginitatis gratia, quae meruit a Christo elegi, ut esset etiam corporale Dei templum, in qua corporaliter, ut legimus (Coloss, II,9) habitavit plenitudo divinitatis? Virgo genuit mundi salutem, virgo peperit vitam universorum.* Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *Epistula LXIII*, 33 (PL 16: coll. 1249-1250).

¹⁵ *Idoneum plane Maria Christo habitaculum, non pro habitu corporis, sed pro gratia originali.* Maximus Taurinensis, *Homilia V. De eadem [ante natale Domini]* (PL 57: col. 235).

¹⁶ *Qui natus est de Spiritu Sancto et Maria Virgine. Quid terrenum nascitur, ubi auctore Spiritu virgo vocatur in partu? quis non divinum credat quando quae peperit nil sensit humanum? Deum mulier virgineo portabat in templo: hinc est quod et adquisivit honorem matris, et virginitatis gloriam non amisit.* Petrus Chrysologus, *Sermo LIX. In symbolum apostolorum* (PL 52: col. 364).

¹⁷ *Domus pudici pectoris / templum repente fit Dei: / intacta nesciens virum / verbo creavit filium.* Caelius Sedulius, *Hymnus II* (PL 19: coll. 763-764).

¹⁸ This leap of five centuries in the patristic tradition on the theme of *templum Dei* may seem excessive and unjustified. But we can only verify it, because, in the current state of our researches, we do not know of any documentary testimony of Fathers or theologians between the 6th and 10th centuries who have dogmatically interpreted the expression *templum Dei* or the other similar metaphors under scrutiny.

¹⁹ *Sicut ergo impossibile erat ut humani generis redemptio fieret, nisi Dei Filius de Virgine nasceretur; ita etiam necessarium fuerat ut Virgo, ex qua Verbum caro fieret, nasceretur. Oportebat quippe prius aedificari domum, in quam descendens coelestis Rex habere dignaretur hospitium. Illam videlicet, de qua per Salomonem dicitur: «Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum» [...] Quam utique aeterna Sapientia, quae attingit a fine usque ad finem fortiter, et disponit omnia suaviter (Sap. VIII), talem construxit quae digna fieret illum suscipere, et de intemeratae carnis suae*

Some four decades later, St. Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) extols the Virgin Mary, calling her «Mother of God [...], the temple of the living God, royal hall of the eternal King, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit». By a unique and incomparable privilege and an unheard miracle, she made possible for the Word of God, begotten of God the Father before all centuries, to become also her (Mary's) child, being both God and man²⁰.

A century and a half later, St. Bonaventure (c. 1217/1221-1274) recapitulates in a clear and precise manner the various ideas and exegetical arguments produced up until then by the Fathers and theologians on the subject, when manifesting:

one designates with the real name of temple [of God] the womb of the Virgin, in which the whole Divinity inhabited corporally; that is why it is rightly called the temple of God made by divine power, adorned by divine wisdom, dedicated by the grace of God and full of the presence of God. The construction of this temple is due to the Father's power; its ornament, to Son's wisdom; its dedication, to the Holy Spirit's grace; its fullness, to the Incarnate Word's presence. Because, being [Mary's womb] «the noble bridal bed of the whole divine Trinity», it is, nevertheless, a particular and purple temple of the Incarnate Word²¹.

4. The temple form in some images of the Annunciation in the 14th and 15th centuries

The discovery of the reliable and centuries-old exegetical tradition that coincides in interpreting *templum Dei* and other textual metaphors alluding to sacred spaces as symbols of Christ's incarnation and Mary's virginal divine maternity impelled us to investigate the images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th centuries, trying to discover some that embody in its scenography a specific form of temple or sacred building. Such an iconographic investigation made foreseeable the finding of some Annunciations that, for including some form of the temple, seek to illustrate the centuries-old tradition on *templum Dei* visually.

Moreover, although this doctrinal tradition lasted, as we have seen, since the 4th century, the search for images of the Annunciation with that unique scenographic feature was only relevant for the 14th and 15th centuries. We have already said that during the Late Antiquity and the High Middle Ages, the scenes of the Annunciation were straightforward, usually reduced to the solitary figures of the angel and the Virgin, superimposed on an abstract background or with little hints of architecture. In that context, some exceptional examples of Annunciations with architectural hints in partial or total form of temple are documented: among such precursor Annunciations we can mention that of the mosaic in

visceribus procreare. Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLV. II. In Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae* [VIII Sept.] (PL 144: col. 741).

²⁰ *O beata Dei genitrix, virgo Maria, templum Dei vivi, aula Regis aeterni, sacrarium Spiritus sancti. Tu virga de radice Jesse, tu cedrus de Libano, tu rosa purpurea in Jericho, tu cypressus in monte Sion ; quae singulari privilegio sicut nescis in omnibus comparisonem, ita nihilominus et angelicam superas dignitatem, cui novo et inaudito miraculo datum est ut Verbum quod ante saecula Deus genuit, fieret filius tuus, Deus et homo*. Anselmus Cantuariensis, *Oratio LV, Ad eandem sanctam Virginem Mariam* (PL 158: col. 961).

²¹ *Secundum allegoriam vero nomine templi datur intelligi uterus Virginis, in quo tota Divinitas corporaliter habitavit; et ideo recte dicitur Dei templum fabricatum divina potentia, adornatum divina sapientia, dedicatum divina gratia et adimpletum divina praesentia. Debetur enim huius templi fabricatio potentiae Patris; adornatio, sapientiae Filii; dedicatio, gratiae Spiritus sancti; adimpletio, praesentia Verbi incarnati. Cum enim sit «totius Trinitatis nobile triclinium», est tamen Verbi incarnati speciale templum et hospitium*. Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *I. De Purificatione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo III* (Obras de San Buenaventura, IV: 564).

the triumphal arch of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (432-440)²², that of the mosaic in the Euphrasian Basilica of Poreč in Croatia (c. 540)²³, that of the ivory Maximian's Throne (545-553)²⁴, and those of the Carolingian miniatures²⁵. Indeed, during the Carolingian period (8th-10th centuries), and especially in the 10th century, some simple architectural elements appear from times to times in the images of the Annunciation painted in miniatures, as a mere exterior scenographic background (not as an interior environment) for Gabriel and Mary. This minimal presence – if not an almost absence – of architectural scenography persists during the following centuries, before some simple metonymic representations of temple-shaped architectures begin to hint at the end of the 13th century. Such is the case of the mosaic Annunciations embodied by Pietro Cavallini in the apse of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome (1291) and by Jacopo Torriti in the apse of Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (c. 1295-1296).

It is mainly during the 14th and 15th centuries when the iconography of the Annunciation becomes much complicated and enriched by a remarkable accumulation of narrative details and symbolic elements. We discover, in this way, a quite large set of pictorial Annunciations that place Mary and the angel Gabriel inside a temple or a building that looks like a church, chapel, or oratory. From that abundant corpus of Annunciations with temple, we will now analyze the eight following representative examples.

²² Gertrud Schiller (1971: 34-35) asserts on these art works: «In the mosaics on the triumphal arch of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (432-440) the motif of the Annunciation forms the first scene of this Christological cycle executed under Pope Sixtus III soon after the Council of Ephesus to glorify the Incarnation of God [...]. The scene of the Annunciation includes on the left a building resembling a temple, on the shot door of which a shield hangs, The house is probably an allusion to Luke 1, 28, which says that Gabriel «came in unto Mary»; the shut door and the shield cannot be explained with any certainty».

²³ In the middle of the 6th century the Annunciation in mosaic of the Croatian Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč (c. 540) presents behind Mary the exterior of a large church-shaped building, whose facade serves as background and throne to the Virgin (Schiller 1971: fig. 72).

²⁴ Schiller 1971: 37, states on this ivory art work: «Mary's house, of which the ivory relief of Maximian's Throne shows only a pediment resting on columns, has been expanded in the Poreč mosaic (fig. 71) to form a basilica, the pedimented front of which also forms part of Mary's throne. This conflation of Mary's throne and the church may be intended as a reference to David's new reign announced by the angel and realised in the Church. Irenaeus, who died as Bishop of Lyons in the year 202, sees the Magnificat spoken by Mary at her meeting with Elisabeth as relating to the future Church. Ambrose's commentary on Luke also contains a suggestion of the typological relationship between Mary and the Church, both of which are filled with the Holy Spirit. Yet the juxtaposition of Mary and the church building – which was often to be repeated later – may simply be an allusion to the church in Nazareth, which was so much visited by pilgrims».

²⁵ On this regard, Schiller 1971: 37, assures: «The pictorial type used for the Annunciation during the Carolingian period was usually the one in which Mary sits on the right in front of a conventional architectural motif, while the angel Gabriel walks towards her from the left».



1 Jacquemart de Hesdin, The Annunciation, *Les Petites Heures du Duc de Berry*, BnF, ms Lat. 18014, f. 22r, c. 1380-1385.

Jacquemart de Hesdin (1350-1410) in this Annunciation places this Marian event within a glorious Gothic church, thus converting the modest home of the Virgin into a magnificent temple.

Pointing with the right index towards God, the Father – whose head emerges in the upper-left edge of the scene, Gabriel begins the gesture of kneeling before Mary. Standing, and retracting her body with shyness, she interrupts her meditation before the book she holds in her left hand, while, bowing her head and opening her right hand, she makes a gesture of passive acceptance of the divine design announced by the angel.

Undoubtedly, Jacquemart de Hesdin, perhaps instructed by

some clergyman as an iconographic programmer of this miniature, wants here to pictorially represent the temple as a symbolic visual metaphor according to the various complementary dogmatic meanings hidden in the textual metaphors that we already explained.



2 Melchior Broederlam, The Annunciation. Dijon Altarpiece, c. 1393-1399.

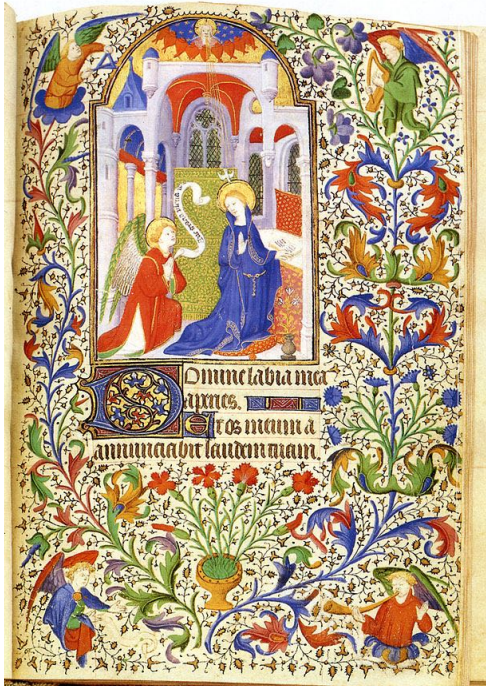
Melchior Broederlam (c. 1350-post 1409) finished in 1399 the painting of the two lateral wings that covered an altarpiece (whose central part disappeared) destined to the Charterhouse of Champmol in Dijon. In both panels, today in the Musée des Beaux-Arts of Dijon, the artist stages four episodes of the life of Mary and Jesus: in the left panel, the Annunciation and the Visitation; in the right, the Presentation of Jesus to the temple and the Flight to Egypt.

In this Annunciation Gabriel, kneeling before Mary, begins to transmit the heavenly announcement after addressing the initial greeting *Ave gratia plena dominus tecum*, inscribed in the phylactery that he carries in his hand. Seated before the prayer book, Mary sketches a gesture of fear and surprise at the unexpected divine design that the angel announces to her. Glowing in his mandorla of cherubs and seraphim in the upper left corner of the picture, God the Father emits his breath/beam of rays of light (symbol of God the Son) towards the Virgin, on whose head the dove of the Holy Spirit flies, to signify the immediate conception of the incarnate Son of God.

For our purposes the most interesting in this panel is the design of the house of Mary in the form of a temple, of strange architecture in which Romanesque and Gothic elements are mixed²⁶. In representing the house of the Virgin with the appearance of a temple,

²⁶ When commenting this *Annunciation* of the Dijon altarpiece, Gertrud Schiller (1971: 49) points out pertinently: «in Melchior Broederlam's Dijon altar (1397, fig. 111) a complex spatial structure related to the Annunciation is combined with a landscape in which the meeting between Mary and Elisabeth takes place. The gold ground remains visible in the top part of the painting only and here God the Father appears in a glory of angels and clouds. At Gabriel's greeting the Virgin looks up from her book and gazes at the angel kneeling before the entrance to her room. The forecorners of the baldachin-like room in which Mary sits on a bench are decorated with two statuettes representing Moses and Isaiah, prophets of the Law and of coming salvation. Above it rises the dome of a circular building, through the door of which, opening into Mary's chamber, part of an altar without candles can be seen. This closed building and the dark window openings of its cupola contrast with the adjoining open hall with its light Gothic gable, through the three openings of which the gold ground shimmers. The number three is an allusion to the Trinity, the window through which the light shines is itself a symbol of light, but more than that, the symbol of the light of Christian belief as contrasted with Jewish unbelief. Light-rays sent by God penetrate the roof and one of the windows of the hall. This third building represents the new Christian Church and is contrasted with the circular building, which we must regard as the Temple of the Old Covenant. Mary, the elect, overshadowed by the Holy Ghost, stands on the threshold from the Old to the New Testament. A little garden borders on the open hall; in a wider sense it relates to Paradise but its walling denotes the *hortus conclusus*, the closed garden of the Song of Solomon,

Broederlam clearly wants to suggest the identification of Mary as the «temple of God», as established by the Greek-Eastern and Latin Fathers and theologians for more than a millennium: this temple painted by Broederlam is a visual metaphor that illustrates the textual metaphor of *templum Dei*, deciphered by the multisecular Christian exegetical tradition.



3 Master of Boucicaut, The Annunciation of the *Livre d'Heures du Maréchal de Boucicaut*. Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, ms 1311, f. 53v, c. 1410-1415.

Also the Master of Boucicaut (act. 1405-1420), in The Annunciation of the *Livre d'Heures du Maréchal de Boucicaut*, converts the humble house of Mary into a three-nave, hybrid-Romanesque-Gothic style church. Inside that broad church, the artist places both interlocutors in this Marian episode: the angel initiates on his knees his dialogue through the salutation *Ave Maria gratia plena*, inscribed in the serpentine banderole. Kneeling in prayer before her prayer book, Mary turns her body and face towards the heavenly messenger, opening her hands in a sign of submissive obedience to the will of the Highest, that Gabriel notifies her. For this reason, at the top of the scene, surrounded by a mandorla of

seraphim, God the Father sends to the Virgin the beam of rays of light (God the Son) and the dove of the divine Spirit, thus making effective the divine promise communicated to her by the angel: *Spiritus Sanctus superveniet in te et virtus Altissimi obumbrabit tibi*²⁷.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that, by configuring in this miniature the house of Mary in the form of a temple, the Master of Boucicaut wants to visually highlight the conceptual value of the *templum Dei*²⁸, like an identifying symbol of Mary as an immaculate tabernacle where God the Son lodges and becomes incarnate by the power of the Holy Spirit.

symbolizing Mary's virginity. From the roof of the chamber hangs a light with three lamps not yet burning. This too may be a reference to the belief that through Mary – regarded in the High and Late Middle Ages as the Temple of the Trinity (*templum Trinitatis*) – the merciful light of the Trinity would become visible on earth».

²⁷ Luke 1, 35 (*Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam* 2005¹²: 1011).

²⁸ Panofsky 2012 (1953): 116-117, fig. 86, in his analysis of this miniature does not say anything about the symbolic meaning of this temple.



4 Brothers of Limbourg, The Annunciation of *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*. Tempera on parchment, 21x21 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 65, f. 26r, c. 1411-1416.

The Brothers of Limburg (c. 1380-1416), in The Annunciation of *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, situate the dialogue between Gabriel and Mary inside a Gothic-style temple or chapel. Kneeling on a prie-dieu before her prayer book, Mary turns her face to the angel, raising her right hand in a gesture of agreement. Kneeling before his Lady and holding a stem of lily in his left hand, Gabriel unfolds a phylactery in which one reads the salutation *Ave gra[tia] plena*. In the upper left part of the scene God the Father, inside a border of cherubs and seraphim,

and holding the cruciferous sphere of the universe, blows the breath/beam of rays of light (God the Son) that falls upon the Virgin, whose head the dove of the Holy Spirit rubs.

In representing the house of the Virgin in the form of a temple, the Brothers of Limbourg want to signify the perfect identification of Mary = *templum Dei*, for her exclusive privilege of being the virginal Mother of God the Son made man.



5 Robert Campin, The Annunciation. Oil on wood, 76x70 cm, Madrid, Prado Museum, c. 1420-1425.

Robert Campin (c. 1375-1444), in his Annunciation places the Virgin inside a monumental Gothic temple, from the exterior of which the angel Gabriel will enter through a side door. In the upper left corner, surrounded by a mandorla of angels, God the Father radiates to Mary a beam of rays of light, while blessing her with the right hand. Absorbed in prayer before an open book, Mary seems not to have noticed the angel's entry yet. It is important to note here that with this imposing church

Robert Campin fully illustrates the traditional theological thesis that defines Mary as *templum Dei*, in which the Son of God took on human nature by becoming incarnate, according to the Mariological and Christological meanings already explained²⁹.

²⁹ In his analysis of this painting, Thürlemamm 2002: 196, fig. 208, in addition to denying the authorship of Robert Campin on it – since he says that it has been painted by the Master of The Betrothal of the Virgin (Workshop), completely avoids the symbolism of the temple painted on it.



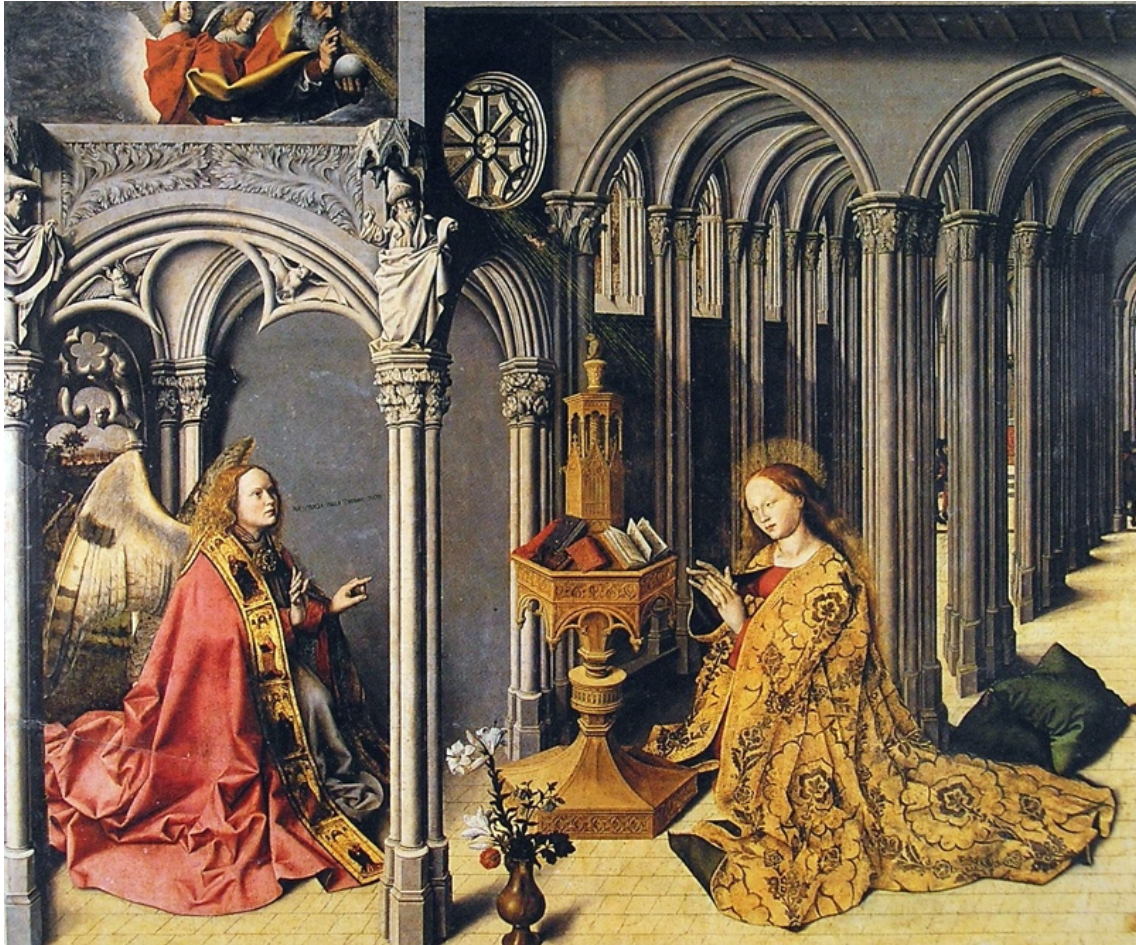
6 Jan van Eyck, The Annunciation in a church. Oil on canvas transferred on wood, 90,2x34,1 cm. Washington DC, The National Gallery of Art, c. 1434.

Jan van Eyck (c. 1390-1441) stages The Annunciation in a church inside a monumental cathedral. The angel points upwards to indicate the origin of his message, while he pronounces the initial greeting *ave gra[tia] plena*, inscribed in an epigraphic line directed towards the Virgin. She manifests her consent to the plan of the Highest by the phrase *ecce ancilla d[omi]ni*, written – inverted from right to left and from top to bottom – in the direction of the archangel.

Besides the well-known symbolism of the stem of lilies and the open book (to signify the fulfillment of some prophecies of the Old Testament) before which Mary prays, it is worth highlighting here the monumental temple with which van Eyck configures the house of the Virgin in this Annunciation³⁰.

With such a configuration the artist illustrates the widespread thesis of the symbolic identification of Mary as *templum Dei*, in her privileged role as Mother of the incarnate Son of God: by the power of the Most High and by the work and grace of the Holy Spirit, the virginal body of Mary becomes the temple into which God the Son inhabits and becomes incarnate when he becomes man.

³⁰ When analysing this *Annunciation in a church* of Jan van Eyck, neither Robb 1936: 506-508, nor Simpson 2007: 102-103, say anything about the temple. In their respective analyses of this painting, Friedländer 1967a: 63-64, plate 57, and Harbison 1991: 175-176, refer to this temple in purely formal and stylistic terms, without mentioning the Mariological and Christological meanings that we have explained.



7 Barthélemy d'Eyck (attributed), *The Annunciation of Aix*. Oil on wood, 155x176 cm, c. 1443-1445. Aix-en-Provence, Church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine.

The Master of the Annunciation of Aix – for many experts, Barthélemy d'Eyck (before 1420-post 1470), in *The Annunciation* from the church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine in Aix-en-Provence³¹, presents originally the iconographic theme that we are studying, by placing the two protagonists of the episode inside a monumental Gothic temple. Emitting the initial greeting *Ave gratia plena Dominus tecum* through his mouth, the angel surprises Mary on her knees, who, interrupting her reading before a lectern, expresses her surprise and fear at the unforeseen presence of the heavenly messenger. From the upper left corner, God the Father, holding the globe of the Universe between two angels, blesses Mary and breathes into her the fecundating beam of luminous rays (God the Son), which carries in its wake the tiny Christ child, bearing a cross on his shoulders. The exciting thing for our purposes is that also in this altarpiece of Aix, the scenographic structure in the form of a temple stands out with an outstanding presence, through which the intellectual author of this painting wants to illustrate the Christological and Mariological symbolisms already explained in the metaphorical identification of Mary as *templum Dei*.

³¹ On the Master of the Annunciation of Aix, see Reynaud 1989 and Laclotte, Thiébaud *et alii* 1983. On this Annunciation see especially Nishino 1999 and Ferré 2008.



8 Jean Fouquet, The Annunciation of the *Livre d'Heures d'Étienne Chevalier*. Tempera on parchment, 16,5x12 cm. Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 71, c. 1452-1460.

Jean Fouquet (1420-1480) also structures his Annunciation of the *Livre d'Heures d'Étienne Chevalier*³² inside a magnificent Gothic church, with a blue altar covered with a white tablecloth and an ark of gold, raised on four columns, guarded by four golden cherubs. Kneeling before the Virgin to the right of the painting, the archangel points his right finger upwards to indicate the origin of his message. Mary, covered with ample blue garment and sitting on a rug, continues praying with her hands together in front of an open book on her left.

It is quite evident that, in staging in this splendid miniature the episode of the Annunciation inside that beautiful Gothic church, Fouquet wants to illustrate the

identification of Mary as «temple of God». That temple painted on parchment illustrates as a visual metaphor the textual metaphors, such as *templum Dei*, *aula Dei*, *domus Sapientiae*, *tabernaculum*, or similar expressions, which the Christian Fathers and theologians deciphered with a double Mariological and Christological approach. Such textual metaphors constitute some clear and direct allusions to the exclusive privilege of Mary having been chosen by the Highest to become the virginal Mother of God the Son incarnate.

³² On Jean Fouquet and his *Heures*, see Reynaud 2006, Avril 2003, and Sterling, Schaefer 1971.

5. Conclusions

From the brief approach to the topic undertaken here, we could extract the following necessary conclusions:

There are many Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches who for more than ten centuries made exegetical comments on certain textual metaphors from the Old Testament, such as *templum Dei*, *domus Sapientiae*, *aula regia*, *Sancta Sanctorum*, «altar», and other terms alluding to sacred spaces.

All those Christian thinkers of the East and West agreed to interpret these Old Testament metaphors with a double projection, simultaneously Mariological and Christological, in the sense that they all considered these expressions as metaphors of the human incarnation of God the Son in the womb of Mary and, so, as metaphorical figures of the virginal divine maternity of Mary.

That huge corpus of concordant exegeses of Eastern and Western Christian thinkers shaped a strong doctrinal tradition in defense of the supernatural incarnation of God the Son in the womb of the Virgin Mary.

In the 14th and 15th centuries, when the artistic images of the Annunciation include an increasingly complex and detailed set, representations of this Marian theme are quite frequent, including a temple to represent Mary's house in Nazareth.

The intellectual authors of those images of the Annunciation that include a temple likely want to illustrate with it, as a visual metaphor, the textual metaphors alluding to the Old Testament's expressions *templum Dei*, *domus Sapientiae*, *aula regia*, «tabernacle», and other similar expressions of sacred spaces, interpreted by the Eastern and Western Fathers and theologians according to the double and complementary Mariological and Christological projection already explained.

List of Illustrations

- 1 Jacquemart de Hesdin, The Annunciation, *Les Petites Heures du Duc de Berry*, Paris, BnF, ms Lat. 18014, f. 22r, c. 1380-1385 (Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Jacquemart_de_Hesdin_002.jpg – Last access: 26.12.2019).
- 2 Melchior Broederlam, The Annunciation, first half of the left wing of the Dijon Altarpiece, c. 1393-1398. Dijon, Musée des Beaux-Arts (Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:L%27Annonciation_Melchior_Broederlam.jpg – Last Access: 26.12.2019).
- 3 Master of Boucicaut, The Annunciation, *Livre d'Heures du Maréchal du Boucicaut*, Paris, Musée Jacquemart-André, ms 1311, f. 53v, c. 1410-1415 (Wikimedia Commons: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Heures_de_Mar%C3%A9chal_de_Boucicaut?uselang=fr#/media/File:Boucicaut-Meister.jpg – Last access: 26.12.2019)
- 4 Les Frères de Limbourg, The Annunciation. *Les Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry*, Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 65, f. 26r, c. 1411-1414 (Wikimedia Commons: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/f/f2/Folio_26r_-_The_Annunciation.jpg/800px-Folio_26r_-_The_Annunciation.jpg – Last access: 26.12.2019).
- 5 Robert Campin, The Annunciation. Madrid, Prado Museum, N° Inv. P01915, c. 1420-1425 (Prado Museum; <https://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/obra-de-arte/la-anunciacion/52a6820f-892a-4796-b99e-d631ef17e96a> – Last access: 26.12.2019).
- 6 Jan van Eyck, The Annunciation in a church. Washington DC, The National Gallery of Art, N° Inv. 1937.1.39, c. 1434 (National Gallery of Art: https://images.nga.gov/?service=asset&action=show_zoom_window_popup&language=en&asset=149068&location=grid&asset_list=149068&basket_item_id=undefined – Last Access: 26.12.2019).
- 7 Master of the Annunciation of Aix (Barthélemy d'Eyck?), The Annunciation, c. 1442-1445. Aix-en-Provence, church of Sainte Marie-Madeleine (Wikimedia Commons: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tr%C3%ADptico_de_la_Anunciaci%C3%B3n_de_Aix#/media/Archivo:Barth%C3%A9lemy_d'_Eyck_002.jpg – Last Access: 26.12.2019).
- 8 Jean Fouquet, The Annunciation, *Livre d'Heures d'Étienne Chevalier*. Chantilly, Musée Condé, ms 71, c. 1452-1460 (Wikimedia Commons: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Livre_d%27heures_d%27%C3%89tienne_Chevalier#/media/Fichier:Jean_Fouquet_-_Heures_d'Etienne_Chevalier,_n%C2%B0_204_-_L'Annonciation_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg – Last access : 28.12.2019).

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