

**Building the Virgin's House: The  
Architecture of the Annunciation  
in Central and Northern Italy  
1400-1500**

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## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the architectural settings constructed by painters for their depictions of the Annunciation, seeking to understand how and why painters employed them. The first, fundamental function of pictorial architecture was to organise the scene, demarcating the spaces allotted to each of the protagonists, often through the use of a central architectural dividing element such as a wall or a column. At the same time it constructed the narrative, and provided concrete metaphors for the Immaculate Conception, with the passage of the Holy Spirit through an arch acting as a stand-in for its entrance into Mary herself. Having established these compositional essentials, painters were then able to use architecture to add further resonances to their images, employing it to expound upon the character of Mary and the intense holiness of the Annunciation itself. Echoes of explicitly sacred places and spaces – tabernacles, cloisters, and chapels – could, for example, serve to imbue Mary's house with a sanctity entirely suited to an event which represented the moment at which Christ appeared on earth. Finally, architecture could promote an audiences' direct, meditative engagement with the scene portrayed by placing it in contemporary, recognisable architectural settings, thereby collapsing the distance between the remote biblical event and the viewer's present. These works with realistic and recognizable buildings existed on a continuum (no painting lacked imagined, fantastical, and ideal elements in its pictorial architecture) with Annunciations that contained buildings that were to varying extents fantastical or imaginary. Instead of aiming to allow the viewer to connect directly with the Annunciation, their inclusion was at least in part as a strategy to distance the events portrayed from them, emphasising the sanctity of the episode.

Overall, this study aims to reinsert architecture into the center of our understanding of these Annunciations, demonstrating that it was far from just background decoration but was instead fundamental to both the conception and reception of these works. It is hoped that having proved the central importance of architecture in these works, this study will encourage a reassessment of architecture's role in Italian Renaissance painting more generally.

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### **Declaration**

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis, and that no part of it has been published or presented for publication elsewhere. This work has not previously been presented for award at this, or any other, university.

## Introduction

### A Miraculous Announcement

Gabriel's appearance before Mary and his announcement of her destiny as the mother of Christ is a pivotal moment in the New Testament, setting in train the events that led to Christ's sacrifice and with it man's redemption. Although the Annunciation receives little attention in the Bible – only Luke offers an account<sup>1</sup> – the apocryphal gospels,<sup>2</sup> theological commentaries<sup>3</sup> and lives of the saints<sup>4</sup> and of Christ<sup>5</sup> offered a much richer description and analysis, expanding not only upon the narrative but also upon its theological subtleties. Despite all this commentary, however, there remained something mysterious and miraculous about the Annunciation, at whose heart lay an ultimately unknowable meeting of the human and the divine, infusing the episode with a potent mysticality. Saint John of Damascus (c. 675-749) wrote "Oh, what a miracle! God is among human beings. He who cannot be held is within a womb. He who is timeless enters time...his conception seedless, his self-emptying ineffable. How great is this mystery!"<sup>6</sup> The episode was also of immense importance in Marian theology and devotion, defining Mary as the selfless "handmaiden of the Lord",<sup>7</sup> the gentle bearer of Christ, and, finally, as the archetypal virgin, the eternal counterweight to the flaws of Eve.

Unsurprisingly given the significance of the event, innumerable images of the Annunciation survive throughout Italy. They can be found in a variety of locations, town halls, churches, convents, and oratories, and on a variety of scales, from small predella panels and images for private devotion, to larger

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<sup>1</sup> Luke 1:26-38.

<sup>2</sup> "The Protevangelium of James", in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, J.K. Elliot (trans.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 58-61.

<sup>3</sup> Sant'Ambrogio, *Esposizione del Vangelo secondo Luca*, G. Coppa (ed.), Città Nuova, Rome, 1978, pp. 145-171 and T. Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 16, Burns, Oates and Washburn, London, 1920, pp. 41-56.

<sup>4</sup> J. de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, G.P. Maggioni (ed.), Edizioni del Galluzzo, Florence, 1998, pp. 326-335.

<sup>5</sup> J. de Caulibus, *Meditazione Vite Christi*, M. Stallings-Taney (ed.), Turnhout, Brepols, 1997, pp. 19-24.

<sup>6</sup> Quoted in E. Topping, "The Annunciation in Byzantine Hymns", *Marianum*, XLVII (1985), pp. 443-469, p. 454.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 1:38.

scale altarpieces and depictions in fresco cycles and mosaics. Visually, these images tend to strike a balance between tradition and innovation, necessarily preserving the unmistakable compositional kernel of the angelic salutation to Mary, while at the same time continually reinventing the environment in which it takes place. It is entirely possible as a result that a Florentine of Giotto's time, miraculously swept forward nearly 200 years to stand in front of an *Annunciation* by Botticelli or Pollaiuolo, could have identified the scene depicted, even if he or she was entirely incapable of explaining anything else about the work. In light of the longevity of the visual core of Mary and Gabriel's meeting and the associated narrative, perhaps one of the most extraordinary aspects of images of the Annunciation is the sheer variety of pictorial solutions created by painters, a variety that can be only partially explained by the diverse demands of the different contexts for which they were commissioned. It is almost as if the fixed context, the immediately recognisable pairing of Mary and Gabriel, freed painters to invent, granting them a pictorial license not found in other less recognisable biblical episodes.

This plurality of solutions is clearly visible in the exuberance and inventiveness of the architectural settings created by painters for their depictions of the Annunciation. Along with the sacred protagonists, an architectural *mise en scène* was the only other fixed element in depictions of the Annunciation, found in almost every image of the episode painted in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although these settings are not always strictly speaking domestic, because of the ways in which they enclose, shelter and support Mary, and given how closely she is associated with the pictorial architecture, they can nonetheless be described as Mary's house. This thesis aims to provide a formal and contextual account of the architecture of this house, and, in the process, to shed some light on the broader topic of architecture in fifteenth-century painting.

### **Pictorial Architecture and the Annunciation**

Architecture in fifteenth-century painting is an underexplored phenomenon, with only one monographical study by Gambuti dedicated

entirely to it.<sup>8</sup> Although Gambuti's study is useful, offering excellent diagrammatic interpretations of pictorial architecture and careful architectural descriptions, it remains focused on formal aspects – the description of architectural style and ornament – and does not seek to address any of the particular issues associated with the study of architecture in painting, in particular what functions architecture performs within an image. There are also several interesting articles examining more specific aspects of pictorial architecture, focusing either on specific painters or on a specific architect's influence upon painters. Chieli's study examines the impact of Michelozzo's architecture on contemporary painters, focusing especially on ornamental motifs and their use in Fra Filippo Lippi's works.<sup>9</sup> Ferino-Pagden's article analysed painted architecture between 1470 and 1490, focusing particularly on panels by the Perugian Workshop of 1473.<sup>10</sup> Smith takes a similar approach in an analysis of Piero della Francesca's architectural "vocabulary", focusing particularly on the nature of its relationship with Alberti's architecture.<sup>11</sup> Ceriana focuses on Fra Carnevale, analysing the development of his architectural style and the effect of his early years in Florence apprenticed to Fra Filippo Lippi.<sup>12</sup> Another approach to the subject is that taken by Giuliani's article on the impact of Santa Maria dei Miracoli on Venetian painters, which offers a more contextual approach than that taken by Gambuti's book or Chieli, Smith and Ceriana's articles, placing the discussion in the context of late fifteenth-century Marian devotion in Venice.<sup>13</sup> Aside from this, pictorial architecture has largely been analysed either as part of a broader study of perspective, an approach exemplified by White's fundamental study on the development of perspective in the Italian

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<sup>8</sup> A. Gambuti, *L'Architettura dei Pittori nel Quattrocento Italiano*, Alinea Editrice, Florence, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> F. Chieli, "L'influenza di Michelozzo architetto sulla pittura coeva", in *Michelozzo: Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, Morelli, G. (ed.), Centro Di, Florence, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> S. Ferino-Pagden, "Painted Architecture", in *The Renaissance from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo*, Millon, H. and Lampugnani, V.M. (eds.), Thames and Hudson, London, 1994, esp. pp. 446-449.

<sup>11</sup> C. Smith, "Piero's Painted Architecture: Analysis of his Vocabulary", in *Piero della Francesca and his Legacy*, M. Lavin (ed.), National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C., 1995.

<sup>12</sup> M. Ceriana, "Fra Carnevale and the Practice of Architecture", in *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master*, K. Christiansen (ed.), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004.

<sup>13</sup> M. Giuliani, "La chiesa di Santa Maria dei Miracoli e la cultura figurativa veneziana tra Quattrocento e Cinquecento", *Venezia Cinquecento*, Vol. 16, No. 32 (2006), pp. 37-84.

Renaissance,<sup>14</sup> or in certain isolated cases where it is unquestionably the dominant feature within an image, as is the case with the studies dedicated to the group of “ideal city” panels.<sup>15</sup> Alongside these printed approaches, there has also been a series of exhibitions dedicated to the subject,<sup>16</sup> most notably *Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting* which took a thematic approach in order to examine the multiple functions of architecture in a selection of fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth-century Italian works.<sup>17</sup>

Apart from the latter exhibition and its associated catalogue, the only work that seeks to consider the broader implications of pictorial architecture is Benelli's book *The Architecture of Giotto's Paintings*.<sup>18</sup> Despite being focused on fourteenth-century examples, Benelli offers some interesting analyses of pictorial architecture, providing frameworks for approaching the subject that prove valuable beyond the ostensible confines of his study. An architectural historian, he argues that while architecture in painted images can and should be analysed formally using the same tools as built architecture, any such analysis must take as its starting point a thorough understanding of architecture's intended function within the image. Benelli's work also considers some of the conceptual problems associated with pictorial architecture, particularly those relating to the complex relationship between built and painted architecture. What is lacking, however, in Benelli's otherwise rigorous analysis is a full consideration of the broader religious and social

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<sup>14</sup> White, J., *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Faber and Faber, London, 1967. See also R. Krautheimer, “Brunelleschi and ‘Proportion in Perspective’”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 16, No. 3/4 (1953), pp. 275-291 and J. Kuhn, “Measured Appearances: Documentation and Design in Early Perspective Drawing”, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 53 (1990), pp. 114-132.

<sup>15</sup> See, for example, R. Krautheimer, “The Panels in Urbino, Baltimore, and Berlin Reconsidered”, in *The Renaissance from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo: The Representation of Architecture*, H. Millon and V. M. Lampugnani (eds.), Thames and Hudson, London, 1994.

<sup>16</sup> S. Ćurčić and E. Hadjityrphonos, *Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, M. Borobia and D. Rodríguez, *Arquitecturas pintadas: del Renacimiento al siglo XVIII*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2011 and *La città ideale. L'utopia del Rinascimento a Urbino tra Piero della Francesca e Raffaello*, A. Marchi and M. Valazzi (eds.), Electa, Milan, 2012.

<sup>17</sup> See A. Lillie, 'Introduction', published online 2014 in 'Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting', The National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/introduction>.

<sup>18</sup> F. Benelli, *The Architecture in Giotto's Paintings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2012.



context in which Giotto and his followers created their pictorial architecture, with the result that a potentially important aspect of these architectural settings remains under explored.

These scholars aside, all too often descriptions of the architecture in fifteenth-century paintings are generic – “palace”, “cloister”, “temple” – and unsubstantiated by any comparative architectural evidence. The result is to convey a sense that the architecture in these images is merely a “backdrop”, a decorative addition that is at most of passing significance to the meaning of the work. This attitude is all the more surprising when one considers the sheer richness and pervasiveness of architecture in fifteenth-century painting, whether secular or sacred.<sup>19</sup> There is a singular clarity to the buildings and architectural settings in many of these works, married to an extraordinary beauty and variety, that seems to invite us to consider them as actually built, to admire their fabulous ornamentation, appreciate the subtlety of their architectural solutions, and inhabit their spacious rooms. Even a cursory glance at the frescoes of Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Benozzo Gozzoli and Ghirlandaio, the scuole cycles of Carpaccio, Gentile Bellini and Mansueti, and the great altarpieces of Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico, Botticelli, Antonello da Messina, and Giovanni Bellini reveals that these painters were entirely steeped in the architectural culture of their age. The extent of this engagement, and the evident care lavished by painters on the creation of their pictorial architecture, should alert us to the possibility that far from decoration this architecture was an integral part of the conception of the works, essential compositionally, narratively, and, more subjectively, aesthetically. Given this, it is surely evident that our understanding of these images and their painters cannot be complete without a full analysis of the architecture within them.

This thesis aims to begin to redress this lack of attention, focusing on the pictorial architecture of the Annunciation to do so. In previous studies, architecture has largely been seen as background, or at least as a separate rather than integral part of the work. Using these Annunciations, this study will

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<sup>19</sup> This is a point eloquently made by Amanda Lillie in her introductory essay to the exhibition *Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting*, see A. Lillie, 'Introduction', published online 2014 in 'Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting', The National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/introduction>.

demonstrate how architecture was fundamentally entwined with both the composition and the meanings of these works, a central rather than supplementary element in both their conception and reception.

As a group of images, Annunciations offer a number of advantages for a study of fifteenth-century pictorial architecture. There are a large number of surviving examples, designed for many different contexts across a broad geographical area. At the same time, all of these images are based architecturally upon the depiction of a fixed element, Mary's house. As a result, an analysis of the Annunciation allows a consideration of pictorial architecture that is both narrow and wide, focusing on this consistent architectural setting, while analysing the effects of a wide variety of factors upon its depiction across a large sample of visual evidence.

Adding to the interest of the architecture of the Annunciation is the fact that both Mary and the sacred narrative represented can themselves be conceived architecturally. Theologians often figured Mary in architectural terms;<sup>20</sup> she was among other things, a tabernacle,<sup>21</sup> a temple or church,<sup>22</sup> a throne, a *thalamus*,<sup>23</sup> the *porta clausa*<sup>24</sup> and the *porta coeli*.<sup>25</sup> The Annunciation, meanwhile, was an episode predicated on physical (Gabriel's) and miraculous entrances (the Holy Spirit's), and represented the moment of Christ's arrival on earth. The importance of access lent itself to the employment of pictorial architecture, with painters using it to describe and

<sup>20</sup> Book 10 of the *De laudibus beatae Virginiae* originally attributed to Albertus Magnus, gives a list of edifices associated with Mary, see Anonymous, *De laudibus beatae Virginiae* Lyon, 1651, Book 10. See also G Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 180-182.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche Volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, Vol. 2, C. Delcorno, (ed.), Rusconi, Milan, 1989, p. 824

<sup>22</sup> On this see Y M-J Congar, *Le Mystère du Temple*, Les Éditions de Cerf, Paris, 1958, p. 302-7, and H. Papastavrou, *Recherche Iconographique dans L'Art Byzantin et Occidental du XIe au XVe Siècle: L'Annonciation*, Bibliothèque de L'Institut Hellénique d'Études Byzantines et Post-Byzantines de Venise, Venice, 2007, p. 233.

<sup>23</sup> On this see L. Bolard, "*Thalamus virginis*. Images de la *Devotio moderna* dans la peinture italienne du XV siècle", *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, Vol. 216, No. 1 (Jan. - Mar. 1999), pp. 87-110

<sup>24</sup> This is a very widely used metaphor for Mary in this period, deriving from the closed door, accessible only to God, in Ezekiel's vision of the temple, Ezekiel 44:1-3. On its relationship to images of the Annunciation see, for example, S. Edgerton, "Mensurare temporalis facit Geometria spiritualis: Some Fifteenth Century Italian Notions About When and Where the Annunciation Happened", in *Studies in Late Medieval and Renaissance Painting in Honour of Millard Meiss*, I. Lavin, and J. Plummer (eds.), New York University Press, New York, 1977, pp. 120-121, and C. Gerbon, "Le Verbe, voilé/dévoilé: La Vision d'Ezéchiél et l'Annonciation de l'Armadio degli argenti", in *Revue de l'art*, No. 167 (2010), pp. 11-24, pp. 20-22.

<sup>25</sup> Like the *porta clausa*, this is another very commonly used metaphor for Mary in this period. See T. Verdon, *Maria nell'arte fiorentina*, Mandragora, Florence, 2002, pp. 34-36.

organise the narrative, and to create easily intelligible metaphors to help clarify some of the Annunciation's more abstract aspects.

Despite the focus offered by the analysis of the Annunciation, it would clearly still be impossible to provide a satisfactorily full account or survey of the hundreds of different architectural interpretations of the subject that were produced throughout the Italian peninsula in this period. Instead this study will focus on central and northern Italy, focusing particularly on Tuscany, and the Veneto, and, to a lesser extent, Umbria and the Marche. The artistic and architectural nodal points of these regions, Venice and Florence, both had strong local architectural styles and traditions in this period, invaluable in trying to situate the architecture of these images in the context of built architecture. Both of these cities also had strong civic associations with the Annunciation, particularly so Florence, where the cult around the miraculous *Annunciation* in Santissima Annunziata<sup>26</sup> was one of city's most popular. The works analysed from these regions have been selected solely on the basis of their architectural content, rather than their painters, but some painters are heavily represented, notably Fra Angelico and Fra Filippo Lippi. This is absolutely not because of their "canonical" status, nor because of any "Tuscocentric" bias. Instead, it is because both of these painters painted a large number of Annunciations, suggesting a continued and close engagement with the subject, and because of the richness and complexity of their architectural settings, which offer fertile material for the analysis of pictorial architecture. Indeed, although these and some of the other painters discussed in this study have received much scholarly attention (among them Piero della Francesca, Botticelli, Carlo Crivelli), other painters analysed in this study (Piermatteo d'Amelia, Jacopo da Montagna, Biagio d'Antonio, Benedetto Bonfigli, Gentile Bellini, Spinello Aretino) have attracted very little notice outside Italy, and, in some cases, very little within Italy either. Although these painters were once again selected solely on the basis of the architectural content of their works, it is hoped that a side effect of this study will be to shed some light upon them, encouraging further study into their work more generally. Importantly, by expanding our understanding of an artwork

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<sup>26</sup> See n. 36

and its significance to include a consideration of pictorial architecture, we can perhaps highlight the differing achievements of painters sometimes sidelined by traditional art-historical definitions of “importance”.

In considering the architecture of the Annunciation, this thesis will address the following key questions. Firstly, what is the function of architecture within these images? Secondly, within this, what messages, theological, socio-economic, and metaphorical does this pictorial architecture convey? How are these messages communicated? Finally, what is the relationship between built architecture and the pictorial architecture of the Annunciation? Did painters play upon the links (and gaps) between built and painted buildings and, if so, how and why? Although these questions have been designed with the particularities of the Annunciation as a pictorial subject firmly in mind, they also serve to raise issues that have a relevance beyond the Annunciation, making their exploration useful for those studying pictorial architecture in diverse types of images in this and other periods.

The answers to these questions will be sought first and foremost in an analysis of the images themselves, as well as of the built environments in which they were created. Although this visual interrogation would appear to be methodologically unproblematic, it does raise the important question of how best to approach the description of objects that sit between painting and architecture, incorporating elements from both yet belonging fully to neither. The structures in paintings remain, for all their creator’s illusionistic prowess, resolutely two-dimensional: we cannot walk through a painted building, for example, and consider the ways in which its architect articulated the internal spaces, nor can we judge the impact of its scale and site upon a viewer. In spite of this lack of a physical experience of these painted buildings, a viewer who has explored and inhabited built architecture can nonetheless “read” them in ways analogous to a reading of an actual building, discerning the succession of rooms, the ornamental articulation of a wall, the framing effect of an entrance, and even, thanks to perspectival wizardry, something of how the structure sits within its surroundings. As a result, it seems evident that if these buildings can be viewed in comparable ways to built architecture, then, as a result, they can be visually analysed like any other structure, including situating them by comparison with related buildings within the architectural

culture of their time.

The approach taken in this study differs from that taken in the few previous approaches to the subject, seeking to widen the context of the analysis beyond the purely formal by using a more interdisciplinary framework. This broader view allows consideration of how contemporary socio-economic and religious currents influenced pictorial architecture in Annunciations, a crucial element in fully understanding the motivations behind painters' architectural choices and their effect on the audience for their works. In order to create this framework, this analysis therefore includes elements of theology, religious history, socio-economic history and fifteenth-century architectural theory. There were a large number of theological writings and sermons dedicated to the Annunciation, and even more dedicated to Mary herself, both of which are fundamental to understanding not only how the Annunciation was conceived intellectually but also how it was expressed didactically to a wide audience (a process in which images clearly had a fundamental role to play). The social context in which these works were created is also significant, especially when considering Mary's role as an exemplar for young, unmarried women, and ideas of decorum and *magnificentia*, both concepts that were understood to apply to architecture. Other important pieces of contextual evidence used in this study are the architectural treatises of Alberti, Filarete and Francesco di Giorgio Martini. The idea is not that painters were directly influenced, or indeed, even aware of these works, more that these writings can, if used sensitively, provide insight into fifteenth-century architectural practice, in particular as regards architectural function and decoration.

The thesis is split thematically into four chapters, each designed to highlight different functions of the pictorial architecture in these works. Chapter One looks at architecture's compositional role, examining how architecture organised the scene and aided a clear presentation of the Annunciation narrative. It focuses upon an analysis of how access, physical (Gabriel's), miraculous (the Holy Spirit's), and intellectual (the viewer's) was expressed architecturally. Chapters Two and Three look at connections with built secular and sacred architecture in these works. Focusing on structures such as tabernacles, cloisters, and palaces, these chapters argue that

painters employed links to the built examples of these structures in order to create houses for Mary that not only embodied her elevated social and religious status, but that were also suitably sacred and dignified settings for this most holy and mysterious of events. The final chapter concentrates upon the architectural evocation of the contemporary in Annunciation images, viewing this in terms of its meditative and civic significance. It then examines the idea of the fantastical or imaginary in the architecture of the Annunciation, viewing this as the other end of a continuum (no painting lacked imagined, fantastical, and ideal elements in its pictorial architecture) from the evocation of the contemporary, designed at least in part to distance the events portrayed, elevating and removing them firmly from the everyday.

## Chapter One Access

### Introduction: Three Types of Access

When in 1481 Botticelli frescoed his *Annunciation* (Fig. 1) in the entrance loggia of the Spedale di San Martino alla Scala in Florence, he was utilising a long association in Florence between images of the Annunciation and entrances to buildings,<sup>27</sup> a tradition exemplified by the miraculous fresco of the *Annunciation* in S.S. Annunziata and its copies (Fig. 2).<sup>28</sup> Like this fresco, Botticelli's work was adjacent to an entrance, although his fresco was on an exterior wall. Reconstructing its original appearance is very difficult, because of subsequent alterations to the structure and the removal of the fresco itself.<sup>29</sup> In 1531 the hospital premises were given to the nuns of San Martino dalle Panche, whose own monastery had been destroyed in the siege of Florence in 1529.<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, in 1623, during work to construct a gallery above the loggia in order to create a nun's choir, the fresco was badly damaged by the placement of pendentives upon it to support the structure above.<sup>31</sup> It was eventually removed from the wall in 1920 and taken to the Uffizi, where it remains.<sup>32</sup> Further complicating attempts to reconstruct the fresco's original position is the fact that the old hospital building is now part of the Juvenile Prison, and very little of the original structure remains, barring a few columns from the original loggia, now set into the wall of the present building (Fig. 3). Nonetheless, a document from the Spedale's accounts, published by Giovanni Poggi in 1916, makes the general position of the fresco clear. It states that Botticelli was paid 'for an Annunciation which is in the

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<sup>27</sup> On this work see H. Horne, *Sandro Botticelli*, George Bell and Sons, London, 1908, pp. 166-168, G. Poggi, "The 'Annunciation' of San Martino by Botticelli", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 28, No. 154 (Jan., 1916), pp. 128-137 and R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989.

<sup>28</sup> Other examples include the *Annunciation* fresco that was originally above the doorway to Santa Maria degli Alberghi (famously desecrated by Antonio Rinaldeschi), which is now in the church of Santa Maria dei Ricci, and Ghirlandaio's *Annunciation* above the Porta della Mandorla of the Duomo.

<sup>29</sup> G. Poggi, 1916, p. 129.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129, see also A. Bencini, and R. Busignani, *Le chiese di Firenze*, Vol. 2, Sansoni, Florence, 1979, pp. 218 – 219.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>32</sup> R. Lightbown, 1989, p. 80.

loggia in front of the door of the church and the door of the house.”<sup>33</sup> Indeed, as this demonstrates, the fresco was in fact placed next to not one, but two doorways, one to the church and one to the house, by which was presumably meant the hospital. Examining the fragments that remain of the loggia and taking into account the fact that the nun’s choir was built above it, we can imagine that the loggia would originally have projected from the church and would have been open on two or three sides.<sup>34</sup> If Botticelli’s fresco was “in front of” two doors, as the document indicates, then we can imagine it perhaps being placed on the rear wall of the loggia, flanked by, or above, the “door of the church” and the “door of the house”.

Perhaps the most important Florentine example of an Annunciation directly connected to a doorway is the miraculous fresco in Santissima Annunziata (Fig. 2). Dated by Servite scholarship to 1252, and by other scholars to c. 1325 – 1360, the fresco, though now obscured by its quattrocento tabernacle, remains in its original position immediately to the right of the main door as you exit the church.<sup>35</sup> Because of the miracle working power ascribed to the image, particularly associated with childbirth and marriage, at least four copies of the image were made in an attempt to

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<sup>33</sup> G. Poggi, 1916, p. 130: “per una dipintura d’una Nunziata la chuale é ne la logg[i]a inanzi de la nostra porta de la chiesa e de la porta di chasa...” Fantozzi, writing in 1842, described how the church (and hospital?) “è preceduta da un vestibulo ove si vedono...due Lunette esprimenti L’Annunziazione di Maria.”, see F. Fantozzi, *Guida Storica-Artistica-Critica della Citta e Contorni di Firenze*, Guiseppe e Fratelli, Florence, 1842, p. 536.

<sup>34</sup> The columns that formed two sides of the loggia are still visible, one facing onto the Via della Scala and one onto the Via degli Orti Orecellai. If there was a third side, it has now been absorbed into the later buildings to the south (Fig. 3).

<sup>35</sup> M. Holmes, “The Elusive Origins of the Cult of the Annunziata in Florence”, in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, E. Thuno and G. Wolf (eds.), L’Erma di Bretschneider, Rome, 2004, p. 97, on this work and the cult that surrounded it see also P. Howell Jolly, “Jan van Eyck’s Italian Pilgrimage: A Miraculous Florentine Annunciation and the Ghent Altarpiece”, *Zeitschrift fur Kunstgeschichte*, 61. Bd., H. 3 (1998), pp. 369-394, pp. 369-373 and M. Casalini, “I Luoghi della devozione Mariana: La Santissima Annunziata di Firenze”, in *Atti del VII Centenario del Duomo di Firenze Vol. 2: La Cattedrale come spazio sacro*, A. Innocenti, and T. Verdon, (ed.), Edifir, Florence, 2001 and M. Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013, pp. 80-83. On the fifteenth-century tabernacle see also M. Ferrara, and F. Quinterio, *Michelozzo Di Bartolomeo*, Salimbeni, Florence, 1984, pp. 231-234, W. Liebenwein, “Die ‘Privatisierung’ des Wunders: Piero de’ Medici in SS. Annunziata und San Miniato” in *Piero de’ Medici: Il Gottoso (1416-1469): Kunst im Dienste der Mediceer*, A. Beyer (ed.), Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1993, and T. Verdon, “Michelozzo e lo Spazio della Preghiera: Il ‘Tempietto’ della Santissima Annunziata”, in *Michelozzo: Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, G. Morelli (ed.), Centro Di, Florence, 1996.



transfer its thaumaturgic properties.<sup>36</sup> An examination of one of these in the Dominican church of S. Maria Novella gives a better sense of how this image would originally have been viewed prior to the addition of a tabernacle (Fig. 4). In this work, painted by an anonymous Florentine in the late fourteenth century, we see Mary seated on an elaborate *lettuccio* inside a two storey Gothic structure, while Gabriel kneels at the doorway. The Santa Maria Novella fresco differs in a number of respects from its Annunziata prototype, most notably in depicting more of Mary's house (including an intriguing suggestion of a rose window to the far right) and in placing Gabriel outside rather than inside with Mary. More important than these differences in this context, however, is that the fresco is placed in the same position as the Annunziata work, immediately to the right of the principal doors on the inner wall of the façade. Indeed, it is separated from the main door by only a stone pier and the fictive border of the fresco itself, a proximity that ensures that it is directly linked to the act of leaving the church. As with Botticelli's fresco, we can imagine that the placement of the fresco adjacent to an important entrance is strategic, allowing the image to serve as a pictorial reminder for its viewer that Christ entered the world through Mary (the *porta coeli*) in order to save them from sin, a reassuring message to carry with them as they left the church and re-entered the worldly bustle of the city outside.

Arguably, however, there is a further significance to this linking of doorways and images of the Annunciation, as access or ingress of varying kinds lies at the very heart of the Annunciation, both on a narrative and a theological level. The theological crux of the event was the miraculous double entry of the Holy Spirit into Mary's womb and with it Christ into the world, a moment of immense and continuing importance for the Christian faithful. Prefiguring this was Gabriel's appearance before Mary, which announces both literally ("Ave Maria, gratia plena.../Hail Mary, full of grace..."), and pictorially the events to come. For these reasons, images of the Annunciation were full of openings of many kinds, from grand arches to simple wooden doorways. Because of this thematic connection, images of the Annunciation

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<sup>36</sup> Howell Jolly, 1998, p. 370 and Holmes, 2004, p. 110, n. 45. As well that in Santa Maria Novella, there was one in Santa Maria Ughi (destroyed), one in Ognissanti and one in Santo Spirito, Prato.

were both visually and symbolically well suited for association with entrances of many kinds. This chapter will examine how these varying kinds of access were expressed architecturally within paintings of the Annunciation, including a consideration of one final type of access, that of the viewer to the work. This was an access that was both physical, in terms of the eye's exploration of the scene, and intellectual, resting upon the understanding (and the realisation of this understanding's limits) created by this ocular interrogation. Arguably, all three types of access, the mechanical (Gabriel's), the miraculous (the Holy Spirit's) and the intellectual (the audience's), relied upon an architectural setting for their expression or, in the case of the audience, their direction or limitation. Finally, any idea of access clearly also depends on there being a space to be accessed, the architectural creation of which forms the first part of the analysis below.

### **Mary's Space**

The space to be accessed in the Annunciation was always that of Mary. In most, though by no means all, Annunciations in this period Mary occupies a visually distinct space, one that is invariably created architecturally. Essential to the creation of this separate zone within a work was a formal demarcation, the the dividing of the work into two, most often accomplished architecturally using a central column.<sup>37</sup> Discussing Piero della Francesca's *Annunciation* (c.1458) in San Francesco, Arezzo (Fig. 5), Roberto Longhi noted that such was the prominence of the central column in this work that a viewer unaware of Christian traditions might think that the figures had gathered to worship the column itself.<sup>38</sup> Here the central Corinthian column with its subtle swelling acts as a fundamental visual break

<sup>37</sup> A. Caprettini, *Lettura dell'Annunciazione: fra semiotics e iconografia*, G. Giappichelli Editore, Turin, 1979, p.19 describes the importance of the central column and other architectural elements in "creare diversi spazi in un stesso quadro", see also pp. 10-11 for further analysis.

<sup>38</sup> R. Longhi, *Piero della Francesca*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Ulrico Hoepli, Milan, 1946, p. 55. On this work, see also K. Clark, *Piero della Francesca*, Phaidon, London, 1951, p. 35, R. Lightbown, *Piero della Francesca*, Abbeville Press, New York, 1992, pp. 175-176, E. Battisti, *Piero della Francesca*, Vol. 1, Istituto Editoriale, Milan, 1971, pp. 250-257, A. Ronen, "L'Annunciazione nel ciclo della Croce di Piero della Francesca e la tradizione aretina", in *Citta e Corte nell'Italia di Piero della Francesca*, C. Via (ed.), Marsilio, Venice, 1992, pp. 250-257, M.A. Lavin, *Piero della Francesca: San Francesco, Arezzo*, George Brazillier, New York, 1994, pp. 56-61 and J. Beck, "Piero della Francesca at San Francesco in Arezzo: An Art-Historical Peregrination", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 24, No. 47 (2003), pp. 51-80, pp. 76-77.

between Gabriel and Mary, unequivocally dividing the work compositionally between the semi-enclosed corner loggia on the right and the open space on the left. The important symbolic functions of the central column have already received much attention, so the concern here is solely with its practical and visual demarcatory function.<sup>39</sup>

The column in Piero's *Annunciation* is part of a larger structure, functioning as the outside corner of a corner loggia. Porches and corner loggias are fundamental architectural elements in a large number of Italian Annunciations of this period, building upon the demarcation accomplished by the central column to create a distinct space for Mary within the work, clearly separate from that occupied by Gabriel.<sup>40</sup> As a setting for the Annunciation, or more precisely as a space to house Mary, the porch first appears at the beginning of the fourteenth century in Duccio's predella of the *Annunciation*, part of his *Maestà* (1311) (Fig. 6).<sup>41</sup> Because of the small number of extant Annunciation images from this period, it is impossible to say with any certainty whether the porch was Duccio's invention. Nonetheless, given its prominent situation (the high altar of Siena's Duomo) and the status of the painter who created it, this predella panel has been viewed by scholars as providing an important compositional and architectonic model for subsequent depictions of the Annunciation. For Robb, writing in 1936, Duccio's work was the first to attempt to place the Annunciation in a "convincing" space,<sup>42</sup> further arguing

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<sup>39</sup> See, for example, P. Rubin, *Images and Identity in Fifteenth Century Florence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2007, p. 206. Discussing Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* in the Prado (Fig. 51), she draws attention to the central column in the work, noting both that various important symbols (the dove, the doorway) cluster around it, and that it may be a prefiguration of the column of the Flagellation. On the column in Annunciation images see also G. Didi-Huberman, *Fra Angelico: Dissemblance and Figuration*, J.M. Todd (trans.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1995, pp. 145-150, D. Arasse, *L'Annonciation Italienne: Une histoire de perspective*, Hazan, Paris, 1999, pp. 195-199 and A. Ladis, *Giotto's O: Narrative, Figuration and Pictorial Ingenuity in the Arena Chapel*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2008, pp. 155-156.

<sup>40</sup> Although less common, another compositional tradition did exist. Following the important example of the Annunziata fresco, and influenced later by Northern European models, a number of trecento and quattrocento painters set the Annunciation in an undivided interior, a phenomenon discussed at length in Chapter 2.

<sup>41</sup> On this work see particularly J. White, *Duccio: Tuscan Art and the Medieval Workshop*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1979, pp. 117-118, R. Tarr, "'Ecce virgo concipiet': The Iconography and Context of Duccio's London *Annunciation*", *Viator*, Vol. 31 (2000), pp. 185-233 and D. Gordon, *The Italian Paintings Before 1400*, National Gallery Company, London, 2011, pp. 156-160.

<sup>42</sup> D. Robb, 1936, p. 486.

that its bipartite composition with Mary under a canopy and Gabriel outside was immediately followed by other painters in works such as Pietro Lorenzetti's *Annunciation* (Fig. 7), one of the pinnacles of his Arezzo Polyptych (1320).<sup>43</sup> Spencer built upon Robb's analysis, describing how the "Ducciesque" setting found its way into Florentine art, noting, however, that in many Trecento Florentine annunciations the "canopy" of Mary was extended over Gabriel, so that they share the same space.<sup>44</sup> In Spencer's opinion, the return of the "true" Ducciesque setting to Florence was signalled by Lorenzo Monaco's *Santa Trinita Annunciation* (1424) (Fig. 8),<sup>45</sup> although as Eisenberg points out, a work by Giovanni del Biondo from the 1380's, originally in Santa Maria Novella, actually anticipates Monaco's restoration of Duccio's setting,<sup>46</sup> as indeed does the late trecento Santa Maria Novella *Annunciation* fresco discussed earlier (Fig. 3). In addition, Spencer pointed out that even in a later work like Domenico Veneziano's predella *Annunciation* (1445) (Fig. 9), which contains numerous spatial and compositional innovations, Mary remains enclosed under a canopy.<sup>47</sup>

Given the longevity of the essentials of Duccio's composition, it is worth considering what precisely was new in his treatment of the Annunciation by comparing it to a slightly earlier *Annunciation* mosaic (1297) by Cavallini in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome (Fig. 10).<sup>48</sup> In Cavallini's work, Mary receives Gabriel seated on an elaborate throne. The throne itself contains a number of architectural features, the most striking of which is the small aedicule and the apsidal structure below, against which Mary's head is placed.<sup>49</sup> Arguably, this aedicule anticipates the portico in Duccio's work (Fig. 6), performing a formally similar function of covering and framing Mary. The difference in Duccio's work, however, is that Mary is no longer seated on a

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 487. Robb is, however, only partially correct in this analysis. While Lorenzetti's work is clearly indebted to Duccio's spatially in the division of the scene into two and in the placement of Mary within a space open on two sides, in the specifics of the architecture his panel differs markedly, both by placing Gabriel inside an antechamber and by making Mary's space a room rather than a portico framing a doorway.

<sup>44</sup> J. Spencer, 1955, p. 274.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>46</sup> M. Eisenberg, *Lorenzo Monaco*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1989, p. 135.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>48</sup> On this work see P. Hetherington, *Pietro Cavallini: A Study in the Art of Late Medieval Rome*, Sagittarius Press, London, 1979, pp. 15-17 and M. Tomei, *Pietro Cavallini*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan, 2000, pp. 39-40.

<sup>49</sup> M. Tomei, 2000, pp. 39-40.

canopied throne but is now standing inside a portico that entirely encloses her. Concomitantly with this, in Duccio's *Annunciation* Gabriel no longer exists alone in space as in Cavallini's mosaic but is now placed in the midst of a clearly defined arch. Although the figural relationship between Mary and Gabriel remains largely unchanged from Cavallini's work, they now co-exist in a unified architectonic environment, within which distinct areas can be easily discerned. In particular, the visual distinction given to Mary by the throne in Cavallini's *Annunciation* is now given to her by her placement within an isolated, architecturally defined space. Duccio's architectural setting also appears more naturalistic, both in its spatial relationship to the figures discussed above and in its links with contemporary Sienese buildings.<sup>50</sup> This is apparent, for example, in the series of small arches that run along the rear wall. These have profiled arches springing off squat rectangular piers, an arrangement that is remarkably similar to the arches on the second storey of the Romanesque convent of Torri, south of Siena (Fig. 11).<sup>51</sup> Important though this potential relationship between the built and the painted is, however, Duccio's principal innovations in his panel remain spatial and architectonic, resting upon the depiction of an architecturally defined setting in which the spatial relationships between Gabriel and Mary can be more precisely defined.

Duccio's solution would continue to be used by painters right until the end of the fifteenth century. Anticipating the points made by Spencer and Robb,<sup>52</sup> Panofsky noted in his discussion of an *Annunciation* in the Metropolitan Museum attributed to Petrus Christus (c. 1450) that: "The shrine of the Virgin, originally framing or foiling rather than actually enclosing the figure, developed gradually [in the fifteenth century] into a full-sized,

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<sup>50</sup> The question of the extent of Duccio's naturalism is still debated. For a summary of the different scholarly viewpoints see G. Rosser, "Beyond Naturalism in Art and Poetry: Duccio and Dante on the Road to Emmaus", *Art History*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (June 2012), pp. 475-497, p. 486.

<sup>51</sup> As well as this, it is also possible that Duccio took the form of his porch from a contemporary ecclesiastical building and adapted it for pictorial purposes. Although there are no extant examples in Siena itself, a remarkably similar porch can be seen on Padua's Baptistery (1281) (Fig. 12).

<sup>52</sup> See n. 39, n. 40, and n. 41.

emphatically three-dimensional, and richly ornamented building.”<sup>53</sup> Panofsky used the example of Signorelli’s *Volterra Annunciation* (1490) (Fig. 13), originally painted for the high altar of the oratory of the Compagnia della Vergine Maria adjacent to Volterra’s Duomo and now in the Pinacoteca Civica di Volterra, as an example of this, observing that in architectonic terms the composition remains essentially unchanged from Duccio’s panel painted 180 years earlier.<sup>54</sup> Despite the substantial chronological, stylistic and contextual differences between the two works, this analysis is broadly correct. In both works Mary is placed inside an arched structure, open on two sides, while Gabriel salutes her from outside. There are, of course, differences in the placement of Gabriel. Duccio places him in an arch connected by a wall running along the back of the space to Mary’s portico, making it clear that Mary and Gabriel are to be understood as occupying separate parts of the same structure. Signorelli, by contrast, situates Gabriel in a completely exterior space without any architectural surround, facing the building in which the angel is received by Mary.

### **The Architectonic Character of the Porch and its Significance**

In light of its prevalence and longevity as an architectural setting in Annunciations, it is worth investigating the porch in more depth, seeking to understand what it granted to the image both compositionally and symbolically.

In compositional terms, the architectonic form of both the portico and the corner loggia had a number of advantages. Discussing Duccio’s *Maesta Annunciation* (Fig. 6), Howard Saalman noted the compositional efficiency of the porch in this work, enabling Mary to see Gabriel and vice versa, while at

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<sup>53</sup> E. Panofsky, “The Friedsam Annunciation and the Problem of the Ghent Altarpiece”, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 17, No. 4 (Dec. 1935), pp. 441-442, on Signorelli’s panel see also L. Cristofani, “L’Annunciazione” volterrana di Luca Signorelli”, *Critica d’Arte*, Vol. 56, No. 5/6 (Jan.-Jun., 1991), pp. 130-136 T. Henry, “New Documents for Signorelli’s ‘Annunciation’ at Volterra”, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 140, No. 1144 (Jul. 1998), pp. 474-478, L. Kanter, and T. Henry, *Luca Signorelli: The Complete Paintings*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2002, p. 27 and p. 116, and T. Henry, *The Life and Art of Luca Signorelli*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2012, pp. 105-111.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 445. A similar point, also using Signorelli as an example, is made by D. Arasse, 1999, p. 159.

the same time allowing the viewer to see both of them.<sup>55</sup> He also argued that it was a more naturalistic solution than those Annunciations, for example the miraculous S.S. Annunziata fresco, that rely upon the artificial removal of a “fourth wall” to achieve the same levels of visual access.<sup>56</sup> Leaving aside the problematic issue of whether achieving a naturalistic presentation was uppermost in painters’ minds in the Trecento, Saalman’s formal analysis is correct and is just as applicable to later works such as those by Piero della Francesca as it is to Duccio’s *Annunciation*. If we return to Piero’s Arezzo *Annunciation* (Fig. 5), this visual porousness – the ability for a viewer to gain immediate and easy visual access to the space – is immediately apparent. Gabriel standing on the left can undoubtedly see Mary through his side of the loggia, while the viewer is equally able to see Mary through the other open side.

More subtly, the loggia and the portico are structures that are both open and closed. Access is possible, as the architectonic openness of the space makes clear, yet at the same time it is also a space that is architecturally enclosed, as the demarcatory column mentioned earlier makes explicit. In Piero’s Arezzo *Annunciation*, Mary’s space is utterly porous yet at the same time this central column acts as a visual barrier between Gabriel and Mary, keeping her space absolutely inviolate. It is notable that in Annunciations of this type, Gabriel never penetrates the portico or loggia, in spite of the ostensible ease of access. Indeed, in some examples Gabriel stops abruptly at the very edge of the space as if to highlight its inaccessibility. In an *Annunciation* by the Master of the Judgement of Paris (c. 1430) (Fig. 14), Gabriel kneels outside Mary’s corner loggia, his right arm outstretched towards Mary. Even though the loggia is entirely open, lacking even a dividing column supporting its outer corner, Gabriel’s hand stops short at the very edge of the space, his fingers almost exactly perpendicular with the pier that marks its outer limits.<sup>57</sup> By contrasting the possibility of access with Gabriel’s

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<sup>55</sup> H. Saalman, “Form and Meaning at the Barbadori-Capponi Chapel in S. Felicita”, *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 131, No. 1037 (Aug., 1989), pp. 532-539, pp. 536-537.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 537.

<sup>57</sup> On this work see A. Flint, ‘Master of the Judgement of Paris, The Annunciation’ published online 2014, in ‘Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting’, The National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/place-making/master-judgement-of-paris-annunciation>.

refusal to do so in this manner, the painter perfectly illustrates the simultaneously open and closed character of the loggia in which Mary stands.

This dualism, the dialogue between closed and open, is echoed and emphasised by the portico and the corner loggia's ambivalent relationship to the building of which they are part. They are unequivocally attached yet at the same time are mediating spaces between the outside and the inside, belonging fully to neither. If we consider that in the case of an Annunciation the building to which they are connected is Mary's house, then it becomes possible to view this depiction of a liminal space as decorous. The portico or corner loggia, while without a doubt Mary's space, is at the same time at one remove from the interior of her house and in particular from the inner sanctum of her *thalamus*. This architectural liminality may also reflect the Annunciation's long association with thresholds and entrances discussed earlier, setting the event in spaces that are themselves transitional and whose penetration represents the beginning of access to the holy inner spaces of Mary's house itself.

Mary was in fact doubly enclosed in many Annunciations, for the structure in which she stands is often itself then enclosed by a surrounding wall. In Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (Fig. 107), painted around 1443 for the Florentine convent of Le Murate, a series of walls are visible through the large arched opening at the rear of Mary's house. The first is a low wall that entirely encircles a small garden with an enigmatic tree trunk in the centre, while the second runs the entire visible length of the background of the painting and has what appears to be a gateway with a triangular pediment in the middle. In her analysis of this painting, Megan Holmes has linked the proliferation and prominence of these walls to the famous walls of the convent for which the work was commissioned.<sup>58</sup> This is very plausible, but such enclosing walls were also far from uncommon in Lippi's work. In the Barberini *Annunciation* (c.1440) (Fig. 150), for instance, a wall of light coloured stone is just visible in the very background of the painting, separating the wooded garden from the rocky hills behind. A similar arrangement can be seen in Filippo's Spoleto

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<sup>58</sup> M. Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 233-234. Holmes argues that the low wall around the garden is a reference to the cloister. While plausible, the lack of any architectural context means that it is perhaps more convincingly read as a reference to the *hortus conclusus*.



*Annunciation* (c. 1468) (Fig. 15). Here a high crenellated stone wall, pierced by an arch of rusticated stone, divides the garden of Mary's house (or villa, as will be discussed later) from the wooded hillside behind. These walls are also to be found in works by other painters, such as Pesellino, who was closely associated with Lippi. In a small *Annunciation* (c.1450) in the Courtauld Gallery (Fig. 16), Pesellino depicts Mary bowing to Gabriel within an open loggia. A screen of Ionic columns, which forms one side of this loggia, is visible to the left of the panel, while behind it is a high stone wall. Where the walls in Lippi's works are generally visually unimposing, strung along the rearmost plane of the work, the wall in Pesellino's painting dominates the upper left corner, rising to such a height that from our viewpoint only a strip of blue sky remains to be seen. The resulting effect for a viewer is almost claustrophobic, shutting out the world beyond and demonstrating unequivocally the tight enclosure of Mary's house by this wall.

What might be the significance of these rigorously closed settings? Firstly, they were almost certainly intended as a reference to the *hortus conclusus*, the closed garden, a figure whose association with Mary is well known.<sup>59</sup> Discussing the Florentine Annunciations of this period, Rubin has noted how the setting comes to be made up of certain "well-known symbolic referents", among which she includes the *hortus conclusus*, a set of "associations" that lent the scene an easy memorability.<sup>60</sup> Unequivocally *conclusus* spaces, such as those in the works discussed by Pesellino and Lippi, undoubtedly fulfil this requirement, their walled gardens creating easily comprehensible "symbolic referents". Indeed, the prominent walls in Pesellino and Lippi's works could even be seen as an amplification of these symbolically enclosed spaces, especially in the case of Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation*, which contains both a garden surrounded by a low wall and the

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<sup>59</sup> The metaphor derives from the Song of Solomon 4:12 – "Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa, hortus conclusus..." On the *hortus conclusus* see S. Stewart, *The Enclosed Garden: The Tradition and the Image in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, University of Wisconsin Press, London, 1966, M. L. D'Ancona, "L' *hortus conclusus* nel medioevo e nel rinascimento", *Miniatura*, Vol. 2 (1989), pp. 121-129, M. Azzi Visentini, "Dall'*hortus conclusus* al giardino di villa aperto sul paesaggio: riflessioni in margine ad alcuni dipinti e disegni di area veneta tra Quattro e Cinquecento", *Venezia Cinquecento*, Vol. 11, No. 22 (Jul.- Dec., 2001), pp. 155-167, pp. 155-157, and on the *hortus* and the Annunciation in Florence, see P. Rubin, 2007, pp. 209-215.

<sup>60</sup> P. Rubin, 2007, p. 215.

high wall at the back, as if to reinforce this point. Secondly, and related to the evocation of the *hortus conclusus*, these outer walls create a double inviolability for Mary, meaning that she is protected by not only the barrier created by the edges of her particular space but also by the extra borders of the outer walls.

This forceful architectural reiteration of Mary's seclusion should be viewed in the light of the immense importance of her virginity for the Church. Jacopo Sannazaro (1458-1530), the Neapolitan poet, expressed this emphatically in his *De partu Virginis* (1521):

"Between the cities of the Phoenicians and the broad flow of the Jordan lies a land well known for our worship. Men call it Judea, strong in might and law. Here a chaste virgin, sprung from famous ancestors of prophets and princes, an ancient race, though she has been blessed with marriage, still preserves for me, and will preserve as the many years pass, her heart's modesty untainted... In my wisdom, I have long since chosen her alone from among virgins, and have sequestered the notion deep in my thoughts that she should be the virgin who would conceive in her womb the sanctity of God, and bear her holy offspring from no seed."<sup>61</sup>

"Chaste virgin...alone from among virgins...the virgin who would conceive..." Sannazaro leaves us in absolutely no doubt as to Mary's chastity. Seen in the light of the emphasis on Mary's virginity, demonstrating Mary's situation apart from the world and its temptations by means of high walls and other enclosures was clearly a piece of visual rhetoric, designed to architecturally highlight her purity. Finally, in the case of the many Annunciations where Mary stands or sits within a corner loggia or porch, it is arguable that the impenetrability of the surrounding wall serves to counteract the potentially

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<sup>61</sup> J. Sannazaro, *De partu virginis*, C. Fantazzi and A. Perosa (eds.), Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1988, pp. 10-11: "Est fines Phoenicum inter lateque fluentum/Iordanem region antiquis notissima sacris:/Iudaeam appelunt templisque arisque potentum./Hic claris exorta atavis, regumque priorum/antiquum genus et paribus licet aucta hymenaeis,/pectoris intactum virgo mihi casta pudorem...Hanc mihi virginibus isam pridem ex omnibus unam/delegi prudensque alta sub mente locavi,/ut foret aeterni sobolem quae sola Tonantis/conciperet ferretque pios non territa partus..." For the translation see J. Sannazaro, *Latin Poetry*, M. Putnam (trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge (MA) and London, 2009, pp. 7-9. The doctrine of Mary's virginity had its roots in the prophecy of Isaiah 7:14: "propter hoc dabit Dominus ipse vobis signum ecce virgo concipiet et pariet filium et vocabitis nomen eius Emmanuel/ Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign. Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel."

indecorous openness of the loggia in which Mary stands, making it clear that while Mary may be placed in a seemingly penetrable space, she has a solid wall for further protection. Compositionally too, this creates a delicate interplay of open and closed architectural forms, as the juxtaposition between the large arches of the Le Murate *Annunciation* (Fig. 107) and the stone walls that run across and behind them demonstrate.

### The Porch of Ezekiel

Beyond its compositional advantages, the porch was also iconographically significant as a space with important symbolic associations with Mary herself. Specifically, there was a long exegetical association between Mary and the following passage in Ezekiel 44: “Then said the Lord unto me ‘This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut. It is for the Prince; he shall sit in it to eat bread before the Lord; he shall enter by way of the porch of that gate, and shall go out by way of the same.’”<sup>62</sup> In his commentary on the book of Ezekiel, St Jerome made the symbolic connection between Mary and the structure described in Ezekiel 44 absolutely apparent.<sup>63</sup> He wrote:

“The leader has shut the door, a beautifully closed gate, through which only the Lord God of Israel may enter, the door which is understood to be the Virgin Mary, who remained a virgin before and after giving birth...”<sup>64</sup>

Mary was the permanently shut gate, open only to God and Jesus “the prince”, on the basis of which exegesis the *porta clausa* became a key symbol

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<sup>62</sup> Ezekiel 44: 1-3: “Et dixit Dominus ad me porta haec clausa erit non aperietur et vir non transiet per eam quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam eritque clausa. Principi princeps ipse sedebit in ea ut comedat panem coram Domino per viam vestibuli portae ingredietur et per viam eius egredietur.” On the association between the Annunciate Virgin and this see S. Edgerton, 1977, pp. 120-121 and C. Gerbon, “Le Verbe, voilé/dévoilé: La Vision d’Ezéchiel et l’Annonciation de l’Armadio degli argenti”, in *Revue de l’art*, No. 167 (2010), pp. 11-24, pp. 20-22.

<sup>63</sup> Saint Jerome, *S. Hieronymi Presbyteri Opera*, Vol. 1:4, G., Francisci (ed.) Brepols, Turnholt, 1964, pp. 643-647.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 646-647: “Pulchre quidam portam clausam per quam solus Dominus Deus Israel ingreditur et dux qui cui porta clausa, Maria virginum intellegunt, que et ante partum et post partum virgo permansit...”

of Mary's perpetual virginity. Given that the Annunciation represents precisely the moment of Jesus' entrance into Mary and the world prefigured by Ezekiel's vision, it is clear that the porches found in many Annunciations are likely to be, in at least some cases, deliberate references to the "porch" of Ezekiel 44.

Before this can be established, however, it is important to identify precisely what is described in the passage in Ezekiel and why painters might have interpreted this as a porch and a gate/door? The phrase the "porch of the gate" ("vestibuli portae" in the Vulgate) is architecturally generic.<sup>65</sup> no precise architectural details are given, so we have no way of establishing the scale of either the entrance or its porch/vestibule, nor do we have any suggestion as to the decoration of either element.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, the word *vestibuli* is problematic in terms of how it might have been understood in the fifteenth century.<sup>67</sup> Flavio Biondo in his *Roma Triumphans*, described *atria* as follows: "...they are something similar to the vestibule, what we nowadays call the *androne*: Gellio writes that the ancients, who built magnificent and beautiful houses, left a place in front of the door, that came to be between the door of the house and the street..."<sup>68</sup> Pellecchia convincingly argues that Biondo here envisages a structure similar to those atriums found in front of early Roman churches.<sup>69</sup> Alberti, by contrast, seems to have envisaged the vestibule as some sort of hallway, advising that: "In the centre of the bosom of the building should be the entrance with a vestibule [*vestibulum* in the Latin]; this should be dignified, and in no way narrow, tortuous, or poorly lit." where

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<sup>65</sup> *Porta* can mean both gate and door, although in this context establishing precisely which is meant is less important than the form of the enclosure attached to it.

<sup>66</sup> Although attempts were made to visualise the plan of Exekiel's temple, most particularly by Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1270 – 1349) and Richard of St Victor (d. 1173), these bear no relationship to any extant Annunciation from the fifteenth century, for more information on these see C. Delano-Smith, "The Exegetical Jerusalem: Maps and Plans for Ezekiel Chapters 40-48", in *Imagining Jerusalem in the Medieval West*, L. Donkin and H. Vorholt, (ed.), The British Academy, Oxford, 2012.

<sup>67</sup> On this see G. Clarke, *Roman House - Renaissance Palaces: Inventing Antiquity in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, pp. 107-119.

<sup>68</sup> F. Biondo, *Roma trionfante*, L. Fauro (trans.), Michiele Tramezzino, Venice, 1550, p. 329: "sono una cosa medesima co' l'vestibulo chiamano hoggi andito: scrive Gellio, che gli antichi, che fabricavano belle, e magnifiche case, lasciavano un luoco avanti a la porta, che veniva ad essere fra la porta de la casa e la strada..."

<sup>69</sup> L. Pellecchia, "Architects Read Vitruvius: Renaissance Interpretations of the Atrium of the Ancient House", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 51, No. 4 (Dec., 1992), pp. 377-416, p. 382.

the use of the words “tortuous” and “narrow” implies something akin to the *androne* found in many fifteenth-century *palazzi*.<sup>70</sup> It appears to be unclear precisely how a painter, seeking to place the Annunciation in a setting relating to the *vestibuli* mentioned in Ezekiel, might have achieved this. Yet, what Biondo’s atrium and Alberti’s hallway have in common is that they picture the vestibule as an entrance space, a mediating zone between the public and the private. It is therefore reasonable to hypothesise that a painter might turn to the porch and an associated entrance as a means of evoking the *vestibuli portae* of Ezekiel’s account.

A work in which this may be the case is Piero della Francesca’s *Sant’Antonio Annunciation* (Fig. 17). Here we see Mary standing in a porch extending over a doorway, although admittedly one that appears to be open. Because of the lack of any further architectural specifics in the biblical passage, we cannot seek any further corroborative details, except to note that Ezekiel’s gate/door is an entrance not to a temple but to its outer sanctuary. As will be discussed at greater length later, the architectural details of the courtyard in Piero’s *Annunciation* seem to indicate that it can be understood as a cloister. It is possible then that Piero, searching for an analogous structure for the outer sanctuary in the biblical passage, decided to group his version of Ezekiel’s porch with a cloister, using the cloister as a stand-in for the sanctuary. As a result, especially if we take into consideration that at least some of Piero’s audience, the nuns and clergy attached to Sant’Agostino, would have been well versed in the exegetical tradition attached to Ezekiel 44, it is reasonable to hypothesise that Piero intended the porch in which Mary stands to refer to the “*vestibuli portae*” of Ezekiel’s description.

Piero’s panel aside, however, direct associations between porches and gates which could be read as deliberate allusions to Ezekiel’s portico are difficult to find in Annunciations of this period. Ruda has argued that the space in which Mary sits in Filippo Lippi’s *Annunciation* (1468) in Spoleto (Fig. 15) should be seen as referring to the biblical structure, although given that the

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<sup>70</sup> L. Alberti, *L’architettura*, Vol. 1, G. Orlandi (ed.) and P. Portoghesi (trans.), Edizioni il Polifilo, Milan, 1966, p. 419: “Patebitque in medium sinum aditus et vestibulum, honestissimus, minime arctus, minime arduus, minime obscurus.” For the translation see L. Alberti, *On the Art of Building in Ten Books*, N. Leach, J. Rykwert, and R. Tavernor (trans.), The MIT Press, Cambridge M.A., 1988, p. 146.

space in Lippi's work is clearly a corner loggia rather than a portico, this reference is surely a fairly allusive one.<sup>71</sup> One work that does seem to refer more straightforwardly to this portico is an *Annunciation* (c. 1475) by Biagio di Antonio, now in the Pinacoteca Comunale di Faenza (Fig. 18).<sup>72</sup> The picture is a large lunette (113 x 223 cm), and the location for which it was commissioned and how it was displayed remains unclear. It is, however, possible that it originally formed the crown to an altarpiece.<sup>73</sup> The poses of the figures and their placement reveal Biagio's debt to Leonardo and Verrochio's *Annunciation* (c. 1473) in the Uffizi, but the architectural setting of the Faenza *Annunciation* is very different. Behind where Mary sits a large porch can be seen viewed from the side, allowing us to see its vaulted ceiling and one ornate marble supporting column. Though the porch itself seems not to have any associated entry, framed by its arching structure is a prominent gray archway set into a red brick wall enclosing a garden, which contains a small, yellow open half-gate. The architecture is very different to that in Piero's Perugia *Annunciation*, lacking in particular the clarity of the relationship between porch and doorway, but nonetheless it is a setting that clearly refers in its combination of walled sanctuary and gate with a large porch to the "porch of the gate" in Ezekiel's description.

The grandeur of the porticoes in both Biagio and Piero's works is notable, and suggests another motivation behind their choice as enclosures for Mary. In general, as was noted previously, the porch was normally attached to an important entrance, the main door of a church, for example. The *Annunciation* represents the moment at which Christ enters the world, and can therefore be viewed metaphorically as one large doorway, the doorway of Christ. What better space than the porch in which to situate this immensely significant arrival? A porch represents an aggrandisement or celebration of entrance, emphasising moments of ingress through the ornate visual highlighting of a door. Taken together with the rich decoration of Biagio and Piero's edifices, which provide a fittingly ornate reception point for the Son of God, all this would seem to make the porch or corner loggia a structure

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<sup>71</sup> J. Ruda, 1993, p. 295.

<sup>72</sup> On this work see R. Bartoli, *Biagio d'Antonio*, Federico Motta, Milan, 1999, pp. 56-59 and Cat. 34, p. 194.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

eminently suited for Mary's acceptance of the Holy Spirit.

### **Narrative Beginnings: Gabriel's Ingress**

"And the angel came in unto her" are the opening words of Luke's description of the Annunciation.<sup>74</sup> Gabriel's moment of entrance, his "coming in", is thus made the starting point of the whole narrative. Indeed, narratively speaking, his ingress and his subsequent announcement to Mary are the subject of the whole episode. To place the episode in its wider theological context, as Gabriel announces the coming of Christ, his entrance is the beginning of the whole cycle of events that leads to Christ's redemption of man's sins through his crucifixion. This narrative significance was sometimes expressed through the placement of the Annunciation within predellas showing the life of Christ. In the predella to his *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1502-3), painted for the Oddi Chapel in San Francesco al Prato in Perugia and now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, Raphael depicts three scenes, the *Annunciation*, the *Adoration of the Magi* and *Christ's Presentation in the Temple* (Fig. 19).<sup>75</sup> The *Annunciation* is placed on the left of the predella, forming the opening episode in the mini cycle. As a result, Gabriel's entrance in the *Annunciation* is the natural visual starting point for a viewer, from which their eye can then move to the right to see the subsequent episodes, just as in the narrative of Christ's life the angel's ingress is the narrative starting point. Within the *Annunciation* itself, Gabriel enters, as was traditional in depictions of the Annunciation, from the left. His entry can therefore be viewed as a visual "starter gun" for the episode, which if read like a book from left to right then culminates in Mary's reaction, described by Luke as follows: "And when she saw him, she was troubled at his saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this should be."<sup>76</sup> In Raphael's panel, we see Mary reacting to Gabriel's entrance, although not violently, looking up from the book that she has been reading and raising her hand as if to acknowledge his

<sup>74</sup> Luke 1:28: "Et angelus ingressus..."

<sup>75</sup> On Raphael's altarpiece see J. zur Capellen, *Raphael: A Critical Catalogue of His Paintings*, Vol. 1, B. Polter (trans.), Arcos, Postfach, 2001, pp. 128-137 and D. Cooper, "Raphael's Altarpieces in San Francesco al Prato, Perugia: Patronage, Setting and Function", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 143, No. 1182 (Sep., 2001), pp. 554-561.

<sup>76</sup> Luke 1:29: "quae cum vidisset turbata est in sermone eius et cogitabat qualis esset ista salutatio".

presence.

Luke's opening phrase offered painters a useful starting point for considering where to place Gabriel in their compositions, particularly in light of the fact that these opening words of the description were well known to their audiences.<sup>77</sup> Architecturally/spatially, it could be clearly expressed by the placement of Gabriel within or in front of an opening of some kind. Fra Angelico's Cortona *Annunciation* (c.1435) (Fig. 20), painted for the high altar of San Domenico in Cortona, provides a good example of how this might be achieved in practice. The setting is a corner loggia supported on Corinthian columns, with three arches visible to the left extending back towards the expulsion of Adam and Eve, and two in the foreground of the work parallel to the picture plane. Gabriel is framed in the left hand foreground arch, but is not fully contained by it. The angel's wingtips and part of his right leg instead remain just outside the loggia, expressing the fact that the angel is in the process of entering. In fact, Fra Angelico seems to have partially conflated the moment of ingress and the moment of Annunciation, as while Gabriel is still within the arch, the words of the announcement are already curling around the central column.

Other painters choose to have Gabriel's entry mirror that of the Holy Spirit. Baldovinetti's *Annunciation* (1447) (Fig. 21), now moved to the Uffizi from its original location inside San Giorgio sulla Costa, Florence, depicts Gabriel facing Mary within a loggia/arcade behind which a high wall runs along the back of the work.<sup>78</sup> Gabriel is shown leaning sharply forward with his right heel raised off the ground, demonstrating that the angel is still in the process of entering, while, as in the Fra Angelico, his right wing tips are just in front of the columns supporting the arch behind. Baldovinetti, like Fra Angelico, therefore captures the very moment at which Gabriel "came in unto her" through a combination of figural expression (his forward pose) and his placement within an architectural setting (the wing tip still touching the doorway behind and his right foot, placed in the midst of the arch behind).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> A Caprettini, 1979, p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> For more information on this work see R. Kennedy, *Alessio Baldovinetti: A critical and historical study*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1938, pp. 72-81.

<sup>79</sup> White notices a similar combination of architectural placement and figural expression to express the entrance of Gabriel in Duccio's *Maesta Annunciation*, see J. White, 1979, p. 118.



Another arch, identical in form, is placed immediately in front of Gabriel and serves as the entrance to the space in which Mary stands. The rays of the Holy Spirit, which emanate from somewhere beyond the top of the leftmost archway, pass through this central arch, meaning that the Holy Spirit's access in the centre of the work is a visual echo of Gabriel's on the left.

These mirrored entries are highlighted by the use of bands of stone in the flooring of the arcade to create strong thresholds. Gabriel's back foot rests upon one of these stone threshold bands, and another can be clearly seen passing between the bases of the two columns of the central arch. Even though the space is only divided by open arches, the bands, standing out strongly from the polychrome marble used elsewhere in the flooring, nonetheless create emphatic visual borders for each of the two principal spatial zones within the work. Compositionally, Gabriel's access, his stepping across the threshold, prefigures that of the Holy Spirit, making the angel's physical ingress a pictorial announcement of the incarnation of Christ as represented by the entry of the Holy Spirit, just as in the biblical narrative the angel verbally announces the coming of Christ.

It is worth reiterating at this juncture that Gabriel's access was limited; generally, as in the works by Duccio, Baldovinetti, Fra Filippo Lippi and Piero della Francesca analysed previously, he is depicted outside of Mary's space. Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (1450) (Fig. 22) in the National Gallery, London was originally commissioned for the Palazzo Medici, along with its companion the *Seven Saints*, also in London.<sup>80</sup> In this work, as in Baldovinetti's *Annunciation*, an opening, in this case in the low wall behind Gabriel, indicates how the angel has entered the space. In Lippi's work, however, any further ingress on Gabriel's part is notionally prevented by another low wall, on which sits a vase of lilies. The limits placed on Gabriel's access, implied in Baldovinetti and Signorelli's works, are in Lippi's made literally concrete, and

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<sup>80</sup> On this work see L. Steinberg, "How Shall This Be?' Reflections on Filippo Lippi's "Annunciation" in London. Part 1", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (1987), pp. 25-44, S. Edgerton, "How Shall This Be?' Reflections on Filippo Lippi's "Annunciation" in London. Part II", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 8, No. 16 (1987), pp. 45-53, J. Ruda, 1993, pp. 199-203 and Cat. 50a, pp. 445-456, F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and the Early Medici", in *The Early Medici and their Artists*, F. Ames-Lewis (ed.), Birkbeck College, London, 1995, pp. 120-122 and D. Gordon, *The Fifteenth Century Italian Paintings*, Vol. 1, National Gallery Company, London, 2003, p.158. The original positioning of the lunettes is still a matter of some debate, see F. Ames Lewis, 1995, p. 120, for a discussion of the various possibilities.

are further highlighted by the contrast between the broken wall through which the angel enters and the unbroken one which confronts him.<sup>81</sup> Adding further weight to this is the fact that the vase of lilies (symbolic of Mary's purity) rests upon the unbroken wall, highlighting its role as a guarantor of the inviolability of Mary's space and of Mary herself. Of course, it should be noted that in this work, as in many others, the decorum of Gabriel's approach is also echoed in Mary's response: while Gabriel never advances into her space, nor does she ever leave hers. It is striking that there are no known examples of Annunciations where Mary is not either within her *camera*, within a portico or loggia, or, on the rare occasions she is outside, within a private courtyard or terrace. In all these cases, the setting is one associated with the private sphere of the home or the seclusion of the convent; it is no coincidence that Annunciations have proved so useful to scholars working on Italian Renaissance interiors.<sup>82</sup> As the following section will demonstrate, it is very unlikely that this was solely for iconographic or compositional reasons. Instead, it seems clear that Mary's secluded positioning was also designed to express the ideal conduct expected of young unmarried women. This is particularly likely, as we shall see, given how often Mary's conduct was used didactically as an exemplar for these women.

### **Mary's Architectural Placement and Contemporary Expectations of Young Women**

Scholars have long recognised that women in this period led circumscribed and restricted lives in comparison to their male counterparts. In Venice, as Denis Romano has described, women were largely confined to a series of socially acceptable spaces, most notably either the home or the

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<sup>81</sup> This architectural contrast is described by Drury as follows: "In this picture Lippi has carefully designed an architectural setting which is a mixture of enclosure and openness, seclusion and availability to the world outside. As such, it is a poem of the focal body in the painting, Mary's." See J. Drury, *Painting the Word: Christian Pictures and their Meanings*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000, p. 48.

<sup>82</sup> For a discussion of the interiors depicted in Annunciations and of their usefulness as "documents" for reconstructing contemporary interiors, see L. Syson, "Representing domestic interiors", in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, Ajmar-Wolheim, M., and Dennis, F. (eds.), V and A Publications, London, 2006.

convent, venturing out relatively rarely, and then normally to church.<sup>83</sup> In fifteenth-century Florence, women were barred by law from government buildings, out of fear of their distracting and potentially corrupting influence, and were, at least those from the wealthier classes who did not need to work, unlikely to have been seen much on the streets of the city.<sup>84</sup> Women, especially young unmarried women, were expected to essentially cloister themselves within the home for their own protection.<sup>85</sup> The fourteenth-century merchant Paolo di Certaldo forcefully described how young women should follow the example of Mary:

“...young women and virgins must live according to the example of the Virgin Mary...She never left the house, and didn’t go talking down here nor up there, nor here or there, didn’t listen to or look at vain men nor any other vanities, rather she stayed locked in a hidden and honest place.”<sup>86</sup>

Even safely within the home, there were still worries as to how visible they were, leading churchmen such as Archbishop Antoninus and Savonarola to advise in no uncertain terms that young women must stay away from windows, and young women sitting in windows was a trope in contemporary literature for women who lacked honour.<sup>87</sup> Even in their outings to church, it is likely that they would have been segregated from the men, once more out of fear as to their deleterious effect on the piety and cleanliness of men’s thoughts.<sup>88</sup> It should be noted, however, that despite their cloistered existence within the home, women would have received a great number of visitors, particularly in the houses of the elite, where there was an almost constant

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<sup>83</sup> D. Romano, “Gender and the Urban Geography of Renaissance Venice”, *Journal of Social History*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (Winter, 1989), pp. 339-353, pp. 340-342.

<sup>84</sup> N. Tomas, “Did Women Have a Space?”, in *Renaissance Florence: A Social History*, R. Crum and J. Paoletti (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2006, pp. 313-314.

<sup>85</sup> J. Musacchio, 2008, p. 77.

<sup>86</sup> P di Certaldo, “Il libro di buoni costumi”, in *Mercanti scrittori: Ricordi nella Firenze tra Medioevo e Rinascimento*, V. Branca (ed.), Rusconi, Milan, 1986, p. 59, no. 300: “...la femina giovane e vergine dee vivere ad assempro de la Vergine Madonna Santa Maria...Ella non istava fuori di casa, e non andava discorrendo né giu né su né qua né la, né udendo né guardando gli uomini vani né l’altre vanità, anzi stava rinchiusa e serrata in nascoso e onesto luogo.”

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>88</sup> A. Randolph, “Regarding Women in Sacred Space”, in *Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy*, G. Johnson and S. Matthews Grieco (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997, p. 32.

stream of clients.<sup>89</sup> Some women, though they are exceptions to the rule, even had extensive client networks, bestowing their favour on women less fortunate than themselves.<sup>90</sup> Lucrezia Tornabuoni, wife of Piero de Medici, for instance, was well-known for the scale of her patronage, apparently receiving petitioners almost daily.<sup>91</sup>

In light of the above it seems reasonable to argue that the secluded and private architectural settings for Annunciations, and Mary's positioning within them, are in part a reflection of contemporary social attitudes towards women. This is an argument eloquently put forward by Adrian Randolph in an analysis of Crivelli's *Annunciation* (1485) (Fig. 24) in the National Gallery, London: "Indeed this space [Mary's room] seems to exemplify a familiar, intimate sphere of visual and material culture associated with the domestic and with female lives. Crivelli's painting, if seen in this light, appears to reproduce standard gender binaries tying women to domesticity, enclosure, and visual objectification..."<sup>92</sup> The role played by Marian paintings in promoting Mary as an exemplar for women's conduct and a companion in their troubles has often been noted.<sup>93</sup> To give just one example, it seems likely that images of the *Birth of the Virgin*, commonly found in major Marian cycles and predellas, were placed in settings that reflected, to varying degrees of accuracy, contemporary interiors in order to heighten female feelings of identification with St Anne.<sup>94</sup>

More specifically, Mary's behaviour at the Annunciation could be used to present an ideal for young women, as the following extract from a sermon

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<sup>89</sup> J. Musacchio, 2008, p. 80.

<sup>90</sup> N. Tomas, 2006, p. 325.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>92</sup> A. Randolph, "Renaissance Genderscapes", in *Structures and Subjectivities: Attending to Early Modern Women*, A. Seeff and J. Hartman (eds.), University of Delaware Press, Newark, 2007, p. 25. Lightbown has argued that the well known passage in Saint Ambrose's commentary on St Luke (discussed at greater length in Chapter 2) in which he emphasises Mary's seclusion at the moment of Gabriel's arrival had an influence on images of the Annunciation that placed Mary in secluded settings.

<sup>93</sup> See M. Rubin, *Emotion and Devotion: The Meaning of Mary in Medieval Religious Cultures*, Central European University Press, Budapest and New York, 2009, pp. 81-90, P. Tinagli, *Women in Italian Renaissance Art: Gender, Representation, Identity*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1997, p. 158 and M. Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, Picador, London, 1990, p. 189.

<sup>94</sup> J. Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999 p. 10.

discussing the twelve young women who accompanied Mary, given in Siena in 1427 by San Bernardino, makes clear:

“The first young girl that Mary had was called Clausura (My Lady Cloister). She had such love for Mary that she never wanted to leave her side, for all that she had the care of the door. Mary came to an arrangement with her, and said to her ‘You know what to do when someone knocks at the door? You must never go to open it, if first you have not asked who it is and told me. If it is a man, you know what to do: stand at the window (she had a window like this one here of the Signori or that one of the Podestà, that allowed her to see others and they not to see her); and if you also go down, do not open the door: open the hatch like this. If he is a man, never open up: if she is woman, ask her what she wants, so that we are never deceived.’ And she held to that rule whenever someone came. And it is true that, when the angel Gabriel arrived, and he knocked, Clausura ran quickly to the window, and seeing him asked: ‘Who is it?’ She quickly turned inside, ran to Mary, and said ‘He is knocking at the door and seems to me to be an angel.’ Then Mary spoke ‘Go and open it, and when it is open, quickly bow your head so as to not see the face’...

O young girls, learn how you must stay at home, and how you must watch who enters the house; you see that Mary stayed locked in her house and wanted always to see who wanted to enter there and what they wanted...But we will speak of where the angel found her. Do you believe where she was? At the window or doing some vain exercises? No! She stayed locked in her room, and read, to give an example to you young girls, that you never take delight in staying neither outside nor at the window, but that you stay in the house, saying the Ave Maria or the Pater

Noster...<sup>95</sup>

This extract is of interest for a number of reasons. Firstly, it specifically allies Mary with *clausura* or enclosure, by giving her a follower whose sole purpose (as her name less than subtly indicates) is to maintain the inviolate decorum of Mary's home. Mary's explicit instructions to Clausura on how she should act if someone comes knocking are a device that allows San Bernardino to lay great emphasis on how firmly shut Mary's door was to male visitors and, by implication, to indicate how strict was her architectural seclusion. Indeed, such was Clausura's dedication to her task, that even Gabriel, the angelic visitor, had to first pass her scrutiny before being allowed entrance to Mary's home. Just in case the point of all this had somehow passed his audience by, Bernardino then continues to highlight exactly where Mary was when the angel arrived, namely locked in her *camera*, decorously reading. Secondly, he explicitly states that Mary's conduct at the Annunciation is to be seen as an exemplar of where a young girl should place herself, not outside nor at the window, but inside, safely sequestered within her *camera*.

Given the precision with which he describes the position and posture of Mary, it is possible that Bernardino had in mind contemporary images of the Annunciation when he constructed this analogy, although precisely which one

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<sup>95</sup> Bernardino da Siena, *Prediche Volgari sul Campo di Siena 1427*, Vol. 2, C. Delcorno, (ed.), Rusconi, Milan, 1989, pp. 861-862: "La prima donzella la quale aveva Maria, si fu Madonna Clausura. Costei portava tanto amore a Maria, che mai non si voleva partire da lei, con tutto che ella avesse la cura della porta. Maria s'era composta con lei, e avevale detto: "Sai come tu fa' quando niuno bussasse la porta? Fa' che mai tu non vada aprire, se prima tu no mel dici, e fa' che tu domandi prima chi é? Se egli é uomo, sai come tu fa': fara'ti costi a la finestra (che aveva una finestra questa qui de' Signori o quella del Podestà, che poteva vedere altrui e non era veduta lei); e se pure tu vai giù, non aprire la porta: apre così lo sportellino. Se egli è uomo, mai non aprire: se ella è femina, domanda quello che ella vuole, acciò che noi non siamo mai ingannate". E questa regola teneva sempre a chiunque vi veniva. E che sia vero, quando l'angiolo Gabriello gionse, egli bussò, e Madonna Clausura sura subito corse a la finestra, e veduto costui domandò: "Chi è?". E subito tiratasi dentro, corse a Maria, e disse: - Elli è stata bussata la porta e parmi che sia un angiolo. - Allora disse Maria: - Va', e apreli: - e uperto, subito chinò il capo per non essere veduto il volto'...

O fanciulle, imparate come voi vi dovete stare in casa, e come voi vi dovete guardare da chi v'entra in casa; che vedi che la Vergine Maria stava inserata in casa e voleva sempre vedere chi voleva entrarle in casa e quello che voleva...Ma diciamo dove la trovò l'Angiolo. Dove credi ch'ella fusse? A le finestre o a fare qualche altro assercizio di vanità? Eh no! Ella stava inserrata ub camera, e leggava, per dare essempro a te fanciulla, che mai tu non abbi diletto di stare né a uscio né a finestra, ma che tu stia dentro in casa, dicendo delle avemarie e de' paternostri..."

remains uncertain.<sup>96</sup> It is known that Bernardino used painted images for illustration in his sermons, among which was Simone Martini's *Annunciation* (c.1330).<sup>97</sup> Although clearly he cannot have had Martini's panel in mind in this instance, given its lack of any architectural setting, it is not unreasonable to imagine that perhaps another image provided him with the impetus for this description. Certainly, it goes into more detail about the position of Mary, specifying that she was inside and nowhere near a window, than any other contemporary account of the Annunciation.

Bearing the above in mind, a work such as Filippo Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation* (1468) (Fig. 15) appears on one level to present a visual exemplar of good, womanly conduct. Mary sits at her desk, safely ensconced within her room, as Gabriel kneels outside. Both her studiousness, alluded to by the desk, and her position, inside the home, could be read as proposing a model femininity. We should, however, be wary of viewing an image such as this as a didactic presentation of an exemplar alone. As has already been demonstrated, the choice of an architectural setting was motivated by a variety of factors from the compositional, to the narrative, to the symbolic. Consequently, while it is undoubtedly important to note that this Annunciation, along with many others, conforms very closely to quattrocento social customs surrounding the proper sphere of women, we should remain aware that this was only one element determining the architectural settings constructed by painters.

### **Miraculous Entry: The Holy Spirit**

The central mystery of the Annunciation was the incarnation of Jesus or in other words the penetration of Mary's womb by the Holy Spirit. How this was actually achieved was subject to centuries of theological debate. Many medieval theologians, for example, argued that the Holy Spirit must have entered through Mary's ear, as she was the recipient via Gabriel of the word

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<sup>96</sup> San Bernardino travelled all over Italy, and could by 1427 have seen a number of Annunciations which showed Mary inside reading or praying.

<sup>97</sup> N. Debby, "The Preacher as Goldsmith: The Italian Preachers' Use of the Visual Arts", in *Preacher, Sermon and Audience in the Middle Ages*, C. Muessig (ed.), Brill, Leiden, 2002, pp. 137-140.

of God,<sup>98</sup> while Thomas Aquinas resorted to Aristotle's analysis of conception, using it to argue that the "matter" within Mary could be changed into Christ, although in this case without even the usual male "agent" identified by Aristotle.<sup>99</sup> Despite these debates the central fact, that God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, had impregnated Mary without leaving a trace, was long established by the fifteenth century and a pictorial convention had been created for showing God dispatching the Holy Spirit. In most cases God was placed in the upper left sending the Holy Spirit (depicted either as rays or as a dove) diagonally across the picture to Mary in the bottom right, as can be seen in Piero della Francesca's *Arezzo Annunciation* (Fig. 5).<sup>100</sup> While it was thus possible to describe the passage of the Holy Spirit, how to express its entrance into Mary herself - in Arasse's words "...how to represent the infinite within the finite, the unsymbolisable within the symbol, the unlimited within the place, the invisible within the visible?" - remained a thorny problem.<sup>101</sup>

Writing in 1972, Michael Baxandall noted that certain fifteenth-century paintings depicting "transcendental" episodes, among which he included the Annunciation, seemed to share a common feature, namely a setting that included at its centre a perspectival void, often expressed as a tunnel of columns or a similar architectural structure.<sup>102</sup> He suggested that perhaps the use of these virtuoso perspectival constructions in works of this type could be viewed as a means of expressing the mysterious and incomprehensible elements within a painting, but emphasised at the same time that, due to a lack of any solid historical evidence, his suggestion could be no more than that. Georges Didi-Huberman picked up the idea that a void could have meaning within an Annunciation, but placed this in a slightly different context. He observed that in a few Annunciations, this perspective tunnel led the eye to a symbolically significant element; in the case of Veneziano's predella *Annunciation* (1445) (Fig. 9), for example, he pointed out that the eye is led directly back to the closed door, the *porta clausa*, which had a long history as

<sup>98</sup> On these and other theories see L. Steinberg, 1987, pp. 25-35.

<sup>99</sup> T. Aquinas, 1920, pp. 84-85.

<sup>100</sup> L. Steinberg, 1987, p. 26.

<sup>101</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 12: "comment représenter l'immensité dans la mesure, l'infigurable dans la figure, l'incircriscriptible dans la lieu, l'invisible dans la vision?"

<sup>102</sup> M. Baxandall, *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth Century Italy*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972, p. 108.



a figure for Mary's perpetual virginity.<sup>103</sup>

Building upon the work of both these scholars, Daniel Arasse proposed that perspective within paintings of the Annunciation could be viewed as a symbolic representation of how to “render in visual terms this meeting of the immeasurable within the measurable.”<sup>104</sup> Emblematic of this is a work such as Piero della Francesca's Sant'Antonio *Annunciation* (1468) (Fig. 17), where the prominent central alley of columns is, according to Arasse, symbolic of this meeting of the infinite and finite upon Christ's entry into the world.<sup>105</sup> Arasse's analysis is persuasive up to a point. Although there are works where this could be the case, there are also a great number with no such perspectival void. This results, as Arasse acknowledges, in a methodological problem but not one that necessarily invalidates his analysis, given that it could still apply to that specific group of “perspectival” Annunciations.<sup>106</sup> More problematic is the highly abstract nature of the symbolism, which would seem to presuppose a fairly advanced understanding of both the mathematical properties of perspective and of theology on the part of the viewer. While such a reading may have been possible for a learned audience well versed in these matters, it was surely beyond the grasp of many. In light of this and of the fact that these voids are found in only handful of works, it seems reasonable to ask what other, more concrete means might painters have employed to depict the crucial moment of incarnation?

The miraculous nature of Jesus' conception lay in the fact that, in Didi-Huberman's words, Mary was “a threshold at once crossed and intact.”<sup>107</sup> Didi-Huberman chooses threshold as a metaphor very much aware of its architectural character. He points out a number of instances in Annunciations where thresholds are “denaturalised” and thus made in some sense supernatural or miraculous.<sup>108</sup> In an *Annunciation* by the Master of the Strauss Madonna (c. 1400-1410) (Fig. 23), for instance, he highlights an odd “shimmering of pure white” on the threshold of the doorway at the back of the

<sup>103</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 138-139.

<sup>104</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 13: “rendre visible cette venue de l'incommensurable dans la mesure.”

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 19-38.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>107</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 133.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 140-141.

loggia.<sup>109</sup> More obviously still, by depicting the penetration of Mary's space by the dove or the rays of the Holy Spirit, painters could arguably create an architectural metaphor for the penetration of Mary herself.<sup>110</sup>

If we examine Botticelli's San Martino fresco of the *Annunciation* (Fig. 1), discussed in the introduction to this chapter, we can see this combination in practice. In this fresco, the rays of the Holy Spirit spray out from the profiled archway on the far left and then continue to the right, eventually passing through an identical archway in the centre. This archway is the entrance to Mary's *camera*, identified by the prominent bed in the background. The rays therefore enter Mary's most private space, crossing a prominent boundary, the central arch, to do so. If we are prepared to take Mary's space as in some sense an extension of Mary herself, with its boundaries her boundaries, then this architectural penetration can be viewed as presenting an analogy for the Holy Spirit's entry into Mary. Lending more weight to this interpretation is the architectural character of this archway, whose stone construction displays its immutability, while simultaneously the void at its centre signals that it is porous, in an echo of the intact yet crossable nature of Mary's holy hymen.

It is possible too that in certain works a deliberate contrast is constructed between the limited access granted to Gabriel and the unfettered access of the Holy Spirit. In Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciation* (Fig. 24),<sup>111</sup> we see Mary encased within her lavish bedroom, framed by a large doorway that faces the spectator directly. Gabriel kneels in the street outside, pointedly prevented from entering Mary's space by the stone wall and the barred window in front of him. The dove of the Holy Spirit, however, bursting from the clouds above, has already driven straight into the room. Importantly, the laser-like rays left by the dove on its passage demonstrate unequivocally the means of its entry, a small arch-shaped hole in the terracotta frieze. Its impossibility,

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., p. 194.

<sup>111</sup> On this work see M. Davies, *Carlo Crivelli: The Annunciation*, National Gallery, London, 1947, T. Zanobini Leoni, "Carlo Crivelli: L'Annunciazione della National Gallery di Londra", *Critica d'Arte*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (1984), pp. 93-96, P. Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, Nardini Editore, Florence, 1986, p. 285 and R. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004, pp. 323-344 and A. Flint, 'Carlo Crivelli, The Annunciation, with Saint Emidius' published online 2014, in 'Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting', The National Gallery, London, <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/entering-the-picture/crivelli-annunciation>.

or at the very least its improbability, are signaled by the golden glow which surrounds it, seemingly signaling the divinity of its builder. It is worth noting also that compared to the Annunciations discussed above, the building in Crivelli's *Annunciation* is far less open; the spatial demarcation implied by the central column of a porch/loggia has here become emphatic, with Gabriel facing a solid stone wall rather than an open arch.

It is interesting to compare this hole bored for the Holy Spirit with the more conventional symbolism employed by Crivelli in an earlier *Annunciation*, painted as part of his Camerino polyptych in 1482 (Fig. 25).<sup>112</sup> Here the rays of the Holy Spirit enter through a barred window, very similar to that seen in the Ascoli *Annunciation*. A comparable solution can be seen in Filippo Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation* (Fig. 15). In this work, as in Crivelli's Camerino *Annunciation*, the rays left by the dove on its passage demonstrate unequivocally that it has entered this space by passing through this barred window. Evidently, the barred window, impenetrable to man but presenting no barrier to God and his emissary, functions in an analogous manner to the archway in Botticelli's fresco, allowing Lippi and Crivelli to create easily apprehensible architectural metaphors for the supernatural impregnation of Mary. Why then did Crivelli not adopt the same metaphor for his Ascoli altarpiece, which, in its essentials, is broadly similar to his Camerino panel? Most obviously, the use of a miraculous opening renders the architectural metaphor literally more concrete, emphasising the supernatural nature of the Holy Spirit's entry into Mary. Perhaps too, it is designed to demonstrate that Mary's house, like Mary herself, was pre-destined to receive the Holy Spirit, created from the start with the intention of housing Christ incarnate.

If we accept that Botticelli and Lippi, in common with many painters, used their architectural settings to create metaphors, we must ask what advantages this mode of presentation carried with it? Firstly, like all successful analogies, it translates a mystical concept outside everyday experience into one that is firmly within it, substituting the ethereal with the concrete. In the case of Lippi's fresco and Crivelli's Camerino *Annunciation*, the Holy Spirit's paradoxically easy passage through the barred window

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<sup>112</sup> On the Camerino polyptych see P. Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, Nardini Editore, Florence, 1986, pp. 279-280. On the *Annunciation* in particular see R. Lightbown, 2004, pp. 294-296.

creates a striking and memorable figure. It is not too fanciful, perhaps, to imagine a priest, expounding upon the mysteries of the Annunciation in a sermon in Spoleto's Duomo, referring to Lippi's prominently positioned fresco for aid in explaining in understandable terms the supernatural impregnation of Mary. Secondly, as an analogy it operates within architectural terms already established by exegetical commentary upon Mary, who was often figured as an architectural structure.<sup>113</sup> In St Augustine's sermons, for example, we are told that:

"Furthermore, if faith believes that God was born in the flesh, it does not doubt that two miracles are possible to God, namely that though the doors of the house were closed, He manifested His mature body to those within the house, and that as an infant He came forth, a spouse from His bride-chamber, that is from the virginal womb, leaving his mother's integrity inviolate."<sup>114</sup>

Here, in an interesting variation upon notions of Mary as tabernacle of the Lord (discussed at greater length in Chapter 3), we see Mary explicitly architecturally figured, in this case as a bridal chamber. We have already seen how by this period Mary was closely associated with the porch of the gate in Ezekiel's description of the temple. Given that Mary was thus already figured as a porch accessible only to the Lord, using the penetration of an architectural space as a metaphor can be viewed as adapting this association for pictorial depiction. Finally, it offered a means of expressing an unflinchingly intimate physical concept in a decorous manner. After all, if painters were reluctant even to follow the aural explanation of Jesus' incarnation to its logical conclusion by allowing the dove to touch Mary's ear,<sup>115</sup> it is inconceivable that they would have resorted to a bodily means of depicting this moment of supernatural penetration. Indeed, a bodily depiction would, if anything, have detracted from the purity of Jesus' conception, which of course

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<sup>113</sup> An interesting example of this is provided by the *De Laudibus Beatae Mariae Virginis* (previously attributed to Albertus Magnus but now given to another as yet unknown author), Book 10 of which gives an extensive list of edifices prefiguring the Virgin's body, see Anonymous, 1651, Book 10. See also G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 180-182.

<sup>114</sup> St Augustine, *Sermons on the Liturgical Seasons*, S.M. Muldowney (trans.), Fathers of the Church, New York, 1959, p. 29.

<sup>115</sup> L. Steinberg, 1987, p. 32.

left no physical trace.

### **Sight to Insight: The Spectator**

Discussing the work of Joachim Patinir, a Flemish painter noted particularly for landscape works replete with significant details, Falkenburg described how the process of encountering these paintings might be understood as a move from “sight to insight...”<sup>116</sup> In other words, a spectator in front of one of Patinir’s works performs a visual journey from their initial visual appraisal to an in-depth exploration which discovers a number of details, details which in turn increase their comprehension. Thus in Patinir’s *Landscape with St Jerome* (c. 1519) in the Prado (Fig. 26), the eye can trace a journey that, starting with the figure of the saint in the foreground, then follows a narrow path behind the saint to a rocky promontory, where significant episodes from the end of his life are depicted.<sup>117</sup> The word insight is carefully employed by Falkenburg here, as its precise meaning is the gaining of understanding through penetration, in this case visual. In an analysis of Crivelli’s *Annunciation* (Fig. 24), Randolph highlights a number of visual penetrations within the work, most notably the *tromp l’oeil* vegetables grouped invitingly in the very foreground of the work, which seemingly break the boundary between the pictorial field and the spectator’s realm and in the process serve to invite us in.<sup>118</sup> Arasse described a similar process of visual exploration built around the use of perspective, suggesting that recession of single point perspective into the picture might be called an axis of enunciation or elaboration, in contrast to an axis of annunciation which runs from Gabriel to Mary parallel to the picture.<sup>119</sup> Before Arasse, as we have seen, Georges Didi-Huberman had already highlighted a number of examples where following the recession of perspective led the viewer to a significant figure such as the *porta clausa*.

This notion of visual exploration leading to intellectual and spiritual

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<sup>116</sup> R. Falkenburg, ‘The Devil is in the Detail: Ways of Seeing Joachim Patinir’s ‘World Landscapes’” in *Patinir: Essays and Critical Catalogue*. A. Bergara (ed.), Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, 2007, p. 67.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

<sup>118</sup> A. Randolph, 2007, pp. 22-24.

<sup>119</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 25.

understanding recalls that described by Saint Augustine in his discussion of a triad of vision: corporeal, spiritual and intellectual. He wrote:

“But love can neither be seen in its own essence with the eyes of the body nor can it be thought of in the spirit by means of an image like the body; but only in the mind, that is in the intellect, can it be known and perceived. Corporeal vision indeed does not oversee any operations of the other two kinds of vision; rather the object perceived by it is announced to the spiritual vision, which acts as an overseer...And so, after the eyes have taken their object in and announced it to the spirit, in order that an image of it may be produced there, then, if it is symbolic of something, its meaning is either immediately understood by the intellect or sought out...”<sup>120</sup>

The idea of the eye seeking out something that in turn allows a spiritual understanding, with the eyes taking it in before the intellect either understands or seeks to understand, seems precisely that encouraged by the funneling perspectives leading to significant elements described by Didi-Huberman and Arasse.

All the concepts discussed in the previous sections of this chapter have in common the explication of various important elements in the Annunciation narrative, for example the Incarnation, through the use of carefully constructed architectural settings. These settings can therefore be understood as enabling understanding, both through demonstration and by allowing visual access. If we return, for instance, to the discussion of the open porch, we recall that this was a structure that as well as allowing a full visual interplay between Gabriel, Mary and the viewer, also carried within its form references to Ezekiel’s porch and the ever closed gate, symbolic of Mary’s perpetual virginity. This final section, however, will move beyond this to consider the boundaries of this visual access and their significance for a spectator.

Saint Bonaventure (c. 1221-1254), the Franciscan theologian and Minister General, built upon Augustine’s triad of vision in his *Journey of the Soul to God*, leavening it with a rich sense of the mystical. In this work, he describes how the believer may journey closer to God, passing through the

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<sup>120</sup> Saint Augustine, *The Essential Augustine*, V. Bourke (trans. and ed.), Hackett Publishing, New York, 1974, p. 96.

physical to the metaphysical, the realm of the eternal:

“Now, among things, several are vestiges of God, outside of your imagination; several are of the body, others spiritual: several are temporal, others immortal; and, therefore, some are outside of you, others instead are within you. It follows that, if you want to reach consideration of the first Principle, that which is pure spirit, eternal and transcendent, it is necessary that you first pass through consideration of those remnants/remains that are of the body, temporal and external, by that means to be conducted upon the road to God.”<sup>121</sup>

Bonaventure describes a progression similar to that advocated by Augustine, with bodily vision acting as a necessary precursor to intellectual understanding, except that the end goal for Bonaventure is a more numinous one, perhaps one felt more than understood. The section that follows will examine architecture’s role in encouraging precisely this kind of journey, creating limits to a spectator’s visual access that move a spectator from looking to meditating both upon the limits of their understanding, and, in turn, to a consideration of the mysterious and transcendent ideas that lie at the heart of the Annunciation, akin to those elements described by Bonaventure as “pure spirit”.

Before considering the works themselves, it will be useful to discuss their architectural situation in order to place the visual access to these works in a broader physical context. Compared with a subject such as the Coronation or Assumption of the Virgin, altarpieces of the Annunciation were very rarely found in the most prominent positions within a church, such as the high altar, with the exception of examples such as Fra Angelico’s Cortona *Annunciation*, which was painted for the high altar of San Domenico in Cortona. Instead, altarpieces of the Annunciation were usually to be found in

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<sup>121</sup> Bonaventura da Bagnoregio, *Itinerario dell’anima a Dio*, L. Mauro (trans. and ed.), Rusconi, Milan, 1985: “Ora, tra le cose, alcune sono vestigio di Dio, altre sua imagine; alcune sono corporee, altre spirituali; alcune sono temporali, altre sono immortali; e, pertanto, alcune sono fuori di noi, altre invece in noi. Di conseguenza, se vogliamo pervenire alla considerazione del primo Principio, che è puro spirito, eterno e trascendente, è necessario che passiamo prima attraverso la considerazione delle sue vestigia che sono corporee, temporali ed esterno, e questo significa essere condotti sulla via di Dio.”

side chapels, in small oratories, or within the private spaces of a monastery or convent, as well as in the private space of the home.<sup>122</sup> An example of this is provided by Lorenzo Monaco's *Annunciation* (Fig. 8), painted for the altar of the Bartolini-Salimbeni Chapel in Santa Trinita, where it remains. Frescoed with scenes from the Life of the Virgin, also by Lorenzo Monaco, the chapel is situated on the right hand side of the church. It still has its original *cancello* (possibly made by the Pistoese Manfredo di Franco), an iron grille, which ran across the entrances to many private chapels in order to prevent public access, while the altarpiece remains in its original position upon the altar of the chapel (Fig. 27).<sup>123</sup> Because of this unaltered state, the chapel is very useful in trying to reconstruct how such Annunciations would originally have been experienced, showing that in these cases there were two levels of viewing. The first, by an ordinary worshipper, consisted of a glimpse of the altarpiece through the *cancello* from the nave, while the second, more privileged, unencumbered view of the altarpiece would have been granted only to those who had access to the chapel, in this case the Vallombrosan friars of Santa Trinita and the members of the Bartolini-Salimbeni family.

A more unusual example is provided by the miraculous fresco of the *Annunciation* in Santissima Annunziata. This work, like that of Lorenzo Monaco, is still housed in its original position, just to the right of the main door on the counter façade. When it was originally painted, there was no tabernacle as there is now, meaning that the fresco could be freely accessed.<sup>124</sup> The late fourteenth-century copy of the fresco in the same position in Santa Maria Novella, to which access is still unrestricted, gives a good idea of how accessible this fresco might have been when first painted. In the 1450's, however, as the fame of the miracle working image continued to grow, Piero de Medici, who was by then patron of the chapel, decided to commission an ornate tabernacle from Michelozzo, which was consecrated in

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<sup>122</sup> For example, Annabel Thomas has noted that images of the Annunciation are often found in the private spaces of the nun's choir, see A. Thomas, *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space and the Religious Woman's Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 79.

<sup>123</sup> M. Eisenberg, 1989 p. 38.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 110.



Easter 1452 (Fig. 28).<sup>125</sup> The tabernacle still entirely surrounds the image, its weighty fluted Corinthian columns and richly coffered ceiling surmounted by a large and richly decorated cornice, providing a formidable architectural surround, particularly when compared to the Santa Maria Novella work. A balustrade built at the same time as the tabernacle by Maso di Bartolomeo, consisting of ornate corded metalwork topped by a heavy marble banister, entirely encases the work, making access to the inner sanctum impossible except through a small gateway placed directly in front of the image.<sup>126</sup> All of these architectural additions, and the fact that a curtain (swept aside only on certain holy days) now protected the image contrived to restrict physical and visual access to the *Annunziata Annunciation*. Both this and Monaco's *Annunciation* illustrate that physical and visual access to these images was not uniformly available. Instead, the act of insight, or of understanding through visual penetration, was often anticipated by some form of physical entry to a restricted space.

Some idea of how this restricted access might have resonated within the architecture of an image is provided by Signorelli's *Annunciation* (Fig. 13), painted in 1490 for the Confraternità della Nostra Donna in Volterra, whose oratory was attached to Volterra's Duomo.<sup>127</sup> The *Annunciation* originally stood on the high altar of this oratory, and was only removed in the late eighteenth century.<sup>128</sup> The painting's position within an oratory meant that admission to it would most likely have been restricted to members of the *confraternità*, in much the same manner as access to Monaco's *Annunciation* would only have been granted to the Bartolini-Salimbeni and the Vallombrosan monks. As a result, even before visually encountering Mary within her loggia, a viewer would already have penetrated the small, semi-private space of the oratory itself. In doing so they would have passed through the stone frame of the door to the oratory, which includes the inscription "AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA" (Fig. 29). The painting would have been visible at

<sup>125</sup> On the Annunziata tabernacle see M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, 1984, pp. 231-234 and T. Verdon, "Michelozzo e lo Spazio della Preghiera: Il 'Tempietto' della Santissima Annunziata", in *Michelozzo: Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, G. Morelli (ed.), Centro di, Florence, 1996

<sup>126</sup> L. Gnocchi, "Le preferenze artistiche di Piero di Cosimo de' Medici", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 9, No. 18 (1988), pp. 41-78, pp. 17-49.

<sup>127</sup> L. Kanter and T. Henry, 2002, p. 27, see also, T. Henry, 2012, p. 105.

<sup>128</sup> T. Henry, 2012, pp. 105-7.

the end of the oratory, making it clear – in combination with the inscription - to a member of the confraternity that they were about to enter a space particularly associated with the Annunciation and setting up their approach to the work itself. These parallels between the physical entry to the oratory and the visual entry to Mary's loggia are heightened by the architectural similarities between the two spaces. As Henry notes, the vaulting of Mary's loggia seems to explicitly recall the vaulting within the oratory, although it is unlikely that the oratory's vaults were ever painted gold and blue like those within the picture.<sup>129</sup> In addition, the long, narrow form of Mary's space, and the arched openings down its left hand side, mirror the long, thin shape of the oratory and its three windows on the left side, an association highlighted by the fact that the light direction in the oratory is the same as that within the painting. Parallels are undoubtedly being drawn between the secluded, sacred space of the loggia and the oratory, but it is worth noting that Signorelli has positioned the viewer outside of Mary's space, as if to signal that despite these architectural affinities there is still a limit to how much access the spectator is allowed. Indeed, with the important exception of those Annunciations by Filippo Lippi and Botticelli which set the episode within Mary's *camera* or another interior space, it is crucial to note that very often, as in Signorelli's work, the position of the spectator in relation to the principal building is from the outside looking in. Once again the open yet closed architectonic characteristics of the porch or corner loggia prove useful for a painter, allowing them to grant the viewer optical access while at the same time placing their viewpoint emphatically outside an enclosed space.

Significantly, the optical ingress granted in Signorelli's work has its limits. At the back of Mary's loggia, there is a half open wooden door partially visible behind the figure of Mary, which leads in turn onto an unfathomable darkness. In this case, we are not talking so much about a door that is fully closed or fully open, the symbolism of which – the *porta clausa* or *porta coeli* – has been discussed at length.<sup>130</sup> This is instead a door that seems to hint at the possibility of visual access, before denying it. In Didi-Huberman's words "Consider, finally, the doors and windows we find everywhere half-closed, and

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<sup>129</sup> T. Henry, 1998, p. 475.

<sup>130</sup> See, for example, S. Edgerton, 1977, p. 119, p. 125, p. 127.

to which an entire book ought to be devoted. We have the impression that the painters are constantly challenging with one detail what one detail tends to affirm: every sign of opening corresponds to a closing..."<sup>131</sup> In an article on the connections between Duccio and Dante's descriptive approaches, Gervase Rosser focused upon the motif of the half open door in the narrative panels of Christ's Life on Duccio's *Maestà* (1311). For Rosser, the black spaces beyond these doors are a comment upon the limits of naturalism in depicting mysterious and otherworldly religious subjects, whose core meaning "inevitably lies beyond all possibility of material depiction."<sup>132</sup> The doors and their impenetrable beyonds thus act as symbols of all that is ultimately indescribable, and perhaps even ultimately unknowable; in Rosser's words "It is as though, like certain spiritual writers, Duccio had recourse to a negative theology: the divine being not of this world, it can be represented only as an absence."<sup>133</sup> Rosser does not specifically mention the *Annunciation* in the predella of the *Maesta* (Fig. 6), which also has an enigmatic half-open door, but clearly his hypothesis would apply equally well. After all, what could be more ultimately inexplicable than the miraculous incarnation of Jesus?

Indeed, it is surely plausible that one reason behind Signorelli's suggestively impenetrable doorway is precisely that which may have motivated Duccio, the depiction of the undepictable. Furthermore, it may be possible that a similar motivation underlies not just Didi-Huberman's half opened doors, but also the numerous glimpsed spaces seen in Annunciations of this period. In Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (Fig. 30), now in the Martelli Chapel in San Lorenzo, Florence, two openings are visible at the extreme left and right hand sides of the work.<sup>134</sup> The right hand one, more visible because the light falls upon it, seems to be some kind of vaulted space, with what may be a doorway leading off to the right.<sup>135</sup> In fact, all we can say with any real certainty about this space is that it allows us to confirm that the principal

<sup>131</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 137.

<sup>132</sup> G. Rosser, 2012, p. 490.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 194.

<sup>134</sup> On this work see M. Pittaluga, *Filippo Lippi*, Turco Editore, Florence, 1949, p. 50, F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Filippo Lippi's San Lorenzo *Annunciation*", *Storia dell'Arte*, Vol. 69 (May – Aug., 1969), pp. 155-164, J. Ruda, 1993, pp. 115-123 and Cat. 22a, pp. 399-403, and M. Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 113-124.

<sup>135</sup> On the "rood screen" in the Le Murate work see Chapter 3.

chamber within the work is not isolated, that the building continues beyond what is visible. This impression is corroborated by the glimpse we are given of the outside flank of a building on the right, which presumably corresponds to the spaces implied by the opening on the right. Interestingly, this evocation of spaces lying beyond is very similar to that in Giusto da Menabuoi's *Annunciation* (c. 1375) (Fig. 31), painted for Padua's Baptistery. In this work, as in Lippi's, we can just see slivers of architectural spaces at the far right and left, including the very cryptic beginnings of a staircase on the right hand side. We know that Lippi spent time in Padua, making it possible to argue that Lippi derived the motif of these twinned glimpsed spaces from Menabuoi.<sup>136</sup> Regardless of its source, the important fact remains that Lippi's fictive architecture indicates, but never reveals, that there is much more to this structure than we can see. This is arguably enough, however, to create the notion in the viewer's mind that there *is* more to be seen, more to be known of this structure than they are being shown. Arguably, these glimpses of architecture in Lippi's works and the glimpsed space beyond the closed door in Signorelli's *Annunciation* serve a dual purpose, encouraging on the one hand exploration and contemplation of the scene, much in the same way as the funneling perspective of Domenico Veneziano et al did. However, at the same time, as Rosser's analysis begins to indicate, our fragmentary knowledge of these glimpsed spaces provides a possible metaphor for the impossibility of totally understanding - and indeed of totally depicting - an episode as mysterious as the Annunciation. There is, in the end, a limit to our insight.

## Conclusion

Access was at the very heart of the Annunciation, both narratively and theologically. As we have seen, architecture was a crucial tool for painters when expressing, describing and elucidating this concept. First and foremost it allowed them to establish a space to be accessed, a space that was clearly circumscribed and reserved exclusively for Mary. This space very often took

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<sup>136</sup> On Lippi's time in Padua and its possible influence on his work see E. Rowlands, "Filippo Lippi and His Experience of Painting in the Veneto Region", *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 10, No. 19 (1989), pp. 53-83.

the form of a porch or corner loggia. These were architectural forms that had a number of compositional benefits, as well as a variety of metaphorical and exegetical meanings. Open on two sides, the porch was an economical and naturalistic visual solution, allowing Gabriel to see and address Mary while allowing the viewer to see both of them. Despite this visual porousness, it was also a clearly circumscribed space, creating a protected zone within the architectural environment reserved exclusively for Mary. This was in turn a succinct metaphor in stone for Mary's eternally inviolate status, especially when the building of which the porch was part was itself surrounded by high walls to provide yet further protection for Mary. Finally, there was the exegetical association between Mary and the porch of the gate of the temple described by Ezekiel, through which only Christ could enter, which gave the porch's use in Annunciations a deeper iconographical significance.

With this space established, painters could then use it to describe three types distinct but related types of access. The first was mechanical and focused upon the physical act of Gabriel's entry. By using architectural boundaries, painters could create a sense of an event captured *in media res*, placing Gabriel in the midst of an arch to give a sense that he was in the act of entering. Simultaneously, these thresholds could also indicate the limits of Gabriel's access, keeping him outside Mary's space to reinforce the notion of its inviolability. The image of Mary remaining protected from the world beyond her home also chimed with contemporary expectations of the ideal conduct of young women, with Mary's actions at the moment of Annunciation being used by writers and preachers to teach young women what was required of them. Secondly, there was the miraculous entry of the Holy Spirit, which unlike Gabriel was shown penetrating easily into the very heart of Mary's space. In this manner, painters created clear and decorous metaphors for the miraculous entry of the Holy Spirit, which left Mary pregnant but untouched. Finally, by creating easily apprehensible architectural means of understanding these two types of access, painters also gave a viewer the possibility of a third type of access, that of insight or understanding by visual entering and exploring an image. Concurrently, painters were also able to create architectural metaphors for the impossibility of fully comprehending an event as sacred and mysterious as the Annunciation, using half-open doors and

glimpsed spaces to create limits to a viewer's visual access that mirrored the limits of their understanding.

## Chapter Two Mary's House

### Introduction

The principal writings on the Annunciation agreed that it took place within a house, more specifically within Mary's house or within the house of her parents (it is sometimes unclear which).<sup>137</sup> Saint Ambrose (c. 340-397), Bishop of Milan, described in his commentary on Luke how the angel found Mary "all alone in her secret rooms..."<sup>138</sup> The early apocryphal gospels, the *Protoevangelium of James* and the *Gospel of Pseudo Matthew*, both place Mary in her/her parents' house at the time of the angel's visit. According to the *Protoevangelium*: "And, trembling, she went to her house and put down the pitcher and took the purple and sat down on her seat and drew out the thread. And behold an angel of the Lord stood before her..."<sup>139</sup>, while Jacobus de Voragine's *Legenda Aurea* described how just before Gabriel arrived: "Mary returned to her parent's house in Nazareth", implying that this was where she received the angel.<sup>140</sup> Perhaps the most specific account of them all was that in the late thirteenth-century Franciscan text *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. In this it was stated that, having received his mission from God, "Then he [Gabriel] arose cheerfully and gaily and flew down from heaven and in a minute stood in human form before the Virgin, who was in a room of her little house."<sup>141</sup> This was as precise architecturally, ("little house", "in a room") as accounts of the Annunciation got.

Not all accounts agreed, however, that the Annunciation had taken place in a house. The theologian Saint Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence from 1446 until his death in 1459, attempted in his *Summa Theologica* to pinpoint exactly where and at what time of day the event had taken place – "in

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<sup>137</sup> G. Prampolini, *L'Annunciazione nei pittori primitivi Italiani*, Ulrico Hoepli, 1939, p. 2.

<sup>138</sup> Sant' Ambrogio, *Esposizione del Vangelo secondo Luca*, G. Coppa (trans. and ed.), Città Nuova, Rome, 1978, p. 153: "tutta sola nelle sue stanze segrete..."

<sup>139</sup> *The Apocryphal New Testament*, 1993, p. 61.

<sup>140</sup> J. de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, G.P. Maggioni (ed.), Edizioni del Galluzzo, Florence, 1998, p. 327: "ipsa vero in Nazareth in domum parentum rediit." For the translation see J. de Voragine, 1993, p. 197.

<sup>141</sup> J. de Caulibus, *Meditaciones Vite Christi*, M. Stallings-Taney (ed.), Turnhout, Brepols, 1997, p. 20: "Surgen igitur Gabriel iucundus et gaudens volitavit ab alto, et in humana specie in momento coram vergine, in thalamo domuncule sue manente". For the translation see *Meditations*, 1961, p. 16.

which place it [the message of God] was sent...”<sup>142</sup> He concluded first that it must have occurred at dawn, as the rays of a new sun were a suitable allegory for the coming of Christ, and that Mary must have received Gabriel in a private sacred place, in other words a temple or, more specifically, the Temple of Ezekiel described in the Old Testament.<sup>143</sup> Antoninus’ learned interpretation aside, the sources discussed above make it clear that by the fourteenth century the Annunciation was considered to have occurred inside a house of some kind.

Although the textual sources agreed that the Annunciation had taken place in a house, this still left painters with an important question, made more difficult by the absence of detailed architectural descriptions in the texts; what sort of house should Mary have? This was especially important because the house of Mary had the potential to add much to a work, not only compositionally (as described in Chapter 1) but also, as we shall see, narratively, shedding light on Mary’s status through her surroundings as well as enriching the work aesthetically. This chapter will first analyse the development of Mary’s house from the late thirteenth century to the mid-fifteenth century, seeking to establish the iconographical and stylistic precedents for its depiction in the second half of the fifteenth century. This is of particular importance with regard to the depiction of the Annunciation, whose basic composition (most importantly in this context always placing Mary inside or near a structure) continues to follow models established in the trecento right through the quattrocento. Following this, it will then examine the impact of the adoption of a system of one-point perspective on the depiction of Mary’s house in the first half of the quattrocento, examining the effect this had in terms of the scale and detail of pictorial conceptions of the house. Having discussed the establishment of these iconographical and practical foundations in the trecento and first half of the quattrocento, it will then analyse a number of works from the second half of the quattrocento in which they were employed. This was a period when painters described Mary’s house in an unprecedented level of detail, allowing a thorough examination of

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<sup>142</sup> “In quo loco missus est...” Sancti Antonini, *Summa Theologica*, Vol. 4, Akademische Druck - U. Verlagsanstalt, Graz, 1959, cap. 9, col. 465.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, cap. 9, cols. 965-972 and S. Edgerton, 1977, pp. 118-120.



how Mary's house was conceived architecturally in this period, the messages it conveyed about Mary and her status, and the logic behind these choices in terms established by contemporary social, architectural and pictorial theory. Ultimately, it will be demonstrated that although the forms taken by Mary's house change dramatically over time, its essentially palatial and honorific character does not.

### **A Throne for the Virgin: The Origins of Mary's House**

Thirteenth-century painters and mosaicists followed Byzantine precedent for their Annunciations, placing Mary in front of a building or on a throne while Gabriel approached from the left.<sup>144</sup> In Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Annunciation* (c. 1260) (Fig. 32), part of his monumental *Madonna* from Santa Maria Maggiore, Florence, Mary stands in front of a tall tower with two small windows, only just wider and taller than her.<sup>145</sup> A similar composition can be seen in Guido da Siena's *Annunciation* (c. 1275) (Fig. 33), a predella from his *Dossale di Badia Ardegnà*, where Mary is once more shown in front of a tower.<sup>146</sup> Whether the towers in these panels are, in fact, Mary's house is unclear, although given the strong visual link between the figure of Mary and the tower it is certainly possible.<sup>147</sup> She is not, however, inside these structures, although because of their visual association they do undoubtedly frame and support her. A different approach can be seen in the *Annunciation* mosaic in Florence's Baptistery (Fig. 34), in which Mary is seated on or

<sup>144</sup> Ciatti discusses the Byzantine model and its impact upon Coppo di Marcovaldo's *Annunciation* in his Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece, see M. Ciatti, "L'immagine antica: problemi e risultati", in *L'Immagine Antica: La Madonna col Bambino di Santa Maria Maggiore*, M. Ciatti and C. Frosinini (eds.), Edifir, Florence, 2002. See also D. Robb, 1936, pp. 482-483.

<sup>145</sup> On the Santa Maria Maggiore altarpiece see J. Gardner, "'Sanctae Dei Genetricis imago [...] reverenter compacta et sanctorum reliquiis cavato loco insignita'. The altarpiece in Santa Maria Maggiore", in *L'Immagine Antica: La Madonna col Bambino di Santa Maria Maggiore*, M. Ciatti and C. Frosinini (eds.), Edifir, Florence, 2002.

<sup>146</sup> On this work see J. Stubblebine, *Guido da Siena*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1964, p. 13 and p. 45, and N. Muller, "Guido da Siena's *Annunciation* in Context", *Record: Princeton University Art Museum*, Vol. 63 (2004), pp. 29-41.

<sup>147</sup> This tower may be intended to refer to contemporary Tuscan tower-houses, used by the elites as residences in the often violent cities, which would make a fittingly elite residence for Mary.

standing in front of a throne.<sup>148</sup> Although undoubtedly a throne, this structure can also be read as house, as there are small window-like openings in its upper part, and it has a tiled roof.<sup>149</sup> The designer of the mosaic has created a “throne-house” for Mary, a structure which, unlike Coppo or Guido da Siena’s *Annunciations*, is not in the background but instead actually houses Mary.<sup>150</sup>

In *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, Panofsky traced the origins of the “box-like” buildings in the works of Duccio and Giotto to the aedicules that contained Gothic statuary.<sup>151</sup> In some senses, the aedicule (literally translated as “little house/building”) represents a house reduced to its bare essentials, shelter and enclosure. In a similar manner, Coppo’s seat indicates its nature through the act of enclosure and framing (although less clearly than in Cavallini’s *Annunciation* (Fig. 10), and, in particular, by the inclusion of elements (the roof, the small windows) that clearly signify its status as house as well as throne. Although the practice of architecturally conflating house and throne was superseded by the Giottoesque model from the 1310s on (discussed below), in the 1330s Taddeo Gaddi revived it and took it to its logical conclusion. In his *Annunciation* in the Baroncelli chapel (Fig. 35),<sup>152</sup> the seat section of the throne has been transformed into a loggia with a coffered ceiling, open on three sides, while the upper section is more three-dimensional, with a series of four elegant monofore windows and a projecting cornice. Gaddi’s debt to the house-throne is even more apparent in his Fiesole panel *Annunciation* (c. 1337) (Fig. 36).<sup>153</sup> In this, a strongly projecting roof supported by console brackets covers Mary’s throne, above which an “upper storey” with two monofore windows and a simplified entablature is

<sup>148</sup> On the vault mosaics see A. M. Giusti, “I mosaici della cupola”, in *Il Battistero di San Giovanni a Firenze*, A. Paolucci (ed.), Franco Cosimo Panini, Florence, 1994. As Giusti notes (p. 281) the attribution of these mosaics is considerably complicated by the loss of records pertaining to their commission. Various names have been advanced, most prominently Cimabue, Jacopo Torriti and Coppo di Marcovaldo, but this is impossible to verify (see Giusti pp. 281-287).

<sup>149</sup> P. Rubin, 2007, p. 196.

<sup>150</sup> A similar structure, part throne, part house can be seen in the near contemporary *Annunciation* (1297) (Fig. 7) by Cavallini in Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome.

<sup>151</sup> E. Panofsky, *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, C. Wood (trans.), Zone Books, New York, 1991, pp. 52-54.

<sup>152</sup> On the Baroncelli Chapel see J. Gardner, “The Decoration of the Baroncelli Chapel in Santa Croce”, *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 34 Bd., H. 2 (1971), pp. 89-114 and A. Ladis, *Taddeo Gaddi: Critical Reappraisal and Catalogue Raisonné*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia and London, 1982, pp. 22-34 and Cat. 4, pp. 88-113.

<sup>153</sup> On the Fiesole panel see A. Ladis, 1982, p. 53 and Cat. 16, p. 155.

visible. Mary's throne has become a structure much closer to a "house", while retaining its essential characteristics as a seat designed to honour and elevate Mary. These honorific characteristics, highlighted here by the visual slippage between house and throne, remained an important determinant of the form taken by Mary's house throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. In some senses, Mary's house never stopped being a throne, rhetorically if not formally, continuing to provide an architectural indication of her importance and holiness throughout the fifteenth century.

### **The Development of Mary's House in the Fourteenth Century**

Possibly the first true house in an Annunciation (in the sense of a structure that fully encloses Mary within an interior space), is that created by Giotto for his *Annunciation* in the Arena Chapel in Padua (1305) (Fig. 37).<sup>154</sup> Mary kneels at a small desk, framed by a large opening. Small barred windows flank this opening, above which are strongly projecting enclosed balconies with gothic bifore windows. A simplified entablature, consisting of a blank frieze sandwiched between two stringcourses, serves to tie these balconies to the central opening. Interestingly, although this house seems to represent a departure from the thrones discussed above, it contains within its architecture subtle links to Mary's seat in Cavallini's *Annunciation* (Fig. 10). These links are particularly apparent when comparing the upper sections of the two structures. Despite their stylistic differences, both have a u-shape, formed by projecting balconies and loggias, and both share the simplified entablature tying this "u" together. Roman influences on Giotto's art have long been noted, including specifically architectural references.<sup>155</sup> It is entirely possible that, seeking a solution for Mary's house, Giotto turned to Roman

<sup>154</sup> The literature on the Arena Chapel is extensive, for the *Annunciation* specifically see particularly L. Jacobus, "Giotto's *Annunciation* in the Arena Chapel, Padua", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 81, No. 1 (Mar., 1999), pp. 93-107 and A. Ladis, *Giotto's O: Narrative, Figuration and Pictorial Ingenuity in the Arena Chapel*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, Pennsylvania, 2008, pp. 155-159.

<sup>155</sup> White noted the strong similarity between the temple in Giotto's *Expulsion of Joachim* and the cosmatesque choir enclosure of San Clemente, Rome, see J. White, "Giotto's use of Architecture in 'The Expulsion of Joachim' and 'The Entry into Jerusalem' at Padua", in *The Arena Chapel and the Genius of Giotto*, A. Ladis (ed.), Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1998, p. 190; Benelli describes how Giotto (?) replaced the frieze on Santa Maria sopra Minerva, Assisi, with a cosmatesque architrave similar to those found on San Paolo fuori le Mura and San Giovanni in Laterano, in his depiction of the church in *The Homage of a Simple Man*, see F. Benelli, 2012, p. 45.

precedents, enlarging Mary's throne into something a step closer to a "house", while preserving architectonic and honourific elements from Cavallini's structure. One of the principal differences between Cavallini's "throne" and Giotto's "house", however, is Giotto's use of light and shade to create a sense of a true interior, with the spaces behind Mary enveloped in shadow to give a sense of depth.

Arguably, however, it was not the house in Giotto's *Annunciation* that was to prove most influential but that found in his *Annunciation to Anne* (Fig. 38) (seen again in the *Birth of the Virgin*).<sup>156</sup> This consists of one room with a wooden coffered ceiling, with a bed, chest and bench partly screened by a white curtain at the rear of the space. The angel bursts through a round arched window on the left, while Anne kneels in the center of the building. An *all'antica* vegetal frieze runs around the exterior, surmounted by triangular pediments, the foremost ornamented with a low-relief sculpture of God in a scallop shell supported by *putti*. The only addition to this restrained, geometrical box is the external staircase leading to a platform with a balustrade, underneath which a woman sits winding wool, leaning towards the door as if intrigued by the events within. The lack of a façade, removed to allow unimpeded visual access to the interior, led Bellosi and following him Benelli to describe this type of structure as a "dolls-house" (*casa-di-bambola*).<sup>157</sup> Even though Benelli does write that the "dolls-house" is "something resembling a real building, made of proper walls, windows and a roof",<sup>158</sup> the use of this problematically value-laden term seems to confer an ephemerality upon this house and its followers, characteristics that are unlikely to have been uppermost in painters' minds.

Elsewhere in the Arena cycle, Giotto's architectural approach was often predicated upon reducing a building to its essentials, concentrating a structure upon one significant detail. In three scenes, *The Bringing of the Rods to the*

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<sup>156</sup> Jacobus contrasts the two structures, arguing that while that in the *Annunciation* is "schematic", the building in the *Annunciation to Anne* demonstrates a measure of "social realism" with its depiction of a recognizable domestic interior, see L. Jacobus, 1999, pp. 96-97. See also Benelli, who describes the architecture of the house in this work, highlighting its classicizing elements, in particular the pediment and the *all'antica* frieze, F. Benelli, 2012, pp. 84-86.

<sup>157</sup> L. Bellosi, *La pecora di Giotto*, Einaudi, Turin, 1985, p. 89, and F. Benelli, 2012, p. 82.

<sup>158</sup> F. Benelli, 2012, p. 82.

*Temple* (Fig. 39), *The Suitors Praying*, and *The Marriage of the Virgin*, the temple of Jerusalem is depicted as an open apse. Two smaller spaces, approximately 2/3 the height of the apse, open off each side, each containing miniature versions of the hemicircular blue tiled apse. The result is a building that resembles a simplified cross section of the east end of a basilica-plan church, such as San Clemente, Santa Maria in Trastevere, or Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome (Fig. 40).<sup>159</sup> Giotto signals that this building is a church by including the apse, and the nascent side aisles, economically signifying its ecclesiastical nature through the use of the most easily apprehensible architectural forms.<sup>160</sup>

It is clear that a similar process of reduction is at work in the *Annunciation to Anne*. Giotto condenses the house to one room, employing the bed, chest and bench to establish the domestic character of the structure. This is undoubtedly an architectural simplification, but not one that results from naivety, as the term “dolls-house” implies. Giotto was entirely capable of producing more “fully realised” buildings, as the extraordinary temple in the *Massacre of the Innocents* and the model of the Arena Chapel in the *Last Judgment* (Fig. 41) demonstrate. That he, and the others who followed him, chose not to do so is arguably because their primary aim was not the rendering of architectural portraits, but the creation of structures whose sole purpose was to serve the picture compositionally, rhetorically and narratively.

One of those to follow Giotto was Lippo Memmi, whose *Annunciation* (c. 1335-1345) (Fig. 42) in the Collegiata di San Gimignano takes the geometric simplicity of Giotto’s architecture to extremes of restraint.<sup>161</sup> As in the *Annunciation to Anne*, Memmi’s house consists of one room with another

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>160</sup> A. Derbes and M. Sandona, 2008, pp. 107-110.

<sup>161</sup> On Memmi’s *Annunciation* see Delogu Ventroni, S., *Barna da Siena*, Giardini, Pisa, 1972, pp. 26-28. On the cycle as a whole see E. Borsook, *The Mural Painters of Tuscany*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1980, pp. 43-46 and B. Cole, *Sienese Painting: From its Origins to the Fifteenth Century*, Harper and Row, New York, 1980, p. 181. All of the scholars above attribute the cycle to Barna da Siena but as Freuler proved, a painter called Barna almost certainly never existed. His “existence” is instead likely to be the result of a mistranscription by Ghiberti (inherited by Vasari) of Bartolo di Fredi’s signature, attached to the Old Testament cycle opposite Memmi’s frescoes in the Collegiata. In fact, the New Testament cycle is signed “Lipo da Siena pinsi [t]”, which on stylistic grounds must be the signature of Lippo Memmi rather than his contemporary Lippo Vanni. See G. Freuler, “Lippo Memmi’s New Testament Cycle in the Collegiata in San Gimignano”, *Arte Cristiana*, Vol. 74, No. 713 (Mar.-Apr., 1986), pp. 93-102, pp. 93-98.

smaller space attached, where, as in Giotto's work, a woman sits spinning with one ear pressed to the wall.<sup>162</sup> In some ways, however, this is a more complex work than Giotto's. There is a suggestion of greater depth, created by the bed in its screened alcove, while the top of a staircase visible on the right seems to imply that this is the upper storey of a building that extends down beyond what we can see.<sup>163</sup> The type of Annunciation represented by Memmi's work, where Mary and Gabriel are placed within one undivided structure, co-existed with the "traditional" Italian composition, in which Mary sits in a portico while Gabriel approaches from outside.

There was, however, another compositional model, which used the classic divided setup while placing Mary and Gabriel within the interior of a house.<sup>164</sup> An example of this solution is Pietro Lorenzetti's *Annunciation* (c. 1320) (Fig. 7), part of his Tarlati polyptch, which remains in situ in the Pieve of Arezzo.<sup>165</sup> Gabriel kneels in an antechamber, decorated with a coffered ceiling, and a painted (?) frieze. In front of him is a door, placed in the centre of the panel, its composition acting as though it were the central strut of the wooden frame. Together they divide the scene into two in a manner analogous to the division accomplished by the outer column of the portico (discussed in Chapter One). Mary sits on the other side of this division, tightly enclosed in a small room. The room is lavishly decorated, with a frescoed (?) geometric pattern in black and red.<sup>166</sup> The final architectural element is the superstructure above Mary's room. This is not an upper storey (a hole in the roof of Mary's room demonstrates that it is an extension of the space below), but acts as one, recalling the loggias found at the top of fourteenth-century *palazzi*.

<sup>162</sup> As Delogu Ventroni notes, this is a detail that proves the link between the two works. See S. Delogu Ventroni, 1972, p. 27.

<sup>163</sup> Sandstrom describes how this house has a dual existence, as a house within the picture and "as a niche in real space...", see S. Sandstrom, *Levels of Unreality: Studies in Structure and Construction in Italian Mural Painting During the Renaissance*, University of Uppsala Press, Uppsala, 1963, p. 28.

<sup>164</sup> On these two models, see D. Arasse, 1999, pp. 102-107.

<sup>165</sup> On this work see A. Monciatti, "Pietro Lorenzetti" in *Pietro e Ambrogio Lorenzetti*, Frugoni, C. (ed.), Le Lettere, Florence, 2002, pp. 18-25 and G. Freni, "The Aretine Polyptch by Pietro Lorenzetti: Patronage, Iconography and Original Setting", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 63 (2000), pp. 59-110, esp. p. 72 and pp. 79-82 on the *Annunciation*.

<sup>166</sup> On painted non-figurative wall decoration see P. Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400 – 1600*, Weidenfield and Nicholson, London, 1991, pp. 35-39. Examples of trecento wall decoration survive in the Palazzo Davanzati, Florence, some of which is broadly similar to that seen in Lorenzetti's work.

Bernardo Daddi's *Annunciation*, a predella panel from his San Pancrazio Polyptych (Fig. 43), is constructed on the same model as Lorenzetti's work. Mary sits in a tall room, richly ornamented with a cloth of honour, with Gabriel kneeling in a sparse antechamber. The crucial difference between the two works lies in Daddi's addition of a tower-like upper storey to the building. It has a gabled roof, and bifore gothic windows, and continues as an L-shaped upper storey. The origins of Daddi's house appear to lie in the Sienese tradition, specifically in Duccio's *Annunciation of the Death of the Virgin* from the Maesta (1311) (Fig. 44) and in Simone Martini's frescoes in the Capella San Martino in the Lower Church of San Francesco in Assisi (1317-20).<sup>167</sup> In Duccio's panel, Mary sits in an open chamber with a beamed roof, while Gabriel stands in a porch, open on two sides. This combination of an open space, occupying approximately two thirds of the composition, with a narrower porch-type space filling the remains of the work, appears to have been adopted by Simone Martini in two of the scenes in the Capella San Martino, the *Miracle of the Fire* and the *Death of St Martin*.<sup>168</sup> The *Death of St Martin* (Fig. 45) is particularly interesting in relation to Daddi's predella. The scene takes place in a single structure, divided into three sections. On the left, there is a large open chamber with a coffered ceiling and two deep arches visible behind. To the right of this is the second section of the work, a porch, open on three sides, supported by slender pale red marble columns. The final part of the structure is the squat tower, placed immediately above the loggia. Each side of this compact square has two rounded arches, with a simple cornice running around the top.<sup>169</sup> Although it contains many original features, the outlines of Mary's house (the large antechamber, narrow loggia, and squat tower-like upper storey) in Daddi's San Pancrazio predella are undoubtedly similar.

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<sup>167</sup> On the Capella San Martino see J. Brink, "Sts Martin and Francis: Sources and Meaning in Simone Martini's Montefiore Chapel", in *Renaissance Studies in Honour of Craig Hugh Smyth*, E. Borsook, A. Morrogh, F. Gioffredi, and P. Morselli (eds.), Giunti Barbéra, Florence, 1985, A. Garzelli, "Peculiarità di Simone ad Assisi: gli affreschi della Capella di San Martino", in *Simone Martini: atti del convegno*, L. Bellosi (ed.), Centro Di, Florence, 1988, esp. pp. 57-60 on the fictive architecture in the chapel.

<sup>168</sup> Benelli convincingly describes the relationship between Duccio's panel and Martini's fresco, see F. Benelli, 2012, pp. 180-182.

<sup>169</sup> This tower is strikingly reminiscent of the uppermost section of a *campanile*, for example that of the romanesque *campanile* of San Giorgio in Siena (Fig. 46), which also has two arches on each side and a projecting notched cornice.

The influence of the miraculous fresco of the *Annunciation* (Fig. 2) in Santissima Annunziata upon later fourteenth-century Florentine depictions of the subject has often been highlighted.<sup>170</sup> The anonymous painter of this fresco chose to reject a divided composition in favour of a more unified Giottesque solution similar to that adopted by Lippo Memmi. These influences are particularly apparent in the architecture of the house in this work, which is an architecturally simple, geometric box.<sup>171</sup> There is relatively little architectural detail in the fresco, save a door, pierced by the ends of Gabriel's wings, and a small rose-window on the left of the structure. Inside, the room is divided in two lengthways by a partially drawn curtain, in front of which a richly ornamented *lettucio* stretches the width of the room. Although the Annunziata fresco's imitators would adopt the notion of setting the Annunciation in a unified interior they elaborated upon its sparse box-like form in a number of significant ways.

In an *Annunciation* of the 1370s (Fig. 47), commissioned for the counter-facade of the church of San Marco, Florence, Mary and Gabriel are once more contained within the same structure.<sup>172</sup> The painter of this work (Jacopo di Cione?) chose, however, to embellish his work with a number of additional architectural details, which combine to create a house that is both spatially more complex and architecturally more fully described than the fresco on which it is based. Like the Annunziata fresco (Fig. 2), the San Marco fresco has a door surmounted by an oculus on its left hand side, in front of which Gabriel kneels with his arms crossed. This left hand wall also contains an ogival window, with two lobed arches and an oculus, set in a thick stone

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<sup>170</sup> On the fresco's artistic and thaumaturgic influence see P. Howell Jolly, "Jan van Eyck's Italian Pilgrimage: A Miraculous Florentine Annunciation and the Ghent Altarpiece", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 61. Bd., H. 3 (1998), pp. 369-394, pp. 369-373, D. Arasse, 1999, pp. 107-111, M. Holmes, "The Elusive Origins of the Cult of the Annunziata in Florence" in *The Miraculous Image in the Late Middle Ages and Renaissance*, E. Thuno and G. Wolf (eds.), L'Erma di Bretschneider, Rome, 2004 and M. Holmes, *The Miraculous Image in Renaissance Florence*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013, pp. 150-153. There are similar frescoes in Santa Maria Novella, Ognissanti, San Marco, Santa Maria Ughi (destroyed) and Santo Spirito, Prato, see M. Holmes, 2004, p. 110, n. 45.

<sup>171</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 111 argues that the painter of this fresco may have been influenced by Memmi's architecture in San Gimignano. While this comparison is convincing, the question of influence also depends on the dating of the Annunziata fresco, which as noted previously is still unclear.

<sup>172</sup> On this fresco see G. Prampolini, 1939, pp. 30-32 and M. Bietti Favi, "La pittura nella chiesa di San Marco", in *La chiesa e il convento di San Marco a Firenze*, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, Florence, 1990, pp. 214-215.



frame. These windows continue across the building, with two set into the wall behind Gabriel, and two more in the wall behind Mary, one of which is partially hidden by her cloth of honour. The principal space in the fresco can be divided into two nearly equal sections of varying depths. The first is that in which Gabriel is placed, which extends to the rear wall of the structure. That of Mary, by contrast, is much shallower, filled by the bench, ornamented with intarsiate decoration, on which Mary sits. Behind this narrow front section, another room projects into the space. An open door, with an oculus above, leads into this room but offers no view of the room beyond. A compressed tower-like upper storey, similar in shape if not in ornament to those in the works by Martini and Daddi, follows the ground plan of the room below. The painter of this fresco has expanded Mary's house in comparison to earlier Annunciations, not only creating a greater variety of spaces, but also using visual hints such as the open door into a projecting room and the upper storey to imply that the room in which we see the protagonists is part of a larger structure.

The idea of an expanded conception of Mary's house, allowing a viewer to see, or at least glimpse a number of spaces, rendered in considerable architectural detail, would remain the norm throughout the fifteenth century. Mary's house had grown considerably from its origins as a throne or background structure, and would continue to do so. More specifically, by the end of the fourteenth century numerous elements, both formal and stylistic, that would remain constant in depictions of Mary's house until at least the end of the fifteenth century were already present. The first was the existence of three alternative compositional models for Mary's house: the undivided interior, the divided interior, and a composition featuring a split between interior and exterior. Secondly, there was the presence of Mary's *camera*, represented as a bed or, less commonly, as a room with a *lettuccio* and a carpet, as a feature of the domestic iconography of the Annunciation. These were sometimes part of the principal space, as in the *Annunziata Annunciation* (Fig. 2), or glimpsed in a subsidiary space, as in the *Annunciation* in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 3). The spatial setup in this particular work, where Mary's bed is visible through an open doorway behind the principal figures, would survive essentially unchanged through to the

works of Filippo Lippi and, following him, Botticelli.<sup>173</sup> It also creates a convincing impression, within an ostensibly simple structure, of a progression of rooms, from the “reception” room where Mary greets her angelic visitor to the inner sanctum of her *camera*.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly in terms of the rhetorical potential of Mary’s house, there was the idea of housing Mary in a structure whose rich decoration and architectural magnificence reflected and emphasised her status. The ornate stone ogival windows with their rose oculi in the San Marco *Annunciation*, or richly tiled floors and frescoed walls in Pietro Lorenzetti’s Tarlati Polyptch *Annunciation* (Fig. 7), are all architectural status symbols. Comparisons can be made between these Marian dwellings and a palatial structure like that in Maso di Banco’s *The Dream of the Emperor Constantine* (Fig. 48) in the Bardi di Vernio Chapel, Santa Croce, Florence.<sup>174</sup> Here we see Constantine’s palace, a high status structure, reduced in Giottesque fashion to a single room. Though ostensibly simple, refined architectural details such as the low relief frieze and the engaged pseudo-Corinthian columns on each outside corner, and the heraldic fresco decoration on the walls of Constantine’s chamber, all combine to indicate that this is a noble residence.

It is worth returning here to the idea of Mary’s house remaining in some functional and/or metaphorical sense a throne, designed to honour and elevate its occupant, even after it lost any formal reference to such structures. The anonymous author of *De laudibus beatae Virginiae*, a thirteenth-century text in praise of the Virgin, included in his catalogue of Mary’s architectural attributes the fact that she was a “thronus”.<sup>175</sup> One of the author’s justifications for this is a reference to two Old Testament prefigurations – “... for so King Solomon was sitting alone in this throne, just the same Christ sat alone in the

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<sup>173</sup> Bolard compares the partially hidden position of the bed in images of the Annunciation with the more prominent position of the bed in images of the Birth of the Virgin in the later quattrocento, arguing that this is because of its role as “le lieu du Mystère, métaphore de l’Incarnation, est lui aussi plus discret que le lit natal...il n’est le plus souvent vu que partiellement; ou, bien, relégué dans un espace accessoire...” See L. Bolard, 1999, p. 98.

<sup>174</sup> On this fresco see E. Neri Lusanna, “L’apparazione dei santi Pietro e Paolo a Costantino”, in *Maso di Banco: La Capella di San Silvestro*, C. Acidini Luchinat and E. Neri Lusanna (eds.), Electa, Milan, 1998.

<sup>175</sup> Anonymous, *De laudibus beatae Virginiae*, Lyon, 1651, pp. 252-263: “...quia sic solus rex Salomon sedebat in hoc throno, sicut solus Christus sedit in Vergine gloriosa. Unde Ezech. 44. Princeps ipse sedebit in ea...”

glorious Virgin. So Exekiel 44: the Prince he shall sit in it..."<sup>176</sup> Elsewhere in this list of her architectural attributes Mary is referred to as "palatium" (palace), because of her splendor and her status as the mother of Christ.<sup>177</sup> St Antoninus quoted St Augustine on Mary's symbolic attributes: "And St Augustine spoke of it in a sermon when he said: throne of heaven, bridal-chamber of God."<sup>178</sup> In each of these texts Mary is figured as both the throne of Christ and his room/bridal chamber, attributes that are seemingly reinforced, referenced and emphasised by the splendour of her architectural surroundings. If she is Christ's room and his throne, then her house must reflect this; it becomes an honorific structure, not just a house, but also a palace. This conception of Mary's house is one that would continue to be important throughout the fifteenth century.<sup>179</sup>

### **The Impact of the Introduction of Single Point Perspective on the Depiction of Mary's House 1420-1440**

Although these honourific ideals would remain central to the depiction of Mary's house, the adoption of a scientific system of single-point perspective would from the 1420s would give painters the tools to increase the scale of Mary's house and the depictions of the details of its ornament. In his account of the life of Brunelleschi, Manetti describes the impact of perspective upon pictorial representation:

"During the same period he propounded and realised what the painters call perspective, since it forms part of that science which, in effect, consists of setting down properly and rationally the reductions and enlargements of near and distant objects as perceived by the eye of man: buildings, plains, mountains, places of every sort and location, with figures and objects in correct proportion to the distance in

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., p. 252.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 273.

<sup>178</sup> Sancti Antonini, 1959, cap. 10, col. 974: "Et B. Augustinus in sermone de ea loquens ait: Thronum dei caeli, thalamum Dei..."

<sup>179</sup> Didi-Huberman notes in passing that if Mary herself is considered in architectural terms then the form of her house must also be relevant, see G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 68.

which they are shown."<sup>180</sup>

As this makes clear, one of the key effects of the new perspectival technique was to allow the convincing depiction of a variety of objects in pictorial space, among which Manetti includes "buildings". It is impossible to discuss the development in the depiction of Mary's house in the first half of the fifteenth century without at some point recognising the impact of perspective.<sup>181</sup> At the same time, although it is clear that technical advances must have affected the depiction of Mary's house, as they did much else, it is nevertheless difficult to quantify the precise overall effect that it had on architecture in paintings. In order to consider its impact, this section will examine a number of Annunciations painted in the 1420s, 1430s and 1440s - decades when one point perspective was first being employed pictorially - using them to illustrate how the traditional compositional models employed in Annunciation images were affected by its use.

Fra Filippo Lippi's Doria *Annunciation* (c. 1450) (Fig. 49) shows Mary

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<sup>180</sup> A. Manetti, *Vita di Filippo Brunelleschi*, D. de Robertis (ed.), Edizioni il Polifilo, Milan, 1976, p. 176: "Così ancora in que' tempi e' misse ed in atto, lui proprio, quello ch'e i dipintori oggi dicono prospettiva, perché ella e una parte di quella scienza, che è in effetto porre bene e con ragione le diminazioni ed acresimenti che appaiono agli occhi degli uomini delle cose di lungi e da presso: casamenti, piani e montagne e paesi d'ogni ragione, ed in ogni luogo le figure e l'altre cose di quella misura che s'apertiene a quella distanza che si mostrano di lungi..." For the translation see A. Manetti, *The Life of Filippo Brunelleschi*, C. Engrass (trans.), H. Saalman (ed.), The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park and London, 1970, p. 42. Argan notes the inherent distinction drawn here by Manetti between Brunelleschi's initial development and its later codification and use by painters. See G. Argan and N. Robb, "The Architecture of Brunelleschi and the Origins of Perspective Theory in the Fifteenth Century", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 9 (1946), pp. 96-121, p. 103.

<sup>181</sup> The relationship between the development of painted architecture and one point perspective demands a study of its own. The best overview remains that in J. White, *The Birth and Rebirth of Pictorial Space*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Faber and Faber, London, 1967. Krautheimer argued that there may be a connection between the ways in which Brunelleschian built architecture is experienced perspectively or pictorially and the construction of perspectival, realistic architecture in painting, see R. Krautheimer, "Brunelleschi and 'Proportion in Perspective'", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 16, No. 3/4 (1953), pp. 275-291, pp. 289-291. Kuhn examines some of the implications of Alberti's codification of one-point perspective on pictorial architecture, see J. Kuhn, "Measured Appearances: Documentation and Design in Early Perspective Drawing", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 53 (1990), pp. 114-132, pp. 128-131. Frommel argued that Brunelleschi "brought architecture and painting continually closer, until pictorial space had an architectural structure, and architecture became increasingly pictorial, conceived as a subject seen from a fixed viewpoint." See C. Frommel, "Reflections on the Early Architectural Drawings" in *The Renaissance from Brunelleschi to Michelangelo: The Representation of Architecture*, H. Millon and V.M. Lampugnani (eds.), Thames and Hudson, London, 1994. Arasse's book, *L'Annonciation Italienne*, thoroughly discussed the impact of perspective upon images of the Annunciation, but was more focused upon its theoretical and metaphorical implications than with its impact upon the depiction of painted architecture per se. See D. Arasse, 1999.

receiving Gabriel in her *camera*.<sup>182</sup> She sits on a *lettuccio*, richly decorated with intarsia, in front of her bed, while Gabriel kneels before her on the right of the panel. As well as the bench and the bed with its red cover, the work contains other elements familiar from fourteenth and early fifteenth-century Annunciations, notably the cloth of gold draped somewhat awkwardly behind Mary, and the vase of lilies placed between the two figures. Both the bench and the bed can be seen for example in Gentile da Fabriano's (?) *Annunciation* (c. 1425) (Fig. 50), now in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, a work which conforms architecturally to the precedent established by the *Annunciation* at Santissima Annunziata. Like Lippi's work, Gentile's *Annunciation* also places Mary and Gabriel in an undivided interior, with the key difference that in Lippi's work the viewer is now placed within the space, rather than outside it.<sup>183</sup> In terms of its perspectival construction, a key feature of the Doria *Annunciation* is the window at the rear, similar in its tunnel-like form to an *androne*. This *androne* both demonstrates and heightens the effects of spatial recession, granting the space a convincing sensation of depth.<sup>184</sup>

Fra Angelico's *Annunciations* also reveal the impact of one-point perspective on images of Mary's house. His Prado *Annunciation* (c. 1426) (Fig. 51) adopts the porch setting of fourteenth-century Annunciations, and transforms it into a cross-vaulted corner loggia.<sup>185</sup> This loggia now covers both figures, but retains the dividing line in the form of a column between them,

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<sup>182</sup> On this work see F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Filippo Lippi and Flanders", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 42. Bd., H. 4 (1979), pp. 255-273, pp. 255-259 and J. Ruda, 1993, p. 159 and Cat. 38, pp. 428-429.

<sup>183</sup> Ames-Lewis argues that "The domestic setting of the Doria *Annunciation* derives from Flemish prototypes.", see F. Ames-Lewis, 1979, p. 258. This statement, however, ignores the long standing trend for showing interiors in trecento Florentine Annunciations, most notably in the Annunziata fresco and its imitators, which may also have been a factor influencing Lippi's depiction.

<sup>184</sup> Lippi used similar barrel-vaulted windows and doors in a number of his other *Annunciations*, most notably in the Barberini (Fig. 150) and Corsham Court panels (Fig. 82). In both of these, the tunnel is placed in an analogous position to the Doria work, at the rear of a room, leading into a landscape or garden beyond.

<sup>185</sup> On this work, and its relationship to Fra Angelico's Cortona and San Giovanni *Annunciations*, see A. Gambuti, *L'Architettura dei Pittori nel Quattrocento Italiano*, Alinea Editrice, Florence, 1994, pp. 7-9, D. Gordon, "Zanobi Strozzi's 'Annunciation' in the National Gallery", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 140, No. 1145 (Aug., 1998), pp. 517-524, pp. 517-520, see also P. Rubin, 2007, pp. 198-206 and C. Gebron, "Les *Annonciations* de Fra Angelico, Pollaiuolo, Piero della Francesca et Robert Campin: questions de ornamentalité et de couleur", *Studiolo* Vol. 10 (2013), pp. 58-73, pp. 59-63.

analysed at length in the previous chapter. Fra Angelico's rendering of this corner loggia is aided by use of one-point perspective, employed, as in the works by Lippi discussed above, to grant the scene a convincing depth as well as to make the architecture itself more realistic.<sup>186</sup> The loggia itself is square in plan, with two arches on its front side and two on the side facing the garden. These arches are supported on a series of Corinthian columns with stylised capitals. The loggia itself is lavishly adorned. A finely detailed vegetal frieze runs across its facade, below which there is a high relief sculpture of the head of God in a roundel, while the interior has a floor of polychromatic marble, and a ceiling decorated with stars on a blue background. It is unclear whether this loggia is part of a larger structure, as nothing can be seen above it or to the right hand side, nor do any doors lead off it except that to the room behind. The presence of this room, however, as well as the suggestion that the front facade continues beyond the picture frame does indicate that the loggia is part of a larger structure. A later *Annunciation* by Fra Angelico, however, offers more structural context. In his Cortona altarpiece (c. 1435) (Fig. 20), the setting is once more a corner loggia.<sup>187</sup> This loggia, however, has a number of differences to that in the Prado *Annunciation*. The viewpoint has been changed, so that the arches (of which there are three as opposed to two) on the garden side now recede to the left, and the viewer is offered a different view into the room to the rear, which now contains a bed sheltered by a red curtain. Most strikingly, the loggia is now clearly part of a larger structure, as is revealed by the fragment of an upper storey visible above the left-hand arches, divided from them by a plain frieze of red stone. In contrast to the fourteenth-century Annunciations discussed previously, the upper storey of this structure is not schematically compressed but appears to be on a similar scale to the ground floor, giving Mary's house a new sense of height,

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<sup>186</sup> Kanter notes Fra Angelico's absorption of Masaccio's perspectival techniques in this work, see L. Kanter, "Fra Angelico: A Decade of Transition", in *Fra Angelico*, L. Kanter and P. Palladino (eds.), Metropolitan Museum of Art New York, 2006, pp. 81-82. Gerbron sees Fra Angelico's Prado work as a turning point – "si bien que l'architecture de la maison de Marie acquiert une unité et une profondeur nouvelle dans la peinture florentine", see C. Gerborn, 2013, p. 59.

<sup>187</sup> On this work see J. Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico*, Phaidon, London, 1974 (first pub. 1952), pp. 14-15, M. Salmi, *Il Beato Angelico*, Edizione Valori Plastica, Spoleto, 1958, p. 27 and p. 107, and S. Orlandi, *Beato Angelico*, Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1964, pp. 55-57, D. Ahl, *Fra Angelico*, Phaidon, London, 1998, pp. 98-104, and L. Kanter, pp. 84-86.

depth and architectonic presence.

Discussing how best to achieve convincing one point perspective in his *De pictura*, Alberti advised that the orthogonals or “colliniari” be considered as akin to “those which a continuous straight line touches equally in every part, like the surfaces of square columns [piers or pilasters] standing in regular succession in an arcade”.<sup>188</sup> Alberti’s choice of an architectural metaphor reveals the extent to which a pictorial perspectival system can be easily understood and expressed architecturally. It is evident, for example, that the regular form, and evenly spaced architectural elements present in the corner loggias in both of Fra Angelico’s works must have provided the painter with a useful basis on which to construct convincing perspectival depth, as well as simultaneously making the depiction of the structure itself easier: sections of both loggias demonstrate Fra Angelico’s understanding of the essential rules of linear perspective. In the Prado *Annunciation* (Fig. 51), this can be seen in the relationship between the capital of the central column and the *peduccio* on the wall immediately behind. Both Ionic, the *peduccio* is clearly smaller than the capital, granting an immediate sensation of it being removed in space, an impression aided by the foreshortened tie rod that connects the two. A similar diminution in size can also be seen in the *peducci* on the right hand wall, once again providing the loggia with space and depth. In the Cortona altarpiece, the use of perspective is most evident in the left flank of the structure, where a row of arches stretches into the background (recalling Alberti’s “square columns standing in regular succession in an arcade”).

The strong horizontal lines presented by architectural features, the stringcourses, friezes etc., particularly when combined with the vertical of the outside corner of a building, provided ideal points on which a painter could anchor or start their orthogonals. The impact of this is particularly apparent in the works of Masolino, as for example in his *Healing of the Cripple and the*

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<sup>188</sup> L. Alberti, *De pictura*, L. Bertolini (ed.), Edizioni Polistampa, Florence, 2011, p. 227: “una diritta linea in ogni parte equalmente toccherà, come sono le faccie de’ pilastri quadri ad ordine in uno portico.” For the translation see L. Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, C. Grayson (trans. and ed.), Phaidon, London, 1972, p. 49. On Alberti’s codification of perspective see R. Krautheimer, 1953, pp. 277-279, J. White, 1967, pp. 121-126 and S. Edgerton, *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective*, Basic Books, New York, 1975, pp. 79-90.

*Raising of Tabitha* (Fig. 52). The right-hand side of the work depicts the raising of Tabitha set in a corner loggia, supported by a pier on its outermost side. This pier's relationship to the pier that occupies the corner behind demonstrates recession, but the most significant element in this context are the sharply receding horizontals of the frieze panel and stringcourse above. These are in essence orthogonals disguised within architecture and serve to initiate the perspective, a function mirrored to an extent by the loggia on the opposite side of the fresco, which also has a sharply defined frieze dividing it from an upper storey.<sup>189</sup> A similar arrangement can be seen in Fra Angelico's *The Story of Saint Nicholas* (c. 1448) (Fig. 53), a predella from his San Domenico altarpiece in Perugia. The building on the left, for instance, in which the birth of the saint is shown, has a low-relief swagged frieze, surmounted by a cornice and a balustrade, all of which plunge vertiginously back into the pictorial space.

Analysing the impact of the Albertian system of perspective on the representation of fictive architecture, Kuhn writes "The constraint that had locked the Trecento interior spaces to the picture surface is extended to all architectural settings: piazze, streets, courtyards and gardens come to be treated as unroofed negative spaces rather than as gatherings of individual positive forms."<sup>190</sup> The result, as Kuhn convincingly argues, is to create an environment in which "frontality" predominates, a situation that continues to the end of the fifteenth century. In fictive architectural terms this results in compositions very similar to that in the Cortona altarpiece; a front side aligned and secured by the picture plane, from which a flank of the building then extends obliquely back into the pictorial space.<sup>191</sup> Krautheimer sheds further light on the reasons why an architectonic solution like that adopted by Fra Angelico succeeds visually. The front façade of the loggia is mirrored by that of its flank – "One has, therefore, an elevation as a foil against which to judge

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<sup>189</sup> Lee Roberts notes the importance of these architectural horizontals in the perspectival construction of the fresco, see P. Lee Roberts, *Masolino da Panicale*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 69-70. See also White, who discusses Masolino's use of perspective at length, J. White, 1967, pp. 142-148.

<sup>190</sup> J. Kuhn, 1990, pp. 129-130.

<sup>191</sup> Kuhn contrasts this approach with that demonstrated by Brunelleschi in his second perspectival panel, which showed the Palazzo Signoria viewed obliquely, so that two facades receded away from the viewer, see J. Kuhn, 1990, p. 130.



the foreshortened part of the building.”<sup>192</sup> The house constructed for Mary by Fra Angelico in the Cortona altarpiece was one that took full advantage of the new possibilities offered by a system of linear perspective, using them to build a structure that offered a new vision of a house firmly situated within space. It would, nonetheless, be wrong to say that Fra Angelico’s choice of architectural setting was entirely determined by technical changes. Instead, it is better characterised as an “updating”, a transformation of a traditional compositional model for the Annunciation, founded upon the porch, into new architectural, pictorial and spatial terms.

### **A New Magnificence: Mary’s House 1440 – 1500**

The new scale of Fra Angelico’s house for Mary can be used to mark the beginning of a trend that would continue for the rest of the fifteenth century, with painters using the new possibilities created by one-point perspective to place Mary in houses that were both more richly detailed architecturally and on a larger scale than those that had appeared before. This change in detail and scale did not occur in isolation. The fresco cycles, for example, of the second half of the fifteenth century by Gozzoli, Piero della Francesca, Ghirlandaio, and in Venice, the scuole cycles by Mansueti, Bastiani, Carpaccio and others all display (to differing extents) a new scale and level of detail in their fictive architecture. In a catalogue entry on Fra Carnevale’s Washington *Annunciation* (c. 1450), Boskovits wrote “Toward the middle of the century a new emphasis appears in the iconography of the Annunciation. Instead of the intimacy of Mary’s house in Nazareth, the scene is set in the interior or porch of an idealized Renaissance princely palace, bestowing a particular solemnity on Mary’s encounter with the heavenly messenger.”<sup>193</sup>

Although broadly correct, particularly in its characterisation of Mary’s house as an “idealized palace”, it is, however, wrong to see this splendor as new, or, indeed, as a rejection of “intimacy”. As the analysis of the depiction of Mary’s house in the fourteenth century showed, the manner in which it was

<sup>192</sup> R. Krautheimer, 1953, p. 290.

<sup>193</sup> M. Boskovits, *Italian Paintings of the Fifteenth Century*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 2003, p. 182.

depicted was far from humble, with many images displaying a richness of architectural ornament and interior decoration. Furthermore, a new expansiveness in the depiction of Mary's house did not necessarily entail a rejection of the focus on the intimate, domestic space of Mary's *camera*. There remained a number of painters, most notably Botticelli, who continued to place their Annunciations in interiors, while even in a work with as large and as magnificent an architectural setting as Cossa's monumental *Annunciation* in Dresden (1470) (Fig. 54), Mary's bedroom remains a distinct and important element in the image. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to describe the second half of the quattrocento as a period in which painters placed a new emphasis on the architecture of Mary's house, displaying an inventiveness and virtuosity in their creation of architectural settings that resulted in an unparalleled diversity of solutions.

As so often, the reasons behind any change are difficult to pin down. In addition, the change, although noticeable, does not represent a dramatic break with previous approaches to depicting Mary's house: as noted above, the scale and detail of the house changes, but its essentially palatial and honorific character does not. We can nonetheless identify three basic reasons that might account for this development, one technical, one social and one with its roots in an increased focus on *disegno* in architecture from the 1430's on. The technical reason lies in the mastery of one-point perspective described above, which by 1450 was widely used by painters. Although buildings on an impressive scale can be seen in fourteenth-century images – particularly in the works of Altichiero and Giusto da Menabou in Padua – one-point perspective made their depiction far easier. An interesting insight into this is given by Bambach's analysis of the technical processes used by Masaccio in frescoing his *Trinity* in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 110). The foundation of the fresco as a whole was lines incised by stylus into the prepared wall surface to map out the perspective grid. Having established this, Masaccio then elaborated the details of the architecture with more incised lines, including circles for the oculi and semicircles for the base of the Ionic capitals. Only once the outlines of this monumental architectural setting were fixed did Masaccio add the figures. As Bambach describes: "He had projected the main forms of the architectural setting before he integrated the

figures into the pictorial space: the incised construction often runs through the figures."<sup>194</sup>

The social reason lies in new trends in private architecture, concisely summarised by Goldthwaite; "By the mid-fifteenth century, however, a boom in the building and re-building of private homes for the rich got under way throughout Italy...In the process, domestic architecture emerged as a distinct art form..."<sup>195</sup> Practically speaking, this spate of innovative building provided painters with a rich variety of potential built sources from which to create a house for Mary. It is worth considering in this regard that the elite patrons for some of these Annunciations would surely have been aware of the latest architectural developments, especially if actively engaged in commissioning architecture themselves. Finally, painters, feeding off the febrile atmosphere of architectural innovation that surrounded them, must also have been encouraged to create ever more elaborate and inventive pictorial architecture. This was a period in which *disegno* (design/invention), and specifically its application in the creation of new architectonic and ornamental solutions, took on an especial importance in architectural theory. Alberti, and following him Filarete and Francesco di Giorgio, laid especial emphasis on the architect's ability to create and invent.<sup>196</sup> Crucially with regard to pictorial architecture, this creative and experimental stage of the design process was separate from the practical stage of plans and architectural models.<sup>197</sup> Painters, who never had to advance to the practical stage of the design process, were evidently well placed to practice *disegno*, using their freedom to create novel solutions.

The rest of the chapter will examine some of the palatial interpretations of Mary's house that were the results of these changes, seeking to examine the motivations and architectural sources that underpinned their forms, in the context of architecture both as built and as theorised, situating these interpretations in the context of the social changes mentioned above, and the problematic relationship between these grand residences and a theological tradition that emphasised Mary's poverty.

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<sup>194</sup> C. Bambach, *Drawing and Painting in the Italian Renaissance Workshop: Theory and Practice*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 194.

<sup>195</sup> R. Goldthwaite, *Wealth and the Demand for Art in Italy 1300-1600*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1993.

<sup>196</sup> Invention in pictorial architecture is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

<sup>197</sup> C. Frommel, 1994, pp. 103-104.

## A Palace for Mary: The Interior

As noted above, an interior setting for Annunciations, although comparatively rare, continued to be deployed throughout the quattrocento. In many cases, these were smaller scale works, probably used for private devotion.<sup>198</sup> Filippo Lippi's two lunette *Annunciations*, one in the National Gallery, Washington (c.1440) (Fig. 55)<sup>199</sup> and the other in the National Gallery, London (c. 1450) (Fig. 22), were both commissioned for an interior. The Washington panel appears to have been commissioned for the Palazzo della Signoria, along with a panel depicting *The Vision of St Bernard*,<sup>200</sup> while the London panel is likely to have been commissioned for the Palazzo Medici, as one of a pair of overdoors with Lippi's *Seven Saints* lunette.<sup>201</sup> Given this context, the fact that both are set in an interior (albeit only partially in the case of the London *Annunciation*), is clearly fitting.<sup>202</sup>

Despite these similarities in the contexts for which they were designed, the two lunettes each have markedly different architectural settings. The Washington lunette, while preserving the well-established central dividing element between Gabriel and Mary – in this case a *pietra serena* pier with engaged half-columns either side – absorbs this into a unified interior. On the right, Mary kneels humbly in a small *camera*, furnished with wooden shelves and what may be a bed on a wooden platform (as the panel appears to have

<sup>198</sup> Syson has described how Annunciations could be employed within the home for use in private devotion, arguing that the interiors depicted in these works could foster a sense of identification between the women of a household and Mary: "The *camera* could thus become a combination of real bridal chamber and the Virgin's *thalamus*, the devout space of the pious (but spiritually anxious) merchant and his wife." See L. Syson, 2006, pp. 96-98.

<sup>199</sup> On this work see J. Ruda, 1993, Cat. 21, pp. 397-398 and M. Boskovits, 2003, pp. 395-400.

<sup>200</sup> The *Codex Magliabechiano* records that "E nel palazzo detto [palazzo de' Signori], sopra la scala, è di sua mano [Lippi] una Nunziata." *L'Anonimo Magliabechiano*, A. Ficarra, (ed.), Fiorentino, Naples, 1968, p. 105. See also D. Gordon, *The Fifteenth Century Italian Paintings*, Vol. 1, National Gallery Company, London, 2003, who discusses the commission in relation to *The Vision of St Bernard*, pp. 151-153.

<sup>201</sup> There is some debate as to where these panels were situated within the Palazzo Medici. On this see Ames-Lewis, F., "Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and the Early Medici", in *The Early Medici and their Artists*, Ames-Lewis, F. (ed.), Birkbeck College, London, 1995, p. 120 and D. Gordon, 2003, p. 151.

<sup>202</sup> It is important to note, however, that only one of Lippi's *Annunciations*, the fresco in Spoleto, shows a full exterior of a building, with his preference overwhelmingly being to set the event in an interior. In the case of the Spoleto fresco the reason for the setting is probably explained by the scale of the fresco, and the need to create a structure visually impactful enough to be legible from the main body of the church.

been cut down from a lunette,<sup>203</sup> only a fragment of a red bedspread is now visible). This room is connected to the left-hand part of the space by an opening, indicated by the luminous blue-gold curtain behind the central pier, which appears to have been tied back to leave this entrance open. Gabriel's side of the work is unfurnished, barring a small chest below the curtain, with a square window at its left-hand edge and another room visible through a narrow door. In comparison to this clearly circumscribed arrangement of rooms, each logically divided from each other, the London *Annunciation's* setting initially seems schematic (for a fuller description of the architecture of this panel, see Chapter 1). Any divisions within the architecture are suggested rather than secure, as, for example, is the case with the step that separates the space in which Mary sits from her *camera* in the right background which can be contrasted with the wall that separates Mary from Gabriel in the Washington panel. What both do share, however, is a sense that the rooms shown are part of a larger whole, implied in the Washington version by the slice of another room visible in the left background and in the London panel by the inclusion of the beginnings of a staircase at the rear of the space.

Botticelli, Lippi's pupil in the 1460s, adopted his master's practice of using an interior setting in his Annunciations, whether divided in two as in the San Martino della Scala *Annunciation* (c. 1480) (Fig. 1), or unified as in his Cestello *Annunciation* (c.1490). Two particularly interesting examples are the *Annunciations* from the Metropolitan Museum (c. 1485) (Fig. 56)<sup>204</sup> and Glasgow (c. 1490) (Fig. 57),<sup>205</sup> which together give an insight into the construction and architectural characteristics of Botticelli's interior *Annunciations*. On a formal level both display the same conflation of unified interior and architectural division employed by Lippi in his Washington *Annunciation*, achieved in both cases by a thick gray pier. The Metropolitan panel has a corridor on its left side in which Gabriel kneels, each side of which is articulated by engaged piers (identified by Pope-Hennessy as similar to

<sup>203</sup> M. Boskovits, 2003, p. 395.

<sup>204</sup> On this work see J. Pope-Hennessy and L. Kanter, *The Robert Lehman Collection: Volume 1 The Italian Paintings*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1987, pp. 188-191 and R. Lightbown, *Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1989, p. 215.

<sup>205</sup> On this work see M. Kemp, "Botticelli's Glasgow 'Annunciation': Patterns of Instability", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 119, No. 888 (Mar., 1977), pp. 180-185.

those in Botticelli's predella *Last Communion of Mary Magdalene* in Philadelphia) (Fig. 58).<sup>206</sup> At the end of this corridor is another space, distinguished by a coffered ceiling lower than that in the rest of the corridor, in which there are two monofore windows flanking a Corinthian pilaster. An opening opposite Gabriel leads into the *anti-camera* in which Mary sits on a large *lettucio*, which almost fills the space.<sup>207</sup> Behind Mary, a pedimented doorway leads into a *camera*, where a large bed is partially visible.

In contrast to the relatively enclosed spaces of the Metropolitan panel, the architectural setting in the Glasgow *Annunciation* is larger in scale and more spatially complex. The architecture can be split into four areas, an *androne* where Gabriel kneels, a courtyard, Mary's *anti-camera* and a *camera*. The cross-vaulted *androne* is split into two sections by a thick arch resting on piers and a corresponding band of stone on the floor, while a projecting stringcourse runs down each side, tying these two sections together. A narrow stone arched doorway with an oculus above leads into a cross vaulted *anticamera*, architecturally similar to the first section of the adjacent *androne*, where Mary is shown rising from her bench. Another narrow stone doorway with an oculus leads into a *camera*, where part of a large bed can be seen. The final part of the architectural environment is a spacious courtyard, viewed through another arch at the end of the *androne*. In the courtyard, profiled arches spring from piers, above which windows with a rusticated stone surround rest upon a moulded stringcourse. These arches open directly onto a landscape, which may indicate that it is a curtain wall leading onto a garden, a feature found, for example, at both the Palazzo Medici and the Palazzo Rucellai (see the plan of the *piano terreno* of the Palazzo Medici, Fig. 59).<sup>208</sup>

The architecture in both of these works appears to have some similarities with that found in built *palazzi* of the period. It is important,

<sup>206</sup> J. Pope-Hennessy, 1987, p. 191.

<sup>207</sup> Thornton discusses this *lettucio*, describing it as being placed in an "antechamber", see P. Thornton, 1991, p. 146.

<sup>208</sup> Although Botticelli's use of an *androne* to stage his *Annunciation* appears to be unique in extant painted Annunciations, similar architectural setups can be found in a number of contemporary manuscript illuminations. In an *Annunciation* illumination by Attavanti, now in the Pierpoint Morgan (ms. 14, f. 19v) (Fig. 34), for example, Gabriel kneels before Mary in front of a deep arch, similar to an *androne*, which leads into a palatial courtyard.

however, to note the inherent difficulties in trying to establish firm links between the two. Interiors have very often been subject to extensive remodelling and redecoration, while the details in the works themselves are quite likely to be invented, or only generically related to any real building. One feature of these works, however, that can be cautiously compared to built architecture is the succession of rooms within them, as ground plans for the Palazzo Medici and Palazzo Rucellai survive that reveal their internal arrangement in the later quattrocento. The arrangement in the Glasgow panel, for example, where an *androne*, flanked by subsidiary rooms, leads into a large courtyard, is broadly reminiscent of that at the Palazzo Medici, where two large rooms were accessed directly from the principal *androne* (Fig. 59), and was an arrangement common in many *palazzi*. Furthermore, grand ground floor *camere* were common features in many *palazzi* of this period; the 1492 inventory of the Palazzo Medici, for instance, describes the objects found "in the grand ground-floor chamber known as the chamber of Lorenzo..."<sup>209</sup>

The Metropolitan panel, by contrast, reflects the arrangement of rooms found on the *piano nobile* of contemporary *palazzi*. Francesco di Giorgio Martini describes the ideal arrangement of rooms on the *piano nobile* of a nobleman in his *Trattati*, saying that "those reception rooms must have chambers and after-chambers and antichambers, a chapel and studies..."<sup>210</sup> Thornton notes that Francesco places the rooms in order of privacy, with the *salotto* and *camera* followed by a suite of more private rooms. *Anti* in fifteenth-century Tuscan did not necessarily mean before, but could also mean "next

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<sup>209</sup> *Libro d'inventario dei beni di Lorenzo il Magnifico*, G. Bertelà and M. Spallanzani (eds.), Associazione 'Amici di Bargello', Florence, 1992, p. 11 : "nella chamera grande terrena detta la chamera di Lorenzo..." Vasari also gives a description of the palace's ground floor, which makes it clear that it contained such rooms - "Nel primo piano terreno sono due [?] cortili con logge magnifiche, nelle quali rispondono salotti, camere, anticamere, scrittoi, destri, stufe, cucine..." G. Vasari, *Le vite de' più eccellenti, scultori e architettori*, Vol. 2, P. della Pergola, G. Grassi, and P. Previtali (eds.), Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1967, p. 33. See also B. Preyer, "The Florentine Casa", in *At Home in Renaissance Italy*, M. Ajmar-Wollheim and F. Dennis (eds.), V and A Publications, London, 2006, pp. 35-36.

<sup>210</sup> Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattati di architettura ingegneria e arte militare*, Vol. 1, Maltese, C. (ed.), L. Degrassi (transc.), Edizioni Il Polifilo, Milan, 1967, p. 352: "li quali salotti dieno avere camere e postcamere et anticamere, capella e studii..." On the *anticamera* see B. Preyer, "The Rucellai Palace", in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone Vol II: A Florentine Patrician and his Palace*, The Warburg Institute, London, 1981, p. 172 and P. Thornton, 1991, pp. 294-295.

to".<sup>211</sup> In fact, in a quattrocento elite residence, the *anticamera* was almost always reached after the principal *camera*, in a more private part of the home.<sup>212</sup> This arrangement can be seen in a plan of the Palazzo Medici's *piano nobile*, where a *camera* is followed by a suite of rooms (broadly similar to those described by Martini); an *anticamera*, *scrittoio*, and *capella* (Fig. 60).<sup>213</sup> If we apply this understanding to the Metropolitan panel, in which Mary sits in her *anticamera*, we realise that the space we are seeing is, arguably, that behind the *camera*, in the most private sphere of Mary's home.

Although the descriptions given above may appear too detailed, they are necessary to demonstrate the nature and extent to which Botticelli's interiors are comparable to those built in the second half of the fifteenth century. The drawing of these parallels is not in any way to suggest that Botticelli was attempting to portray a specific interior, but they do reveal that he was aware of the arrangement of the palace interiors of his day, and employed that knowledge to plan the disposition of rooms in his works. Furthermore, these similarities, particularly with regard to the Glasgow panel's *androne/courtyard* arrangement and the use of an *anticamera* in the Metropolitan panel, when combined with the evident splendour of the architectural ornament in these works – the pedimented doorway, the high cross-vaulted *androne*, the engaged piers and Corinthian pilasters – clearly signal the palatial nature of these interiors.

Both of Botticelli's *Annunciations* used a particular sequence of rooms in combination with ornament and architectural details to signal the palatial nature of Mary's residence. Other interior Annunciations, however, placed the *Annunciation* within a single room, and had therefore to use decoration and architectural detail alone to signal the elite nature of the space. Cima da Conegliano's *Annunciation* (Fig. 61), painted in 1495 for the chapel of the Arte della Seta in the Crociferi, Venice, places both Mary and Gabriel within a single room.<sup>214</sup> The walls are a drab faded terracotta, and appear to be completely undecorated. The most prominent object in the room is the large

<sup>211</sup> B. Preyer, 2006, p. 36.

<sup>212</sup> P. Thornton, 1991, p. 295.

<sup>213</sup> B. Preyer, 2006, p. 36.

<sup>214</sup> On this work see L. Coletti, *Cima da Conegliano*, Neri Pozza Editore, Venice, 1959, pp. 66-67 and Cat. 30, pp. 75-76 and P. Humfrey, *Cima da Conegliano*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 31-32.



bed, which fills the right hand side of the composition. It is undoubtedly a luxurious object, with its delicate Corinthian piers enlivened by grotesque decoration and its weighty wooden entablature, indicating that its owner is a person of some standing. The architecture of the chamber itself also contains clues to the status of the building of which it is part. A close look at the large biforate window reveals that its central colonette is of polished speckled marble with a delicate Corinthian capital. Flanking it, the inner sides of two Corinthian pilasters are just visible, clearly the interior side of an ornate round arched Corinthian biforate window, similar to those that were beginning to find their way into the palaces of Venice's elite in this period. Codussi's Palazzo Vendramin Calergi, for example, construction of which was underway in the 1490s, has large biforate windows, although the window in Cima's work lacks the distinctive Codussian oculi (Fig. 62).<sup>215</sup> More indicative of the splendour of this residence than the form of this window, variants of which were found in a wide variety of Venetian buildings, is the use of marble for the colonette and the finely carved Corinthian capitals. Arguably, both of these signify that this is no ordinary residence, but is instead the house of a person who was wealthy enough to display rich materials and sophisticated ornamentation.<sup>216</sup> A final indication of the status of the *camera* in Cima's *Annunciation* is given by its position on an upper floor, demonstrated by the elevated views visible from its windows. In contemporary Venetian palazzi, the principal *camera*, occupied by the owner or his wife, was situated off the main *portego* on the *piano nobile*, with its principal windows set in the main façade.<sup>217</sup> The rich decoration of the bifore windows in these works would befit their inclusion in a façade, allowing the conclusion that what is being shown is a pictorial rendering of the principal *camera* in a Venetian *palazzo*.

The relationship between Mary's *camera* and contemporary palace

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<sup>215</sup> On Codussi's palazzo see L. Puppi and L. Puppi, *Mauro Codussi*, Electa, Milan, 1977, Cat. 14, pp. 221-227.

<sup>216</sup> Similarly prestigious decoration is present in the Venetian painter Francesco da Santacroce's *Annunciation* (1504) (Fig. 36), signed and dated 1504 and clearly indebted to Cima's work for its composition. See L. Coletti, 1959, pp. 66-67, who notes the influence of Cima's work on Francesco's panel, and on another *Annunciation* by Andrea Previtali.

<sup>217</sup> On this arrangement and its development over time, see J. Schulz, *The New Palaces of Medieval Venice*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 2004, p. 39, see also P. Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture and the Family*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2004, pp. 63-64.

interiors could in some cases be more specific, referencing particular *palazzi*. Painted just a few years before Cima's *Annunciation*, and strikingly similar in some respects (most notably the combination in the background of a bifore window and part of a magnificent bed), Ghirlandaio's *Annunciation* (Fig. 63), part of his monumental fresco cycle in the apse of Santa Maria Novella, also sets the sacred event within a richly decorated contemporary interior.<sup>218</sup> Mary and Gabriel occupy the entire foreground of the fresco, while behind Mary a large bed, draped in an opulent red silk, and completed by an imposing headboard, fills approximately half of the background. The room has a dark red frieze running around it, and is covered by a lavish coffered ceiling, constructed of inlaid dark red panels and dark gray wood interspersed by small bronze or gold bosses. The final prominent element is the narrow-arched biforate window, constructed from *pietra serena* and completed by a lunette pierced by an oculus. Such windows were to be found on a number of Florentine *palazzi* by this period, including most notably the Palazzo Medici (c. 1444) (Fig. 64), the Palazzo Rucellai (c. 1450) (Fig. 65), the Palazzo Strozzi (c. 1457) (Fig. 66) and the Palazzo Pazzi (c. 1458) (Fig. 67). Most importantly, however, they were found on the Palazzo Tornabuoni itself. Although the palazzo has been extensively remodeled and has lost these windows, Vasari, in his account of the life of Michelozzo, describes them as being very similar to those on the Palazzo Medici, as are those in Ghirlandaio's fresco.<sup>219</sup>

The inclusion of the Villa Medici at Fiesole, seen in the background of the *Death of the Virgin* (Fig. 67), makes it clear that Ghirlandaio was capable of introducing references to contemporary buildings. A subtle reference to the Palazzo Tornabuoni, such as that in the *Annunciation* fresco, could be viewed

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<sup>218</sup> On the Tornabuoni cycle see P. Simons, "Patronage in the Tornaquinci Chapel, Santa Maria Novella, Florence", in *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy*, F.W. Kent and P. Simons (eds.), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1987, J. Cadogan, *Domenico Ghirlandaio: Artist and Artisan*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000, pp. 67-93 and Cat. 17, pp. 236-243, and F. Forsgren, "Generic Transfer in the Tornabuoni Frescoes: Domenico Ghirlandaio and the *Sacra Rappresentazione*", in *The Formation of the Genera in Early Modern Culture*, C. Guest (ed.), Fabrizio Serra Editore, Pisa and Rome, 2009.

<sup>219</sup> G. Vasari, 1967, p. 343: "Tornato finalmente a Firenze, fece al canto de' Tornaquinci la casa di Giovanni Tornabuoni, quasi in tutto simile al palazzo che aveva fatto a Cosimo, eccetto che la facciata non è di bozzi, né non cornici sopra, ma ordinaria." See also M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, *Michelozzo Di Bartolomeo*, Salimbeni, Florence, 1984, pp. 375-377.

as a form of flattery to the cycle's patrons, an architectural counterpart to the oft-noted portraits of Florentine worthies in Ghirlandaio's works.<sup>220</sup> The Tornabuoni themselves appear in the fresco cycle, not only in the portraits of Giovanni and Francesca Tornabuoni either side of the altarpiece, but also within the sacred narratives themselves. Ludovica Tornabuoni, for example, Giovanni and Francesca's daughter, appears at the head of the procession that enters Anne's chamber in the *Birth of the Virgin*.<sup>221</sup> Regardless, as in Cima and Francesco's works, the forms of this window, joined with the opulence of the rest of the chamber, make it conceivable that this space could have been read by a late fifteenth-century audience as the *camera* of a wealthy Florentine.

As the examples analysed above make clear, there were three key means by which a painter could signal that an interior was palatial: architectonically/architecturally, by dividing the space in a manner recognisable from contemporary *palazzi* and using a familiar architectural language when doing so; ornamentally, incorporating rich forms and lavish decoration to signal the elite status of the room's occupant; and, finally, by referring (subtly) to recognisable contemporary interiors.

### **A Palace for Mary: The Exterior**

Painters depicted not just the palatial interior of Mary's house, but also its splendid exterior, as can be seen in Fra Filippo Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation* (Fig. 15). The essential compositional details of this work were analysed in the previous chapter, but the form and decoration of its principal structure, unique among surviving Annunciations and seemingly directly inspired by the most recent developments in Florentine *palazzo* design, render it of considerable interest in this context. A large profiled arch, flanked by spandrels of a delicate pinkish stone and supported on distinctive early Christian capitals<sup>222</sup> frames Mary, facing the viewer directly. On the other side of the building, Gabriel kneels in front of a small rectangular doorway,

<sup>220</sup> On these portraits see E. Borsook and J. Offerhaus, *Francesco Sassetti and Ghirlandaio at Santa Trinita, Florence: History and Legend in a Renaissance Chapel*, Davaco Publishers, Doornspijk, 1981, pp. 36-42.

<sup>221</sup> J. Cadogan, 2000, p. 242.

<sup>222</sup> The capitals are copied from those in San Salvatore, Spoleto. See J. Ruda, 1993, p. 294.

surmounted by a barred window, a door and window repeated further down the same flank. Separating the two stories of the structure is a richly decorated entablature, with a frieze decorated with a foliate motif and a cornice with precisely depicted egg and dart mouldings and dentils. The second storey comprises evenly spaced recessed bifore windows, divided by slender colonettes and interspersed with plain pilasters. A simple cornice and a balustrade complete the structure.<sup>223</sup>

Lippi's building displays numerous similarities with contemporary Florentine palazzi, of which a number of important and innovative examples were built in this period, including the Palazzo Medici (Fig. 68),<sup>224</sup> the Palazzo Rucellai (Fig. 69),<sup>225</sup> Palazzo Tornabuoni, the Strozzi (Fig. 70),<sup>226</sup> and Palazzo Pazzi (Fig. 71).<sup>227</sup> Lippi had worked at Palazzo Medici, producing the pair of lunettes discussed earlier in this chapter, and could not have failed to notice the other examples, whose *all'antica* regularity and ornament were a prominent and novel feature of the Florentine cityscape. The first architectural elements that Lippi appears to have adopted from these *palazzi* are his bifore windows. Lippi's windows are closest to those found on the Medici, Strozzi and Pazzi *palazzi*, as they lack the distinctive cross bar below the oculi seen on the Palazzo Rucellai. On the other hand, their "open" oculi above the arches are closest to those on the Palazzo Rucellai, while the other palazzi all have low relief sculpted roundels. A final element present in Lippi's windows and in all the above examples is the use of slim pilasters abutting the frame to

<sup>223</sup> P. Davies and D. Hemsoll, "Balusters and the Antique", *Architectural History*, Vol. 26 (1983), pp. 1-23 and 117-122, p. 6, argue that this was one of the very first times such a balustrade appears in either built or painted architecture.

<sup>224</sup> On the Palazzo Medici see I. Hyman, *Fifteenth Century Florentine Studies: The Palazzo Medici and a Ledger for the Church of San Lorenzo* (Phd. Diss., New York University, 1968), Garland, London and New York, 1977, M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, 1984, pp. 207-212 and B. Preyer, "L'architettura del palazzo mediceo", T. Gargiulo (trans.), in *Il Palazzo Medici Riccardi Di Firenze*, G. Cherubini and G. Fanelli (eds.), Giunti, Florence, 1990, pp. 58-64.

<sup>225</sup> On the Palazzo Rucellai see K. Forster, "The Palazzo Rucellai and Questions of Typology in the Development of Renaissance Buildings", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 58, No. 1 (Mar., 1976), pp. 109-113, B. Preyer, "The Rucellai Palace", in *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone: Vol II A Florentine Patrician and his Palace*, The Warburg Institute, London, 1981, G. Clarke, 2003, pp. 202-210 and R. Tavernor, *On Alberti and the Art of Building*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1998, pp. 79-95.

<sup>226</sup> On the Palazzo Strozzi see M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, 1984, pp. 365-369 and G. Belli, "Il Palazzo dello Strozzi", in *Michelozzo: Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, G. Morelli (ed.), Centro Di, Florence, 1996.

<sup>227</sup> On the Palazzo Pazzi see A. Moscato, *Il Palazzo Pazzi a Firenze*, Florence, 1960 and L. Ginori-Lisci, *I palazzi di Firenze nella storia e nell'arte*, Giunti, Florence, 1972, pp. 545-560.

support the outer edges of the window arches. The other windows on Lippi's building, the barred square windows on the ground floor, are analogous to those found on the forbidding ground stories of all these *palazzi*, although their scale and shape is perhaps closest to those on Palazzo Rucellai. Also present on the Palazzo Rucellai's façade is a grid of pilasters, a feature perhaps alluded to by the engaged piers between the windows on Lippi's building, and a frieze separating the stories. Although Lippi's frieze is surmounted by a projecting cornice far more elaborate than the stringcourse found above the frieze on the Rucellai façade, its position and dividing function are analogous. One aspect of the ornamentation of Lippi's structure that is unusual in comparison to the examples above is its white *intonaco* surface, which is entirely at odds with the rustication and facing of masonry found on the facades of the Medici, Strozzi and Rucellai.<sup>228</sup> In fact, this finish is closer to that of the Villa Medici, Fiesole, completed in the 1450s (Fig. 70), perhaps granting Lippi's structure a partly rural character that befits its situation in the countryside, indicated by the wooded hills visible beyond the garden wall. The final important architectonic element in Lippi's structure is the "corner loggia" in which Mary sits. This bears some similarity to that on the Palazzo Medici (Fig. 71), although this resemblance is admittedly based more upon its position within the structure than on any direct formal links, as the massive rusticated blocks that formed the arches of the Medici structure are evidently very different from the relative lightness of the profiled arch in the Spoleto fresco.

It is arguable that the house created for Mary by Lippi in this fresco displays the closest reflection of contemporary architectural practice of any of the Annunciations discussed in this thesis. Lippi assimilated the ornamental language of the *palazzi* above, modified it to create novel combinations (as, for example, in his bifore windows), and then arranged it in a façade that, while unique, is also undoubtedly couched in the structural and decorative mode established by the grand *all'antica* residences of the 1440s, 1450s and 1460s. This can be seen particularly with regard to the façade, whose articulation arguably displays some understanding of Alberti's achievements

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<sup>228</sup> Although the Palazzo Pazzi does have white *intonaco* on its upper façade, its lower storey is heavily rusticated.

in the façade of the Palazzo Rucellai (Fig. 65). The links to the Palazzo Rucellai can be seen particularly in the alternating pilasters and recessed panels on the upper storey, the rhythm of which is markedly similar to that created by Alberti on the upper stories of the Rucellai palace.<sup>229</sup> An earlier example of a similar facade articulation may be seen in Zanobi Strozzi's *The Abduction of Helen* (c. 1450-1455) (Fig. 72), which Lillie has convincingly linked to the Palazzo Rucellai.<sup>230</sup> By incorporating these elements taken from contemporary *palazzi*, Lippi creates a house of considerable scale, magnificence and architectural refinement. Because of this, Mary is figured as the inhabitant of an unequivocally elite residence,<sup>231</sup> a figuration that, while unusual in its expansiveness, is nonetheless firmly within the tradition of endowing Mary's house with an honourific splendor; a tradition whose origins lie in the "thronum dei" of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.

Perhaps inspired by the monumentality of Lippi's architecture,<sup>232</sup> Piermatteo d'Amelia, Lippi's assistant in Spoleto, also set his *Annunciation* (c.1475) (Fig. 73)<sup>233</sup> within a monumental architectural setting, in his case a courtyard.<sup>234</sup> Although courtyards were rarely used as settings for *Annunciations*, architectonically they shared many of the advantages of the traditional porch or loggia setting. They were liminal, associated with but not

<sup>229</sup> On Alberti's façade see B. Preyer, 1981, pp. 179-197 and R. Tavernor, 1998, pp. 81-89.

<sup>230</sup> A. Lillie, "Zanobi Strozzi, The Abduction of Helen", published online 2014, in 'Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting', The National Gallery, London, 2014. <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/entering-the-picture/strozzi-abduction-of-helen>

<sup>231</sup> Longo describes this as a "palais marial", although without providing any architectural evidence, see S. Longo, "L'intervallo sacré", *Studiolo*, Vol. 10 (2013), pp. 74-91, p. 87.

<sup>232</sup> F. Zeri, 1953, p. 242.

<sup>233</sup> On this work see F. Zeri, "Il Maestro dell'Annunciazione Gardner" I and II, *Bollettino d'Arte*, Vol. 2/3 (1953), pp. 125-139 and pp. 233-249, pp. 242-244, P. Hendy, *European and American Paintings in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum*, Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum, Boston, 1974, pp. 7-8 (attributed to Antonizzo Romano), S. Edgerton, 1977, pp. 126-129, L. Canonici, "L'Annunciazione Gardner alla Porziuncola", *Archivum Franciscum Historicum*, 71 (1978), pp. 459-462, M. Castrichini, "Annunciazione", in *Piermatteo d'Amelia: Pittura in Umbria meridionale fra '300 e '500*, C. Fratini, (ed.), Ediert, Perugia, 1997, F. Marcelli, "Piermatteo d'Amelia e la *Liberalitas Principis*", in *Piermatteo d'Amelia: Pittura in Umbria meridionale fra '300 e '500*, C. Fratini, (ed.), Ediert, Perugia, 1997, p. 31, and C. Strinati, "Lo spazio e la luce in Piermatteo d'Amelia: riflessioni sulla pittura tra Roma, Viterbo e l'Umbria", in *Piermatteo d'Amelia: Pittura in Umbria meridionale fra '300 e '500*, C. Fratini, (ed.), Ediert, Perugia, 1997, pp. 87-88.

<sup>234</sup> The work was originally commissioned for the Franciscan convent of Santissima Annunziata in Amelia. See L. Canonici, 1978, pp. 460-461, who discusses documents that prove that the work was originally commissioned for the Amelian convent, and was only moved to the Porziuncola in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Prior to this it was believed that the work had been commissioned for the Porziuncola, see, for example, S. Edgerton, 1977, p. 129.

inside the house, open, so as to provide maximum visibility of the two protagonists, and yet also enclosed and protected to a great degree. In Piermatteo's *Annunciation* Gabriel kneels before Mary in the midst of a large rectangular courtyard (there are two arches at the rear, and three behind Mary), broken only by a cross-vaulted *androne* leading into a walled garden at the rear. A screen of gray marble composite columns with striking gilded or bronze capitals rings the courtyard, springing from which are broad arches constructed from or faced with blocks of a grey stone. Behind these, there is a cross-vaulted arcade, whose pendentives rest directly on a gray stringcourse, onto which lead two doors with simple stone frames. The interior walls above the arcade are faced with large blocks of masonry, above which a gray stone moulded stringcourse divides the first and second stories. Only a portion of this second storey is visible, but it seems to comprise a series of stone framed windows with wooden shutters, whose bases rest directly upon the stringcourse below.

Piermatteo appears to have spent some time in Florence in the 1470s, possibly in the workshop of Andrea Verrochio.<sup>235</sup> There he would have seen a number of new *all'antica* courtyards, including those of the Palazzo Medici (Fig. 74), Palazzo Rucellai, Palazzo Laroni,<sup>236</sup> Palazzo Tornabuoni, and Palazzo Pazzi (Fig. 75). The courtyard in Piermatteo's work exhibits numerous features that appear to have been derived directly from this experience. These include cross-vaulted arcades, windows resting directly on a stringcourse, monumental stone arches (although the arches in the examples above were normally profiled rather than constructed from blocks of stone), and the springing of two arches from one column in the corners. Yet there are also indications that despite Piermatteo's absorption of these essentials, he simplified or failed to fully translate many of the architectural nuances of these courtyards into his panel's fictive architecture. The arches, for example, rather than meeting an architrave, which is then followed by a frieze (a solution present in all the examples mentioned above), are instead set into an expanse of wall. Similarly, the pendentives of the cross-vaulting

<sup>235</sup> F. Marcelli, 1997, pp. 14-15.

<sup>236</sup> On the architecture of the Palazzo Laroni-Canigani see H. Saalman, "Tommaso Spinelli, Michelozzo, Manetti, and Rosselino", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (Oct., 1966), pp. 151-166, pp. 160-163.

rest directly on a stringcourse, rather than on *peducci*, as in the vaulted arcades of the courtyards listed above. Other unusual elements can be explained as the result of pictorial license. The deep *androne* that leads into the walled garden in the background would have been an unlikely addition to a contemporary palace, whose rear walls are often curtain walls. Instead, it is included to draw attention perspectively to the symbolically significant *hortus conclusus* behind, a solution also used in Domenico Veneziano's *Santa Lucia Annunciation* (c.1445) (Fig. 9) where the funneling perspective leads directly to the *porta clausa* in the red wall, which Piermatteo could have seen in Florence. The luxurious bronze/gilt capitals and marble columns are on the other hand a pictorial invention/innovation not found in any of the *palazzi* above, and serve to elevate Mary's surroundings.

Although this would seem to make it clear that Piermatteo's intention was to create a *palazzo* for Mary,<sup>237</sup> Castrichini offers an alternative interpretation, describing the setting as a "renaissance cloister".<sup>238</sup> Castrichini, unfortunately, offers no architectural evidence. The question raised is nonetheless valid given that the differences between the courtyard and the cloister were far from fixed in this period, and given that the work was commissioned for a convent (although Piermatteo's courtyard bears no resemblance to that at the convent itself). Linguistically, the use of the terms "chostro" or "claustrum" and "cortile" was not standardised in this period.<sup>239</sup> In his description of the Palazzo Medici, for example, Filarete describes how the architect "makes a square cloister above which are rooms..."<sup>240</sup> In formal terms too, the cloister and the courtyard shared the same basic template: an open space surrounded by vaulted arcades and a series of regular arches

<sup>237</sup> Arasse describes this courtyard as "le *cortile* d'un palais parfait, conçu dan le style florentin moderne...", although gives no architectural specifics. See D. Arasse, 1999, p. 212.

<sup>238</sup> M. Castrichini, 1997, p. 134: "un choistro rinascimentale".

<sup>239</sup> W. Lotz, "Bramante and the Quattrocento Cloister", *Gesfa*, Vol. 12, Vol. 1/2 (1973), pp. 111-121, pp. 113-114.

<sup>240</sup> Filarete, Book XXV, f. 190r: "fa un chostro quadro sul quale sono camere..." Hyman describes a similar attitude on the part of Alberti, who advised, "Around this area [the cloister] a portico, a walkway, the cells, dining hall, council chamber, and utility rooms should be arranged, as in a private house...", see I. Hyman, 1978, p. 197.



resting on columns.<sup>241</sup> Despite this, a brief comparison between the palace courtyards described above and a number of prominent quattrocento Florentine cloisters (which Piermatteo would also have seen), at the Badia Fiorentina (c. 1440) (Fig. 76),<sup>242</sup> and the group designed by Michelozzo and, following him, Antonio Manetti, the Badia Fiesolana (c. 1450),<sup>243</sup> San Marco (c. 1440), San Lorenzo (c. 1450) (Fig. 77), and the Spinelli cloister at Santa Croce (c. 1450),<sup>244</sup> reveals that there are differences, but that they reside in the details rather than in the overall form. A key distinguishing feature is the low wall on which the columns rest in cloisters, designed to allow the monks or nuns to sit, an amenity not seen in palatial courtyards.<sup>245</sup> Another crucial difference is that the second storey of these cloisters is usually in the form of an open loggia with a tiled pitched roof, where palaces usually had an enclosed second storey with a series of bifold windows. Bearing these differences in mind, it is clear that the courtyard in Piermatteo's work, which lacks low walls and has an enclosed upper storey, is closer to that in a palace than in a convent. Given the ambiguities outlined above, however, it is also true that Piermatteo's courtyard could perhaps be read as a "cloistered" space, inviolate and removed from the world, benefiting from the formal interchanges between the palace courtyard and the cloister.<sup>246</sup>

As with Filippo's Lippi Marian palace in Spoleto, Piermatteo's architecture cannot be directly linked to one source alone, but is instead a sensitive amalgamation, the result of a process of formal borrowing, adaptation and invention akin to that practiced by architects themselves. Nevertheless, it is clear that, like Lippi, Piermatteo learnt from the palatial architecture that surrounded him, employing his understanding of its

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<sup>241</sup> Lotz has suggested that the origins of the arcaded palace courtyards of the quattrocento could be found in the medieval cloister, see W. Lotz, 1973, p. 114, see also I. Hyman, 1978, p. 198. This is a point echoed by Clarke, who argued that though classical architectural precedent (the Vitruvian peristyle, for example) may have been important, formally these courtyards were indebted to the cloister, see G. Clarke, 2003, p. 122 and pp. 255-256.

<sup>242</sup> On the Badia Fiorentina's architecture see A. Leader, *The Badia of Florence: Art and Observance in a Renaissance Monastery*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2012, pp. 109-118.

<sup>243</sup> On the Fiesolana see A. Belluzi, "La Badia Fiesolana. Tipologia edilizia e linguaggio architettonico", in *Ricerche Brunelleschiane*, Florence, 1977.

<sup>244</sup> On the San Lorenzo and Spinelli Cloisters, see H. Saalman, 1966, pp. 153-158.

<sup>245</sup> See I. Hyman, 1978, p. 197 and A. Leader, 2012, p. 113.

<sup>246</sup> The positive messages conveyed by architectural references to the cloister are analysed at greater length in Chapter 3.

constituent elements when creating a palace for Mary. Direct links between what is built and what is painted are difficult to demonstrate, but, as Lippi and Piermatteo's *Annunciations* show, understanding the sources of a fictive architectural building can help elucidate the messages a painter wished his architecture to convey. In their case, as in the *Annunciations* by Botticelli (Fig. 56 and 57), Cima da Conegliano (Fig. 61) and Ghirlandaio (Fig. 63), they convincingly figure Mary as a lady of some status. These messages, the means of their transmission and their implications, are the subject of the rest of this chapter.

### **The Semiotics of Architecture: How Architecture Signifies Mary's Status and Virtues**

There has been much analysis of how architecture functions as a semiotic system, and specifically of how architecture is not just functional but also communicative.<sup>247</sup> For Umberto Eco, architecture has both a primary and a secondary function. Its primary function is to perform a certain role, such as a church operating as a space for worship, while its secondary function is connotative, so that the same church may also refer to the Temple of Solomon through the use of Solomonic columns in its window frames.<sup>248</sup> Furthermore, Eco argues, these connotations become socially ingrained through repeated usage, so that in the case of the works discussed above, the forms and decoration of a *palazzo* courtyard or *camera* would immediately have connoted notions of wealth, social position and perhaps even power.<sup>249</sup> Marvin Trachtenberg, discussing the relationship between architecture and painting, wrote the following:

"That such images often took architectural form depended on the fact that architecture was not merely space-producing but involved vital representational

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<sup>247</sup> See D. Preziosi, *The Semiotics of the Built Environment: An Introduction to Architectonic Analysis*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London, 1979, C. Jencks, "The Architectural Sign", in *Signs, Symbols and Architecture*, G. Broadbent, R. Bunt and C. Jencks (eds.), Wiley, Chichester, 1980 and U. Eco, "Function and Sign: The Semiotics of Architecture", in *Rethinking Architecture*, N. Leach (ed.), Routledge, London, 1997.

<sup>248</sup> U. Eco, 1997, pp. 186-188.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 189.

dimensions, both inside and outside painting (and sculpture). A crucial aspect of what is meant by 'monumental' architecture refers to just this attribute, to architecture as visual signification..."<sup>250</sup>

The idea that architecture, whether painted or built, is not just the production of space, but also contains "representational dimensions" is of crucial importance in understanding how the architectural specifics of these works' settings connoted not just "palazzo" but also wealth and status. The palatial, ornate and luxurious architectural aspects of these works are thus not just decorative, but also connotative, expressing clear messages about the identity of Mary.

Discussing Botticelli's small panel of the *Annunciation* in the Metropolitan (Fig. 56), Daniel Arasse describes how "In amplifying the architecture to make an image (unlikely) of Mary's palace, Botticelli's result is a monumentalisation of the "little house" of Mary and a glorification of the Virgin."<sup>251</sup> This glorification of Mary is arguably the single most potent result of these palatial settings. If we return to the palace in Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation* (Fig. 15), we can imagine the emphatic statement made by such a structure, the modern, *all'antica* forms of which would have been all the more striking in a town such as Spoleto, whose architectural vocabulary at this point would have been almost entirely Gothic and medieval despite the presence of ancient Roman remains. Similarly, any Florentine who had walked past one of the city's more modern palaces and let their eye wander down a gloomy *androne* to a spacious classicising courtyard would instantly have recognised the prestige attached to Mary by her residence in the grand palace of Botticelli's Glasgow panel. Perhaps the clearest example of how the palatial environs chosen by painters served to glorify Mary by providing concrete evidence of her status is Crivelli's National Gallery *Annunciation* (Fig. 24), where the street setting dictated by the civic commission (discussed at greater length in Chapter 4) throws the magnificence of Mary's house into

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<sup>250</sup> M. Trachtenberg, *Building-in-Time: From Giotto to Alberti and Modern Oblivion*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2010, p. 280.

<sup>251</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 199: "En amplifiant l'architecture pour en faire l'image (peu vraisemblable) du palais de Marie, Botticelli aboutit à un monumentalisation de la *domuncula* de Marie et à un glorification de la Vierge..."

sharp focus. The house immediately opposite Mary's, for instance, is solidly constructed, with a fine brick exterior staircase, complete with a prominent section of marble in its balustrade, an elegant stone faced second storey and a refined cornice. Yet, even if we just compare the second storey of this house with that of Mary we can see a marked difference. Where the first house has a simple cornice dividing its two stories, Mary's has an richly decorated *all'antica* entablature, and while the window frames of the first house are a dull red stone, those of Mary's are constructed of marble and are interspersed with delicate gold putti. Indeed, the ornamentation of Mary's house shares more with the triumphal arch in the middle ground of the work (note, for example, the echoes of the frieze on Mary's house in that on the arch, including a near repetition of the vegetal motif and exactly the same egg and dart moulding),<sup>252</sup> than it does with any of the houses either in the street or in the model of Ascoli Piceno held by Saint Emidius. This unequivocal, pointed splendour, further heightened by the contrast with the adjacent houses, renders it absolutely apparent that Mary's house is a structure apart and above, and thus, by extension, that she herself is a person apart and above the rest of society.

### **Mary in the Countryside: The Annunciation and the Villa**

In the second half of the quattrocento, a distinct group of Annunciations emerged, by Pollaiuolo (Berlin, 1468) (Fig. 78), Biagio d'Antonio (Rome, c. 1490) (Fig. 79) and Filippino Lippi (Naples, c. 1480-2) (Fig. 80), all of which used a villa type structure as a house for Mary. Associated with these because of their rural settings are also another *Annunciation* by Biagio d'Antonio (Faenza, c. 1475), and works by Lorenzo di Credi (Florence, c. 1480) and Carpaccio (Venice, 1504), although these latter works lack the topographical specificity that, as we shall see, is potentially a key factor in identifying the structures in these works as villas. How are these settings defined as villas/rural and what rationale might painters have had for using them as settings for their Annunciations?

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<sup>252</sup> R. Lightbown, 2004, p. 334, discusses the ornamentation of Mary's house at length.

In Pollaiuolo's *Annunciation* (Fig. 78), the composition is divided in two by a wall, with Mary in her *camera* (identified as such in the usual manner by the bed that is just visible to the far right of the room) while Gabriel kneels in an adjacent corridor, a solution later used, as we have seen, by Botticelli in a number of his *Annunciations*.<sup>253</sup> The decoration of the room and its furnishings are lavish in the extreme. The walls of the corridor are covered by panels of deep red marble, interspersed with Corinthian pilasters, and bronze or gilded capitals, stuccoed or carved in low relief with a foliate pattern. At the end of the corridor, there is a bifore window with profiled arches and a blood red Corinthian colonette in the center, described plausibly by Wright as "Michelozzian".<sup>254</sup> The walls of Mary's *camera*, meanwhile, are decorated with panels showing seraphim encased in a foliate frame, once more interspersed with ornate pilasters, above which a rich entablature encircles the room. A coffered ceiling, complete with inlaid embossed panels covers the space, while the floor is paved by giant slabs of polychrome marble. Indeed, so opulent is the room as a whole, that Wright connects the opulence of its decoration to descriptions of the early Christian and medieval churches of Rome by Giovanni Rucellai, in which he details the elaborate decoration of mosaic and marble covered interiors of these buildings.<sup>255</sup> Judging by the view of Florence just visible through the larger lefthand window (identified by Imesch as being from the north or northwest of the city),<sup>256</sup> the building of which this space is part apparently occupies a site in the hills between Fiesole and Maiano.<sup>257</sup> The elevated site, which follows Albertian precepts on the siting of the villas of distinguished owners, and the extravagance of the decoration clearly indicate, as Wright notes, that this building is one of

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<sup>253</sup> On this work see S. Ortolani, *Il Pollaiuolo*, Ulrico Hoepli, Milan, 1948, p. 44, L. Ettlinger, *Antonio and Piero Pollaiuolo*, Phaidon, London, 1978, p. 30, p. 50 and Cat. 2, p. 138, K. Imesch, "The Spiritual and Civic Meaning of Pollaiuolo's Berlin *Annunciation*", *Fifteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 25, 1999, and A. Wright, *The Pollaiuolo Brothers: The Arts of Florence and Rome*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2005, pp. 300-306.

<sup>254</sup> A. Wright, 2005, p. 303.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 304.

<sup>256</sup> K. Imesch, "The Spiritual and Civic Meaning of Pollaiuolo's Berlin '*Annunciation*'", *Fifteenth Century Studies*, Vol. 25 (1999), pp. 41-82, p. 43.

<sup>257</sup> Ettlinger identifies the view of Florence as roughly equivalent to that from the Villa Medici at Fiesole, see L. Ettlinger, 1978, p. 172.

considerable status.<sup>258</sup> Arguably, however, it is possible to go beyond this broad description and describe the structure more precisely as a villa. We can do so not just on the basis of its evidently rural situation, but also perhaps because of the peculiarly ornate nature of its decoration. Alberti himself noted that "...there is a further difference between a town house and a villa: the town house ought to be far more sober in character, whereas in a villa the allures of license and delight are allowed."<sup>259</sup> What could better describe the elaborate, almost playful decoration of this room? Although Wright argues, correctly, that the principal purpose of this decoration is to describe the status and sacrality of the room and its occupants,<sup>260</sup> the lavish décor can surely also be viewed as displaying those "allures" to which Alberti referred, all the more so when compared to the austere palace settings espoused by Botticelli. While it is true that in reality town palaces were almost invariably more grandly furnished than villas, in designing this space Pollaiuolo was operating with the freedom allowed by pictorial architecture, a freedom that allowed him to create the ideal richness of decoration advocated by Alberti.

Florence appears once again in the background of Filippino Lippi's *Annunciation* (c. 1483) (Fig. 80),<sup>261</sup> now in Capodimonte, Naples.<sup>262</sup> Here the announcement itself, accompanied in this case by attendant saints, takes place outside, while the principal foreground building is relegated to the right hand side. Although little can be seen of this edifice, what can be seen is sharply detailed. Immediately behind Mary is what appears to be a two bayed loggia supported by broad piers that leads onto a garden encircled by a low wall. This loggia is crowned with a simple entablature, which in turn supports

<sup>258</sup> Ibid., pp. 305-306.

<sup>259</sup> L.B. Alberti, Vol. 2, 1966, p. 789: "hoc interest: quod urbanarum ornamentum prae illis multo sapere gravitatem oportet, villis autem omnes festivitatis amoenitatisque illecebrae concedentur." For the translation see L. Alberti, 1988, p. 294.

<sup>260</sup> A. Wright, 2005, p. 305.

<sup>261</sup> On this work see U. Baldini and L. Berti, *Filippino Lippi*, Edizioni d'Arte Il Fiorino, Florence, 1991, p. 182 and P. Zambrano, "Filippino Lippi: la formazione e la prima maturità (c.1457-1488)", in N. Katz and P. Zambrano, *Filippino Lippi*, Electa, Milan, 2004, p. 361.

<sup>262</sup> S. Blasio, "Il mito di Firenze nelle vedute d'insieme. La città ideale dei Cristiani e degli Umanisti, l'immagine del potere mediceo", in *Firenze nella pittura e nel disegno dal Trecento al Settecento*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan, 1994, has discussed the views of Florence that appear in numerous later Quattrocento paintings.

a second storey of which very little can be seen. Loggias were a common feature of Tuscan villas in this period, although such loggias were normally incorporated into a courtyard type space as at the Pazzi villa at Trebbio, the Medici villa at Trebbio and the Strozzi villa at Santuccio.<sup>263</sup> The Villa Medici at Fiesole, however, does have a similar loggia (Fig. 70). Lippi's loggia, however, stretches the entire width of the façade and has a cornice above it that is not present on the Villa Medici. Despite these differences, it is still the case that this loggia was clearly informed by contemporary villa architecture, making it entirely suitable for a structure set in an explicitly rural environment. Although these architectural features allow us to tentatively identify Lippi's structure as a villa, it is also true that, as with Pollaiuolo's *Annunciation*, we can only securely define this as a villa because of its situation within a rural landscape, emphasised here by the physical distance imposed between the foreground villa and Florence in the background.

A greater specificity of place can be seen in Biagio d'Antonio's *Annunciation* (Fig. 79), now in the Accademia di San Luca, Rome,<sup>264</sup> where in place of a view of Florence, the landscape in the background contains a portrait of a recognisable building, the Medici villa at Fiesole.<sup>265</sup> Mary receives Gabriel in front of two richly decorated arches, which open onto a small loggia. These arches are heavily decorated, with finely detailed monochrome foliate stucco or carved stone work in recessed spandrels. Flanking these arches are opulent light purple pilasters, enlivened by a precisely depicted grotesque patterning. The gilded Corinthian capitals are of an unusual type, with little *putti* supporting a garland replacing the normal acanthus leaves; such individualised capitals are not unknown in Florentine architecture, the

<sup>263</sup> A. Lillie, *Florentine Villas in the Fifteenth Century*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2005, p. 113.

<sup>264</sup> On this work see R. Bartoli, *Biagio d'Antonio*, Federico Motta, Milan, 1999, pp. 130-134, and R. Bartoli, "Annunciazione", in *L'Uomo del Rinascimento: Leon Battista Alberti e l'arte a Firenze tra ragione e bellezza*, C. Acidini Luchinat and G. Morolli (eds.), Mandragora, Florence, 2006, p. 232.

<sup>265</sup> C. Bargellini and P. du Prey, "Sources for a Reconstruction of the Villa Medici, Fiesole", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 111, No. 799 (Oct., 1969), pp. 597-605, pp. 597-598. Galetti refines their visual analysis, noting that where Ghirlandaio shows a four bay loggia stretching the entire width of the villa's façade, Biagio d'Antonio depicts a three bay loggia occupying the centre of the façade only, which more closely reflects the building itself. See G. Galetti, "Una committenza medicea poco nota: Giovanni di Cosimo e il giardino di villa Medici a Fiesole", in *Giardini medicei: giardini di palazzo e di villa nella Firenze del Quattrocento*, C. Acidini Luchinat (ed.), F. Motta, Milan, 1996, p. 70.

capitals of the Palazzo Pazzi courtyard, for example, feature an intricate design which incorporates dolphins in place of scrolls (Fig. 75). The loggia behind is decorated with the same pilasters, and arches with the same stucco work in the spandrels, while the ceiling is coffered, with large roseate bosses. It is open on two sides, while to the right there is a doorway with a simple *pietra serena* frame, whose austerity is slightly at odds with the exuberant décor that surrounds it. More of the building is visible outside this loggia, where an outside flank of the structure is visible, from which it appears that this is a relatively simple structure of two stories. On the first floor there are two small square windows with *pietra serena* frames, while above is a string course on which rest slim monoforate windows, once again framed by a thick band of *pietra serena*. The structure is completed by a projecting roof.

The architecture of the exterior of the villa, leaving aside the ornate loggia, bears a marked resemblance to the Medici villa at Fiesole in the background, in particular as regards the projecting roof, small square windows and terraced garden.<sup>266</sup> It is not, however, by any means a faithful copy, nor does it seem to be based on any villa currently extant. Biagio's *Annunciation* therefore illustrates an important point. Any architectural portraiture is firmly placed in the background, while Mary's villa remains resolutely, perhaps even decorously generic; this decorous approach was also seen in the "palatial" Annunciations analysed previously. While describing Mary's house as a "palace" or a "villa" by inviting comparison with contemporary built architecture had advantages, it would undoubtedly have been a step too far to identify Mary's dwelling too closely with any actual building, and no Annunciations survive which do so.

The fact that these "villa" Annunciations seem to form a typologically distinct group may suggest that common factors underlie these painters' choice of a villa setting in these works. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that by placing the Annunciation in a landscape made recognisable by the inclusion of familiar features, painters tied the sacred event to a place, or more

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<sup>266</sup> On Fiesole see M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, 1984, pp. 252-255, J. Ackerman, *The Villa: Form and Ideology of Country Houses*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1991, pp. 73-78, C. Frommel, *Architettura e committenza da Alberti a Bramante*, Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 2006, pp. 43-78, and A. Lillie, "Fiesole: Locus Amoenus or Penetential Landscape", *I Tatti Studies*, Vol. 11 (2008), pp. 11-55.



precisely to the Florentine *contado*. It is possible that these works were intended either for private chapels within villas or within an associated oratory or church, or for the chapel of a villa-owning family within one of Florence's churches. Biagio's *Annunciation*, for example, was not alone in showing the Medici villa at Fiesole; as we have seen the villa also appears in the background of Ghirlandaio's *Death of the Virgin* in the Tornabuoni Chapel (Fig. 68). This makes it possible, Bartoli suggests, that Biagio's work was also commissioned by a Tornabuoni, probably Lucrezia, or by a member of the Medici family themselves.<sup>267</sup> It is worth reiterating, however, that the association drawn between the family and the sacred event by this topographical allusion is a decorous one, with the villa in the background acting more as a memory of place, a memory distant to a certain degree from the sacred *locus*, which acts as a means of making the scene more memorable, and more personal, for an audience familiar with the places described.<sup>268</sup>

Horticultural settings and Mary had long been linked, particularly by the commonplace metaphor of the *hortus conclusus*, a feature that appears in numerous depictions of the *Annunciation*.<sup>269</sup> In Fra Angelico's Cortona *Annunciation*, for example, the left hand side of the painting contains an enclosed garden, behind which Adam and Eve are shown at the moment of their expulsion from Eden (Fig. 20). As Didi-Huberman explains in his analysis of the work, these gardens (Mary's and Eden itself) contain a number of horticultural references, to the *hortus conclusus* but also to Nazareth, the place of flowers, alluded to by the profusion of flowers in the foreground garden.<sup>270</sup> Is it possible to see the landscapes in these "villa" *Annunciations* as partly elaborations upon the horticultural themes already well established in previous images?

Rural settings, or at least the suggestion of rural settings, were already

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<sup>267</sup> R. Bartoli, 1999, p. 131.

<sup>268</sup> On this see S. Blasio, 1994, p. 67 and P. Rubin, 2007, pp. 216-217 who discusses this with regard to Filippino Lippi's Santo Spirito *Madonna and Child*, which contains a detailed view of the Porta San Frediano and of the palace of the Nerli, the donors of the work, in the background.

<sup>269</sup> See Chapter 1, n. 60.

<sup>270</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 157.

a feature of some Florentine Annunciations in the first half of the quattrocento. In Lorenzo Monaco's Capella Bartolini *Annunciation*, a screen of trees is clearly visible beyond Mary's house, indicating that it has been placed in a rural environment (c.1420) (Fig. 8). Trees are also a feature in Baldovinetti's *Annunciation*, filling the horizon behind the high wall which stretches across the background of the painting, in this case accompanied by a clear allusion to the *hortus conclusus* in the form of a verdant garden which occupies the space between this wall and Mary's loggia in the foreground (Fig. 21). In contrast to these arboreal hints, fully developed landscapes fill the backgrounds of a number of Filippo Lippi's paintings, often seen framed by a window or doorway at the rear of Mary's *camera*. In his Corsham Court *Annunciation* (c.1460) (Fig. 81), for instance, a path leads from a doorway into a plain dotted with trees, culminating in a walled city surrounded by mountains.<sup>271</sup> What separates the *Annunciations* by Monaco, Baldovinetti and Filippo Lippi from those discussed above, is that in the latter, especially in the paintings by Biagio and Filippino, the building or villa is now situated within a landscape, enveloped by it rather than simply looking out to it; instead of looking from a building to a landscape, our viewpoint is outside the building, allowing us to gain a better sense of its situation. We have a far clearer sense too, of *where* these buildings are thanks to their seemingly recognisable topography, meaning that what we see is not a generic landscape but a place. Nonetheless, the intention is at least partly the same, namely to visually expand upon the long alliance between Mary and the horticultural. It is important to note in this regard that enclosed gardens feature prominently in both Biagio and Filippino's works, with the result that, despite the greatly expanded landscape, the metaphorical kernel of the *hortus conclusus* remains prominent and unchanged.

Other factors too made the villa a suitable choice as a setting for the Annunciation. Due to their privacy and often remote situations, villas were almost akin to cloisters in the seclusion they could offer, an important attribute in the house of the inviolate Mary. As well as this, the villa was also commonly

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<sup>271</sup> Given its situation at the head of a valley, flanked by mountains to the right, this city may represent Prato. Lippi's Barberini *Annunciation* also includes a view of landscape in the background, with a wooded hillside visible behind a wall, as does his Spoleto *Annunciation*.

associated with a simple and virtuous existence, as reflected in contemporary literature, where the pure rural situation was held as the antithesis or antidote to the busy immorality of the city. Petrarch stated in his *De Vita Solitaria* that:

“But whether we go in search of God, whether of ourselves and of the honest studies that will help us reunite the one thing and the other, whether of a soul akin to ours, we must take a place as far as possible from the crowd of men and the swirl of the city.”<sup>272</sup>

In advising of the necessity of removing oneself from the world and its travails, Petrarch also draws attention to how such a removal will allow you to better “search for God”, identifying the countryside as somehow a more holy place.

Building on these Petrarchan ideals, in Alberti's *Della Famiglia*, Gianozzo describes how:

“You can at the villa flee those shouts, those tumults, that storm of the earth, of the piazza, of the palace...How blessed will he be that stays at the villa: a happiness unknown!”<sup>273</sup>

This alludes to the opposition between *negotium*, the business of the city, and *otium*, the productive, learned leisure of the countryside.<sup>274</sup> Villas were also places particularly associated with the women of the family, who on occasion would spend as much as six months of the year at the villa,<sup>275</sup> making it an

<sup>272</sup> F. Petracca, *La Vita Solitaria*, A. Bufano, (trans.), in F. Petracca, *Prose*, G. Martellotti, P. G. Ricci, E. Carrara, and E. Bianchi (eds.), Riccardo Riccardi, Milan and Naples, 1955, p. 297: “Ma sia che andiamo in cerca di Dio, sia di noi stessi e degli onesti studi che si aiutano a raggiungere l'una cosa e l'altra, sia di un animo al nostro affine, dobbiamo tenerci il più possibile lontani dalla turba degli uomini e dal turbine della città.”

<sup>273</sup> L.B. Alberti, *I Libri della Famiglia*, R. Ruggiero and A. Teneti (eds.), Giulio Einaudi, Turin, 1969, p. 245: “...puoi alla villa fuggire questi strepiti, questi tumulti, questa tempesta della terra, della piazza, del palagio...Quanto sarà beatissimo lo starsi in villa: felicità non conosciuta!”

<sup>274</sup> See D. Coffin, *The Villa in the Life of Renaissance Rome*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1979, pp. 9-14 and J. Ackerman, 1991, p. 64. Vickers has noted, however, that it is wise not to oversimplify *otium* as a concept, see B. Vickers, “Leisure and idleness in the Renaissance: the ambivalence of *otium*”, *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2. On *otium* as specifically relating to villas see A. Lillie, “The Humanist Villa Revisited”, in *Language and Images of Renaissance Italy*, Brown, A. (ed.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1995, p. 213.

<sup>275</sup> A. Lillie, “The patronage of villa chapels and oratories near Florence: a typology of private religion”, in E. Marchand, and A. Wright (eds.), *With and Without the Medici: Studies in Tuscan Art and Patronage 1434-1530*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 1999, p. 22.

apt choice as the home of Mary, herself a young woman. As a space associated with a virtuous, productive, secluded lifestyle, the villa, particularly when considered as antithesis to the busy, morally lax city, was thus well matched with the purity of Mary. Nor was this virtuous existence purely secular, as might be supposed. On the contrary, villas were associated with a variety of religious activities, as Amanda Lillie has demonstrated in a series of articles.<sup>276</sup> Regardless of the realities of villa life, the villa carried a number of positive associations in contemporary thought, most importantly perhaps those to do with seclusion and a virtuous existence, which made it a natural home for Mary.

### **A Room of her Little House: The Problem of Mary's Poverty**

Like the palatial settings discussed previously, the villas in these works also served to aggrandise Mary by placing her in buildings whose lavish decoration, and, in the case of Biagio d'Antonio and Pollaiuolo's works, elevated situation served to indicate that their owner was a person of considerable status. Yet, by giving Mary a house of such obvious wealth, painters were making statements that ran contrary to a considerable body of religious thought that praised Mary for her poverty, seeing her as an exemplar of a simple life, unencumbered by excessive materialism. At the end of the quattrocento, Savonarola took painters to task for their portrayals of Mary, saying: "Do you think Mary went clothed in the manner that you paint her? I tell you that she went dressed as a poor woman, simply, and covered so you could hardly see her face...You make the Virgin Mary appear dressed like a whore."<sup>277</sup> Although Savonarola's stinging criticism is aimed specifically at Mary's clothing in contemporary images, it could just as easily be applied to the grandeur of her house. His contemporary, the poet Jacopo Sannazaro, was unequivocal in his description of the poverty of Mary's surroundings,

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid. and A. Lillie, 2008, pp. 11-55.

<sup>277</sup> G. Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Amos e Zaccaria*, Vol. 2, Ghiglieri, G. (ed.), Angelo Belardetti, Rome, 1972, pp. 25-26: "Credete voi che la Vergine Maria andassi come voi la dipignete? Io vi dico ch'ella andava vestita come poverella, semplicemente, e coperta che apena sigli vedeva el viso...Voi fate parere la Vergine Maria come meretrice." For the translation see A. Nagel, *The Controversy of Renaissance Art*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011, p. 14.

describing them in his *De partu Virginis* as “the meager quarters of a poor man’s abode.”<sup>278</sup> Unsurprisingly, given that poverty was a foundational element of their order, the Franciscans particularly promoted Mary as a paradigm of the virtuously poor life.<sup>279</sup> In the Franciscan *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, for example, the author uses the Nativity as a starting point for ruminating upon Mary’s poverty, admonishing his reader and himself by saying “On this the Blessed Francis said, ‘Brothers, you know that poverty is the peculiar road of salvation, for it is the nourishment of humility and the root of perfection, whose fruit is abundant but secret.’ Thus it is to our great shame and injury that we do not embrace it [poverty] with all our might, but are bowed down by the superfluous, when the Lord of the World and the Lady, His mother, observed poverty so rigidly and diligently.”<sup>280</sup>

Important architectural “evidence” of Mary’s poverty was presented by the Santa Casa at Loreto, believed to be Mary’s house itself transported to the Marche on the wings of angels in order to save it from the onslaught of the pagan armies of Islam, apparently arriving in Loreto on the night of the 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1294.<sup>281</sup> The house as it exists today is a simple one room structure built of rough hewn brick, 9m long and 4.5m wide (Fig. 82),<sup>282</sup> its forms echoed by the account of the Annunciation in the *Meditations*, which

<sup>278</sup> J. Sannazaro, 1988, p. 11: “thalamis et paupere tecto.” For the translation see J. Sannazaro, 2009, p. 9

<sup>279</sup> On this see N. Havely, *Dante and the Franciscans: Poverty and the Papacy in the ‘Commedia’*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2004, pp. 104-106 and H. Flora, 2009, pp. 187-189 See also H. Baron, *In Search of Florentine Civic Humanism: Essays on the Transition from Medieval to Modern Thought*, Vol. 1, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988, pp. 163-191, on the widespread social effects of the mendicant orders’ praise of poverty.

<sup>280</sup> J de Caulibus, 1997, p. 32: “De qua dicebat beatus Franciscus: Paupertum noveritis frates spiritualementem viam esse salutatis, tamquam humilitatis fomentum, et perfeccionis radicem, cuius est fructus multiplux sed occultus. Magnus est igitur nobis verecundia et nociva, quod eam non amplectamur toto posse sed oneramus superfluis, quando mundi Dominus et Domina mater eius eam sic strictissime ac studiose servaverunt.” For the translation see *Meditations*, 1961, p. 31. Flora has observed that the illustrations in a mid fourteenth-century manuscript of the *Meditations* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Ms. Ital. 115) reinforce this by showing the “pious destitution” of the holy family, see H. Flora, 2009, p. 187.

<sup>281</sup> F. Grimaldi, “Il Sacello della Santa Casa Di Loreto”, in *Il Sacello della Santa Casa*, Casa Di Risparmio di Loreto, Loreto, p. 13. On the cult of the Santa Casa see also A. Nagel and C. Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance*, Zone Books, New York, 2010, pp. 195-204. On the complex at Loreto and its development through the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries see K. Posner, “Cloister, Court and City Square”, *Gesta*, Vol. 12, No. 1/2 (1973), pp.123-132.

<sup>282</sup> F. Grimaldi, p. 25.

expresses wonder at “what a small house these persons entered, and what events They caused.”<sup>283</sup> Its cult grew throughout the fifteenth century, spreading from the Marche throughout Italy, so it would likely have been known to all of the painters mentioned above,<sup>284</sup> and yet it appears not one of them paid any attention to the humility of the Santa Casa, preferring instead to place Mary in a succession of more or less architecturally splendid palaces and villas.<sup>285</sup>

In spite of this praise directed towards Mary’s poverty, the “reality” as detailed in the apocrypha and in Voragine’s *Golden Legend*, which was a popular source for painters, was a little more complex. In the *Protoevangelium of James* we are told that Joachim, Mary’s father “was a rich man and bought all his gifts for the Lord twofold”,<sup>286</sup> while in the *Golden Legend*, Mary’s royal status is established by detailing her descent from King David.<sup>287</sup> It is true also that in many of the images of Mary that a contemporary audience would have encountered she is shown not as a humble girl from Nazareth but as the Queen of Heaven, enthroned in the court of heaven and surrounded by attendant saints and angels. Consider, for example, the numerous depictions of the *Coronation of the Virgin Mary* painted in the first half of the quattrocento by Fra Angelico (c.1435) (Fig. 83), Fra Filippo Lippi (c.1447) (Fig. 84) and others.<sup>288</sup> In all of these, the emphasis is on maximum display, with Mary dressed in the richest clothing, and seated on thrones so elaborate as to almost qualify as buildings in themselves, while around her a score of angels and saints proclaim her glory. Thus, while Savonarola and the Franciscans

<sup>283</sup> J. de Caulibus, 1997, p. 16: “O qualis est illa domuncula ubi tales sunt et talia exercentur.” For the translation see *Meditations*, p. 16.

<sup>284</sup> A. Nagel and C. Wood, 2010, p. 204, who document the growth of the cult through the appearance of a number of churches dedicated to the Santa Casa throughout Italy in the fifteenth century.

<sup>285</sup> R. Lightbown, 2004, p. 33, notes how, despite the example of the Santa Casa, fifteenth-century painters in the Marche continued to show Mary’s house as “a mansion, richly furnished...”, a trend exemplified by Crivelli’s London *Annunciation*.

<sup>286</sup> *New Testament Apocrypha*, Vol. 1, R. Wilson (ed), Lutterworth Press, London, 1963, p. 374

<sup>287</sup> J. de Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, Vol. 2, W. Ryan (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, p. 143.

<sup>288</sup> Lorenzo Monaco, *Coronation of the Virgin*, Uffizi, Florence, c.1414, Fra Angelico, *Coronation of the Virgin*, Louvre, Paris, c. 1435, Fra Filippo Lippi, *Coronation of the Virgin*, Uffizi, Florence, c. 1447. See also J. Ruda, “Style and Patronage in the 1440s: Two Altarpieces of the Coronation of the Virgin by Filippo Lippi”, *Mitteilungen des Kunsthistorischen Institutes*, 28 Bd., H. 3 (1984), pp. 363-384.

may have emphasised her poverty, other sources, both visual and textual, told a very different story. They showed Mary as a wealthy lady, high born, and as a queen, a long way from the humble girl in a Bethlehem manger. Seen in this light, the splendour of Mary's surroundings as described in the Annunciations above begins to make more sense, especially when viewed through the lens of contemporary architectural thought, which addressed the question of appropriate display through the concepts of *magnificentia* and *decorum*.

Simply speaking, *magnificentia* refers to an idea, originally expressed in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and revived in the quattrocento by Leonardo Bruni and others, that held that people should spend according to their status in society, or in other words that a wealthy man should live in a manner suited to, and reflective of, his riches.<sup>289</sup> Aristotle wrote: "It is also typical of the magnificent person to furnish his house in a way appropriate to his wealth (even this is a sort of ornament) and to spend more on those results that will last a long time (because they are the noblest) and in each case to spend what is fitting..."<sup>290</sup> Importantly in this context, these ideas of fitting expenditure allowed a certain amount of architectural display, although this display was subject, as we shall see, to other constraints. Also crucial was the sense that *magnificentia* and an associated reassessment of the moral status of material goods, with its licensing of a certain amount of ostentation, supplanted to a certain extent the status of poverty, and of the unostentatious life, as the paradigmatic virtue.<sup>291</sup> In other words, display, within proper boundaries, no longer carried the same moral penalty that it had in the fourteenth century and earlier.

More apposite to architecture itself was *decorum*, or the idea that buildings should reflect the function of the building and the status of its owner,

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<sup>289</sup> On *magnificentia* see Fraser-Jenkins, A., "Cosimo de Medici's Patronage of Architecture and the Theory of Magnificence", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 33 (1970), pp. 162-170, P. Howard, *Beyond the Written Word: Preaching and Theology in the Florence of Archbishop Antoninus 1427-1459*, Leo S.Olschki, Florence, 1995, pp. 208-211, P. Howard, "Preaching Magnificence in Renaissance Florence", *Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (Summer 2008), pp. 325-369, esp. pp. 328-344, and P. Rubin, 2007, Chap. 2.

<sup>290</sup> Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, R. Crisp (trans. and ed.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 65.

<sup>291</sup> H. Baron, 1988, Chapter 9, esp. p. 229-231.

in scale, in the types of rooms, and in their ornament.<sup>292</sup> Originally a rhetorical term formulated by Cicero and Quintilian and having to do with applying a suitable style for different types of speech, it had been applied by Vitruvius to architecture in his influential treatise. Vitruvius advised in his first introductory book on general architectural principles that "For those powerful men by whose counsel the republic is governed, dwellings should be designed to accommodate their activities, and in every case the allocation of buildings should be appropriate to every different type of person."<sup>293</sup> Later in the work, he goes on to discuss how this might be applied in practice, describing how, as the houses of different types of citizen have to accommodate different numbers of people, the number and type of rooms should reflect this.<sup>294</sup> So, for example, he states that "for those of moderate income, magnificent vestibules, tablinia, and atria are unnecessary..."<sup>295</sup> In the fifteenth century, Alberti adopted the idea of *decorum* in his *De re aedificatoria*, updating it for contemporary use but retaining many of its classical essentials. As we have seen, he advised that the decoration of villas and town houses ought to differ, because of their varying uses and situations, while elsewhere he straightforwardly appropriates the Vitruvian precepts discussed above, stating that "And yet between a prince's and a private citizen's house there is an intrinsic difference in character. Since the house of a prince must accommodate a large number of people, it should have rooms notable for their number and size..."<sup>296</sup> Later in the century, Filarete addressed the same ideas in his architectural treatise in a more straightforward, and perhaps even more prescriptive fashion. In the introductory book, he discusses private

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<sup>292</sup> On decorum see C. Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence 1400-1470*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, pp. 117-199, who discusses its practical application in Pius II's projects at Pienza, A. Payne, *The Architectural Treatise in the Italian Renaissance: Architectural Invention, Ornament and Literary Culture*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 56-57, and G. Clarke, 2003, pp. 56-58.

<sup>293</sup> Vitruvius, *Ten Books on Architecture*, I. Rowland (trans.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 26.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 80.

<sup>296</sup> L.B. Alberti, 1966, Vol. 1, p. 341: "Inter principium et privatorum hoc maxime interest, quod earum utraeque in primis naturam sapient. In hac quidam, quae plurimorum sunt usibus addicatae, numero et amplitudine excellere..." For the translation see L. Alberti, 1988, p. 120.



buildings, arguing that “These are of three manners and types according to their order. These are the palaces of gentlemen and the houses of people, of common artisans, of persons of low condition, and the poor.”<sup>297</sup> He also explicitly tied stylistic choices, the use of the orders, for example, to the status of the building’s patron. So in the palace of a gentleman the columns should “have the qualities and proportions of the Doric, or the large. I do this because of the rank of the owner; among men he is one of the greats or the upper class. The building thus ought to be in harmony with the inhabitant.”<sup>298</sup> As the statements above illustrate, *decorum* is essentially to do with an architecture that is fit for purpose, with its forms and ornament reflecting both its expected functions, large reception rooms to accommodate the extensive client base of a powerful man, for example, and the social standing of its owner.

Is Mary’s house, as portrayed in the Annunciations analysed above, in “harmony with the inhabitant”? Mary was royal, both in an earthly and a heavenly sense, and was the daughter of a wealthy man. If we follow the precepts of *decorum*, as expounded by Vitruvius and subsequent writers, we see that Mary is thus absolutely entitled to the grand palaces and villas in which she is housed. These are building types that are in “harmony” with her status.

Leopardi has placed the rich costumes of the holy figures in Crivelli’s works in the context of the sermons of the contemporary preacher Jacopo della Marca and of the sumptuary laws of Ascoli Piceno.<sup>299</sup> Applying this understanding to Crivelli’s religious paintings, Leopardi concludes that: “The type of fabric, the cut, the precious colours in which Crivelli shrouded the

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<sup>297</sup> Filarete, *Trattato di architettura*, Vol. 1, A. Finoli and L. Grassi (eds.), Edizioni Il Polifilo, Milan, 1972: “Quelli saranno di tre maniere e ragioni secondo loro ordine. Questi saranno: palazzi di gentili uomini, e casamenti di popolari e di communi artigiani e da persone di bassa condizione e poveraglia.” For the translation see Filarete, Vol. 1, 1966, p. 21. Onians highlights Filarete’s use of the word *qualità* in his discussion of *decorum*, pointing that it was a word explicitly associated with social class in this period, see J. Onians, *Bearers of Meaning: The Classical Orders in Antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Renaissance*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1988, p. 166.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 323: “...e questi saranno della qualità e misura dorica, cioè grande. Questo fo, perché la qualità di chi l’ha a possedere, secondo l’universale numero di persone, sono de’maggiori, sì che così debbono conseguire li edifizii [da loro] abitati...” For the translation see Filarete, Vol. 1, 1966, p. 146.

<sup>299</sup> L. Leopardi, “‘Ornamentatis Secundum Condescentiam sui Status’: New Criteria for Assesing the *Ornato* in Crivelli’s Paintings”, in *New Studies on Old Masters: Essays in Renaissance Art in Honour of Colin Eisler*, J. Gaston and D. Wolfthal (eds.), Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, Toronto, 2011.

Virgin and saints served as refined symbols of devotion and social prestige that identified the figures so ornamented.”<sup>300</sup> Like the ornamental costumes of Crivelli’s figures, as the residences depicted are those of a noble, even royal, personage, the elaborate architectural ornament seen in these works is entirely in tune with contemporary attitudes. In the courtyard of Piermatteo’s *Annunciation* (Fig. 73), for instance, we see arches springing from elaborate Composite columns, the most prestigious of the orders, a feature commonly found in the courtyards of the grandest palaces of the period (the Palazzo Medici is just one example) and one that is directly linked to the princely status of their owners.<sup>301</sup>

Mary was not the only holy figure receiving such treatment in the fifteenth century. As Forster notes, artists such as Gozzoli actually very often depicted the facades of holy protagonist’s houses using motifs taken from the very latest developments in *all’antica* architectural design, using the plethora of fashionable buildings represented in Gozzoli’s Old Testament cycle in Pisa as examples.<sup>302</sup> In fact, Gozzoli was apparently paying attention to the messages carried by architectural style in his very first fresco cycle, that of the *Life of St Francis*, painted for San Francesco, Montefalco in the early 1450s.<sup>303</sup> In the first scene from the cycle, which shows both the prophecy of the saint’s birth and his actual birth, the events are shown taking place in a richly decorated house (Fig. 85). An *all’antica* frieze forming part of a simple entablature runs above the ground storey of the house, while immediately above Francis’ mother on the steps is an ornate Gothic biforate window set into a panel of rich polychromatic marble, all features eminently suited to the birthplace of a young man of a wealthy family. In his Saint Augustine cycle, painted in the mid 1460’s for Sant’Agostino in San Gimignano,<sup>304</sup> Gozzoli

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid., p. 264.

<sup>301</sup> J. Onians, 1988, p. 142.

<sup>302</sup> K. Forster, 1976, p. 111.

<sup>303</sup> On this cycle see A. Padoa-Rizzo, *Benozzo Gozzoli: Pittore Fiorentino*, Editrice Edam, Florence, 1972, pp. 39-44 and Cole-Ahl, D., *Benozzo Gozzoli*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1996, pp. 48-60.

<sup>304</sup> On this cycle see D. Cole-Ahl, “Benozzo Gozzoli’s Frescoes of the Life of Saint Augustine in San Gimignano: Their Meaning in Context”, *Artibus et Historiae*, Vol. 7, No. 13 (1986), pp. 35-33 and A. Padoa-Rizzo, “Pittura, Architettura e Scultura nelle Storie Agostiane di Benozzo Gozzoli”, in *Benozzo Gozzoli: Le Storie di Sant’Agostino a San Gimignano*, R. Cardini, A. Padoa-Rizzo and M. Regoliosi (eds.), Bulzoni Editore, Rome, 2001.

continued his careful attention to appropriate architectural decoration. The scene of *Saint Augustine's Vision of Saint Jerome* (Fig. 86) shows the saint seated at his desk in an austerely furnished study. One notably unaustere element, however, of this study is the round arched bifore window with its small oculus, filled with bottle-top glass set into a *pietra serena* frame. Such windows, as we saw in Lippi's *Spoleto Annunciation* (Fig. 15), Ghirlandaio's *Tornabuoni Annunciation* (Fig. 63) and the *Annunciation* by Cima da Congeliano (Fig. 61), were commonly found on more prestigious private edifices. The date of Gozzoli's fresco in the 1460s is also significant, as such windows were at that point a recent addition to the vocabulary of domestic architecture. They would have been seen first-hand by Gozzoli on the Palazzo Medici where he frescoed the chapel in the late 1450's.<sup>305</sup> Once again, as in his frescoes at Montefalco, the ornamentation of Gozzoli's fictive architecture reveals much about the elevated status of the protagonists it houses, in the same way as Mary's regal standing was signalled by the palaces and villas which housed her in the Annunciations analysed above.

There is a further type of *decorum* at work in these images, a *decorum* centered around notions of narrative and aesthetic fitness. In his *Della Pittura*, Alberti advises painters always to be aware of the narrative they are attempting to describe, and to ensure that all the elements within their work are plausible; "Everything should also conform to a certain dignity. It is not suitable for Venus or Minerva to be dressed in military cloaks; and it would be improper for you to dress Jupiter or Mars in women's clothes."<sup>306</sup> Although Alberti does not mention architecture in this regard, these concerns are clearly applicable. Because it was set in a manger it would not be suitable for the Nativity to take place in a palace, but the same palace could easily, and decorously according to contemporary criteria, play the part of Mary's house (an element of the Annunciation narrative established by the textual sources discussed at the beginning of this chapter) in an image of the Annunciation.

<sup>305</sup> A. Padoa-Rizzo, 1972, p. 53.

<sup>306</sup> L.B. Alberti, 2011, p. 274: "...ogni cosa seguiti ad una dignita. Sarebbe cosa non conveniente vestire Venere o Minerva con uno cappellone di saccomano; simile sarebbe vestire Marte o Giove con una vesta di femmina." For the translation see L.B. Alberti, *On Painting and On Sculpture*, C. Grayson (trans.), Phaidon, London, 1972, p. 77.

Yet painters were not just in the business of producing a dryly appropriate image; there were aesthetic considerations at play as well. It is difficult to discuss the aesthetic qualities of an image in an analytical fashion, aesthetic fitness being ultimately subjective, yet we can at least consider the fact that these works were not only telling stories but were telling them in ways designed to seize and hold a spectator's attention and, in many cases, to provide a suitably ornate and dignified embellishment to a sacred space. If we return to Alberti, we find that he outlines how he believes this could be profitably achieved:

"A 'historia' you can justifiably admire will be one that reveals itself to be so charming and attractive as to hold the eye of the learned and unlearned spectator for a long while with a certain sense of pleasure and emotion. The first thing that gives pleasure in a 'historia' is a plentiful variety. Just as with food and music novel and extraordinary things delight us for various reasons but especially because they are different from the old ones we are used to, so with everything the mind takes great pleasure in variety and abundance...I would say a picture is richly varied if it contained a properly arranged mixture of old men, youths, boys, matrons, maidens, children, domestic animals, dogs, birds, horses, sheep, buildings and provinces..."<sup>307</sup>

Although Alberti mentions buildings only in passing, as one of a number of elements that add variety to a picture, it is possible that in images of the Annunciation, containing at most a handful of figures, the architectural setting could itself be called upon to provide this "plentiful variety". Despite being populated with an unusual number of figures for an Annunciation, Crivelli's

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-276: "Sarà la storia, qual tu possa lodare e maravigliare, tale con sue piacevolezze si porgerà sì ornata e grata che ella terrà con diletto e movimento d'animo qualunque dotto e indotto la miri. Quello che prima dà voluttà nella istoria viene dalla copia e varietà delle cose. Come ne' cibi e nella musica la novità e abbondanza tanto piace quanto sia differente dalle cose antique e consuete, così l'animo si diletta d'ognia copia e varietà: per questo in pittura la copia e varietà piace. Dirò io quella istoria essere copiosissima in quale, a' suoi luoghi, sieno permisti vecchi, giovani, fanciulli, donne, fanciulle, fanciullini, polli, catellini, uccellini, cavalla, pecore, edifice, province..." For the translation see C. Grayson, 1972, p. 79. On the *istoria* and *varietas* see J. Spencer, "Introduction", in L. Alberti, *On Painting*, J. Spencer (trans.), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1966, pp. 25-28, A. Grafton, "Historia and Istorìa: Alberti's Terminology in Context", *I Tatti Studies: Essays in the Renaissance*, Vol. 8 (1999), pp. 37-68 and G. dalli Regoli, "Copia e varietas nelle Storie di Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano", in *Benozzo Gozzoli: Le Storie di Sant'Agostino a San Gimignano*, R. Cardini, A. Padoa-Rizzo and M. Regoliosi (eds.), Bulzoni Editore, Rome, 2001.

Ascoli *Annunciation* (Fig. 24) nonetheless contains within it an enormous amount of visually diverting architectural detail, from the colourful coffering of the ceiling of the loggia above Mary's *camera*, to the splendid Composite pilasters with their bronze capitals that flank the entrance to Mary's house. Undoubtedly then, the house designed by Crivelli for the Virgin contains within it the "variety and abundance", necessary in Alberti's conception to give the mind "great pleasure." The abundance of rich decoration in these *Annunciations*, such as the capitals in Biagio's *Annunciation* (Fig. 79), with their small putti, or the splendid *all'antica* frieze encircling Mary's house in Filippo Lippi's Spoleto *Annunciation* (Fig. 15), not only honour Mary but also enhance the visual experience of the spectator.

### **Conclusion: Buildings Speak**

Whatever the changes wrought in the representation of Mary's house, its honorific function remained the same. There is, in some sense, a direct line between the throne in the Bapistery *Annunciation* (Fig. 34) and other late thirteenth-century *Annunciations*, and the fifteenth-century paintings described above. Both serve to honour Mary, mother of God, confirming her status by giving her a splendid house. Painters sought to create a house worthy of Mary and of God, largely ignoring Mary's apocryphal poverty and, later, the example of the Santa Casa at Loreto to do so. Instead, the houses they created often reflected the very latest architectural fashions, meaning that Mary was at least as well housed as any member of the leading families of Florence or Venice. Formally, painters were aware of the latest fashions in architectural ornament, very quickly making use of innovations in design and using them to carefully construct buildings that used and developed the *all'antica* mores of the period. The round arched biface window, with its slender colonettes, quatrefoils and delicate marble or *pietra serena* frame, found scattered throughout many of the works discussed above, is perhaps the most eloquent example of this formal exchange; painters such as Fra Filippo Lippi took the forms found in contemporary buildings and transformed them into something distinctly new. Furthermore, this exchange was not just formal but also typological, with painters figuring the Virgin's house in ways

that, as we have seen, evoke contemporary architectural types, in particular the villa and the palace, while simultaneously embellishing them, creating new architectonic and ornamental combinations, and adapting them for pictorial purposes. Importantly, these citations, whether formal, architectonic or typological, were never slavish: Mary's house can never be precisely identified with any real building.

This figuration of Mary's house as a high status residence conformed to contemporary theories of magnificence, and of architectural decorum as expressed in the treatises of Alberti and Filarete. According to these a house should reflect the status of its owner; accordingly therefore Mary, who as Queen of Heaven and mother of Christ was a person of great stature, deserved an elaborate residence. Realising this pictorially was far easier in an image than it was in real life. Painters did not need to worry about cost or structural integrity and could as a result decorate their interpretations of Mary's house with lavish marbles, brass capitals and other rich ornament. Such opulence, however, ran counter to a long-standing and deep rooted tradition in Marian devotion that viewed her as the archetypal model of devout poverty, expressed textually in works such as the *Meditaciones vitae Christi* and orally in sermons by Savonarola and others. Despite this, however, painters invariably continued to show Mary as a privileged young woman housed in the latest and grandest of residences. In doing so, they were also conforming to traditions in other Marian works, especially those depicting the Coronation of the Virgin, where Mary was shown enthroned in maximum splendour. The richness and diversity of the ornament that resulted also allowed painters to produce works that fulfilled contemporary expectations of the composition of a work, in particular the importance of *varietas*, which was expressed clearly in Alberti's *De pictura*.

If in the first chapter of this thesis we saw how fictive architecture could function, then in this chapter we have begun to see how it could speak. It seems that painters were fully aware of the statements made by their choice of a palace or a villa, knowingly forging connections with the architectural world that surrounded them and their audience in order to enrich the messages carried by their works. As this makes clear, these links could prove powerful tools for a painter, a subject that will be further explored in the next

chapter by examining how painters used connections with the architecture of sacred places and spaces for a variety of practical, theological and metaphorical purposes.

## Chapter 3 Sacred Spaces

### Introduction: Defining the Sacred

In his influential liturgical treatise *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, Guillaume Durand (d. 1296) wrote that “The sacristy...signifies the womb of the most blessed Mary, in which Christ clothed Himself with the sacred vestment of his flesh. The priest processes to the people from the place where he put on his vestments because Christ, proceeding from the womb of the Virgin Mary, came into the world.”<sup>308</sup> Durand’s metaphor figures Mary architecturally as that part of the church where the consecrated bread and wine were kept, a holy room removed from the public spaces of the nave. Durand was not alone in employing architectural metaphors for Mary, a figuring that, as we will see, provided fertile material for painters considering how best to house Mary in their images of the Annunciation.

This chapter will discuss how Mary’s role as a sacred container for the infant Christ (and as a venerated figure in her own right) led some painters to place Mary within architectural surroundings that reflected to differing extents the architecture of holy places, from the ciborium to larger spaces such as the cloister. Key to this is the idea that as the bearer of Christ, Mary came to be viewed as his tabernacle.<sup>309</sup> In a sermon on the Annunciation, San Bernardino said “The tabernacle of Christ was Mary, sanctified by God, she remained always clean and pure without any stain.”<sup>310</sup> The Annunciation is thus the moment at which Mary becomes a sacred receptacle, a figure worthy of both veneration and protection.

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<sup>308</sup> G. Durand, *Rationale divinatorum officiorum*, A. Davril and T. Thibodeau (eds.), Brepols, Turnhout, 1995, p. 23: “Sacrarium, siue in quo sacra reponuntur, siue in quo sacerdos sacras uestes induit, uterum sacratissime Marie significat in quo Christus se sacra ueste carnis uestiuit. Sacerdos a loco quo uestes induit ad publicum procedit quia Christus, ex utero Virginis procedens, in mundum uenit.” For the translation see G. Durand, *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum*, T. Thibodeau (trans.), Columbia University Press, New York, 2007, p. 21.

<sup>309</sup> On this see C. Purtle, *The Marian Paintings of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, p. 6, and D. Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: The Meaning of Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, Catholic University of America Press, Washington D.C., 2001, p. 64. See also M. Holmes, 2013, pp. 218-219, and M. Guerin, “Meaningful Spectacles: Gothic Ivories Staging the Divine”, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 95, No. 1 (Mar., 2013), pp. 53-77, pp. 59-62

<sup>310</sup> San Bernardino da Siena, 1989, p. 824: “El tabernacolo di Iesu fu Maria, e Iddio li santificatò, e stette sempre netto e pura senza alcuna macula.”



These ideas can be seen in practice in Ghiberti's sculpted *Annunciation* for the North Door of Florence's Baptistery (Fig. 87).<sup>311</sup> A highly economical composition resting upon a tense interplay between the dynamic forward motion of Gabriel and a forceful recoil from Mary, its architecture is equally concentrated, consisting solely of a small edifice snugly encasing Mary. In its form it closely resembles a ground level version of the street tabernacles of Florence, with a small barrel-vaulted roof projecting on simple unadorned brackets (Fig. 88).<sup>312</sup> Ghiberti's reduction of Mary's house (familiar to his audience from painted Annunciations, such as the near contemporary panel by Lorenzo Monaco in Santa Trinita (Fig. 8)) to a simple niche encases, protects and highlights Mary in much the same way as the built tabernacles of Florence did their sacred images. Importantly, this was also a reference that Ghiberti's Florentine audience, conditioned by years of viewing sacred objects in similar structures, would have understood. It is also surely not accidental that Ghiberti refers to a type of religious micro-architecture particularly associated with Marian images, which occupy the majority of surviving tabernacles. Although Annunciations of this period made reference to a variety of religious spaces for a number of reasons, arguably at the heart of all of these was this desire to demonstrate the importance of Mary and her burden using a visual language of the enshrined object, a visual language common to both painter and spectator. If Mary was a tabernacle, then it was logical that she be enclosed by fictive structures that reflected those that housed sacred or holy objects such as miraculous images and altars in built architecture.

Before considering how and why painters chose to reflect holy architecture in their works, a broader question must first be considered: can architecture, its forms and the spaces it creates, signify, or even create and

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<sup>311</sup> On this panel see R. Krautheimer and T. Krautheimer, *Lorenzo Ghiberti*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1956, pp. 121-123, see also I. Danilova, "Sull'interpretazione dell'architettura nei bassorilievi dei Ghiberti e di Donatello", in *Lorenzo Ghiberti nel suo tempo*, Vol. 2, Leo S. Olschki, Florence, 1978.

<sup>312</sup> On these street tabernacles see C. A. Luchinat, "Tabernacoli, architetture senza architetti", in *Arte, storia e devozione: Tabernacoli da conservare*, Centro Di, Florence, 1991 and R. Chierici, "Tabernacoli stradali dipinti a Firenze nel XIV secolo", *Arte Cristiana*, Vol. 95, No. 840 (May - Jun., 2007), pp. 181-190. An excellent surviving example of a tabernacle similar in form to that in Ghiberti's relief can be found on the corner of the Via delle Casine and the Via dei Malcontenti in Florence, containing a fresco by Nicolo di Pietro Gerini of the *Madonna and Child Enthroned Between Two Angels, St. Peter and St. John the Baptist*, see Fig. 89.

construct holiness or is this only conferred by what it contains? Richard Trexler addressed the question in a number of writings on Florentine religious experience, arguing that churches, for example, were considered sacred because of what they contained, not just in terms of relics but also because God was considered to be more present in those spaces.<sup>313</sup>

"The church was holy...because it housed things and persons. Its primary residents were God and the titular saint of the church...Then the body of Christ was there, which is to say Christ himself. Next angels lived in the church, as did other saints. Clearly, the primary ritual inducing element in the church was sacred presence, and not abstract enclosure of space. Certainly the sacred numen that these objects radiated reached a limit of sorts at the walls of the church...But the *sacer locus* focused on the area occupied by *cose sacre*..."<sup>314</sup>

While this is certainly true, there was also a distinct formal and architectonic language associated with ecclesiastical structures. The ciborium and tabernacle, for example, both important sources for the fictive architecture of the Annunciation, followed certain spatial and ornamental tropes in their housing of sacred objects, tropes that arguably immediately signalled sacrality. There were also means by which the most sacred areas within a church – the high altar, reliquary chapels, and the sacristy – could be separated architecturally from the main body of the church, their special status indicated by the great arches that framed their entrances, or the rood screens that ensured that lay eyes had only controlled glimpses of the high altar and its surroundings.<sup>315</sup> As Bacci notes these divisions, as well as the demarcation created by the walls of the church itself, combine to create a real sense of a space apart. She writes: "The walls of the church delimited a space

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<sup>313</sup> See R. Trexler, *Public Life in Renaissance Florence*, Academic Press, New York, 1980, and R. Trexler, *Church and Community 1200-1600: Studies in the History of Florence and New Spain*, Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, Rome, 1987, pp. 11-12.

<sup>314</sup> R. Trexler, 1980, p. 53, see also S. Hamilton and A. Spicer, "Defining the Holy: the Delineation of Sacred Space" in *Defining the Holy: Sacred Space in Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, S. Hamilton and S. Spicer (eds.), Ashgate, Aldershot, 2005.

<sup>315</sup> See M. Hall, "The Tramezzo in Santa Croce, Florence, Reconstructed", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Sep. 1976), pp. 325-341, pp. 338-339 on the division of the church into lay and ecclesiastical areas in medieval thought, and J. Jung, "Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 82, No. 4 (Dec., 2000), pp. 622-657, pp. 629-631, on the rood screen's role as both barrier and mediating space.

that belonged to a dimension distinct from the everyday experience of the inhabitants of the city: it was something other, charged with an extraordinary charisma, that the architecture and the décor were called upon to express to the fullest.”<sup>316</sup> These areas were, of course, considered sacred because of the “*cose sacre*” they contained, but, nonetheless, the architectural setting did do much to create a suitable “*sacer locus*”. Arguably, the relationship was more symbiotic than Trexler’s analysis considers, with the holy object conferring an importance upon a space that its architecture then confirms and amplifies.

When assessing the nature and extent of painters’ references to sacred architecture, it is also important to bear in mind the varying forms these could take. While direct references – a “portrait” of a church or other ecclesiastical structure – are very rare, indirect formal allusions, as we shall see, are relatively common. Ideas of enclosure, limiting access and framing, are all important within ecclesiastical architecture. While not explicitly holy, their employment within the fictive architecture of Annunciations – discussed with reference to access in the first chapter of this thesis – could nevertheless effectively confer sacrality on Mary’s architectural environs. This chapter will look at a variety of these allusions to sacred architecture, organised typologically, with the underlying aim of examining to what extent fictive architecture could create a sacred space, how this was achieved and why? It will then examine a related phenomenon, the situation of Annunciations within sacred spaces, and the diverse ways in which they interacted with each other.

### **The Tabernacle**

A particularly clear visual expression of the metaphor of Mary as the tabernacle of the Lord is found in a marble relief of the *Annunciation* by

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<sup>316</sup> Bacci, M., *Investimenti per l'aldilà: Arte e raccomandazione dell'anima nel Medioevo*, Editori Laterza, Rome, 2003, p. 8: "Le pareti della chiesa delimitavano uno spazio che apparteneva a una dimensione distinta da quella esperienza quotidiana degli abitanti di una città: era qualcosa di altro, caricato di un carisma straordinario, che l'architettura e l'arredo erano chiamati ad interpretare ed esprimere al meglio." See also Eliade, who describes how "For religious man, space is not homogenous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; some parts of space are qualitatively different from others.", M. Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, W. Trask (trans.), Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, 1959, p. 20.

Arnolfo di Cambio, executed in Florence around 1300 (Fig. 89).<sup>317</sup> Strikingly simple, this relief shows Gabriel approaching from the left, while Mary, clasping her hand to her breast, shrinks away from the angel on the right. Entirely filling the middle ground between them is a tabernacle/ciborium (it is difficult to say precisely which) that consists of two Solomonic columns supporting a dome. The hand of the Lord rests on the top of this structure, with the dove of the Holy Spirit just visible underneath. The scale of the tabernacle/ciborium and its position within the relief make it clear that it is to be understood as a third participant in the work. Discussing a copy of the relief, currently affixed to the outside of the Duomo immediately adjacent to the campanile, Verdon noted that "The artist therefore has visualised *in architectural and spatial terms* the mystery that is in that moment within Mary..."<sup>318</sup> In other words, the tabernacle/ciborium here acts as an architectural substitute for Mary, its penetration by the Holy Spirit a decorous metaphor for Mary's impregnation. As well as this, however, the very act of visualising Mary as a tabernacle/ciborium is itself significant, serving to render concrete and easily apprehensible the Mary as tabernacle metaphor.<sup>319</sup> This point would have been even more easily understandable with the relief in its original state, when the figure of the adult Christ stood within the central structure.<sup>320</sup> With this figure in situ, the idea of Mary as a sacred receptacle for the Lord, expressed by Christ under the canopy, would have been readily comprehensible, made explicit by Arnolfo's carefully contrived staging of the Annunciation.

Although Arnolfo's sculpted *Annunciation* extracts and clearly visualises the tabernacle analogy, painted versions of the Annunciation were more likely to express the metaphor through the built environment of their

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<sup>317</sup> On this work see E. Neri Lusanna, "Annunciazione", in *Arnolfo: alle origini del rinascimento Fiorentino*, exh. cat., Pagliai Polistampa, Florence, 2005, see also E. Neri Lusanna, "Oltre la facciata: il contesto della scultura arnolfiana tra Firenze e Roma", in *Arnolfo: alle origini del rinascimento Fiorentino*, exh. cat., Pagliai Polistampa, Florence, 2005, p. 361.

<sup>318</sup> T. Verdon, 2002, pp. 26-27: "L'artista cioè ha visualizzato *in termini architettonici e spaziali* il mistero che in quell'istante si avvera in Maria...", on this relief see also T. Verdon, "Costruire una Casa per Il Signore", in *Alla Riscoperta di Piazza del Duomo in Firenze: Vol. 1 Dal Battistero al Duomo*, Centro di, Florence, 1991.

<sup>319</sup> E. Neri-Lusanna, "Oltre la facciata", 2005, p. 361, described how this relief "capace di dar figurazione a complessi concetti teologici...", a point exemplified by Arnolfo's clear presentation of this complex metaphor.

<sup>320</sup> E. Neri-Lusanna, "Annunciazione", 2005, p. 366.

depictions, alluding to it architecturally through the encasing of Mary in structures that reflect contemporary tabernacles. Spinello Aretino's *Annunciation*, frescoed in San Francesco, Arezzo, around 1410, is a particularly clear example of this architectural borrowing (Fig. 90).<sup>321</sup> The composition is very similar to Duccio's predella of the *Annunciation* (Fig. 6) – given Arezzo's relative proximity to Siena, it is perfectly possible that Spinello could have seen it - though there are many differences in the architectural detail. Gabriel is placed on the left of the scene, having entered through a round arch topped by a crocketed Gothic pediment. A screen of pointed arches replaces the wall found in the background of the Duccio panel, at the right end of which Mary stands to receive Gabriel in a splendid, tall, domed structure open on two sides. Although architectonically similar to the porch occupied by Mary in Duccio's *Annunciation*, formally it is a very different structure. Duccio's porch is far simpler, and its ostensible function is acting as a porch for the open doorway behind Mary. The function of Spinello's edifice, by contrast, is spatial and decorative, serving only to cover, frame and highlight Mary with maximum aesthetic effect; it is a tabernacle rather than a porch. It has two broad Gothic arches with spandrels decorated with inlaid panels of purple stone, one facing Gabriel and one facing the viewer of the fresco, which in turn frames the figure of Mary between two slender Solomonic columns. Inside, there is a large throne-like chair and a lectern, with what appears to be a red brocaded cloth hanging on the far wall. The structure has an elaborate vault, with crocketed pinnacles marking the four corners surrounding a ribbed golden dome. Each of the arches supports a lobed and crocketed Gothic gable inlaid with what appears to be pink, gold and green stone, in the foremost of which a small sculpted roundel of God can be seen (the roundel on the other pediment is at too oblique an angle to allow us to see what it depicts).

Architecturally, Spinello's structure bears a considerable resemblance to fourteenth-century tabernacles in Rome and Florence (although this is hard to quantify properly, given the few that survive), as a comparison with

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<sup>321</sup> On this work see M. Zucker, "Parri Spinelli's Lost Annunciation to the Virgin and Other Aretine Annunciations of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Jun., 1975), pp. 186-195, p. 190 and p. 192, and S. Weppelmann, *Spinello Aretino e la pittura del Trecento in Toscana*, Edizioni Polistampa, Florence, 2011, Cat. 37, pp. 195-197.

Orcagna's tabernacle in Orsanmichele, Florence,<sup>322</sup> which Spinello would have seen when working in Orsanmichele in the 1390s,<sup>323</sup> makes clear (Fig. 91).<sup>324</sup> Signed and dated 1359, Orcagna's tabernacle is an immensely lavish structure, encrusted with precious stones and marble reliefs, and is evidently far more complex than Spinello's edifice in many respects. In its essentials, however, there are some similarities. Like the structure in the fresco, Orcagna's tabernacle is domed and ornamented with pinnacles and Gothic gables, making it clear where Spinello's formal inspiration lay. Also directly related to Spinello's structure are the chapel-ciboria of San Francesco itself.<sup>325</sup> These are restrained structures comprising an arch and tall gable, which project from the wall and rest upon banded octagonal columns (Fig. 92). Although they are far from identical, the formal links between this structure and Spinello's are plain: a broad arch (round not pointed as in Spinello's fresco) topped by a gable within which is set a roundel of God the father.

Spinello's sources, the tabernacles and ciboria-chapels, reveal his

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<sup>322</sup> On Orcagna's tabernacle see N. Fabbri and N. Rutenberg, "The Tabernacle of Orsanmichele in Context", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (Sep., 1981), pp. 385-405, B. Cassidy, "Orcagna's Tabernacle in Florence: Design and Function", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 55 Bd., H. 2 (1992), pp. 180-211, G. Kreytenberg, *Orcagna's Tabernacle in Orsanmichele, Florence*, Harry N. Abrams, New York, 1994, D. Zervas, *Andrea Orcagna: Il Tabernacolo di Orsanmichele*, Franco Cosimo Panini, Modena, 2006, and M. Holmes, 2013, pp. 227-239.

<sup>323</sup> S. Weppelmann, 2011, pp. 64-65.

<sup>324</sup> There were a number of these tabernacles in Rome, most notably the Tabernacle of the Veronica in Old St Peter's, the tabernacle in San Giovanni Laterano (still extant) and the Felici Icon Tabernacle in Santa Maria Arcoeli. These all shared a number of distinct features in common with Orcagna's tabernacle and with Spinello's fresco, namely a dome surrounded by pinnacles and gables and the use of Solomonic columns, although a comparison with Orcagna's tabernacle is most apposite for Spinello's work, given that he had first-hand experience of the structure. On the Roman tabernacles see C. Bolgia, "The Felici Icon Tabernacle (1372) at S. Maria in Aracoeli, Reconstructed: Lay Patronage, Sculpture and Marian Devotion in Trecento Rome", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 68 (2005), pp. 27-72 and C. Bolgia, "Icons in the Air: New Settings for the Sacred in Medieval Rome", in *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond*, P. Davies, D. Howard and W. Pullan (eds.), Ashgate, 2013. On their links to Orcagna's tabernacle see B. Cassidy, 1992, pp. 199-203.

<sup>325</sup> On these chapels specifically see M. Salmi, *San Domenico e San Francesco di Arezzo*, Del Turco, Rome, 1950, p. 26. On this type of trecento chapel, a cross between a canopy and a tabernacle, more generally see M. Bacci, 2003, pp. 134-138 and J. Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2013, pp. 252-255 and Holmes, who offers the following precise description of their form with reference to chapel in Santa Maria e Michele in Cigoli – "This structure essentially takes the primary face of the Orsanmichele tabernacle - the central arch, pinnacles and the lateral pinnacles - and embeds it in the wall.", M. Holmes, 2013, p. 238. One of the best documented examples of this type of chapel is the Dragomani Chapel in San Domenico, Arezzo (c. 1365).

intention to create within his setting a tabernacle for Mary, who was herself a tabernacle for the Lord. Given this, it is worth considering in more detail the function of the tabernacles that formed his inspiration, focusing once more upon Orcagna's tabernacle in Orsanmichele. Orcagna's tabernacle was commissioned by the Compagnia della Madonna di Orsanmichele to house Bernardo Daddi's 1346 *Madonna and Child*, painted to replace an earlier fourteenth-century copy of the original miracle-working image painted on a pillar of the grain market between 1285-1292. Within a few years, this image became renowned for its thaumaturgic properties, until it was destroyed by fire in 1305. Orcagna's tabernacle replaced an earlier structure, a fourteenth-century image of which survives, which was most likely dismantled when the Signoria built a new stone loggia for the grain market in 1337.<sup>326</sup> As shrine architecture, Orcagna's tabernacle had two principal functions: firstly, to house and frame a sacred image, and secondly, to provide a focus for Marian devotional practices.<sup>327</sup> It was, according to Fabbri and Rutenberg, "a diminutive but ornate church",<sup>328</sup> and, significantly in relation to Spinello's work, a specifically Marian one, a point reinforced by the series of sculpted reliefs depicting the Life of the Virgin which decorate it. In creating his "church" to honour and house Mary, Spinello thus not only successfully utilised the architectonic and formal language of a shrine but at the same time also deliberately referred to an architecture associated with Mary and her worship, a combination which constructs a richly appropriate set of references for Mary the sacred container of Christ.<sup>329</sup>

The tradition of grand tabernacle shrines for miraculous images was continued in Florence and its environs in the fifteenth century by Michelozzo's tabernacle for the miraculous Annunciation at Santissima Annunziata (discussed in Chapter One) (Fig. 28) and the related twin shrines at Santa

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<sup>326</sup> B. Cassidy, 1992, p. 196.

<sup>327</sup> On the functions of tabernacles see M. Holmes, 2013, pp. 211-217 and P. Davies, "Framing the Miraculous: The Devotional Functions of Perspective in Italian Renaissance Tabernacle Design", *Art History*, Vol. 36, No. 5 (Nov., 2013), pp. 898-921, p. 899.

<sup>328</sup> N. Fabbri and N. Rutenberg, 1981, p. 390.

<sup>329</sup> Cornelison describes how a reliquary made to house the arm of St Philip in Florence around 1425 contains references to Orcagna's tabernacle, linking this to its role as a container for a sacred object. See S. Cornelison, "Art Imitates Architecture: The Saint Philip Reliquary in Renaissance Florence", *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 86, No. 4 (Dec., 2004), pp. 642-658, pp. 648-649.

Maria in Impruneta (Fig. 93).<sup>330</sup> Elements of both the Impruneta and Florence structures can be seen in the fresco of the *Annunciation* by Piero della Francesca, which, like Spinello Aretino's work, is still *in situ* in San Francesco, Arezzo (Fig. 5). Like the shrines, the lower storey of Mary's house in Piero's work is formed of a corner loggia supported on weighty Corinthian columns (although Piero's are unfluted, and the Annunziata tabernacle actually has a mixture of Corinthian and Composite columns),<sup>331</sup> above which is an entablature, considerably simpler in Piero's works than in the Impruneta or Florence tabernacles. Differences in ornamentation aside, the parallels between the structure that houses Mary in Piero's fresco and these monumental shrines seems clear, and, even though Piero's "shrine" forms the lower part of a house,<sup>332</sup> the effect is arguably the same, elevating, framing and protecting Mary in the same manner as Michelozzo's shrine at the Annunziata did the miraculous fresco. As with Spinello's tabernacle, it cannot be entirely insignificant that the sources used are from contemporary Marian buildings.

Both Spinello and Piero thus surround and glorify Mary in a manner entirely suited to her role as a holy vessel for Christ, using the spatial and ornamental language of Marian shrines to do so. Importantly, Mary's holiness, her status as the chosen carrier of Christ, is indicated in architectural terms that would have been familiar to the fifteenth-century worshippers in San Francesco, who, even if they failed to fully grasp the recondite theological allusions to Mary's tabernacle womb, could not miss the sacrality so clearly conveyed by the architecture created to contain Mary in these frescoes.

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<sup>330</sup> On the Impruneta shrines see M. Ferrera and F. Quinterio, pp. 351-353 and P. Davies, "Likeness in Italian Renaissance Pilgrimage Architecture", in *Architecture and Pilgrimage, 1000-1500: Southern Europe and Beyond*, P. Davies, D. Howard and W. Pullan (eds.), Ashgate, 2013, and M. Holmes, 2013, pp. 128-139. Whether Michelozzo was also responsible for the Impruneta shrines is unclear. Rossi, in an article of 1950, attributed them to Michelozzo, see F. Rossi, "La Basilica di Santa Maria dell'Impruneta", *Bollettino d'Arte*, No. 35 (1950), pp. 85-93, p. 89, while Ferrera and Quinterio, are unclear to whom they should be attributed, but do note that the reliefs on the Impruneta shrines are probably by Pagno di Lapo, who also worked on the Annunziata tabernacle, see M. Ferrara and F. Quinterio, 1984 p. 352.

<sup>331</sup> J. Onians, 1988, p. 143.

<sup>332</sup> Although as Timothy Verdon notes, Michelozzo's tabernacle at Santissima Annunziata also acts as a corner loggia, framing and protecting the entrance to a small chapel, see T. Verdon, 1996, p. 173.



## The Chapel

At their most elaborate, such as with Michelezzo's tabernacle at Santissima Annunziata, these tabernacles were more akin to chapels than to the simple shrines on street corners. Like the tabernacle, chapels were secluded spaces separate from the main body of the church, and were specifically designed to house sacred objects, in this case usually an altar. In addition, like the tabernacle they could also be made easily recognisable by combining a particular architectonic arrangement of space with specific architectural detailing, commonly the evocation of an entrance arch. Given that the chapel was in some senses thus an elaboration upon the tabernacle, it is unsurprising that some painters turned to it to impart sacrality to their renditions of Mary's house.

Brunelleschi's Barbadori Chapel in Santa Felicita, built between 1419 and 1423, shares some similarities with Michelozzo's later Annunziata tabernacle (Fig. 94).<sup>333</sup> Although altered in the early sixteenth century when Pontormo's *Desposition* and fresco of the *Annunciation* was installed, and then entirely hidden within an eighteenth-century rebuilding of the church, it is still possible to reconstruct its original appearance from the fragments of the chapel that remain and from pictorial evidence.<sup>334</sup> From Saalman's reconstruction it appears the chapel, situated in a corner of the church, was open on two sides, with a fluted Corinthian pier supporting the outer corner. The two profiled arches spring from semi-engaged Doric half-columns and have fan roundels in their spandrels. Inside the chapel, paired columns supported the pendentives of the dome that roofed the structure, while two large *oculi* lit the chapel with light from the outside. Arguing that Pontormo's *Annunciation* probably replaced an earlier *Annunciation*, Saalman hypothesised that the form of Brunelleschi's chapel, which is essentially a corner loggia, was inspired by the "porch" model for the Annunciation,

<sup>333</sup> On the chapel see U. Schlegel, "La Cappella Barbadori e l'architettura fiorentina del primo Rinascimento", *Rivista d'Arte*, Vol. 32 (1957), pp. 77-106, H. Saalman, "Further Notes on the Cappella Barbadori S. Felicita", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 100, No. 665 (Aug., 1958), pp. 270-275, E. Battisti, *Filippo Brunelleschi*, Electa, Milan, 1976, pp. 98-101, H. Saalman, "Form and Meaning at the Barbadori-Capponi Chapel in S. Felicita", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 131, No. 1037 (Aug., 1989), pp. 532-539, and H. Saalman, *Filippo Brunelleschi: The Buildings*, Pennsylvania State University Press, University Park, 1993, pp. 81-105.

<sup>334</sup> H. Saalman, 1989, p. 532.

introduced by Duccio in his *Annunciation* and revived by Lorenzo Monaco in his *Santa Trinita Annunciation* (Fig. 8), which is nearly contemporary with the chapel.<sup>335</sup> As the architectonic form of the chapel would have been immediately associated with the Annunciation by contemporary audiences, Brunelleschi's structure not only fitted its awkward site in the corner of the church but did so in a manner entirely suited to a chapel housing the Annunciation. Crucial to Saalman's reconstruction of the chapel was a small panel of the *Annunciation* in Castiglione d'Olona, dated to the 1440s and now attributed to Apollonio di Giovanni (Fig. 95), which he argued used the chapel as the basis of the structure housing Mary.<sup>336</sup> Brunelleschi's chapel was informed by the pictorial tradition established by Duccio's *Annunciation*, and then was itself used as the basis for Apollonio's *Annunciation*. As a result, this is a fascinating example of an exchange of forms from pictorial to built sacred architecture and back again, compellingly demonstrating how closely the two could be related.

In general terms, the composition and use of architecture in Apollonio's panel reflects the model established by Fra Angelico in his series of *Annunciations* painted through the 1430s and 1440s (Figs. 20 and 51).<sup>337</sup> Mary is seated, her pose very close to that of Mary in Angelico's works, in a loggia viewed at an oblique angle, while Gabriel approaches from the outside. Indeed, it is possible that the alterations that Apollonio made to his "portrait" of the Barbadori Chapel – preserving the key forms, the Corinthian corner pier and the half-columns supporting the arches, while essentially doubling the chapel to create a two arched loggia facing Gabriel and an extra chamber inside – may have been done in order to modify his architecture to better fit the model established by Fra Angelico. It is important also to remember Apollonio's work as a *cassone* painter, the narrative scenes of which often demanded complex architectural backdrops. A panel painted by Apollonio and Marco del Buono di Giamberti depicting the biblical story of Queen Esther, dated to the 1460s and now in the Metropolitan Museum, contains a variety of structures that reveal Apollonio's familiarity with contemporary Florentine

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid., pp. 536-57.

<sup>336</sup> H. Saalman, 1958, p. 273.

<sup>337</sup> See, for example, Fra Angelico's Cortona *Annunciation*, painted in 1433-1434.

architecture (Fig. 96).<sup>338</sup> The left side of the panel is filled by a palace faced in rusticated stone, which recalls the Palazzo Medici (c. 1450) (Fig. 64) and the Palazzo Strozzi (c. 1455) (Fig. 66) as well as a number of earlier Florentine *palazzi*, while on the far right is a loggia whose grey profiled arches, roundels and pilasters at either end make it resemble a scaled down version of Brunelleschi's Loggia degli Innocenti.<sup>339</sup> This familiarity with contemporary architecture aside, it is clear also that Apollonio was aware of the practical advantages offered by the Barbadori Chapel. Its cuboid form made it relatively easy to depict within a pictorial space predicated upon one-point perspective, while the corner loggia offered many advantages, discussed at length in relation to access in Chapter One.

Apollonio's use of Brunelleschi's chapel thus demonstrates an important point; the borrowing of forms from sacred architecture was dictated not only by the apposite symbolic connotations they carried, but also by their practical value. These were after all structures explicitly designed to house and frame a view of an altar or work of art, making them a recognisable, visually powerful architectural source for painters to employ in their Annunciations.

An *Annunciation* by Gentile Bellini (c. 1475) also incorporates allusions to a chapel within its composition, using sources drawn from indigenous Venetian architecture (Fig. 97).<sup>340</sup> On the left-hand side of the panel is a cityscape empty of figures, while the bulk of the painting is filled by a view of part of Mary's lavish house. The part we see is a corner loggia, with one profiled arch springing off broad piers facing the viewer, while the other (presumably the same) is implied by the shaft of light that enters the loggia from the left. This front arch is flanked by two dark stone Corinthian columns on high rectangular pedestals, the shafts of which are spilt into three bands

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<sup>338</sup> On this panel see K. Christiansen and J. Pope-Hennessy, "Secular Painting in Fifteenth-Century Tuscany: Birth Trays, Cassone Panels and Portraits", *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, Vol. 38, No. 1 (Summer, 1980), pp. 2-64, pp. 13-16.

<sup>339</sup> Christiansen and Pope-Hennessy identify the three principal structures as a family palace, the Duomo and a family loggia, though without going into the architectural specifics, see *Ibid.*, p. 16.

<sup>340</sup> On this work see R. Van Marle, *The Development of the Italian Schools of Painting*, Vol. 17, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1935, pp. 141-3, J. Meyer zur Capellen, *Gentile Bellini*, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1985, Cat. C6, p.151 and M. Borobia, *Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza: Old Masters*, Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 2009, p. 77.

divided by encircling acanthus leaves, two of them fluted and one spiral. These forms are most likely adapted from the columns on Pietro Lombardo's tomb of Doge Niccolo Marcello (c. 1470), now in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, which are markedly similar to those in Gentile's work (Fig. 98).<sup>341</sup> The capitals of these columns are extraordinary bronze or gilded creations, decorated with swags, a crane and a human head between the volutes. Gentile Bellini used similarly fantastical, part spiral columns in his later work *The Healing of Pietro Ludovici*, one of the three works he painted for the Miracles of the True Cross cycle in the Scuola Grande di San Giovanni Evangelista (Fig. 99). There they encircle an immense ciborium, within which can be seen an altar, suggesting that Bellini saw an association between sacred space and the use of this type of column, presumably because of their use in Venetian chapels and tombs. While the lower part of the loggia is built from exposed and finely finished pale gray stone blocks, the upper third is faced in regular panels of polychrome marble. Such panels, as well as cladding the facades of Venice's greatest *palazzo* such as the Ca d'Oro, can be found on much of the exterior and interior of San Marco, for example in the Cappella Mascoli decorated in the 1450s (Fig. 100), lending the structure a peculiarly Venetian ecclesiastical air while simultaneously remaining appropriate for a structure that is still ostensibly Mary's house. A substantial and highly elaborate Corinthian entablature completes the loggia. An architrave enlivened by denti moulding is followed by a floral frieze with the whole finished by a cornice decorated with foliate swags and small scallop shell niches. Within the loggia, a part of Mary's *camera* is just visible, divided from the space in which Mary sits by a wall formed of large stone blocks, surmounted by a cornice supported by slender, semi-engaged Corinthian columns above which are more panels of polychromatic marble.

The outermost arch facing the viewer is of special interest in this context because of its resemblance to the entrance arch of a chapel or a chancel arch, although it does not appear to reflect any specific extant example. The closest match is the arch over the entrance to the altar niche of

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<sup>341</sup> On the Marcello Monument and its distinctive architectural vocabulary see O. Paoletti, *L'architettura e scultura del Rinascimento in Venezia: ricerche storico-artistiche*, Ongania-Naya, Venice, 1897, p. 204 and J. McAndrew, *Venetian Architecture of the Early Renaissance*, MIT Press, Boston, 1980, p. 127.

the Cappella Cornaro in Santi Apostoli, sometimes attributed to Mauro Codussi but more likely to be the work of an architect closely associated with him (Fig. 101).<sup>342</sup> As in Bellini's *Annunciation*, this has a profiled arch flanked by columns with mixed fluted and spiral shafts, although in this case the columns are split into two rather than three parts. The relationship between the chapel and the painting is also complicated by the fact that Bellini probably painted his work around 1475, while the chapel was not commissioned until 1483, and was only completed in 1499. There are thus three possibilities if the two are related: firstly, that they are both drawn from a now lost common source; secondly, that the painting influenced the chapel's architect; and, thirdly, that the painting is in fact later than is currently considered. Regardless of their precise relationship (about which it is impossible to be definitive), the effect of the great arch surrounding Mary is the same, creating a sense of looking into a chapel. It is important in this regard to note our position as viewers; we are outside the chapel looking in, meaning that our view of Mary is akin to glimpsing an altar or sacred object within a chapel from the nave of a church. Gentile creates a suitably holy surround for Mary in a manner in essence analogous to that of Spinello Aretino or Piero della Francesca, placing her within a structure whose form – an echo of the chapels of Venice well known to Gentile's fifteenth-century Venetian viewers - signals clearly the sanctity of the figure within.

## The Church

Some painters chose to go beyond the allusions to chapels, ciboria and tabernacles and instead create evocations of entire churches in their Annunciation images, in the process referring to a figural tradition that saw Mary not only as *tabernaculum Christi* but also as *Maria ecclesia*, Mary as the body of the church. This appears to be the case in a striking manuscript illumination, commissioned around 1432 from Lippi d'Andrea as the frontispiece to a gradual by the Bridgettine nuns of Santa Maria del Paradiso

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<sup>342</sup> On the Cappella Cornaro see P. Paoletti, 1897, p. 234, L. Puppi and L. Puppi, *Mauro Codussi*, Electa, Milan, 1976, Cat. 1, pp. 230-232 and J. McAndrew, 1980, pp. 42-47 and M. Ceriana, "La Capella Corner nella chiesa dei Santi Apostoli in Venice", in *All'ombra delle volte: architettura del Quattrocento a Firenze e Venezia*, M. Bulgarelli and M. Ceriana (eds.), Electa, Milan, 1996.

in Pian dei Ripoli (Fig. 102).<sup>343</sup> This frontispiece consists of two rectangular scenes split by a red border. The lower scene shows a group of nuns grouped around a lectern, with the figure of Saint Bridget extending her word (teachings?) over the group in the form of a scroll. The figures are placed within the nave of a Gothic church. A row of lobed bifore windows with quatrefoil *oculi* runs along the back of the nave, with the ecclesiastical character of the space suggested by these lancet windows confirmed by the altar in its apsidal niche, surmounted by a blue hemispherical dome that refers to the blue starred ceilings popular in many Italian Gothic churches and chapels.<sup>344</sup> The upper scene depicts the Annunciation taking place in a long house. On the far left there is an arched entry with a second arch above, through which God has just entered. The ground floor entry leads to a long rectangular room in which Gabriel kneels, beyond which another arched door leads to a square, vaulted bedroom where Mary sits, her bed set into an alcove at the rear. Above this room there is a second storey with three Gothic bifore windows, similar to those in the scene below but simplified, in keeping with the ostensibly domestic character of the building.

Despite this apparent domesticity, the structure as a whole bears a strong resemblance to a church. The small arch above the leftmost doorway is akin to the projecting pinnacle of a façade seen from the rear, an effect heightened by its position immediately above an entrance, while the second storey above Mary's *camera* can be viewed as analogous to a dome placed above the transept of a church. It is the relationship of Gabriel's to Mary's rooms, however, that most strikingly creates an ecclesiastical impression. The long rectangular room in which we see Gabriel is the nave to the apse of Mary's *camera*, the arched doorway between them the rood screen that separated the two spaces in the great fourteenth-century mendicant churches. In this conception, Mary's bedroom becomes an apse, appropriately the most

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<sup>343</sup> On this work see M. Saffioti, W. Voelkle, and R. Wieck, *The Bernard H. Breslauer Collection of Manuscript Illuminations*, The Pierpoint Morgan Library, New York, 1992 and L. Kanter, "The Annunciation; St Bridget and a Choir of Bridgettine Nuns", in *Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence 1300-1450*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, p. 319.

<sup>344</sup> An excellent Florentine example of these heavenly ceilings is the Baroncelli chapel in Santa Croce, decorated by Taddeo Gaddi in the 1330's.

holy and most secluded area within a church.<sup>345</sup> This architectural metaphor is emphasised by the direct visual parallels drawn by Lippi d'Andrea between the bedroom and the altar in its apse below, parallels that leave little doubt that his creation of a church-house for Mary was deliberate.<sup>346</sup> Visually, the effect is much the same as in the works above; Mary's *camera* acts as a chapel or tabernacle for Mary's holy body, viewed by the audience from the outside. The key difference, however, is that Lippi d'Andrea's setting adds another layer to the architectural symbolism of the work by alluding in the form of Mary's house to the concept of *Maria ecclesia* (discussed more fully below), in turn making Mary's house not only suitably sacred but also an extension of Mary herself. By constructing these dual but co-existing references, the church and the house, the architecture in this work uses one of pictorial architecture's major strengths, the ability to refer to two types of buildings simultaneously, to contain diverse meanings within a single architectural setting.

Around 1445, Fra Filippo Lippi was commissioned by the nuns of the convent of Le Murate, Florence to paint an *Annunciation* (Fig. 103).<sup>347</sup> The finished panel shows the Annunciation taking place in a single rectangular space, dominated by a triple-arched screen with an entablature and great arches at either end, a large green arch behind the screen and the fluted Ionic columns and beginnings of an arch in the foreground. It is open at the back to reveal a small *hortus conclusus* encircled by a low wall, beyond which can be seen another much higher wall with a gate in its centre, probably a reference to the convent's name (Le Murate literally means "the walled in ones").<sup>348</sup> Lippi's architecture has been described by Holmes as having a "hybrid

<sup>345</sup> The composition as a whole is similar to the *Annunciation* in San Marco, although Gabriel's space is relatively far longer in Lippi d'Andrea's work, and the San Marco fresco does not divide Mary's room from the rest of the structure, weakening or even removing the ecclesiastical parallels.

<sup>346</sup> The monastery itself is now in a fairly ruinous state, unfortunately making it impossible to discover whether it itself had a rood screen or any of the other features seen in these two illuminations. On its history see G. Baccarelli, "Storia del monastero di Santa Maria e Brigida al Paradiso: 1392-1776", in *Il 'Paradiso' in Pian di Ripoli: Studi e ricerche su un antico monastero*, Centro Di, Florence, 1985.

<sup>347</sup> On this work see J. Ruda, 1993, pp. 157-160 and Cat. 29, pp. 411-412, M. Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999 and M. Holmes, "Giovanni Benci's Patronage of the Nunnery, Le Murate", in *Art, Memory and Family in Renaissance Florence*, G. Ciapelli and P. Rubin (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, pp. 121-128.

<sup>348</sup> M. Holmes, 2000, p. 126.

Donatello-Brunelleschi style...”,<sup>349</sup> a stylistic analysis that is supported by this *Annunciation*. The triple-arched screen with an arch behind is an arrangement that may have been drawn from Donatello’s roundel of the *Raising of Drusiana* in the Old Sacristy (Fig. 104), where the same combination of shallow screen and open arch behind can be seen, albeit without the rich materials and ornament of Lippi’s work. This ornamentation in turn reveals part of Lippi’s debt to Brunelleschi. The fluted Corinthian pilasters on the central screen, for example, are close to those in Brunelleschi’s Old Sacristy in San Lorenzo (Fig. 105), where Lippi had recently painted another *Annunciation* for the Martelli Chapel (Fig. 30).<sup>350</sup>

The central architectural feature within Lippi’s *Annunciation* is the screen that stretches across its middle ground. This has three arches supported on half Ionic columns, the middle arch flanked by the two Corinthian pilasters mentioned previously, while the sides of the outer arches are flanked by Corinthian half-pilasters. An entablature rests upon these arches, with a notched architrave, a frieze of three recessed panels interspersed with scallop shells and a cornice with egg and dart mouldings. The interaction between the arch supported on Ionic columns and the pilasters is strikingly similar to that in both the arches of the Barbadori Chapel and the great arch in Masaccio’s *Trinity* (c. 1425),<sup>351</sup> although the spandrels in Lippi’s work do not contain the fan roundels found in both the Barbadori Chapel and the *Trinity* (Fig. 106). It is unclear which was the principal source for Lippi, and it was almost certainly not one exclusively, although it can be said that the entablature in Lippi’s work is markedly different to that in the *Trinity*. Lippi used this arch composition as a template, tripling it and stretching an entablature across to create the screen in the center of the work and placing it on top of a thick low wall decorated with polychrome marble

<sup>349</sup> M. Holmes, 1999, p. 19.

<sup>350</sup> On Brunelleschi’s capitals see H. Saalman, “Filippo Brunelleschi: Capital Studies”, *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (Jun., 1958), pp. 113-137, esp. pp. 123-127 on San Lorenzo.

<sup>351</sup> Writing in 1957, Schlegel proposed that the Barbadori Chapel was influenced by Masaccio’s work, rather than the other way around, and that the chapel was in fact the work of the architect Andrea di Lazzaro, Brunelleschi’s adopted stepson, and could be dated to the 1430’s, see U. Schlegel, “La Cappella Barbadori e l’architettura fiorentina del primo Rinascimento”, *Rivista d’Arte*, Vol. 32 (1957), pp. 77-106. Saalman, writing in 1989, however, published documents which placed the building dates for the Barbadori Chapel from 1419-1423, removing any possibility that Andrea could have been responsible, and placing it before Masaccio’s work, see H. Saalman, 1989, p. 533 and p. 535, and Appendix 1.



inlay. Holmes described this screen as akin to “a rood screen or chapel balustrade”,<sup>352</sup> and it undoubtedly cuts across the nave-like space in a similar manner. There are, however, two main issues with this analysis. Firstly, as the reconstructions by Hall of the *tramezzi* of Santa Maria Novella and Santa Croce reveal, rood screens were deep structures, deep enough to support small chapels on top of them, and normally had only one entrance arranged on an axis with the main door of the church.<sup>353</sup> Secondly, there were no major rood screens built in Florence during the fifteenth century, and those that already existed, such as those in the mendicant churches, were built in a late Gothic style far removed from Lippi’s *all’antica* screen. Assuming that Lippi intended to create a structure similar to a rood screen, which is plausible, what he created is entirely his own, a Renaissance rood-screen built using the architectural language of Brunelleschi, which was then adapted by Lippi to suit his own particular ends.

The principal function of the rood screen or choir enclosure was to create a restricted place within the body of the church occupied by the high altar, usually inaccessible to lay members of the congregation. In this sense, placing Mary within the enclosure made by the screen is perfectly logical, creating an inner sanctum within the work’s fictive architecture for her to receive the angelic salutation. It appears also that the viewer is sharing this space with her, that they are inside looking out, yet this is not entirely true as the arch right in the foreground creates a subtle, but crucial, distance between us and Mary’s space. It is possible too that instead of being behind the rood screen, on the “holy” side, the viewer and Mary are in fact on the “lay” side looking up the nave towards the high altar, represented here by the *hortus* and its central tree.

Whichever of these is true, it is worth also considering the symbolism attached to the rood screen and how this may have related symbolically to the events of the Annunciation. As Jung notes, the rood screen was in fact a transitional space between the lay and the holy, a structure at once

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<sup>352</sup> M. Holmes, 2000, p. 127, see also M. Holmes, 1999, pp. 233-234.

<sup>353</sup> M. Hall, “The Ponte in Santa Maria Novella: The Problem of the Rood Screen in Italy”, *The Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, Vol. 37 (1974), pp. 157-173 and M. Hall, 1976.

permeable and not<sup>354</sup> in a manner similar to the corner loggia/porch of many Annunciations. Because of this, it could plausibly act as an architectural metaphor for Mary herself, an adaptation of the *porta coeli* image that symbolises Mary's role as the mediating zone between heaven and earth through her capacity as the bearer of Christ.<sup>355</sup>

Although using a church-like interior as Lippi does here is rare in Italian Annunciations (one exception is Lippi's own San Lorenzo *Annunciation* (Fig. 33), discussed below),<sup>356</sup> ecclesiastical interiors did appear in a few Northern European manuscripts and painted Annunciations, most famously perhaps in Jan van Eyck's Washington *Annunciation* (Fig. 107).<sup>357</sup> This is an immensely complex work, replete with recondite theological allusions, one of which, the concept of *Maria Ecclesia* or Mary as the church, may be relevant here. Mary as the home of Christ's body was linked to the church, in which Christ also resided, and thus she became identified with the body of the church.<sup>358</sup> In pictorial terms placing Mary within or outside a church could convey this, and, when allied to the Annunciation, such settings could come to represent the equivalence between "the entrance of the Saviour into the body of the Virgin and his entrance into the temple or the church..."<sup>359</sup> It is certainly possible that

<sup>354</sup> J. Jung, "Beyond the Barrier: The Unifying Role of the Choir Screen in Gothic Churches", *The Art Bulletin*, Vo. 82, No. 4 (Dec., 2000), pp. 622-657, p. 631.

<sup>355</sup> Kreuger describes how if Mary is a gate or threshold then "In this way Mary figures not as sacred space or womb but as the membrane separating the sacred and the profane, the pure and the polluted. Like her hymen, this boundary can be permeated without being violated, and thus the membrane both divides and joins the divine and the human, creator and creation." See D. Krueger, "Mary at the Threshold: The Mother of God as Guardian in Seventh-Century Palestinian Miracle Accounts", in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Images and Texts*, L. Brubaker and M. Cunningham (eds.), Ashgate, Farnham, 2011, p. 38.

<sup>356</sup> E. Rowlands, 1989, p. 61 argues that Filippo's San Lorenzo *Annunciation* can also be read as a church, with the tunnel-like garden the nave and the side corridors the aisles, although this is not persuasive.

<sup>357</sup> On these see M. Purtle, 1982, pp. 40-41. It is not clear whether Filippo Lippi spent time in Flanders, Ames-Lewis has argued that he did, see F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Filippo Lippi and Flanders", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 42. Bd., H. 4 (1979), pp. 255-273, although Ruda has questioned this, noting that on many occasions ideas that are seemingly new and "northern" in Florentine art should be attributed instead to a development from earlier Florentine and Tuscan examples, see J. Ruda, "Flemish Painting and the Early Renaissance in Florence: Questions of Influence", *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 47 Bd., H. 2 (1984), pp. 210-236. The argument in this thesis is not so much that Lippi was directly influenced by Van Eyck, but more that the Murate *Annunciation* shared some intellectual common ground with the Washington *Annunciation*, common ground that was widely understood by the theologically learned, namely the idea of *Maria ecclesia*.

<sup>358</sup> On this see the Introduction, n. 23.

<sup>359</sup> C. Purtle, 1982, pp. 53-54.

Lippi's architectural setting is intended to make the same point, creating a visual figure of *Maria ecclesia*. The fact that the nuns of Le Murate, his principal audience, were presumably theologically astute may be further evidence of this, while at the same time explaining why such a setting is rare in other images of the Annunciation.<sup>360</sup>

Another possibility is that these ecclesiastical environs are intended to refer to the Temple in Jerusalem, which Mary was supposed to have entered at the age of three.<sup>361</sup> Saint Antoninus, the Archbishop of Florence, and near contemporary of Filippo, decided that the Annunciation had taken place in a temple (although without specifying precisely which), an idea to which Filippo may have been alluding here.<sup>362</sup> More important perhaps than the precise nature of the architectural reference is the fact that in Lippi's panel, as in the works discussed previously, the structure that contains Mary is itself a signifier of her attributes as mother of Christ. The idea is perhaps further amplified here where Mary as a church has become a whole room, an all-encompassing space. As Congar describes "The Virgin Mary is above all things a place containing Christ..."<sup>363</sup>, a notion that is of great relevance to Lippi's work, where Mary, as well as literally inhabiting the space, becomes in some sense the place and the church itself.

### The Cloister

A small *Annunciation* by Alesso di Benozzo, now in the Metropolitan Museum, offers an unusually explicit depiction of a cloister (Fig. 108). Mary and Gabriel are shown in a courtyard, partly surrounded by arcaded walkways. Certain key features serve to define this courtyard as that of a cloister rather than that of a palace or public building. Firstly, the columns supporting the arcade behind Mary and Gabriel arcade are Ionic, a feature particularly associated with many Florentine convents (see Fig. 111 which

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<sup>360</sup> It is interesting in this regard to consider Lippi d'Andrea's manuscript *Annunciation*, with its ecclesiastical architectural allusions, which was also produced for a monastic community.

<sup>361</sup> Voragine describes how "The Virgin Mary lived in the Temple from her third to her fourteenth year and made a vow to live in chastity unless God otherwise disposed." J. de Voragine, 1993, p. 197.

<sup>362</sup> S. Edgerton, 1977, pp. 118-120.

<sup>363</sup> Y M-J Congar, 1958, p. 306: "La Vierge Marie est tout autre chose qu'un *lieu* contenant le Christ..."

shows those at the Convento di San Marco), although also found in various secular structures such as villas.<sup>364</sup> Secondly, there are the low walls on which the columns rest, which were used in cloisters to provide seating.<sup>365</sup> Finally, and most importantly, there is there is the pitched roof above the rear arcade. Single storey arcades with pitched roofs are found in a large number of cloisters. In addition, the courtyard appears to be part of a wider conventual complex, as a two-storey building with projecting wings and lancet windows can be seen behind. In fact it appears that Alesso's composition was based on his father, Benozzo Gozzoli's *Funeral of St Augustine* (c. 1464), painted as part of his St Augustine cycle for Sant'Agostino in San Gimignano (Fig. 109). The setting in that work has been described by Diana Cole Ahl as "an entire cloister", a description that could potentially also be applied to Alesso's work.<sup>366</sup> In fact, even though the architecture in Alesso's work is less precisely described due to the smaller size of the painting, the specificity of certain cloister elements is if anything greater than in Benozzo's work, particularly with regard to the arcaded walkway, which in Benozzo's work is essentially derived from Brunelleschi's Ospedale degli Innocenti Loggia rather than from an actual cloister. In Alesso's *Annunciation*, by contrast, the arcade at the rear is of a type that is directly taken from contemporary cloisters.

Piero della Francesca's Sant'Agostino altarpiece *Annunciation* offers an interesting contrast to Alesso's *Annunciation* (Fig. 17). Here, to the left of the portico under which Mary sits we see what initially appears to be a single storey courtyard. Two vaulted arcades are visible, with clusters of four Composite columns surmounted by sections of trabeation running down each, supporting profiled arches (this arrangement can be seen most clearly in the group in front and to the left of Mary).<sup>367</sup> As in Alesso's work, here the courtyard is also attached to a building. It also has the low wall running

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<sup>364</sup> A. Lillie, 2005, pp. 113-114.

<sup>365</sup> A. Leader, "Architectural Collaboration in the Early Renaissance: Reforming the Florentine Badia", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 64, No. 2 (Jun., 2005), pp. 204-233, p. 212.

<sup>366</sup> D. Ahl, "Benozzo Gozzoli's Frescoes of the Life of Saint Augustine in San Gimignano: Their Meaning in Context", *Artibus et Historiae*, p. Vol. 7, No. 13 (1986), pp. 35-53, p. 42.

<sup>367</sup> These groups of four columns are highly original; although paired columns are a common feature of Romanesque cloisters, groups such as these are not, seemingly anticipating by 60 years the Mannerist flamboyance of the structures such as the Palazzo del Te, where similar groups are found.

between the columns, highlighted above as key aspect of cloister design.<sup>368</sup> Unlike Alesso's cloister, this courtyard contains a central garden, such as those often placed in the centre of cloisters where they could be used for growing medicinal herbs. Considering these features, it is reasonable to describe this courtyard as a cloister. Ronald Lightbown has linked this evocation of the cloister to the altarpiece's original setting in a convent, further arguing that the combination of the portico under which Mary stands and the column that seems to shield her from view may be understood as a reference to the *parlatorium* (the room within the convent in which the nuns received visitors, hidden behind a grille), although given that the porch is, by definition, an open structure, this interpretation is clearly problematic.<sup>369</sup> Unlike the relatively straightforward depiction of a cloister in Alesso's *Annunciation*, however, this is not a simple depiction of a cloister as it includes a number of unexpected elements. For a start, this "cloister" has composite columns, where many cloisters had Ionic, and an unusually ornate rich foliate relief decoration; in addition, there is the oddity of columns running down the internal wall of the arcade in the centre of the picture, an architectural feature for which no real world source has yet been found. This last feature is, however, explicable as a pictorial means of highlighting the central perspectival alley, a key feature, as we have seen, of many Annunciations of this period.<sup>370 371</sup>

The symbolic resonance attached to the cloister is obvious. The word *chiostro* (cloister) comes originally from the Latin *claustrum*, which in classical Latin and in early Christian writings was used to refer to the key or bar that secured a door, a meaning that later expanded to include a space enclosed

<sup>368</sup> M.A. Lavin, 2002, p. 204. Further evidence for the cloister reading is provided by an illustration in Martone's work on Piero's use of geometry, which "completes" the structure as a four-sided courtyard, extrapolating out from the clues given in the work, see T. Martone, "Piero della Francesca e la prospettiva dell'intelletto", in *Piero Teorico dell'Arte*, O. Calabrese (ed.), Gangemi Editore, Rome, 1985, pp. 181-182. Lightbown has argued that the structure should be read as a house with a cloister courtyard attached, although this seems improbable, see R. Lightbown, 1992, p. 224.

<sup>369</sup> Lightbown, 1992, p. 225, on the *parlatorium* see also A. Thomas, *Art and Piety in the Female Religious Communities of Renaissance Italy: Iconography, Space and the Religious Woman's Perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, p. 79.

<sup>370</sup> This panel is a key example in Arasse's study of the significance of perspective in Annunciations. See D. Arasse, 1999, pp. 22-27.

<sup>371</sup> There is one further difference between Alesso and Piero's works, which may be significant. In Alesso's work, Mary is placed firmly within the seclusion of the cloister itself, while in Piero's she stands outside it in the semi-public space of the porch.

by a wall.<sup>372</sup> Linguistically, it was thus doubly suitable for Mary, being both emblematic of enclosure and separation, as well as referring to the *porta clausa*, one of the key metaphors for Mary's chastity. Associated with the monastery or convent, protected and enclosed sanctuaries for chaste and devout monks and nuns, the cloister was a natural choice as an architectural source for Mary's house. Alluding to the cloister through the form of Mary's house, the fictive architecture could thus amplify and echo Mary's key attributes of chastity and devotion. As Durandus wrote, "In the moral sense, the cloister is the soul's contemplation, where it retreats when it separates itself from the carnal thoughts of the crowd and only meditates on celestial things."<sup>373</sup> This highlights the contemplative remoteness from the immoral world outside that made the cloister rich with positive connotations as an architectural source for Mary's house. Indeed, this relationship between the cloister and monastery and the fictive architecture of the Annunciation was in some sense a reciprocal one, the Annunciation itself being a popular choice for monastic decorative schemes.<sup>374</sup> In some cases, the Annunciation was chosen for the private spaces of nuns' choirs, most likely because it was viewed as an intimate, private scene and thus suitable for this closed area of worship.<sup>375</sup>

As well as carrying these positive cultural connotations, the use of the cloister as setting allowed these depictions of the Annunciation to connect in powerful ways with their monastic audience.<sup>376</sup> Didi-Huberman has described how the architectural metaphors attached to Mary could allow her to inhabit the earthly, everyday world: "That, walking in your own cloister – which St Bernard already saw as 'the antechamber to paradise' – you are

<sup>372</sup> P. Mayvaert, "The Medieval Monastic Clastrum", *Gesta*, Vol. 12, No. 1/2 (1973), pp. 53-59, p. 53.

<sup>373</sup> G. Durand, 1995, p. 25: "Moraliter uero claustrum est anime contemplatio, ubi se recipit dum a turba cogitationum carnalium seperatur et sola celestia meditatur." For the translation see G. Durand, 2007, p. 23.

<sup>374</sup> M. Holmes, 2000, p. 126.

<sup>375</sup> It appears from inventories that the Jerusalemite nuns of San Niccolò dei Freri in Florence had an *Annunciation* in the area of the choir reserved for them, although the panel has not been identified. See A. Thomas, 2003, p. 120.

<sup>376</sup> Although the original setting of Alesso's *Annunciation* is unknown, it seems plausible given its architectural features that it may too have been painted for a convent. Because of its scale (41 x 37 cm) it cannot have been an altarpiece, but it may be that it was used for private devotion by a member of a religious order. The use of gold leaf in parts of the panel would further seem to suggest that this was an object owned or commissioned by an individual of high status, perhaps an abbot or prior.

walking in a great Marian body, even in the half light of your *cellula*. And if in your cell there is a fresco representing the Annunciation, look again at the garden on the left, for love's eyes must "dig" in this garden, or rather must lodge there."<sup>377</sup> Didi-Huberman is referring particularly here to the fresco of the *Annunciation* painted by Fra Angelico and his workshop at the convent of San Marco in Florence, and it is Angelico's other *Annunciation*, painted in the north corridor of the monastery that offers a potent demonstration of how monastic architecture within an Annunciation could forge a link with the monks without (Fig. 110). Hood has highlighted how the fictive architectural border of this work, by clearly alluding to the architecture of the convent, effectively blurs the lines between fictive and real space.<sup>378</sup> This is a process continued by the architecture inside the work. The Ionic columns on small round bases facing the garden, the scrolls of their volutes split in two by a small decorative band, are very similar to those designed by Michelozzo for the cloister of the monastery itself, as are the Ionic *peducci* with their rope mouldings under the volutes (Figs. 111 and 112).<sup>379</sup> Evidently, the monastic viewers are being encouraged to view Mary's world as in some sense analogous to their own, in the process allowing them to empathise with and meditate upon the sacred event.<sup>380</sup> There appears to have been a special connection between monks, nuns and Mary, with Mary acting as an aid and guide, invoked in prayers by the monastic inhabitants in their ongoing struggle for a life without sin.<sup>381</sup>

Mary could also act as exemplar for monastic behaviour, as Pecorini-Cicognoni and Flora make clear in their study of a fourteenth-century Marian cycle painted for the Clarissan convent of San Martino in Pisa in the context of a mid-trecento illustrated manuscript of the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*. As they demonstrate, the *imitatio marie* was a key element of Clarissan

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<sup>377</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 225. Similar ideas are expressed by Male, who wrote that: "Since he was always meditating on the Virgin, the monk saw her everywhere." See E. Male, *Religious Art from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, p. 133.

<sup>378</sup> W. Hood, *Fra Angelico at San Marco*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1993, p. 264.

<sup>379</sup> A. Gambuti, 1994, pp. 7-8, discusses this correspondence in general terms, though without noting the specific ornamental connections.

<sup>380</sup> The use of settings familiar to a work's audience to encourage meditative connections between them and the holy event shown is discussed at greater length in Chapter 4.

<sup>381</sup> See E. Male, 1982, pp. 132-134 and M. Rubin, 2000, p. 84.

devotion and formed a central part of the message of the *Meditations* itself.<sup>382</sup> They describe how the nuns viewing the fresco of the *Annunciation* in their church, which conventionally shows Mary's initial surprise, would also have had in mind an image from the *Meditations* manuscript that showed Mary kneeling in submission after Gabriel's salutation in which "Her act of obedience is emphasized by the caption added to the manuscript image, which reads 'how Mary accepted'."<sup>383</sup> In setting the Annunciation within a cloister, painters were not just employing their architecture to express important Marian attributes but also to forge strong emotive links between Mary and their monastic audiences.

### Sacred Entrances

As was noted in Chapter One, there was a long association between the Annunciation and entrances of various kinds, predicated partly upon the narrative and conceptual centrality of access in the Annunciation. This is particularly true of entrances to holy spaces, whether in the form of church portals, chapel entrances or chancel arches.<sup>384</sup> Yet there was another motivation behind this linking of the Annunciation and the entrances of sacred spaces, specifically the metaphor that described Mary as *porta coeli*. This refers to the idea that Mary, as the gateway for Christ's entry into the world, forms a channel between heaven and earth, a channel that eventually leads to man's salvation through Christ's sacrifice, and that Mary keeps open in her role as the primary intercessor on man's behalf in the celestial sphere – expressed pithily in the words of the popular medieval hymn *Ave Maris Stella* "Nurturing mother of God/And ever Virgin/Happy gate of Heaven..."<sup>385</sup> A little discussed late fourteenth-century fresco *Annunciation* above the entrance to the Cappella Spini in Santa Trinita, Florence provides an illustration of how

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<sup>382</sup> H. Flora and A. Pecorini-Cicogni, "Requirements of Devout Contemplation: Text and Image for the Poor Clares in Trecento Pisa", *Gesta*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2006), pp. 61-76, p. 64.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 64: "come Maria accepta."

<sup>384</sup> Prominent examples include Giotto's *Annunciation*, Arena Chapel, Padua, 1305, Benozzo Gozzoli's *Annunciation*, Camposanto, Pisa, c. 1465, Vincenzo Foppa's *Annunciation*, Portinari Chapel, Sant'Eustorgio, Milan, c. 1470 and Ghirlandaio's mosaic of the *Annunciation*, Porta della Mandorla, Duomo, Florence, 1490.

<sup>385</sup> "Dei mater alma/atque semper Virgo/felix coeli porta..." T. Verdon, 2002, p. 34, discusses this in relation to the miraculous *Annunciation* at Santissima Annunziata, arguing that its positioning by the main door of the church is in part a reflection of the *porta coeli* metaphor.



this could work in practice (Fig. 113).<sup>386</sup> This depicts the Annunciation in an unorthodox fashion with Gabriel entering from the right rather than the left as was usual. It is difficult to make out the architectural details of the structure in which Mary sits due to the fragmentary state of the fresco and the poor lighting, but it appears to be a small house of gray stone, with Mary framed in an arched doorway that faces the viewer in the nave. This arched doorway draws visual parallels between the chapel and Mary's house similar to those in the works discussed previously, echoing the great stone arch of the chapel entrance, a parallel made all the more powerful in this case by the position of the viewer in the nave, who faces both the doorway framing Mary and the chapel's arch framing the altar within. The position of the fresco is especially significant, however, in relation to Mary's status as *porta coeli*. A lunette, positioned at the top of the chapel's arch, this *Annunciation* arguably converts the chapel's arch itself into a form of *porta coeli*, a gateway to salvation, creating a visual link between the salvation offered by Christ's coming into the world and the mass celebrated in the chapel beyond.

Like Gentile Bellini's Museo Thyssen *Annunciation* (Fig. 97) and Crivelli's London *Annunciation* (Fig. 24), in Carpaccio's *Annunciation*, painted in 1504 for the Scuola degli Albanesi, Venice, we look directly into Mary's house through a large opening placed parallel to the picture plane, itself one side of a corner loggia, as is indicated by the fall of light into the room from the left (Fig. 114). In contrast to both Gentile and Crivelli's depiction, however, our view of the exterior of this house has been reduced so that we can only see a monumental entrance. Two Composite pilasters, surmounted by pronounced entablature blocks and decorated with foliate motifs and inlaid marble roundels, similar to those found in the architecture of Antonio Rizzo, Pietro Lombardo and Mauro Codussi, flank this entrance.<sup>387</sup> Between them there is what appears to be the top half of a Codussian biforate window, with an

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<sup>386</sup> On the history of the Cappella Spini see G. Castellazzi, *Santa Trinita: i suoi tempi ed il progetto del suo restauro*, Arte della Stampa, Florence, 1887, p. 57, B. Santi, "Pittura 'Minore' in Santa Trinita: da Bicci di Lorenzo a Neri di Bicci", in *La chiesa di Santa Trinita a Firenze*, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, Florence, 1987, pp. 139-140, and K. Murphy, "'Lilium inter spinas': Bianca Spini and the Decoration of the Spini Chapel in Santa Trinita", *Italian History and Culture*, Vol. 8 (2002), pp. 51-66.

<sup>387</sup> V. Sgarbi, *Vittore Carpaccio*, J. Hyams (trans.), Abbeville Press, New York, 1995, p. 214.

elaborate roseate roundel in the center, “supported” by two *putti*.<sup>388</sup> Although built sources for this use of a Codussian motif in an entrance arch have proved difficult to find, they do appear in another painting, Bastiani’s *Funeral of St Jerome*, painted for the Scuola di San Girolamo, Venice in the 1470’s (Fig. 115).<sup>389</sup> The arcade at the left of this work has been put forward as a possible source for the similar structure at the left of Carpaccio’s *Return of the English Ambassadors* from the S. Ursula cycle, so it is possible that Carpaccio took the idea for the window from this work as well.<sup>390</sup> A high crenellated wall completes the painting’s architecture, with a closed gateway topped by a pavilion visible at its extreme left, combining to create a *hortus conclusus*.

Broadly speaking, the architectural composition of Carpaccio’s loggia arch follows the pattern established by Brunelleschi, analysed earlier in reference to numerous painted Annunciations. Engaged piers support a semi-circular arch, and are in turn flanked by two further supporting piers. The corner loggia setting too has precedents in fifteenth-century Venetian Annunciations, most clearly seen in the works by Jacopo and Gentile Bellini described previously. Carpaccio’s *Annunciation* is also akin to Gentile Bellini’s work in containing within its architecture numerous references to contemporary Venetian ecclesiastical architecture, in this case particularly to Santa Maria dei Miracoli, designed by Pietro Lombardo and built between 1481 and 1489. In an article examining the use of Santa Maria dei Miracoli in Venetian painting and sculpture, Giuliani focuses particularly on its use by Carpaccio in the Albanesi cycle, noting adapted elements from the church in both the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple* and the *Death of the Virgin*,<sup>391</sup> making it entirely plausible that the architectural features in the *Annunciation* were drawn from the same source. Similar pilasters to those in Carpaccio’s work can be found either side of the church’s main door, but the

<sup>388</sup> Ibid., p. 214. Carpaccio employed the Codussian window elsewhere in his pictorial architecture. They can be seen, for example, in the palatial building with a large central arch seen in the background of *The Ambassadors Return to the English Court* from his St. Ursula cycle, now in the Accademia, Venice.

<sup>389</sup> On this cycle see P. Humfrey, “The Life of St Jerome” Cycle from the Scuola di San Gerolamo di Cannaregio”, *Arte Veneta*, 39 (1986), pp. 41-46.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>391</sup> M. Giuliani, 2006, pp. 37-84, on Carpaccio’s use of the church see particularly pp. 37-65.

strongest links are between the chancel arch of the church and the arch of Mary's loggia (Fig. 116). As in the painted work, the piers either side of the chancel arch stand on small bases, have the familiar Lombardo foliate decoration, and are topped by entablature blocks that bear a strong resemblance to those depicted by Carpaccio in his work. The key difference between the two lies in the shape of their respective arches, that in Santa Maria dei Miracoli being a straightforward semicircle decorated with bunches of grapes, while Carpaccio's is the adaptation of a Codussian window described previously. This difference notwithstanding, the architectural links seem clear, and would surely have been apparent to a visually literate contemporary observer. By allying the arch of Mary's loggia with the chancel arch in this manner, Carpaccio transforms it into a sacred threshold, even perhaps a *porta coeli*, beyond which lies Mary with all her redemptive promise. In addition, he transforms the space of the loggia itself into a form of apse with Mary the altar, following the chapel symbolism established by Gentile Bellini in his *Annunciation*. In contrast to Gentile, however, the connections established by Carpaccio are to an important centre of Marian devotion in Venice, home of a miracle-working *Madonna and Child*,<sup>392</sup> an allusion that cannot have been accidental in the context of a Marian cycle. Santa Maria dei Miracoli's function as a sacred container for this image connects Carpaccio's work to Spinello Aretino and Piero della Francesca's *Annunciations*, also images replete with references to local Marian tabernacles and chapels.

### **Excursus: The Annunciation in Sacred Spaces**

Having examined evocations of sacred spaces and places in Annunciations, and the meanings these created, this final section will examine Annunciations in sacred spaces, examining how and why the two interacted. These interactions have two principal forms: one taking place inside the image, where the pictorial architecture reflected the architectural setting for

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<sup>392</sup> On the history of the church's rise to prominence as the center of a local Marian cult, see A. Niero, "La Madonna dei Miracoli nella Storia della Pietà Venezia: Breve Profilo", in *Santa Maria dei Miracoli a Venezia: la storia, la fabbrica, i restauri*, Istituto Veneto di Scienze, Lettere ed Arti, Venice, 2003.

the work, and the other outside the image, based upon a physical interaction with architecture and space.

With the important exception of frescoes and mosaics, very few Annunciations remain in their original context, altarpieces having been removed from churches, while the original domestic contexts of small devotional panels are now either radically changed or very difficult to establish with any certainty. Even in the case of frescoes, given the remodeling of many churches it can be difficult to judge relationships between pictorial and built architecture. Fra Angelico's *Annunciation* in the Covent of San Marco, discussed earlier in this chapter, is a rare exception where links between built and painted remain easily discernable. One altarpiece that does apparently remain *in situ* is Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* (c. 1440) (Fig. 33) in the Cappella Martelli in San Lorenzo, Florence. It is unclear, however, whether this was in fact its intended destination. Ames-Lewis and Ruda both argue that the altarpiece was originally two panels, which functioned as cupboard doors, that were then bolted together when the work was moved to the Cappella Martelli in the 1450s.<sup>393</sup> A close examination of the work's pictorial architecture, however, reveals links to the panel's immediate context in San Lorenzo, links that may indicate that the chapel was the altarpiece's intended destination from the start.

The plan of the space in Lippi's altarpiece is a complex one – all of the figures stand in a square room in the centre, constructed on two levels, while to either side there are narrow rectangular spaces, reached through broad arches, from which archways lead to further rooms/corridors beyond. The final element is the long rectangular garden beyond the two arches at the rear of the principal room, flanked by two long, tall buildings. The character of the architecture is less ornate than in some of Lippi's other *Annunciations* (he does not use the Corinthian order, for example, which can be seen in both his *Le Murate* (Fig. 103) and *Barberini Annunciations* (Fig. 145)), although the scallop shells and patches of polychromatic marble present in much of Lippi's architecture are there. Two architectural features within the work are also to be found in the chapel itself, the tall, slender *pietra serena* colonnettes, which

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<sup>393</sup> F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Filippo Lippi's San Lorenzo *Annunciation*", *Storia dell'Arte*, Vol. 69 (May – Aug., 1989), pp. 155-164, pp. 156-157 and J. Ruda, 1993, p. 117.

can be seen in the two rear corners of the chapel and the *pietra serena* arches, which seem to echo the entrance arch to the chapel itself. By themselves, these connections are not enough to argue that the Cappella Martelli was the intended destination for Lippi's work. Tall, slim colonettes were a common feature in Gothic architecture, as well as in fourteenth-century pictorial architecture, while Florence was replete with *pietra serena* arches of all types and sizes.

More specific, however, are the links between the plan of the work's pictorial architecture and that of San Lorenzo itself (see Fig. 117, a plan of San Lorenzo). Immediately adjacent to the Cappella Martelli at the left-hand end of the transept is a rectangular space, accessed through an arch, which leads in turn to another room beyond, a situation mirrored on the right-hand side. This arrangement is very similar to that seen on both sides of Lippi's work, where a room, entered through an arch, leads in turn into another beyond. In this sense, it is almost as if the figures in the work are standing in the crossing of San Lorenzo, with the nave represented by the long rectangular garden beyond.<sup>394</sup> Furthermore, it is interesting to consider that the first cloister at San Lorenzo was behind the Cappella Martelli and to the left, meaning that garden space to the rear of Lippi's work could be viewed as a reflection of the real space beyond the chapel's rear wall. Adding to this impression is the fact that the long building to the left of this garden bears some similarities to the flank of San Lorenzo as viewed from the cloister (Fig. 77).

Like Fra Angelico's *San Marco Annunciation*, then, it seems that Lippi deliberately draws architectural analogies between real and painted space, using these to create a sense of connection between the holy event portrayed and the worshipper in the chapel outside the image. The way he does so, however, is different, based more upon similarities in the architectonic

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<sup>394</sup> Rowlands argues that the central area of the work may be read as a nave and the side spaces "aisles", but does not link this to San Lorenzo itself, see E. Rowlands, 1989, p. 62. Ruda has a different reading, arguing that the space can be seen as a "narthex" with "fantastical wings" either side, and that this is likely a reference to the "porch at the eastern gate of the sanctuary" in Ezekiel 44, see J. Ruda, 1993, p. 123. Ruda's reading is the more plausible of the two. Although like Rowlands, he ignores the potential links to San Lorenzo, it is still entirely possible that the space could refer both to Ezekiel's temple and to San Lorenzo itself.

arrangement of space than upon links forged by architectural details, as is the case in Fra Angelico's fresco. The space within the altarpiece can nonetheless be viewed as an alternative San Lorenzo. More specifically, it functions both as a distorted mirror, offering a transformed reflection of the church, and as an illusionistic window, suggesting that the space seen exists behind the rear wall of the chapel, an effect powerfully created by the suggestion of the cloister beyond.

The second type of interaction, that based on the physical situation of the Annunciation within sacred architecture, was designed to produce different effects to the architectural mirroring discussed above.<sup>395</sup> Due to its bipartite nature – the compositional kernel of Gabriel and Mary – images of the Annunciation lent themselves to being situated either side of an architectural element, whether a chancel arch, a doorway, a window, an altar or a tomb. A number of examples of this survive from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, most notably Giotto's *Annunciation* either side of the chancel arch in the Arena Chapel, Padua, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's *Annunciation* at Montesièpi (c.

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<sup>395</sup> It is worth recalling that some of the viewers of these works would also have viewed the *sacre rappresentazioni* of the Annunciation staged in Santissima Annunziata and in San Felice in Piazza. Staged in 1439 and known to us through an account by the Russian bishop Abram di Souzda, these were instances where the Annunciation literally rather than illusionistically interacted with the interior of the church. In the *rappresentazioni* staged in Santissima Annunziata, for example, the entire body of the nave from the entrance door to the *tramezzo* became the space of the Annunciation. Although it is clearly difficult to reconstruct precisely given the lack of any visual record, the detailed nature of Abram's account has allowed scholars to reconstruct its general form. Above the entrance doorway there was a platform surmounted by a large aedicule within which was the throne of God the Father surrounded by a group of actors playing the part of a company of angels. On the *tramezzo* meanwhile, Mary, played by a young man, sat in another aedicule smaller than that above the main door. The performance itself seems to have consisted of an actor playing Gabriel descending along a rope from the main door to the *tramezzo* where Mary awaited him, whereupon the two actors recited the familiar words of Luke's account of the Annunciation. On the *sacre rappresentazione* in Santissima Annunziata see Molinari, C., *Spettacoli fiorentini del Quattrocento: Contributi allo studio delle Sacre Rappresentazioni*, Neri Pozza, Venice, 1961, pp. 39-44 and Biancalani, A. and Lisi, C., "Modello interpretativo della Chiesa nell'anno 1439 e dell'ingegno per la rappresentazione della Annunziata in base alla descrizione del vescovo Abramo di Souzda", in *Il Luogo Teatrale a Firenze*, Fabbri, M., Garbero Zorzi, E. and Petrioli Tofani, A.M. (eds.), Electa, Milan, 1975. On Florentine *sacre rappresentazioni* in general see Newbigin, N., "The Word Made Flesh: The *Rappresentazioni* of Mysteries and Miracles in Fifteenth-Century Florence", in *Christianity and the Renaissance: Image and Religious Imagination in the Quattrocento*, Henderson, J., and Verdon, T. (eds.), Syracuse University Press, Syracuse, 1990 and Kent, D. *Cosimo de' Medici and the Florentine Renaissance: The Patron's Oeuvre*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2000.

1340) (Fig. 118) and Lippo Vanni's *Annunciation* at San Leonardo al Lago (c. 1365) (Fig. 119), both situated either side of a window, Altichiero's *Annunciations* in Padua, one either side of a window in the Oratorio di San Giorgio (c. 1384) (Fig. 120), and the other at either end of the rear wall of the Cappella di San Giacomo in the Santo, Vecchietta's *Annunciation* flanking the altar in Siena's Baptistery (Fig. 121), Bicci di Lorenzo's *Annunciation* in Santa Trinita, Florence, mentioned above, Gozzoli's *Annunciation* above a chapel entrance in the Camposanto, Pisa (Fig. 122), and Foppa's *Annunciation* in the Cappella Portinari, Sant'Eustorgio, Milan (Fig. 123). It is also likely that there were many more examples that are now lost. There is a fragmentary mid-fourteenth-century *Annunciation* either side of a tomb arch in the Cappella Davanzati in Santa Trinita, Florence (Fig. 124), for instance, which may be a survival of a tradition that linked tombs and images of the Annunciation; examples of this association survive in the Veneto, including Giotto's Arena Chapel *Annunciation* (the tomb of Enrico Scrovegni lay below), Altichiero's *Annunciation* in the Capella San Giacomo, and a later sculpted *Annunciation* by Tullio Lombardo on the tomb of Andrea Vendramin in Santi Giovanni e Paolo, Venice.

The symbolism attached to this type of Annunciation takes two principal forms, both of which are based upon a symbiotic relationship between space/architecture and images of the Annunciation. In other words, spaces gained meanings from the addition of an Annunciation, while simultaneously the image gained meaning from its deployment in, around or across a particular space. The first is the idea of the *porta coeli*, the gateway to heaven, discussed in detail above with reference to the Cappella Spini *Annunciation* in Santa Trinita. In the cases where the Annunciation flanked a tomb, or spanned the arch above, this idea was clearly potent, particularly when allied to the power of the Ave Maria itself. As Derbes and Sandona note with regard to Giotto's *Annunciation*, the Ave Maria was an intercessory prayer – “Pray for us sinners/Now and in the hour of our death” – making the Annunciation a visualisation in some sense of this prayer, especially suited to

funerary contexts.<sup>396</sup> The second uses the architectural setting to confer meaning on the image of the Annunciation itself. Didi-Huberman argues that the gap between Gabriel and Mary, however it is formed, symbolises the seemingly impassable space crossed by the Holy Spirit, namely Mary's hymen,<sup>397</sup> a "threshold at once crossed and intact..."<sup>398</sup> Another way in which an image of the Annunciation could use its architectural setting to create meaning was by employing the central window to symbolize the light that entered the world at the moment of the Annunciation, as is the case with the *Annunciations* by Ambrogio Lorenzetti, Lippo Vanni and Altichiero.<sup>399</sup> When light was streaming through the window, incense was being burned and a mass being sung, the impression upon a viewer must have been intense.

Given the amount of religious mural decoration that has been lost, it is also possible that the Annunciation interacted with sacred spaces in other, more directly illusionistic ways that are now lost. An idea of how these might have operated is provided by an unusual fragment in Santa Trinita, Florence, frescoed on the pier to the left of the Sassetti Chapel (c. 1450) (Fig. 125).<sup>400</sup> This consists of the Annunciate Virgin alone, above whom is the dove of the Holy Spirit, dispatched by God's hand from the clouds. The fresco is, however, more complex than it first appears. A close look reveals that part of the Virgin's robe draped over her right arm actually breaks out of the fictive frame, as does her left hand, which is almost placed upon the frame. The effect is extraordinary, making it appear almost as if Mary is stepping out of a room beyond the pier into the church herself. The intended audience of this illusionism is revealed by the height of the fresco, which is calculated so as to allow the worshippers in the nave to see it. Allied to the angle of Mary's body, which is turned to the left towards the nave, it is as if the Annunciation is being projected into the body of the church, creating a powerful link between the two

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<sup>396</sup> A. Derbes and M. Sandona, 2004, pp. 215-219. The Latin text of the Ave Maria is as follows: "Ora pro nobis peccatoribus/Nunc et in hora mortis."

<sup>397</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 128-133.

<sup>398</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 133.

<sup>399</sup> E. Borsook, "The Frescoes at San Leonardo al Lago", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 98, No. 643 (Oct., 1956), pp. 351-358, p. 355.

<sup>400</sup> On this work see M. Ciatti, "Una frammentaria 'Annunciata'", in *La chiesa di Santa Trinita a Firenze*, Cassa di Risparmio di Firenze, Florence, 1987, pp. 142-144. There is a trecento *Annunciation* frescoed on a pier in Orsanmichele, which may indicate that the Santa Trinita *Annunciation* is not an isolated phenomenon.



(Fig. 126).

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the multitude of connections that existed between sacred architecture, theological texts and images of the Annunciation, demonstrating that they could be very closely, even symbiotically, linked, particularly where a physical relationship between an Annunciation and a sacred space existed. It is also apparent that, despite Mary's evident status as a *cosa sacra*, this was not always enough for painters, who sought to embellish and emphasise this status by turning to architectural structures and architectonic forms that clearly signaled both her sanctity and that of the event taking place. These connections can broadly be described as serving four important purposes within these Annunciation images. The first of these is a functional one. Faced with housing Mary, who was in a figurative sense a holy container, painters sought out structures that fulfilled similar roles, referring architecturally to the tabernacles and chapels that housed altars and miraculous images. Second, housing Mary in structures of this type allowed painters to express a variety of theological and symbolic ideas within their paintings and frescoes. The tabernacle, as well as being particularly associated with Marian worship, was also an economical metaphor for Mary the "*tabernaculum Christi*". Similarly, the rood screen, as a dividing point and as a liminal, mixed space, could not only symbolize the intermingling of the celestial and the earthly at the Annunciation, but could also signify a church, itself associated with the potent notion of *Maria ecclesia*. There was, perhaps, also an emotive purpose for the echoes of the sacred within these images, a sense in which architecture could help worshippers in their acts of meditation, identification and veneration. Monks and nuns, meditating upon Mary, their "special friend",<sup>401</sup> could see her placed in a setting that was recognizably and particularly connected to their own, in the process further strengthening their already strong bonds. For lay worshippers too, seeing Mary architecturally enshrined within these works must have helped them venerate her, the bearer of their salvation. Finally, the

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<sup>401</sup> M. Rubin, 2000, p. 84.

Annunciation, when placed within sacred spaces, conferred new meanings upon them, in turn gaining new resonance from their interaction with the space.

Whereas this chapter has examined Mary within holy space, the next chapter will look at a number of Annunciations that did precisely the opposite, taking the Annunciation out of these rarefied and celestial places and into the earthliness of the street. As we will see, the essential concept was, however, the same as that seen in this chapter and chapter 2; by using links to built architecture painters created meanings and inculcated empathy between the viewer and the sacred episode they portrayed.

## Chapter 4 Architectural Time and Place

### Introduction

The previous chapters have explored the links between pictorial architecture and the built environment in which it was created, examining the varying reasons, both secular and sacred, behind these architectural choices. This chapter will build on this, focusing upon the motivations behind painters placing the Annunciation - an event that took place in biblical Nazareth - in settings that are, on occasion, more reminiscent of fifteenth-century Florence or Venice. One effect of this is to collapse the temporal distance between past and present, combining the two or at the very least radically decreasing the separation between them in the eyes of a fifteenth-century viewer. Nagel and Wood offer some initial reasons for this, arguing that this seeming “anachronism” was entirely deliberate, designed to both increase the relevance of the event depicted and to render it more comprehensible through the substitution of an analogous structure,<sup>402</sup> a fifteenth-century *all’antica palazzo* for Mary’s house, for example. Arguably, however, the motivation behind the apparently contemporary environments created by painters is both more fundamental and more complex than that. Because pictorial architecture can refer to something outside the image, namely the buildings familiar to its audience, it has great potential to encourage them to identify very directly with the episode portrayed. The first part of this chapter will examine two key reasons for encouraging this identification, the civic (emphasizing a city’s relationship with Mary and the Annunciation) and the devotional/meditative (encouraging worshippers to consider themselves in some senses personally present at the holy happening in order to render it both more memorable and more meaningful).

As well encouraging connections, however, pictorial architecture could simultaneously balance this by creating a sense of distance between audience and image through the inclusion of architectural elements or creation of entire settings that were clearly unreal, imaginary and even fantastical. This extraordinary architecture served to emphasise the

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<sup>402</sup> A. Nagel and C. Wood, 2010, p. 150.

otherworldly, mysterious and intensely holy elements of the Annunciation, clearly removing it from the quotidian. In a sense, this type of pictorial architecture can be described as the other end of a continuum to that introduced above; a continuum that runs from the familiar to the unfamiliar, or, in other words, from association to disassociation. In fact, as the examples that follow will make clear, no Annunciation's pictorial architecture was entirely at one end or the other of this scale. Instead, there was usually a mixture of the "real" and the "unreal". Even in architectural settings which seemed very close to contemporary buildings, there were almost always elements that served to idealise the architecture, to avoid too close an identification between the sacred and earthly. Indeed, it is clear that painters employed architecture in a very considered fashion, using it to control both the nature and the extent of viewer's connection with the Annunciation. Architecture in this reading is both an agent of fifteenth-century naturalism, by which is meant simply the creation of pictorial environments that more closely relate to the everyday, and a means to control it, a tool to ensure that a distance from the everyday appropriate to the sanctity and the mystery of the holy is maintained.

### **Mary and the City 1: Civic Annunciations**

In 1260, on the eve of the Battle of Montaperti, the citizens of Siena followed their *sindaco* Bonaguida Lucari to the Duomo of the city, where Lucari approached the high altar and addressed the image of the Virgin that stood there. Legendarily, he ended his speech with the words "I, most miserable of sinners, give, donate and concede to you this city of Siena, its *contado*, its force and its district, and as a sign of this I place the keys of the city of Siena on this altar."<sup>403</sup> Having dedicated their city to Mary and won a victory against the odds at Montaperti, the citizens of Siena considered themselves especially favoured, and dedicated a great many chapels and artworks to her, most famously Duccio's monumental *Maestà* and the series of Marian altarpieces for the side chapels of the Duomo by Pietro and

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<sup>403</sup> On this event see D. Norman, *Siena and the Virgin: Art and Politics in a Late Medieval City State*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1999, p. 3, and G. Parsons, *Siena, Civil Religion and the Siennese*, Ashgate, Aldershot, 2004, pp. 3-9.

Ambrogio Lorenzetti and Simone Martini.<sup>404</sup> The Sienese were far from alone in this. In Florence, the city's Duomo, originally dedicated to Santa Reperata, was replaced by a new, larger church in the late thirteenth century, this time dedicated to the Virgin and called Santa Maria del Fiore. In Venice, too, although the principal church of the city remained dedicated to their beloved San Marco, the first basilica of the city on the island of Torcello was dedicated to Mary, and numerous smaller *scuole* bearing her name were established in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>405</sup> All these cities had specific associations with the Annunciation; the Florentine new year fell on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, the feast day of the Annunciation, while Venice's traditional founding date was the 25<sup>th</sup> March 421. The cult of the Annunciation was particularly strong in Florence, where the devotion to the miraculous image at Santissima Annunziata was unrivalled by any other church or image within the city.<sup>406</sup> In Venice, although there was no specific cult site attached to the Annunciation, sculpted versions of it were to be found all over the city, most prominently in the two statues of Gabriel and Mary each perched in aedicules flanking the upper five arches of the façade of San Marco so that Annunciation continually played out across the city's sacred and civic heart.<sup>407</sup> Given this devotion to Mary and to the Annunciation, it is unsurprising to find that a number of images of the event refer architecturally to the city in which they were commissioned, creating what might be described as "civic" Annunciations. In other words, these are Annunciations whose architectural settings, while fulfilling a number of functions, deliberately draw visual links between the city-state of their creation and the Annunciation.

One of the foremost examples of a civic Annunciation is Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciation*, painted in 1486 (Fig. 24). In 1482, Pope Sixtus IV had granted the city of Ascoli Piceno *libertas ecclesiastica*, the right to self-government free from direct papal control. According to contemporary accounts, the news

<sup>404</sup> On these altarpieces see D. Norman, 1999, pp. 68-91.

<sup>405</sup> G. Musolino, "Culto Mariano", in *Culto dei santi a Venezia*, Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, Venice, 1965, pp. 241-244.

<sup>406</sup> This occasionally caused disputes. There was some tension in the early fifteenth century between the Servites at Santissima Annunziata and the officials of the Duomo, caused by the instigation of new festivities at Duomo on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, a day on which Florentines traditionally visited the Servite's church. See M. Casalini, 2001, pp. 172-173.

<sup>407</sup> D. Rosand, *Myths of Venice: The Figuration of a State*, University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill and London, 2001, p. 16.

of this important grant reached Ascoli on the 25<sup>th</sup> March, the feast day of the Annunciation, a date and sacred event that thereafter assumed a central importance in the civic culture of Ascoli.<sup>408</sup> Two years before Crivelli executed his work, an altarpiece of the *Annunciation* was commissioned from Pietro Alemanno for the Cappella Anzianale in Ascoli's Palazzo dei Capitani del Popolo (Fig. 127).<sup>409</sup> Painted for a chapel in Ascoli's foremost civic building, and commemorating an episode of the utmost importance for Ascoli's civic consciousness, it is unsurprisingly replete with specifically civic visual messages. These are concentrated in the center of the panel, filling the gap between Mary and Gabriel. The crest of Ascoli Piceno hangs from the crenellated wall in the background, while in the foreground the words "LIBERTAS ECCLESIASTICA", etched in gold, are emblazoned above a model of the city. The link between the Annunciation and the papal grant, between the sacred and civic, is thus effectively expressed by a series of visual cues. It is significant that the model of Ascoli is positioned between the two figures, as it is also in Crivelli's *Annunciation*, creating a potent visual association between them. It as if, having thrown off papal sovereignty, the city was now entirely dedicated/subject to, and entwined with, the Annunciation, in a pictorial version of Lucari's handing of Siena's keys to the Virgin.

Although Ascoli figures prominently in Alemanno's *Annunciation*, it is not the setting itself, which, while apparently contemporary (as signaled by the crenellated town wall in the background), appears to contain no distinctively Ascolian buildings. In this respect, it differs from Crivelli's later *Annunciation*, which contains within its *mise-en-scène* numerous references to Ascoli

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<sup>408</sup> G Fabiani, *Ascoli nel quattrocento*, Vol. 1, Societa Tipolitografica, Ascoli Piceno, 1950, pp. 117-120, and R. Lightbown, 2004, pp. 323-330.

<sup>409</sup> On this work see D. Ferriani, *Ascoli Piceno: Pinacoteca Civica*, Calderini, 1994, Bologna, Cat. 18, pp. 33-34. There are numerous examples of Marian images painted for town halls, especially in the trecento, of which the *Maesta* of Simone Martini (c. 1315-1321), painted for Siena's Palazzo del Pubblico, is perhaps the best known. There is a late fourteenth-century *Annunciation* by an anonymous Florentine in the Sala del Consiglio of Volterra's Palazzo dei Priori, another by Taddeo di Bartolo in the Anticappella della Podesta, also in Siena's Palazzo Pubblico, while the Annunciation in the form of Gabriel and Mary in aedicules of either side of the central figures was incorporated into Guariento's monumental *Coronation of the Virgin* (c. 1370) in Sala del Consiglio of the Palazzo Ducale in Venice.

itself.<sup>410</sup> In the background of Crivelli's painting, a version of one of Ascoli's *case-torri* is visible (Fig. 128), a type of housing that would have been highly familiar to a contemporary audience.<sup>411</sup> Very similar structures can be seen in the street that runs up the left hand side of the model of Ascoli that Saint Emidius offers to Mary, highlighting the connection (Fig. 129). The antique triumphal arch too, though entirely fantastical because of its incongruously pristine state, reflects Ascoli's cityscape, which to this day contains various remnants of its Roman past as Picenum, including the Porta Gemina, from which the Via Salaria ran to Rome, and an ancient Roman theatre.<sup>412</sup> Crivelli, preserving the obvious civic elements (in particular the model of Ascoli), has seemingly gone one step further than Alemanno. Associating Ascoli more directly with the Annunciation by weaving unmistakable reflections of the city into his portrayal of Nazareth, Crivelli blurs the boundaries between the two places. This is an impression aided by numerous details within the work that create a sense of the temporality, even the contemporaneity, of the event; a point made poetically by Bovero, who writes "It is the 25<sup>th</sup> of March, and the spring breeze ruffles the cypresses and flutters the carpets. On the terrace red robed dignitaries intently read the message that has just arrived along the Via Salaria from Rome..."<sup>413</sup>

It is important to note, however, that though it contains elements that allow a contemporary viewer to see references to Ascoli in the work, this is nonetheless far from a portrait of a street in fifteenth-century Ascoli, as a comparison with the model of Ascoli in Saint Emidius' hands makes clear. Although *case-torri* similar to that seen in the background of Crivelli's work are

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<sup>410</sup> In other respects, however, the paintings are very similar. Crivelli incorporated numerous elements from Alemanno's composition, including the crenellated wall in the background and the house with an open lower storey and a loggia above, placed on the left of each work. Where the two works do differ, however, is in the relationship between the figures and the architecture. Alemanno's architecture is background, with the figures occupying the foreground, where in Crivelli's work the figures are set within and around the architecture.

<sup>411</sup> On Ascoli's *case-torri* see O. Sestili and A. Torsani, *Ascoli e l'edilizia privata medievale nei secoli XII, XIII e XIV*, Giannino e Giuseppe Gagliardi Editori, Ascoli Piceno, 1995, pp. 68-73.

<sup>412</sup> R. Lightbown, 2004, pp. 330-331. They differ from the *case-torri* of Tuscany in being generally shorter, and having pitched tiled roofs, although they preserve the absence of windows on the ground floor. Ascoli does have tall *torri* similar to those found in Tuscany, see O. Sestili and A. Torsani, 1995, pp. 31-55, however these are typologically distinct from the *case-torri*.

<sup>413</sup> A. Bovero, *Tutta la pittura del Crivelli*, Rizzoli, Milan, 1961, p. 39: "È il 25 marzo, e il venticello primaverile arrufa i cipressi e agita i tappeti. Sul terrazzo il notevole in robone legge intento il messaggio appena giunto da Roma per la via Salaria..."

visible, in other respects the austere city of stone it shows is clearly distinct from Crivelli's colourful city of marbles, brick, stone and terracotta. Instead, it should be seen as an idealized Ascoli, filled with details, such as the street paved in a pale Verona marble and the ostentatious triumphal arch, that were far too lavish to be a feature of its real cityscape. The city depicted by Crivelli is thus an Ascoli perfected yet recognizable, creating a civic resonance in a setting that, at the same time, is splendid enough to form a fitting stage for the holy event and its protagonists.

In the ancient Roman rhetorical treatise *Ad herennium*, widely distributed throughout this period, the author advises that in order to easily memorise an image it should be mentally set against a backdrop that will "cling lastingly in the memory."<sup>414</sup> Although the author was specifically describing how to memorise parts of a speech or legal argument, the essential principle can be applied to painted images, where placing a sacred narrative against a backdrop made memorable by its familiarity or unusualness facilitates an audience's later recollection of the holy episode.<sup>415</sup> Numerous scholars have described the inclusion of recognizable cityscapes in the second half of the fifteenth century and into the sixteenth century in these terms,<sup>416</sup> arguing that their presence made the city "a memory place for bringing the holy histories to mind."<sup>417</sup> Clearly, fictive architecture is uniquely well placed for providing this mnemonic support, allowing the creation of a recognizable *locus* through the use of architectural portraits or the use of a well-known style or building material (the characteristic gray *pietra serena* of Tuscan architecture seen in Botticelli's *Annunciations* (Fig. 56 and 57) being an excellent example). Portraits of Florence, for instance, identifiable by the inclusion of key landmarks such as the Duomo or the tower of the Palazzo Vecchio, appear in the background of numerous images in the later quattrocento, including some of the "villa" annunciations analysed

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<sup>414</sup> Anonymous, *Ad Herennium*, H. Caplan (trans.), William Heinemann, London, 1964, p. 211. See also F. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1966, p. 6.

<sup>415</sup> F. Yates, 1966, p. 91.

<sup>416</sup> S. Blasio, 1994, pp. 51-52, P. Rubin, 2007, pp. 216-219. The phenomenon has also been discussed in relation to David's *Baptism Triptych* (1505) by Ainsworth, see D. Ainsworth, *Gerard David: Purity of Vision in an Age of Transition*, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1998, pp. 230-235.

<sup>417</sup> P. Rubin, 2007, p. 217.



previously.<sup>418</sup> In Filippino Lippi's *Annunciation* (Fig. 80), Florence appears in the background, the dome of the Duomo placed on or near the perspectival vanishing point and in the middle of the diagonal line that stretches from Gabriel's eyes to Mary's; as in Pietro Alemanno and Crivelli's *Annunciations*, the city occupies the void between the two figures to place it at the heart of the event. The key moment of annunciation is thus explicitly tied to the familiar landmark behind, creating an association between the two that would surely have aided the viewer's recollection of this most important of sacred narratives.

Crivelli's *Annunciation* has no landmark as instantly memorable for an Ascolian as the Duomo was for a Florentine, and yet, arguably, it too uses architecture to meet some of the *Ad herennium's* criteria for the creation of a memorable image. The tower-house in the background, for example, allows the viewer to mentally conjoin the Annunciation and his or her city, albeit not as directly as the depictions of Florence. In order that images might "cling lastingly", *Ad herennium's* author also recommended that the backgrounds be rendered distinctive by an unusual or striking element, arguing that "When we see in everyday life things that are petty, ordinary or banal, we generally fail to remember them, because the mind is not being stirred up by anything novel or marvelous. But if we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonourable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable, or laughable, that we are likely to remember a long time."<sup>419</sup> There are clearly multiple reasons for the richness and individuality of the architectural ornament and form in Crivelli's work, some of which have already been touched upon, but it is plausible that one of its further functions is a mnemonic one. Mary's house, for example, with its incongruously large and luxurious entrance, profusion of marble and other materials and finely worked classical ornamentation was surely "extraordinary" to a contemporary audience. It is, as a result, memorable, an easy hook from which an audience could hang their recollections of the Annunciation as well as their mental images of Mary herself.

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<sup>418</sup> S. Blasio, 1994.

<sup>419</sup> *Ad herennium*, 1964, p. 219.

## Mary and the City 2: Meditating Upon the Annunciation

An important element in religious practice throughout this period was the idea of meditating upon biblical events in such a way as to encourage empathy and identification with them. The Franciscans were particularly important proponents of this, with the best-known written example of this approach being the *Meditations on the Life of Christ*, written by an anonymous Franciscan in the early fourteenth century.<sup>420</sup> In this work, he encourages his reader (possibly a nun of the Poor Clares, the Franciscan's sister movement)<sup>421</sup> to picture herself as a witness to the events described: in the preamble to his description of the Annunciation, for example, he writes "Let us pause here and remember what I told you in the beginning, that you must learn all things said and done as though you were present."<sup>422</sup> As with the mnemonic and civic elements described earlier, this exercise of "witnessing", whether mental or pictorial, relied essentially on a process of localization, of transforming the distant, biblical setting into a local, contemporary one. An excellent example of this translation from past to present can be found in the sermons of the popular Dominican preacher San Bernardino. Describing Clausura, one of the women who accompanied Mary, a passage discussed at greater length in Chapter One, Bernardino stops midway through and in an aside says "She had a window like this one here, or that one of the Podesta..." presumably gesturing behind him to the windows of the Palazzo Pubblico.<sup>423</sup> As Bolzoni argues, the result of this is that "The public therefore has before its very eyes a familiar model that could be used to recreate in "local" terms the room in which the Virgin Mary would receive the Annunciation."<sup>424</sup> This is part of a broader trend of localization of the sacred in San Bernardino's sermons, designed, in common with the devotional practice of placing oneself at the event, to create an impression in the minds of his

<sup>420</sup> On this see M. Baxandall, 1972, pp. 45-46, D. Lesnick, *Preaching in Medieval Florence: The Social World of Franciscan and Dominican Preachers*, University of Georgia Press, Atlanta, 1989, p. 168 and H. Flora, 2009, pp. 117-122.

<sup>421</sup> H. Flora and Pecorini-Cicogni, A., 2006, pp. 61-62

<sup>422</sup> J. de Caulibus, 1997, p. 19: "Attende hic et recordare que tibi in principio dixi, UG scilicet discas omnibus que dicentur et fiunt te exhibere presentem." For the translation see J. de Caulibus, *Meditations*, 1961, p. 15.

<sup>423</sup> Bernardino da Siena, 1989, p. 861: "Ché aveva una finestra come questa qui o quella della Podestà..."

<sup>424</sup> L. Bolzoni, 2004, p. 137.

audience of “direct involvement”.<sup>425</sup>

How this localization of the sacred could be achieved mentally by the individual worshipper was addressed by the author of the *Zardino de Oration*, a devotional manual for young girls published in Venice in 1494. “...pick a city: whichever will be most practical for you. In that city find the principal places where the acts of the passion happen: that is a palace where the Last Supper will be...make these [places] in your mind.”<sup>426</sup> This process of translation, localizing and making contemporary the past biblical event, can be identified in the architectural settings of numerous fifteenth-century Annunciations. In the previous chapters, for example, we have seen how painters employed allusions to a variety of contemporary secular and sacred spaces. Although they clearly did so for a number of reasons, the idea of “witnessing” an event in a comprehensibly familiar setting must also have motivated these fictive architectural choices.

Jacopo da Montagnana’s *Annunciation* triptych (Fig. 130), commissioned around 1495 for the Capella di Santa Maria degli Angeli in the Palazzo Vescovile by Pietro Barozzi (1441-1507), Bishop of Padua, is a striking example of how this “witnessing” of the sacred narrative might be encouraged by the inclusion of a familiar setting.<sup>427</sup> The Annunciation itself takes place in a marble paved enclosure in the very foreground of the work, behind which a *piazza* extends back into the picture. Paved in geometric rectangles of red stone, divided by veins of white marble, this *piazza* is

<sup>425</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

<sup>426</sup> Nicholas de Auximo (?), *Zardino de Oration: Fructuoso*, B. Benalius, Venice, 1494, Cap XVIII: “...piglianodo una citade: la quale ti sia bene practica. Nela qual citade tu trovi li lochi principale neli quelli forono exercitati tutti li acti dela passion: chioe e uno palacio nel quale sia el cenaculo...li quali ti fabbrichi nela mente.” This passage on visualizing the Passion is discussed by Baxandall in his seminal work *The Period Eye*. Oddly, he does not, however, provide the quote or a reference, see M. Baxandall, 1972, p. 46 Carruthers has described how Augustine, followed by medieval thinkers such as Alcuin, recognized that the faithful were bound to translate the unfamiliar into the familiar, for example by picturing Jerusalem as akin to their nearest city. See M. Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images*, 400-1200, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, pp. 119-122. She quotes Alcuin, whose description of how a worshipper might picture Jerusalem is very similar to that in the *Zardino*: “He does not imagine the actual walls and houses and squares of Jerusalem, but whatever he has seen in other cities known to him, these he fashions as being possibly like those in Jerusalem; from known shapes he fashions a thing unknown...”, M. Carruthers, 1998, pp. 119-120.

<sup>427</sup> On the chapel and the triptych see A. Salmazo, “La Capella Barozzi nel Palazzo Vescovile di Padova”, in *Jacopo da Montagnana e la Pittura Padovana del secondo Quattrocento*, Ericani, G. and Salmazo, A. (eds.), Il Poligrafo, Padua, 2002

flanked by two large buildings. The building on the left has an arcaded lower storey, supported on thick Corinthian columns. A simple entablature divides this from the upper floor, which has three bifore windows, with the building completed by crenellations and distinctive chimneys, reminiscent of those that feature prominently in many of Carpaccio's *scuole* cycles, on either corner. The building opposite also has an arcaded lower floor, supported in this case on piers decorated with Lombardesque low relief *all'antica* ornament. Above this is a mezzanine floor, indicated by the small square windows, on top of which is an upper storey with three round-arched bifore windows, mirroring those of the building across the square. Interestingly, this building is surmounted not by crenellations, but by a weighty entablature and a shallow triangular pediment. The piazza opens onto a detailed cityscape, in the center of which is a medieval church, with what appears to be a three-bay portico. To the right, there is a street lined with grand *palazzi*, at the end of which there is a large city gateway surmounted by a machicolated tower.

One of the foremost monuments in Padua's Piazza dei Signori is the Loggia del Gran Guardia (Fig. 131). An elegant two storey construction, its first floor comprises a loggia supported on Corinthian columns, with thick piers supporting each of the outer corners. The second storey has three windows, two bifore flanking a central trifore, divided by low relief pilasters decorated with *all'antica* roundels. Significantly, although it remained incomplete until 1533, construction was begun on this loggia in 1496, at almost exactly the same time as Montagnana was working on his triptych, which may explain the evident similarities between it and the two buildings flanking the piazza in his *Annunciation*.<sup>428</sup> The building to the left, for example, uses Corinthian capitals to support strongly profiled arches, in a manner markedly similar to that on the Loggia del Gran Guardia. The building on the right also appears to borrow from the Loggia, as is demonstrated by the broad undecorated band that divides the ground floor loggia from the upper floor with its bifore windows, an architectural detail also found on the structure in the Piazza dei Signori.

Anticipating the construction of a grand, *all'antica*, loggia in the piazza, it seems Montagnana used this planned loggia as a starting point in the

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<sup>428</sup> As a painter working on a prestigious project for the Bishop of Padua, it is likely that Montagnana could have gained sight of the plans for the loggia.

creation of two buildings, which he then arranged in such a way as to create a symmetrical, “ideal” *piazza*. Idealised though it may be, it is clear Montagnana still intended to evoke the Piazza dei Signori, as the church placed at one end of the square demonstrates. Standing in the equivalent position in the Piazza dei Signori to that of the viewer of this painting, a fifteenth-century Paduan would have seen a broad square with the church of San Clemente, constructed in 1177, at the far end. Unfortunately, as the church was remodeled in the sixteenth century, it is not possible to judge whether the church in Montagnana’s panel did relate to the façade of San Clemente, but given its position relative to the viewer and the loggia it is certainly possible. In its mixture of the real and the imagined, the everyday and the idealized, Montagnana’s Padua is in some respects comparable to Crivelli’s Ascoli. Both localize the event, allowing the audience to identify with the sacred event and hold it in their minds, and both do so in the context of a commission of civic import, one commemorating a decree and the other decorating the chapel of Padua’s leading churchman.

Yet it seems clear that, as with Crivelli, there are more than purely civic motivations behind Montagnana’s choice of a transfigured Padua as a stage for his *Annunciation*. Elsewhere in the *Zardino de Oration*, the author discusses the importance of memorizing the life of Christ, and how best to achieve this. He writes

“Also, it will be useful for you to form in the mind the places and the lands: and the rooms where he [Jesus] conversed. And the persons who alone were always in his company. As was Our Lady Holy Mary: the Magdalen: Martha: Lazarus: and the twelve Apostles. Form in your mind certain people who can represent the aforementioned people for you...Like this you can represent those persons and those places, for that local memory more easily condenses in your mind all the facts and deeds that Sir Jesus did in his life.”<sup>429</sup>

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<sup>429</sup> Nicholas de Auximo (?), 1494, Cap. XVI: “Auchoza ti sera utile formati nela mente li lochi e le terre: e le stantie lui conversava. Et le persone che singularmente erano in sua compagnia. Chome era la nostra madonna sancta Maria: la Magdelena: Martha: Lazaro: e li dodece Apostoli. Formandoti nela mente alcune persone ti representino le sopradicte persone...E cossi ess(??)doti representare quelle persone e quelli lochi per questa memoria locale piu faciliamente reduchi a memoria tutti li facti e le operatione che fece in questa vita esso Misser Jesu Christo.”

This process is precisely that encouraged by the setting in Montagnana's work. By situating the Annunciation in a setting redolent of contemporary Padua, Montagnana places his audience at the event, creating a "local memory" that enables his audience to better empathise with and memorise the event shown. In an article on the links between the townscapes in Ghirlandaio's fresco cycles for Santa Maria Novella and contemporary *sacre rappresentazioni*, Forsgren argues persuasively that the result of the reflections of Florence in the fictive architecture is to make the city "a central character in these scenes. By narrating the tales of the Virgin and John in Florence, the city becomes a sacred site and her citizens become actors in the enacted narrative of the holy."<sup>430</sup> This idea of an almost physical involvement in the narrative is very similar to that created for an audience by Montagnana's vision of Padua in his *Annunciation*.

Where Forsgren's analysis is less persuasive is in its misrepresentation of the accuracy of Ghirlandaio's depiction of Florence. Discussing the scenes from the Life of the Virgin, Forsgren argues that these are set specifically amongst the "streets, houses, *piazze* and churches that surrounded Santa Maria Novella..."<sup>431</sup> A close look at the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Fig. 132), for example, reveals that in fact Ghirlandaio's settings are more aptly characterised as a mixture of fantastical *all'antica* structures (such as the lofty triumphal arch) with buildings only loosely reminiscent of contemporary Florence, than as "portraits" of a particular area. The distinction is made clear by comparing the cycle as a whole with that painted by Ghirlandaio for the Capella Sassetti, which includes, for example, carefully observed depictions of the area around the Ponte Santa Trinita in the *Raising of the Roman Notary's Son* (Fig. 133). Similarly, in Montagnana's triptych there is a contrast between the depiction of a cityscape reminiscent of the view from the Piazza dei Signori, and the partly imaginary *logge* in the foreground, which might be described as creating a balance between association and disassociation. The result is a cityscape that recognisably takes Padua as its starting point, but, at the same time, is far from a topographical portrait of the city. It is as if Montagnana, while wishing to enable a close involvement in the narrative, is

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<sup>430</sup> F. Forsgren, 2009, p. 207.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 203.

at the same time seeking to preserve a decorous distance between the worlds of the idealised sacred and the everyday.

It is important to remember in this context that for many fifteenth-century Italians, Mary was very much among them, listening to their prayers in order to intercede on their behalf in heaven or coming down to earth to work a variety of miracles in their streets and homes. This element of contemporary religious belief is vividly illustrated by the *Miracoli delle Vergine*, first published in Venice in 1475.<sup>432</sup> A collection of accounts of Mary's miraculous interventions on behalf of the devout, it includes numerous instances where Mary appears before her faithful in order to variously cajole, advise, or console. One of them tells the story of how a priest was called to say the last rites to a devout old woman who was about to die. When the priest arrived, so did the Virgin Mary:

"And the last rites were given to the sick lady, and the priest, with much reverence, said 'O my Mother, I come to one who deserves your grace.' And then Our Lady said "This sick lady is my devotee..."<sup>433</sup>

As this story shows, the division between the heavenly and the earthly was far from fixed, with the sacred sometimes being superimposed upon or fused with the secular as part of an existence that had the potential to operate on multiple levels simultaneously. Arguably, a similar layering is present in Montagnana's *Annunciation*, where the Annunciation is laid upon a version of contemporary Padua. Indeed, because of the position of the Annunciation, in the very foreground of the composition, making us view through the space between Mary and Gabriel, visually it is as if we see the city through the lens of the holy event.

In his work *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre describes "representational space" as follows: "space as directly lived through its

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<sup>432</sup> On the *Miracoli* see R. Chavasse, "Latin lay piety and vernacular lay piety in word and image: Venice, 1471 - early 1500's", *Renaissance Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (1996), pp. 319-342, pp. 325-332.

<sup>433</sup> Anonymous, *Miracoli della gloriosa Vergine Maria*, Leonardo di Basilea, Venice, 1475, Capitolo 12: "Et dato che ebbe el sanctissimo sacram[en]to ala don[n]a iferma cu molta revere[n]tia: disse. O madon[n]a mia, v[e]ngo io meritata questa gratia. Alhora la nostra don[n]a li disse. Questa donna iferma e mia devota..."

associated images and symbols, and hence the space of ‘inhabitants’ and ‘users’...It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of objects...”<sup>434</sup> By making his audience view their city as the place of the Annunciation, Montagnana facilitates precisely this type of spatial experience, allowing his audience not only to connect and empathise with the holy, but to carry it with them, incorporating it into their experience of the city to create a truly “representational space”. In this, it is similar to the worldview expressed in the *Miracoli*, whose readers are encouraged to see Mary not as a remote figure, but as a continual sacred presence that has a real potential to elevate their quotidian existence. Both Montagnana’s *Annunciation* and the *Miracoli* encourage an elision of the secular and the sacred, merging them together so as to allow the holy to live within the everyday.

### **Architectural Time and Timelessness: Using Architecture to Combine the Eternal and the Temporal Within an Image**

One striking feature of Montagnana’s *Annunciation* is the low *all’antica* wall immediately behind Gabriel and Mary. This wall divides their space from that of the piazza beyond, a division accentuated by the change in tiling from a complex, polychromatic diamond pattern to a simpler grid arrangement in the piazza, in the process reinforcing the idea of a separate “sacred” zone within the work. A similar arrangement can be seen in Giovanni Bellini’s *Blood of the Redeemer* (c.1460-1465) (Fig. 134). As in Montagnana’s work, there is a sacred zone in the foreground tiled in a diamond pattern, occupied in this case by Christ, which is divided from the rest of the picture by means of a low wall with an antique relief. The background of the picture, meanwhile, contains a view of a village, with a church and a variety of houses and towers, all of which are clearly contemporary. The result, as Fortini-Brown notes, is a work split between two seemingly distinct temporal moments: “The composition thus features a layered space, with the ancient world of paganism and early Christianity in the foreground joined to, but separate from,

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<sup>434</sup> H. Lefebvre, *The Social Production of Space*, D. Nicholson-Smith (trans.), Blackwell, Oxford, 1991, p. 37.



a fifteenth-century background.”<sup>435</sup> Montagnana (perhaps directly inspired by Bellini’s work or a copy) creates exactly the same split in his work, dividing the past event from the present represented by the cityscape and the *piazza*. A key detail, however, is the gate in the midst of the wall. This presents the possibility of some exchange between the two time zones, implying that this is a past still very much accessible from the present.<sup>436</sup>

It is important also to consider the likely architectural sources that informed Montagnana’s choice of an enclosure surrounded by a low wall. Churches throughout the Veneto contained low walls and balustrades used to demarcate the limits of the most important, and often the most private, parts of their interiors, especially family chapels and the space surrounding the high altar. Examples of this type of enclosure include the low marble walls that separate the chancel from the nave in Santa Maria Formosa and San Zaccaria in Venice (Fig. 135). In both of these a wall surrounds a tiled enclosure in a manner reminiscent of that in Montagnana’s work.

The result is that the sacrality of this area within the work, already indicated by the presence of the holy event unfolding within, is confirmed and amplified by Montagnana’s adoption of a means of enclosure that would have been easily associated with church architecture by a contemporary viewer. Indeed, viewed in this light, it is even possible that the rectangular space beyond the enclosure has a dual identity, referring not only to a piazza in contemporary Padua, but also to the nave of a church. In fact by this date the central part of the nave of the Santo in Padua would have been assuming a not dissimilar aspect (Fig. 136). On one side there is the Cappella di Sant’Giacomo, frescoed by Altichiero, whose façade consists of a series of

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<sup>435</sup> P. Fortini-Brown, 1996, p. 199. See also B. L. Brown, “As Time Goes By: Temporal Plurality and the Antique in Andrea Mantegna’s *Saint Sebastian* and Giovanni Bellini’s *Blood of the Redeemer*”, in *Artibus et Historiae*, No. 67 (2013), pp. 21-48, esp. pp. 37-38. A similar enclosure can also be seen in Bellini’s later *Sacred Allegory* (1500).

<sup>436</sup> As Campbell and Lillie note, a similar feature is present in Girolamo da Vicenza’s *Dormition and Assumption of the Virgin* (1488). In this case, however, the division is between a secular/earthly space in front of the gate, and the sacred scene unfolding beyond. This split is dramatized by the presence of a figure clad in black who kneels in the middle of the gate, evidently intended as “stand-in” for our own presence as viewers in the work. See A. Lillie, ‘Entering the Picture’ published online 2014, in ‘Building the Picture: Architecture in Italian Renaissance Painting’, The National Gallery, London, 2014. <http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/exhibition-catalogues/building-the-picture/entering-the-picture/painted-boundaries>

Gothic arches surmounted by a closed attic-storey, while on the other side there was the Sant'Antonio chapel, under construction when Montagnana painted his work, which once again consists of a series of open arches surmounted by an attic storey: these two arcades facing each other are clearly echoed in the two arcaded buildings facing each other across the piazza in Montagnana's work.

Regardless of the precise nature of Montagnana's architectural allusion to a nave and altar enclosure, it has one further important function. By creating an enclosure, you necessarily create a means by which to place a viewer in a more or less privileged position, within or without a space. Here the viewer is firmly within the holiest zone of the work; no wall bars their access. In this way, Montagnana underscores the ideas of "witnessing" the event discussed previously, granting an audience a measure of intimacy. This is particularly interesting in light of the identity of the work's patron. As a prominent clergyman, Bishop Barozzi would have been used to having a greater access to the reserved areas of a church, an idea that may be echoed here in the proximity to Mary and Gabriel created by Montagnana's organisation of space.

Like Bellini and Montagnana's works, in the Perugian painter Bonfigli's *Annunciation* (Fig. 137) a wall creates a split between past and present, with the Annunciation taking place in a foreground enclosure divided from the city in the background by a high wall.<sup>437</sup> The height and solidity of this wall means that the division between the two zones is more emphatic than that in Montagnana's *Annunciation*. Despite this, there is an implied connection between them, created by the large white palace pressing against the dividing wall, symbolizing proximity if not a direct connection. As in Bellini's *Blood of the Redeemer*, where the *all'antica* frieze signaled the antiquity of the sacred precinct, Bonfigli creates a temporal distinction predicated upon stylistic

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<sup>437</sup> On Bonfigli's work see F. Zeri, "An *Annunciation* by Benedetto Bonfigli", Sutton, A. (trans.), *Apollo*, Vol. 108 (Dec., 1978), pp. 394-395, M. Boskovits, *The Thyssen-Bornemisza Collection: Early Italian Painting 1290-1470*, F. Pouncey-Chiarini (trans.), Sotheby's Publications, London, 1990, A. de Marchi, "Benedetto Bonfigli: The Annunciation", in *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master*, K. Christiansen (ed.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004, and M. Silvestrelli, "Benedetto Bonfigli: Annunciazione", *Pintoricchio*, V. Garibaldi and F. Mancini (eds.), Silvana, Milan, 2008.

differences. The wall behind Mary and Gabriel is clearly *all'antica*. It has large inset panels of richly coloured marble, divided by Corinthian pilasters, and is topped with a low-relief frieze of vegetal swags. Bonfigli had assisted Fra Angelico with his cycle for the Capella Niccolina (1447-1449) in the Vatican, a cycle replete with *all'antica* ornament (see, for example, that in the *Condemnation of St Lawrence* (Fig. 138), and his experience there probably formed the basis for this classicizing wall.<sup>438</sup> The city beyond the wall appears to be contemporary, but there are some oddities, such as the large, white circular structure visible in the left-hand middle ground of the work. This has classical (Ionic?) pilasters flanking large square windows, above which, however, is a Gothic dome complete with a crocketed spire with a narrow, pointed bifore window.<sup>439</sup> In general, however, this city, with its towers and ring of crenellated walls appears broadly similar to many quattrocento Italian hill-towns. In sum, Bonfigli has divided his work stylistically, distinguishing past and present in a manner essentially analogous to the binary of the round and pointed arch in fourteenth-century painting, but seemingly without any of the obvious symbolic connotations. This is not a split with a metaphorical import, but is instead an economical and architecturally literate solution to the problem of incorporating past and present in a single work.

Despite this, it seems that Bonfigli, having established a division, was then keen to downplay it. He does this primarily by placing the large, white Gothic palazzo on the left immediately adjacent to the dividing wall, making it almost a bridge between the Annunciation precinct and the city behind. The two zones within the work, though distinct, are thus nonetheless also adjacent to one other: the Annunciation is separate from but connected to the present. This makes sense when we remember that the Annunciation was an event causally connected to events both before and after it in time.<sup>440</sup> As Eve had sinned, so Mary, by accepting God's charge redeemed that sin, and in so doing set in motion the chain of events that would lead to mankind's salvation. Some idea of this can be found in Fra Angelico's Cortona *Annunciation* (Fig. 20), where the expulsion of Adam and Eve takes place in the left background,

<sup>438</sup> M. Boskovits, 1990, p. 40.

<sup>439</sup> A. de Marchi, 2004, p. 214, has noted the fluent way in which Bonfigli navigates between gothic and classical in this work.

<sup>440</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 115-7.

while the events of the Annunciation play out in front: a concise expression of the theological connection between the two.<sup>441</sup> As well as its link to the past, as the episode that enabled Christ's coming and man's salvation, the Annunciation was also an episode whose effects continued to resonate in the present. By placing the Annunciation in a separate but proximate space, Bonfigli created a spatial metaphor for this, effectively saying that this event, though distant in time from the city behind the wall, remains present or close for its inhabitants. Discussing Filippino Lippi's *Santo Spirito* altarpiece (c. 1490) (Fig. 139), Patricia Rubin has noted a similar effect. In this work, Mary sits enthroned in a room beyond which can be seen a representation of the Borgo San Frediano in Florence.<sup>442</sup> As Rubin describes, "This manifest anachronism visualises the connection between the moment and the momentous recurrences of spiritual time."<sup>443</sup> In Bonfigli's work we are arguably seeing two different types of time, the eternal holy event and the temporal everyday, but with the eternal echoing repeatedly in the everyday. Significantly, this temporal symbolism is expressed architecturally, through spatial effect and a striking juxtaposition of architectural styles.

Despite containing a city within its background, the small size of this panel and the non-specific nature of the city behind (particularly when contrasted with the views of Perugia in Bonfigli's *Life of San Ercolano* fresco cycle (Fig. 140),<sup>444</sup> make it unlikely that this painting was intended to have any civic resonance. Given this inspecificity it is also unlikely that the city was intended to serve any particular mnemonic function; with the gold background creating a heavenly sky above and the apparent lack of any clear architectural portraiture (although the changes in Perugia's cityscape in the intervening centuries make this impossible to verify), this is a different depiction of a townscape to the more literal precision of the views of Florence found in the

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<sup>441</sup> J. Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico*, Phaidon, London, 1974, p. 16 and G Didi-Huberman, 1995, p. 157.

<sup>442</sup> P. Rubin, 2007, p. 216.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 217.

<sup>444</sup> Lunghi has analysed the depiction of Perugia in the *San Ercolano* cycle, noting Bonfigli's careful depiction of a number of key Perugian buildings, including the *Porta Marzia*, *San Pietro* and the *Palazzo del Governo*. See E. Lunghi, "Appunti per la storia urbanistica di Perugia negli affreschi della cappella di Priori", in *Un pittore e la sua città: Benedetto Bonfigli e Perugia*, V. Garibaldi (ed.), Electa, Milan, 1996.

background of Filippino Lippi's *Annunciation* (Fig. 80) or Ghirlandaio's Sasseti Chapel cycle (Fig. 134). Instead this is a devotional work that encourages a meditation on the passage of time, asking its audience to forge their own connections between the earthly, contemporary background and the celestial past in the foreground.

### **Imaginary Architecture**

Whereas the first part of this chapter focused upon the links between the built and the painted, this second part will move towards the other end of the continuum from familiar to unfamiliar described in the introduction to this chapter, examining images that contained more imaginary, even fantastical architecture. Although the images by Crivelli and Montagnana analysed above clearly leavened their "realism" with ideal and imagined architectural features, using them to maintain a distance appropriate to the divinity of the figures and event portrayed, the works discussed below differ from them in including a greater degree of fantasy in their architectural settings. The effect, as we shall see, is to heighten the distance between the episode and the viewer, emphasizing its holiness through disassociation.

Freed from the limits imposed upon architects, painters created structures that could not have existed in the real world, whether for reasons of cost, structural integrity or practicality. Marchini argued in his monograph on Filippo Lippi that:

"It is known that painters always give a fantastical interpretation of these [architectural] elements, because, loosed from the fixed chains of real structures, they are free to create whatever solution suits them, independent of a client and therefore also of utilitarian constraints."<sup>445</sup>

This ability to create partly imagined structures was an important aspect of the architectural settings of these Annunciations, a separation of the pictorial from

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<sup>445</sup> G. Marchini, 1975, p. 163: "É noto come i pittori abbiano sempre dato di questi elementi una versione fantastica perché sciolti dai vincoli statici delle costruzioni reali e liberi di configurare qualunque soluzione a loro beneplacito indipendentemente da una committenza e quindi anche dagli condizionamenti utilitari." Although the idea that painter's interpretations are always fantastical is questionable, the point is nonetheless very valid.

the real or built that ran alongside the links between the two previously discussed. As Benelli notes:

"One can infer from the sinopie beneath many frescoes in which architecture is depicted that buildings were conceived in more or less complex volumetric blocks that owed their form to the demands of narrative, symbolism, and the layout of the frame - the true fetters of painted architecture."<sup>446</sup>

Alongside these "true fetters", there were also the rhetorical possibilities of architecture (its capacity to transmit messages), and its aesthetic potential, both of which were arguably aided by the freedom from practical constraint granted to the painter as opposed to the builder of architecture. Perhaps, given that they imply fancy and frivolity, fantasy and fantastical are the wrong words to apply to this unlimited architecture, which for all its occasional extravagance still served key functions within the image. Instead, these buildings could be better described as imaginary, creations of the mind and of the painter's skill rather than of the mason. That being the case, it is also true that some buildings are more imaginary, more distant from real architecture than others, resulting in structures that are truly "flights of fancy". Indeed, even in those fictive settings that are closely related to contemporary architecture, there are nonetheless elements that are truly otherworldly or unreal, as the images in the previous section demonstrated.

The ability, indeed the necessity, for architects to be inventive in order to create new and exciting things was well understood by fifteenth-century architectural theorists. A particularly strong advocate of this was Francesco di Giorgio Martini, the Sienese painter-architect, for whom the successful architect was one capable of great creativity and ingenuity, as the following passage from his *Trattato* makes clear.

"Sacred temples are made in various and diverse forms according to the inventiveness, subtlety, genius, and reason of the architect...But if the architect does not have a perceptive and singular genius, without those aspects he will never perfectly practice that powerful art, for architecture is only a subtle imagining,

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<sup>446</sup> F. Benelli, 2012, p. 5.

conceived in the mind, which manifests itself in the work. Note also that you cannot assign each and every thing to reason, because genius consists more in the mind and the intellect of the architect than in drawing or writing..."<sup>447</sup>

This primacy accorded to the intellect and to the architect's idea is striking. If the practice of architecture in Martini's conception is an exercise based upon the creative exercising of imagination, then it follows that fictive architecture must have represented considerable opportunities for the display of "subtle imagining", an arena in which architectural experimentation could take place without the practical constraint discussed above. The painter was therefore in a privileged position, especially well placed to invent striking new architectural compositions, which either could not or would not be built. Given this, it is unsurprising that we should find such extraordinary, and in some cases truly fantastical, buildings appearing in Annunciations throughout the fifteenth century.

The rest of this chapter will investigate the "imaginary" in quattrocento Annunciations, seeking to analyse what rendered an architectural setting "imaginary", as well as to describe the differing extents to which this was the case; as mentioned at the outset, some pictorial architecture was more imagined, more truly fantastical than others. Alongside this, the following sections will also examine the reasons why painters placed the Annunciation in imagined architecture, focusing particularly on its rhetorical function. In some images, for example, what appears fantastical when viewing the architecture as Mary's house is less so when one considers that as well as a house it is also, as the site of the Annunciation, a place of deep sanctity which merits the same luxurious decoration as any holy space. At the same time, pictorial architecture could also act as a potent signal of the mysterious holiness that lay at the heart of the Annunciation, firmly separating the event from the everyday world of the viewer, increasing the distance between the

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<sup>447</sup> F. Martini, 1967, p. 36: "I tempi sacri da fare sono di più varie e diverse forme sicondo la invenzione, sottilità, ingegno, e ragione dell'architetto...Ma se l'architetto no ha presipace e singulare ingegno, none aspetti mai perfettamente tale arte esercitar potere, imperò che l'architettura è solo una sottile imaginazione concetta nella mente la quale in nell'opera si manifesta. Anco è da notare che d'ogni e ciascuna cosa non si può la ragione assegnare, perché l'ingegno consiste più in nella mente e in nello inteletto dell'architetto che in iscrittura o disegno..."

two rather than narrowing it as the localising works discussed in the first part of this chapter did.

### **Part-Imagined Buildings: Extraordinary Palaces**

In his Ranieri *Annunciation* (Fig. 141), Perugino placed Mary and Gabriel in the courtyard of a grand palazzo.<sup>448</sup> Although, as we have seen, palaces were used by a number of painters as a setting for the Annunciation, the architecture of Perugino's work is in fact closely based upon that in *San Bernardino Restores to Life a Baby that has Died at Birth* (Fig. 142), part of a series of eight panels dedicated to the life of the saint by the so-called Workshop of 1473, a group of painters probably directed by Bartolomeo Caporali, of which Perugino himself may have been a part.<sup>449</sup> Immediately behind Mary, there is small cross-vaulted loggia, inset into a corner of the courtyard, with two arches on one side and one on the other which also serves to frame her. Above the loggia is a simple entablature, complete with an *all'antica* frieze (now barely visible), which it appears would once have been highlighted in bronze in the same manner as the coat of arms on the outermost corner of the loggia. This entablature divides the loggia from the storey above, whose most prominent feature is the window with canvas panes, one of which is propped open, a detail taken directly from the San Bernardino panels. As a whole, this side of the palace can be characterized as having a plausible heft and solidity, indicated by the deep vaulted loggia and the window opened onto a darkened space. This solidity stands in sharp contrast to the palace's other two sides, which are entirely insubstantial. These two outer walls of the courtyard are each apparently three stories high. The lower level of each has sturdy rectangular piers supporting two wide profile-arched openings, a distinctive arrangement that bears a close resemblance to the Loggia del Pasquino of the Palazzo Ducale in Urbino (Fig.

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<sup>448</sup> On this work see P. Scarpellini, *Perugino*, Electa, Milan, 1984, pp. 991-100, who notes the echoes of a palazzo in the architecture, and F.F. Mancini, "L'Annunciazione", in *Pietro Perugino: Il divin pittore*, Silvana, Milan, 2004

<sup>449</sup> On the panels see S.F. Pagden, 1994 and L. Teza, "Una nuova storia per le tavolette di San Bernardino", in *Pietro Vannucci: il Perugino*, L. Teza (ed.), Volumnia, Perugia, 2004. Perugino's main adaptation was to reverse the composition, so that the loggia now occupies the right-hand side of the picture.



143).<sup>450</sup> The second level, which is separated from the first by a continuation of the entablature of the loggia, has rectangular windows with carved stone lintels and extraordinary bronze or gilded curved pediments. Interspersed between these windows are Corinthian pilasters, the capitals of which are also bronze or gilt. Undoubtedly the most striking feature of this section of the architecture, however, is its transparency, made apparent by the landscape and sky visible through it,<sup>451</sup> creating the impression of a theatrical backdrop. In the original San Bernardino panel, this insubstantiality is explained by the ruinous state of the palace, but Perugino's setting is not obviously ruined. It acts the part of a palace, with a courtyard and loggia similar to those in other Annunciations, yet its structural implausibility simultaneously signals that it is not a "real" building. By exposing the unreality of the palace in this manner, Perugino undercuts any attempt on his audience's part to see this palace as an actual earthly building, directing them instead to view the structure as a suitably otherworldly, celestial stage for the unfolding of the sacred narrative.

While Perugino's architecture is grounded in a generic reality – the fifteenth-century *palazzo* courtyard – and then undercuts this with an element of unreality, other painters created structures that were almost entirely imaginary, with only a generic relationship to anything that was actually built. One such structure can be seen in Fra Carnevale's *Annunciation*, commissioned by the wealthy French merchant Jacques Couer and now in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich (Fig. 144).<sup>452</sup> The Annunciation takes place in front of a large "palazzo", which has a number of unusual features. One is the enormous loggia on the left, facing the enclosed garden. Barrel vaulted, this loggia has tall, slender columns with oddly yet elegantly elongated Corinthian columns. Akin in scale to the long loggias which adorned the facades of Florentine hospitals earlier in the quattrocento (Brunelleschi's Loggia degli Innocenti being the most prominent example), it is an incongruously large addition to what is ostensibly a domestic residence. Although, as we have

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<sup>450</sup> L. Teza, 2004, p. 264

<sup>451</sup> Although curtain walls are to be found on a number of fifteenth-century palaces, this is distinguished from those by the fact that all three of the stories are transparent.

<sup>452</sup> The precise circumstances of the commission are unclear, in particular when and for where it was commissioned, c.f. K. Christiansen, "Fra Carnevale: The Annunciation", in *From Filippo Lippi to Piero della Francesca: Fra Carnevale and the Making of a Renaissance Master*, K. Christiansen (ed.), Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 2004, p. 184.

seen, garden loggias were a feature of a small number of Tuscan villas and palaces (as at the Villa Medici, Fiesole), they were never on this scale. Indeed such loggias were never built on domestic structures, even later in the grandest villa projects of sixteenth-century Rome, such as Raphael's incomplete Villa Madama. The unusual features continue on the façade of the building that faces the viewer, which has two open doorways, seemingly without doors, one of which opens directly onto Mary's *camera*, offering a direct view of her bed. These doorways are unnaturally close together, with barely any wall space between them. Even allowing for the fact that this may be a private façade, not viewable by outsiders, the lack of any doors or curtains and the closeness of the *camera* to the exterior are strange features. In combination with the cramped relationship of the two doors, this facade indicates that Fra Carnevale was less concerned with architectural verisimilitude than with presenting an unrestricted view into the building's interior, and in particular to the sacred space of Mary's *camera*. This impression continues into the decoration of the façade. Although the display of Jacques Couer's coat of arms (above the left-hand doorway) is not unusual for a domestic building – family *stemme* were often prominently displayed above principal doorways and on the corners of *palazzi* – the panels of polychrome marble are an implausibly lavish decoration for a Florentine palazzo of this period.<sup>453</sup>

The grandeur that these fantastical features grant Fra Carnevale's architecture in this painting is also found in his most famous works, the *Birth of the Virgin* (Fig. 145) and the *Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple*. Although the scale of the buildings in these works is far larger (in fact, it appears to be nearly life size), the inventive, playful style of the architecture is the same. As Cieri-Via notes, in the Barberini panels "The essentially unreal character of this painting's architecture defines it as experimental, exemplary and therefore theoretical..."<sup>454</sup> Applying this inventiveness to Mary's house, Fra Carnevale created a building that although based upon a recognisable

<sup>453</sup> Not, however, in Venice, where palace facades were often enlivened by panels of marble and a variety of decorative stonework as, for example, at the Ca d'Oro and the Ca' Bernardo.

<sup>454</sup> C. Cieri Via, "Ornamento e varietà: riflessi delle teorie Albertiane nella produzione artistico-figurativa fra'400 e'500", in *Leon Battista Alberti: architettura e cultura*, Leo S. Olshcki, Florence, 1999, p. 238: "Il carattere sostanzialmente irreal delle architetture di questo dipinto ne definisce il valore sperimentale ed esemplare e quindi teorico..."

architectural vocabulary (the column, the capital, the door, the room) uses this to “build” a structure that is highly original, and ultimately undefinable.

### **The Splendour of Holiness: Sacred Architectural Decoration in Imaginary Domestic Spaces**

As is well known, the fifteenth century was a period when architecture was partly conceived through a rhetorical lens. Terms such as *varietas*, *concinnatas* and *armonia*, drawn from ancient rhetorical treatises such as Quintilian’s *Instituto Oratoria* and Cicero’s *De Oratore*, found their way into learned architectural treatises such as Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*.<sup>455</sup> More than this, it was understood that architecture could be a rhetorical device in itself, physically demonstrating the status of a building and its occupants. In an article on architecture and language in Alberti’s work, Caroline van Eck argued that architecture could be seen as an extension of language in this way,<sup>456</sup> noting that for Alberti architecture was “a form of persuasive communication. By moving the passions of a spectator through their architectural splendour, buildings persuade him or her of the majesty of God or the dignity of the state...”<sup>457</sup> Most simply, a beautiful building, one harmoniously constructed and luxuriously ornamented, was an expression of nobility, even of divinity. Alberti stated that “There is no doubt that what delights the mind wonderfully, captivates it with grace and piety, will greatly encourage piety.”<sup>458</sup> Discussing Alberti’s description of Florence’s Duomo in his *Della tranquillità dell’animo* (c. 1441/2), Smith discusses how Alberti believes that the glory of the cathedral is a mirror of the glory of God, that in her words “Its beauty moves the heart, mind and soul of the spectator to cognizance of divinity.”<sup>459</sup> This rhetorical potential is arguably even more prominent in a pictorial context, where, alongside its other functions,

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<sup>455</sup> G. Clarke, 2003, p. 41.

<sup>456</sup> C. van Eck, “Architecture, Language, and Rhetoric in Alberti’s *De re aedificatoria*”, in *Architecture and Language: Constructing Identity in European Architecture c. 1000-c. 1650*, G. Clarke and P. Crossley (eds.), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 72.

<sup>457</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>458</sup> Alberti, Vol. 2, pp. 543-545: “Procul dubio ad pietatis cultum plurimum interest temple, quae animos mirifice delectent detineantque cum gratia atque admiration sui.” For the translation see Alberti, 1988, p. 194.

<sup>459</sup> C. Smith, *Architecture in the Culture of Early Humanism: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Eloquence 1400-1470*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 83.

architecture served as a powerful means of conveying messages about the episode depicted and the protagonists. The following section will look at numerous instances where a seemingly fantastical architecture is in reality a means of conferring sacrality upon a domestic setting, works where the architectural materials selected and the architectonic spaces created are themselves rhetorical statements designed precisely so as to allow “cognizance of divinity.”

Fra Filippo Lippi’s Barberini *Annunciation* (Fig. 146) offers an interesting example of how this might be achieved.<sup>460</sup> The setting is a bedroom, presumably Mary’s, as is made clear by the bed on a raised platform with a rich red cover and intarsiate headboard on the left. In the foreground, Gabriel kneels and presents Mary with a lily. Mary is standing behind a *prie dieu*, itself set on a slightly raised wooden platform, attached to which is an unusual enclosure, in which kneel the donors (?) of the work (as yet not securely identified but possibly members of the Bardi-Laroni family).<sup>461</sup> The floor of this foreground space is tiled with what appears to be polychrome marble set into stone. At the rear of the room is a vaulted loggia, supported on slender Corinthian columns of an ochre marble resting on low walls in a manner reminiscent of a cloister. The vaults of this loggia are richly decorated with white stars on a dark blue background, a “celestial” decoration that recalls the star-studded ceilings of fourteenth-century chapels, such as that in the Cappella Rucellai in Santa Maria Novella (Fig. 147). There is a door at each end of this loggia, to the left an intarsiated lintel, similar in style to the headboard on the bed, and to the right a plainer doorway within which two figures stand on the lower steps of a stone staircase. The room is completed by a large barrel-vaulted window, akin to an *androne*, which leads into a garden surrounded by a high wall. Pittaluga described the architecture of this work as suffused with an air of “Renaissance fantasy”, a description that succinctly captures the curious character of this space.<sup>462</sup> Filled with lavish elements, such as the tiled floor and the ochre columns, and with its vaulted loggia strangely inserted into the rear of the space, it is clear that this is no

<sup>460</sup> On this work see M. Pittaluga, 1949, p. 70 and J. Ruda, 1993, pp. 53-57 and cat. 23, pp. 403-404.

<sup>461</sup> See n. 480.

<sup>462</sup> M. Pittaluga, 1949, p. 70: “fantasiamente rinascimentale”.

ordinary *camera*. These are undoubtedly imaginary features, invented by Lippi to construct this unique bedroom. The question remains, however, what purpose did these imagined flourishes serve pictorially? Are they simply a caprice, ornament for ornament's sake, or would they have carried other implications for the worshippers in the oratory?

Both Alberti, and, following him, Filarete, advocated splendid decoration for sacred buildings.<sup>463</sup> Offering advice to the patron on the appropriate ornamentation of holy spaces, Filarete drew an interesting analogy between the vestments of priests and the spaces in which they performed their rites: "Since those who administer the rites adorn themselves in exercising their office with different sorts of beautiful vestments decorated with gold, silver, pearls, embroidery and noble and precious things, the building that serves this purpose should be [decorated] in the same degree. For this reason it should be clothed and adorned with beautiful stones."<sup>464</sup> In this, he echoes Alberti, who in a discussion of what is suitable for private and sacred buildings said "They [private buildings] should not presume to have doors of bronze...or of ivory; nor should the ceilings sparkle with large quantities of gold or glass; Hymettian or Parian marble should not glisten everywhere: such things are for temples... If I were to sum up the whole question, I would say that sacred buildings ought to be so designed that nothing further may be added to enhance their majesty or cause greater admiration for their beauty..."<sup>465</sup> Evidently then, for Alberti and Filarete a certain degree of opulence, expressed by the use of rich materials, was considered the optimum manner in which to decorate the interior of sacred spaces. Exactly how this might be achieved in practice is made clear later in Filarete's treatise, where he discusses the decoration of the cathedral of his

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<sup>463</sup> J. Spencer, "Introduction", in *Treatise on Architecture*, J. Spencer (trans.), Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1965, p. xxvii, notes Filarete's debt to Alberti in this respect, see also p. 84, n. 5.

<sup>464</sup> Filarete, Vol. 1, p. 190: "...come quelli che hanno a ministrare queste cose e quando per loro s'esercitano, loro si adornano [di] vestimenti varii, e belli, e ornati con oro e argento e perle e con cose degne e ricami e cose preziose, così similmente debbe essere nel grado suo l'edificio che a queste cose serve, il che si debbe vestire e adornare di belle pietre..." For the translation see Filarete, 1965, p. 84.

<sup>465</sup> L. Alberti, 1966, Vol. 2, p. 785: "Non sibi...valvas asciscet aeneas aut eburneas; non splendent lacunaria multo atrio et vitro; non Imeto et Pario marmore universa collustrabuntur: templum enim ista sunt...Quod si brevissime totam diffinisce iuvat, sic statuam: sacra ita parari oportere, ut ad maiestatem et pulchritudinis admirationem addi amplius nihil possit..." For the translation see L. Alberti, 1988, p. 293.

imaginary city of Sforzinda. He describes at length the interior of this church, filled with “noble and beautiful stones”,<sup>466</sup> including, for example, a decorative frieze that runs around the base of its dome “inlaid with tablets of marble of various colours and also with different colours of porphyry all around.”<sup>467</sup> He also draws direct comparisons between this cathedral and certain Roman early Christian churches, including, for example, Santa Prassede.<sup>468</sup> As Spencer argues, Filarete was deeply influenced by his time in Venice, its lavish marbles and porphyry, and, in particular, by San Marco, whose rich decoration is also undoubtedly a presence here.<sup>469</sup> This ornate aesthetic advocated by Alberti and Filarete was, importantly, an ideal one in a Florentine context, informed as we have seen by certain “antique” examples; it was one that rarely found its way into quattrocento Tuscan churches, in which, with the exception of individual projects such as the Cardinal of Portugal’s Chapel and Alberti’s Rucellai Sepulchre (Fig. 148), a comparatively austere aesthetic held sway.

This richness was not, however, solely a fifteenth-century theoretical construct; numerous Florentine churches were lavishly decorated with fictive marble in the trecento.<sup>470</sup> An excellent example is the Sacristy of Santa Croce, decorated at the end of the trecento with an entire wall of fictive marble panels, divided by decorative borders, possibly the work of Jacopo del Casentino (Fig. 149).<sup>471</sup> As Didi-Huberman notes, these patches were employed by Fra Angelico in a number of his Marian paintings, often used to create floors but also, as in his San Giovanni Valdarno *Annunciation*, used to decorate a wall in a manner redolent of fourteenth-century ecclesiastical *marmi finti* (Fig. 150).<sup>472</sup> An *Annunciation* by a follower of Fra Angelico, Zanobi Strozzi, now in the National Gallery, also employs *marmi finti* (Fig.

<sup>466</sup> Filarete, 1972, Vol. 1, p. 252: “marmo, e porfidi, e altre petrine, degni e belli”, p. 252. For the translation see Filarete, 1965, p. 113.

<sup>467</sup> Ibid., p. 251: “E l'altra terza parte dell'altezza di questa trebuna che viene al piano terreno si è poi intavolata di tavole di marmi di varii colori mischiati, e anche di porfidi di diversi colori seguita tutta dentro.”, p. 251. For the translation see Filarete, 1965, p. 112.

<sup>468</sup> Ibid., p. 251.

<sup>469</sup> J. Spencer, 1965, p. xix.

<sup>470</sup> See, for example, the *marmi finti* in the Capella Strozzi and the Capella Bardi in Santa Maria Novella, and throughout San Miniato alla Monte.

<sup>471</sup> On this decoration see E. Zappasodi, “La più antica decorazione della sagrestia capitol di Santa Croce”, *Ricerche di Storia dell'arte*, No. 102 (2010), pp. 49-64.

<sup>472</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, 1995, pp. 29-31.

151).<sup>473</sup> Although clearly based on the model established by Fra Angelico, with Mary and Gabriel placed in a loggia, separated by a central column, Strozzi also introduced a new feature. Instead of the rear of the loggia leading to a small room, as in Fra Angelico's compositions, here the front two arches are mirrored by two at the rear, which give onto a *hortus conclusus*. To the right of this garden, the flank of a building can be seen, with a door which appears to lead into Mary's *camera*. This wall is decorated with rectangular patches of golden *marmi finti* (or actual marble), echoing, as in Fra Angelico's work, the fourteenth-century *marmi finti* decoration of Florentine churches. Yet, as well as indicating by association the sacrality and importance of Mary's house, it is possible there is a further significance to this use of marble in this particular area. The site of the *hortus conclusus*, placed in the background adjacent to the inner sanctum of Mary's *thalamus*, this is undoubtedly a space of particular holiness: it is fitting then that it should be decorated with *marmi finiti*, a decorative mode directly associated with spaces of particular sanctity within churches, such as chapels and sacristies.

Bearing in mind these sumptuous ideals, derived from built examples and already utilised in depictions of the Annunciation, it is surely possible that the luxuriousness that pervades Mary's *camera* in Lippi's *Annunciation* has a further significance. This is apparent in the materials used, the marble panels and columns, which seem almost a direct expression of the opinions expressed by Alberti with regard to the ornamentation of holy places, and in the explicitly ecclesiastical decoration of the vaults of the colonnade. This is not to suggest that Lippi was directly following Albertian precepts (though this is possible), but that he was deliberately ornamenting his architectural setting in a manner that reflects a particular sacred aesthetic. Like Filarete after him, Lippi spent time in the Veneto (in the 1430's), during which period he may have visited Venice and San Marco. Even if he hadn't visited Venice, Florence's earlier sacred buildings, especially San Miniato al Monte and the Baptistery, contained examples of this lavish aesthetic. Alberti and Filarete were not the only Florentines to express admiration for this decorative mode. In his account of a sightseeing trip to Rome in his *Zibaldone*, the Florentine

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<sup>473</sup> On this work see D. Gordon, "Zanobi Strozzi's 'Annunciation' in the National Gallery", *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol. 140, No. 1145 (Aug., 1998), pp. 517-524.

patrician Giovanni Rucellai gives the following fulsome description of Santa Agnesa (?):

"[the] beautiful tribune of the high altar [is decorated] with very large panels of marble, the walls are wrapped with a porphyry frieze of beautiful panels and then mosaic, and the interior of the high altar [is decorated] with beautiful panels of porphyry, and the stair is also decorated like this."<sup>474</sup>

Like Alberti and Filarete, Rucellai focuses particularly on the use of marbles and porphyry, probably at least partly because of their cost, which would allow a reader or worshipper to perceive the literal "richness" of the interior.

Wright has linked the opulence of the architectural decoration in Pollaiuolo's Berlin *Annunciation* (Fig. 78), which has walls entirely faced with panels of polychrome marble, to descriptions of early Roman churches in Rucellai's account, arguing that in this way the "interior is marked as sacred."<sup>475</sup> Although not as splendid as the room depicted by Pollaiuolo, Mary's *camera* as imagined by Lippi does arguably convey sacrality through its decoration. It is a rhetorical device, contained within the architectural character of the space, designed at least in part to convince the work's audience that this is not just a *camera*, but also a space of the utmost holiness. In forming a visual argument for the elevated, holy nature of the space depicted, the architecture of Lippi's *Annunciation* is also in some senses similar to that found in his great Marian altarpieces. The architecture of his *Madonna and Child* (1438), for example, is seemingly designed along the same aesthetic lines as the *Annunciation* (Fig. 152). Here too we find marble floors, while the two ochre marble columns flanking the Virgin in the foreground are markedly similar to those in the background of the *Annunciation*. The crucial difference, however, is that in the Barbadori panel this decoration forms part of a setting that is avowedly unreal, a strangely lavish enclosure open to the sky, while in the *Annunciation*, by contrast, this

<sup>474</sup> G. Rucellai, *Giovanni Rucellai ed il suo Zibaldone*, vol. 1, A. Perosa (ed.), The Warburg Institute, London, 1960, "bella tribuna alla capella maggiore con tavole di marmi grandissime, che fasciano le mura con un fregio di porfido di belle tavole e poi di bel musaicho, e lo spazio interno all'altare maggiore di bellissime tavole di porfido, et cosi le scale."

<sup>475</sup> A. Wright, 1995, p. 305.



ecclesiastical flair is absorbed into the decoration of Mary's *camera*, a more naturalistic space despite its fantastical elements; as a result, the richness is a relatively subtle sign, rather than an overt statement.

Like the Barbadori work, Lippi's *Annunciation* was originally an altarpiece, most likely commissioned by the Bardi-Laroni family for the small oratory of Santissima Annunziata in Bagno a Ripoli (Fig. 153).<sup>476</sup> The oratory itself is attributed to Michelozzo, although this cannot be definitively proved. The oratory itself is architecturally restrained, with white walls and little architectural ornament, carved from Tuscan gray *pietra serena*. This architectural simplicity must have meant that Lippi's bold, brightly colored altarpiece would have stood out sharply from its surroundings, dominating the space and acting as a focal point for a worshipper. Lippi's richly decorative architecture, along with the lavish intarsia and luxurious dress of Gabriel and Mary, would thus also have acted as decoration for the oratory as well as a rhetorical and compositional device. Indeed, it is possible that the visual effect was of another room, a chapel within a chapel, Mary's *camera* acting as an ornate inner sanctum inside the oratory space. This further explains the sacred echoes in Lippi's work, which are appropriate for this particular visual effect. Finally, all this decorative extravagance within the work is likely to have been designed with Lippi's patrons in mind. Before drawing his analogy between the vestments of priests and the decoration of churches, Filarete argued that another reason for splendidly decorating a church was so that it could "be as nobly decorated as its owner, because of whom it is used to primate divine offices and sacred things."<sup>477</sup> In other words, Lippi's architectural choices may well have been informed by the need to offer his

<sup>476</sup> This was originally suggested by Supino, although without any supporting evidence, see I. Supino, *Fra Filippo Lippi*, Fratelli Alinari, Florence, 1902, p. 52-53. Ruda rejects it, see J. Ruda, 1993, p. 403, but others, Torrigiani, Guerrini and Scalzo, consider it highly likely that this was the work's original home, see L. Torrigiani, *Il commune del Bagno di Ripoli descritto nei tre aspetti civile, religioso e topografico*, Vol. 2, Tipografico Successori Vestri, 1902, pp. 99-100, and advanced again later by Guerrini, see S. Guerrini, *Fra terra e cielo: immagini, oratori, tabernacoli, riti*, Stampa Piccardi e Martinelli, Bagno a Ripoli, 1985, pp. 56-57, and M. Scalzo, "L'Oratorio Michelozziano della SS Annunziata nel Pian di Ripoli", in *Michelozzo: Scultore e Architetto (1396-1472)*, G. Morelli (ed.), Centro Di, Florence, 1996, p. 129. None of these, however, offers any documentary evidence to support their hypothesis, relying entirely on the conjectural, yet plausible, evidence that the Bardi-Laroni had property nearby, and so would be likely patrons of the oratory and its decoration.

<sup>477</sup> Filarete, Vol. 1, pp. 189-190: "così debba essere degnamente ornato com'è proprio il padrone d'esso, per quello e a ch'istanza." For the translation see Filarete, 1965, p. 84.

patrons a suitably lavish object with which to endow their oratory.<sup>478</sup> The end result is a work whose imaginatively sumptuous architecture fulfils two important functions, the rhetorical and the decorative or aesthetic.

### **Otherworldly Spaces: Imaginary Structures**

In all of the examples discussed above, the imaginary or unreal elements were combined with those that were more familiar to create buildings and spaces that bore some relationship to built architecture, albeit a remote one in some cases. Even the extraordinary structure in Fra Carnevale's *Annunciation*, with its gigantic loggia, could loosely be described as a "palazzo", as could Perugino's theatrical building in his Raneri *Annunciation*. There were, however, a number of Annunciations whose architectural settings are entirely invented, structures that are truly imaginary or fantastical and resist all attempts at typological categorisation. The function of the architecture in these works can be described as purely pictorial, as they are seemingly designed with reference not to the built environment (except in their use of essential architectural elements such as columns, friezes etc.) but solely to the compositional and rhetorical demands of the picture, especially those designed to inculcate a sense of awe and holiness.

Muir-Wright has considered at length the problem raised by the more "realistic" mode of depicting the sacred that emerged in the fifteenth century, a mode that implied that Mary and the saints, for example, were in some sense among us, existing in a world which in its essentials could be considered as an extension of that of these works' audience. She writes: "The need to stress that these sacred images, although realistic, were to be seen as set apart from the ordinary world, may have been particularly pressing as far as Mary was concerned. The psychological proximity offered by the new naturalism had to be countered by the spiritual distance appropriate to her semi-divine status."<sup>479</sup> Although this needs to be qualified in light of the meditative

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<sup>478</sup> This was certainly the case with his *Annunciation* lunette, produced for the Medici, the sumptuousness of which has been persuasively linked by Ames-Lewis to the prestige of the commission, see F. Ames-Lewis, "Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi and the Early Medici", in *The Early Medici and their Artists*, F. Ames-Lewis (ed.), Birkbeck College, London, 1995, p. 120.

<sup>479</sup> R. Muir-Wright, *Sacred Distance: Representing the Virgin*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2006.

practices designed to bring worshippers closer to Mary discussed earlier in this chapter, it was still nonetheless important to emphasise Mary's holiness, that although she was "in" the world, she was not of it. Architecture clearly had a role to play in creating this "sacred distance". We have seen already how Montagnana and Crivelli incorporated ideal, invented architectural elements in their *Annunciations*, using these to maintain a sense of the separate, elevated status of the holy in images whose architecture was otherwise quite closely identifiable with the cities where they were painted. Clearly, a truly fantastical architecture, connected to the built only in terms of its basic elements – the column and the vault in particular – could go even further in divorcing an image of the *Annunciation* from the everyday, its otherworldliness clearly indicating the transcendental and timeless nature of the event.

An excellent example of this type of fictive architecture is provided by Marco Palmezzano's *Annunciation*, painted for the Santissima Annunziata (known as the Carmine) in Forlì between 1495-1497 (Fig. 154).<sup>480</sup> The altarpiece is dominated by its architecture, which can be described as an open pavilion, constructed not of canvas but of stone. Mary and Gabriel are placed in the middle of the nave-like space created by this pavilion, underneath a succession of three domes whose pendentives (which contain bronze (?) roundels telling the story of Eve) spring off strongly projecting short sections of trabeation. These fragments sit in turn upon four thick ochre and purple-blue marble Corinthian columns. The pavilion is open at one end, where a large profiled arch resting on unadorned piers frames the landscape visible beyond. As Tumidei's catalogue entry on this work makes clear, the sources for the extravagant architecture in this work lie in the Venetian architectural and pictorial tradition, and in particular in the altarpieces of Cima da Conegliano. Especially important for this work is Cima's altarpiece *St John the Baptist with Saints* (1490-1491) in Madonna dell'Orto Venice (Fig. 156), in

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<sup>480</sup> On Palmezzano's work see C. Grigoni, *Marco Palmezzano pittore forlivese: nella vita, nelle opere, nell'arte*, Fratelli Lega, Faenza, 1956, pp. 58-62, T. Verdon, "Marco Palmezzano come maestro d'arte sacra", in *Marco Palmezzano: Il rinascimento nelle Romagne*, A. Paolucci, L. Prati, and S. Tumidei (eds.), Silvana, Milan, 2005, pp. 148-152, and S. Tumidei, "Palmezzano: The Annunciation", in *Marco Palmezzano: Il rinascimento nelle Romagne*, A. Paolucci, L. Prati, and S. Tumidei (eds.), Silvana, Milan, 2005. The church of the Carmine in Forlì was unfortunately entirely remodelled in the eighteenth century, making it impossible to judge how the architecture in the altarpiece might have related to its surroundings.

which a very similar arrangement of domes resting upon polychrome columns can be seen. Evidently, there are numerous differences between the two works, most obviously that while Cima's building is entirely ruined, Palmezzano's appears almost new. There are also differences of architectural detail; the short strips of trabeation appear to have been taken from other works by Cima, possibly the *Madonna and Child Enthroned* in Berlin (Fig. 156), painted at the same time as Palmezzano's work, while the distinctive Corinthian capitals in Palmezzano's work, with dolphins replacing the uppermost volutes, are likely drawn from Giovanni Bellini's *San Giobbe Madonna and Child* (Fig. 157).<sup>481</sup>

These links, particularly those to the great Marian altarpieces, are useful in trying to determine the function played by Palmezzano's architecture in this altarpiece. In the previous chapter, a number of works were examined in which painters had borrowed the architectonic language of ciboria, tabernacles and chapels in order to dignify and highlight Mary. Precisely the same function is fulfilled by Palmezzano's nave/pavilion, which frames and, most importantly, visually exalts Mary. In addition, the architecture of this work fulfils a similar function to that of Lippi's *Barbadori Annunciation*, creating a powerful sense of the importance and holiness of this space through its scale and richness; architecture is used rhetorically to underscore the sanctity of the narrative portrayed. Palmezzano was faced with a formidable challenge in this commission, tasked with producing an *Annunciation* far larger than those usually commissioned (3m x 2m), that would take its place on an altar (it is, unfortunately, unclear which) in one of Forlì's major churches. Unsurprisingly, he turned for a solution to the large altarpieces then being painted in Venice, the architecture of which was specifically designed to function visually in similar contexts and on a similar scale.

A purely imaginary architecture could serve other purposes beside framing and exalting the event portrayed. As mentioned earlier, by employing a completely imaginary architecture, impossible to connect too closely to the world beyond the image, a painter could thus firmly separate the sacred from the secular. This is a tactic exemplified by Pintoricchio's *Annunciation* in the

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<sup>481</sup> S. Tumidei, 2005, p. 228.

Appartamenti Borgia (c.1495) (Fig. 158).<sup>482</sup> Here the Annunciation plays out in front of a great dark green triumphal arch-like structure festooned with flowers.<sup>483</sup> In common with the established form of an ancient Roman three-bayed triumphal arch (the arch of Constantine, for example), the side arches are smaller than the central arch, roughly two-thirds its height. The central arch is flanked by two Corinthian pilasters with rich foliate decoration, topped by the beginnings of the frieze that stretches back the length of the coffered barrel vault of the arch's interior. The whole structure sits on a floor of polychromatic marble tiles, which give way to a lush landscape in the background of the fresco. Pintorricchio here is using a recognisable architectural source, the triumphal arch, yet he has strangely transformed it into what almost appears to be a dwelling.<sup>484</sup> Doorway-like openings can be seen leading off from each of the wings of the structure, and through the right hand one we glimpse what may be a bed. The idea of signalling that a structure is to be understood as a house through the inclusion of certain details (discussed at greater length in Chapter 2) has in this work been put to a bizarre use. Mary's house, if that is what we are to believe it to be, has now become in itself a symbol, a triumphant, theatrical proclamation of the glory of the event that is taking place, once again using architecture in a purely rhetorical fashion. All this splendour and fantasy surely signalled in quite unequivocal terms not just the distance that separated a viewer from the event but, more importantly, the celestial, miraculous and indeed mysterious nature of the Annunciation itself. In some senses then this fantastical architecture performs the same function as the glimpsed spaces and half-open doors discussed at the end of the first chapter, signaling just as clearly all that is ultimately distant and unknowable about the Annunciation.

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<sup>482</sup> On Pintorricchio's frescoes in the Borgia Apartments see C. Ricci, *Pintorricchio*, Vincenzo Bartelli, Perugia, 1915, pp. 151-153, F. Hermanin, *L'appartamento Borgia in Vaticano*, Danesi, Rome, 1933, esp. p. 99 on Pintorricchio's Annunciation, F.F. Mancini, *Pintorricchio*, Silvana Editoriale, Milan, 2007, Chapter 6, and F. Buranelli, "L'appartamento Borgia in Vaticano", in *Pintorricchio*, V. Garibaldi, and F.F. Mancini, (eds.), Silvana, Milan, 2008, and C. La Malfa, *Pintorricchio a Roma: La seduzione dell'antico*, Silvana, Milan, 2009, pp. 119-125

<sup>483</sup> D. Arasse, 1999, p. 242

<sup>484</sup> C. Ricci, 1915, p. 150. Ricci further notes that the arch in the *Adoration of the Magi*, frescoed in the same room, though ruined bears some resemblance to that in this *Annunciation*.

## Conclusion

This chapter has examined architecture's role in creating connections between the sacred event and the world of the viewer, demonstrating how this was achieved by including recognizable and distinct elements from the built environment outside of the painting to link the two. At the same time, architecture could also create imaginary and unusual buildings, using these to signal the dignity and the sacrality of the event shown by distancing it from the everyday architectural experiences of an audience. Painters used familiar, local architecture in civic Annunciations, works commissioned for specific public spaces, using this architecture to underscore the importance of the Annunciation in a number of cities' civic identities and in particular to emphasise the close and special nature of an individual city's ties to that particular sacred event. The links forged by the inclusion of architecture known to a viewer could also help to make the Annunciation both more memorable and more personal for that viewer. This process reflected that advocated by the Franciscans and others, which advised worshippers to mentally place sacred events in settings familiar to them in order to inculcate personal bonds. Placing the Annunciation in more or less familiar cityscapes also chimed with a theological and devotional conception of Mary as intercessor which viewed her as very much present in the lives of her worshippers below, visually placing her in the city itself to provide a powerful metaphor for her continuous presence.

Although this chapter ostensibly began with pictorial architecture that was closely connected to that which was built and concluded with that which was most fantastical, this is clearly an analytical construct; it is evidently impossible to precisely "place" an Annunciation's architecture somewhere on this scale. This is because, as this chapter has shown, no painting was wholly fantastical, as they all relied on a familiar architectural vocabulary, nor did any Annunciation place the events in an architectural setting entirely composed of portraits of existing buildings and places. The idea of a continuum from familiar to unfamiliar introduced at the outset of this chapter, existing both within individual works and across pictorial architecture more generally, is thus demonstrably crucial in understanding these works.

## Conclusion

### The Functions of Mary's House

Architecture formed the foundation for these images, underpinning painter's visualisations of the Annunciation in a number of important ways. As mentioned at the outset, the Annunciation was apparently narratively straightforward, resting upon Gabriel's meeting with Mary. As a result, the Annunciation could be depicted in a very economical manner by simply showing Mary and Gabriel together. There was, however, much more to this event than that core meeting, as its theological and devotional ramifications were immensely significant. It was in elucidating these myriad meanings that pictorial architecture played its vital role, allowing painters to visually enrich their images in a manner that facilitated their audience's comprehension of this most central of Christian events. It can be compared to the relationship between the sparse story of the Annunciation told in Luke's Gospel, and the elaborations offered by later apocryphal gospels and devotional literature. These added flesh to the bare bones provided by Luke, expounding not only upon where and when the Annunciation was supposed to have taken place, but also upon its deep theological importance. Like these written works, pictorial architecture embellished the event but not for embellishment's sake, instead fulfilling a number of crucial compositional, didactic, narrative, rhetorical, mnemonic and devotional roles.

The first, fundamental function of pictorial architecture was to organize the scene, demarcating the spaces allotted to each of the protagonists, often through the use of a central architectural dividing element such as a wall or a column. At the same time it constructed the narrative, with painters often using archways and doors to indicate the point of Gabriel's entrance, and, by showing the angel within an archway or in front of an open gate or door, to create a sense of an event captured *in media res*. Simultaneously, it could also delimit the extent of his access, preserving the inviolate nature of Mary's inner sanctum. Archways also proved useful in creating concrete metaphors for Mary's impregnation by the Holy Spirit, with painters using the path of the Holy Spirit through them as a delicate, non-bodily means of expressing Mary's

status, both penetrated and intact. More subtly, half-open doors, blank walls, and glimpsed staircases could all act as illustrations of the limits of an viewer's knowledge of this ultimately mysterious holy event.

Having established these narrative and compositional essentials, painters were then able to use architecture to add further resonances to their images, employing it to expound upon the character of Mary and the intense holiness of the Annunciation itself. By placing Mary in buildings that could be clearly identified as architecturally high-status, specifically palaces and villas, pictorial architecture could serve to exalt Mary, placing the Queen of Heaven in appropriately lavish surroundings. Although this ran counter to a tradition that viewed Mary as emblematic of a humble, holy poverty, it was entirely in tune with an age that believed architecture ought to reflect social standing. This splendor went hand in hand with painters' use of architecture to confer sacrality on Mary's home; splendor could also indicate the exalted and sacred. More unequivocally, echoes of explicitly sacred places and spaces – tabernacles, cloisters, and chapels – could serve to imbue Mary's house with a sanctity entirely suited to an event representing the moment at which Christ appeared on earth. Furthermore, in creating these allusions, whether secular or sacred, painters relied upon the referential possibilities inherent in the depiction of architecture in painting. Simply speaking, a palace or a tabernacle in a painting could be identified as such because of an audience's ability to compare it to those palaces and tabernacles they saw around them.

Finally, architecture could promote an audiences' engagement with scene portrayed by placing it in contemporary, recognisable architectural settings, thereby collapsing the distance between the remote biblical episode and the viewer's present. There were two key reasons for this. Firstly, it could create "civic Annunciations", which emphasised the links between a city and the Annunciation by including architectural references to the city within the image. Secondly, it could encourage a personal engagement with the Annunciation, borrowing techniques from contemporary meditative practices that encouraged identification with the sacred through localization, as well as reflecting a situation expressed in contemporary miracle accounts whereby Mary was seen as very much continually present in people's lives. The idea of a continuous presence is one that was also applied to the Annunciation, an



event whose eventual result – the sacrifice of Christ and with it man's redemption – remained of vital importance to fifteenth century Christians. This ongoing significance was expressed architecturally by a number of painters, who used architecture to create settings that fused past and present, or presented them as co-existing. As with architecture's use in creating metaphors for Mary's miraculous impregnation or the unknowable of the divine, here again architecture offered a means of rendering solid and comprehensible a concept that appeared abstract and difficult to represent. Existing on a continuum with these localizing images, finally, were those images which contained more or less entirely imaginary buildings. The use of the "fantastical" in these Annunciations served to not only to render them timeless (as it was impossible to temporally fix them architecturally or indeed otherwise) but also more importantly to create a sense of distance between the viewer and the event portrayed, thereby expressing those aspects of the Annunciation that remained mysterious and celestial. Such images occupied the other end of a continuum from the "real" to the "unreal". Even in Annunciations that contained familiar, local architecture, there were always unfamiliar idealised and imaginary architectural elements that served to preserve a separation between audience and episode appropriate to the divinity of the event.

### **Architectural Annunciations**

It is clear that fifteenth-century images of the Annunciation were truly architectural, in the sense that architecture was fundamental both in the conception and the reception of these images. Painters appear to have conceived their works with pictorial architecture as an integral element, rather than a decorative afterthought, while it is likely that as a result, their audiences' responses to these images were also conditioned by the architectural setting.

The functions of the pictorial architecture of these Annunciations can now be split for analytical purposes into two categories, the compositional and the rhetorical. Compositional is taken here in the Albertian sense, as referring not just to the organisation of the picture but also its content, buildings,

figures, animals, and its narrative elements. The rhetorical functions, on the other hand, refer to architecture's unique ability to communicate, translating the intangible into the tangible through metaphor, illuminating and visually reinforcing aspects of Mary's character, granting civic resonances, and conveying sacrality. All of these relied on architecture's ability to make clear statements. Although the compositional importance of pictorial architecture had been recognised by some of the previous writers on this subject, the rhetorical aspects remained largely unexplored due to the focus upon formal rather than contextual analysis. Yet, as this study has demonstrated, pictorial architecture offered incredibly fertile opportunities for visual statements of various kinds. Architecture speaks in these paintings, and only once it has been listened to can we say that we have anything approaching a rounded understanding of these works, their painters, and their viewers.

The myriad links between pictorial and built architecture were absolutely crucial to the efficacy of these statements, allowing painters to create a broad range of meaningful allusions, which helped transform Mary's house into a tabernacle or a palace. Pictorial architecture in Annunciations was firmly situated within contemporary architectural practice, borrowing from it not just broad typological categories, such as the chapel or the palace, but also specific formal elements, demonstrated, for example, by the employment of *all'antica* features such as the round-arched bifore window. This is not to suggest, however, that these painters merely slavishly copied the buildings around them. Architectural portraits in that sense are very rare in Annunciations, and where they do occur are almost invariably confined to the background of the work. Instead, we should take these painters' architectural creativity seriously, paying attention to the originality of the buildings they constructed, which were the result of a real understanding of the architectural context that surrounded them. In addition to these practical borrowings, painters were also aware of ideal architectural practice, as proposed in the treatises of Alberti, Francesco di Giorgio Martini and Filarete. Even if not directly aware of the works themselves, it is clear that painters were aware of some of the precepts contained within them. This can be seen, for example, with regard to the lavish decoration of sacred spaces, advocated by Alberti and Filarete, precepts which painters, unencumbered by economic realities,

were free to apply to their pictorial architecture.

It is also apparent that the pictorial architecture of Annunciations was intimately connected to the contemporary religious, social and political contexts in which it was created. This can be seen in a number of key areas. Firstly, there are the civic Annunciations, where the sacred event was set in a cityscape that reflected to varying degrees that of the city for which it was created. By doing so, painters provided potent visual expression of the extent to which the civic identity of cities such as Florence, Venice and others was tied to the Annunciation. Secondly, the placement of Mary within the architectural settings of these works, always sequestered within an enclosed environment, and very often depicted within the private space of the home, reflects contemporary ideals attached to the conduct of young women. Mary was an exemplar for them, invoked in prayers and sermons, and so it seems clear that while there were other compositional and metaphorical reasons for placing Mary within enclosed, inviolate spaces, this placement must be in part influenced by these contemporary ideals. There are also ideas of decorum and *magnificentia*, discussed at length within contemporary architectural treatises and other writings. As their inclusion in these works makes clear, architecture was an art in which these concepts were directly relevant. It is surely no accident, given this context, that Mary is given a house of great splendor in many of these works, particularly given the fact that this went against both the example of the Santa Casa in Loreto and an important strain of Marian devotion that emphasised her humility and poverty. Bearing all of the above in mind, we can conclude that the pictorial architecture of these Annunciations was not architecture for architecture's sake, created in an aesthetic vacuum simply as an abstract, decorative accompaniment to the narrative portrayed, but instead was informed by and operated very much within the socio-economic, political and religious milieu of the time.

Reduced to its essentials, the job of a religious narrative image is to communicate and connect, or, in other words, to tell a story, explain its significance and impress them both upon an audience. As this study has shown, this is a function that fifteenth-century Annunciations would have been unable to perform as effectively without pictorial architecture. It was fundamental to an audience's experience and understanding of these works,

encouraging them to enter and explore Mary's house, and rewarding this exploration by granting them a greater insight into the sacred event. As well as providing them with a world they could enter and ransack for meaning, it also provided a means to carry that world into their own, allowing them to see the sacred and secular, the eternal and the everyday, not as separate but as continuous. In this way, the Annunciation was transformed from remote biblical event to one in which the spectator had a personal stake, whose message they could take with them when, having finished their prayers before the image, they returned to the world outside.

This study has sought to provide a through assessment of architecture's role in these Annunciations, demonstrating its centrality in both the composition and reception of these images. In doing so, it has also emphasised the importance of employing a contextual approach to architecture in painting. Where previous studies focused upon the formal aspects of pictorial architecture – the sources used by painters in the creation of their architecture and the ornamental and architectonic characteristics of the buildings that resulted – this analysis has proven that a more nuanced understanding can be gained by adding a in-depth consideration of the context in which the images were created. Alongside this, the investigation of architecture in Annunciations stimulated a search for ways in which the functions of this architecture in painting more generally can be conceptualised. The notion of architecture's rhetorical impact, its ability to express and convey a variety of religious, devotional, social and civic messages was one important result of this search: it will hopefully be useful for those investigating architecture in other images, both in the Italian Renaissance and in other locations and periods.

The importance of pictorial architecture to these Annunciations should prompt a reconsideration of its significance in Italian Renaissance painting more generally, bringing it from the background to the foreground of our analysis of these paintings and of the visual culture within which they were created. Pictorial architecture was not mere decoration, a theatrical backdrop added for extra colour, but was instead absolutely integral to the composition, narrative and meanings of these works. Without a full understanding of its role, our conception of many of these paintings remains incomplete.

## Appendix One: Accounts of the Annunciation

### Luke 1:26-28

“In mense autem sexto missus est angelus Gabriel a Deo in civitatem Galiae cui nomen Nazareth. Ad virginem desponsatam viro cui nomen erat Ioseph de domo David et nomen virginis Maria. Et ingressus angelus ad eam dixit ‘Ave Maria, gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus.’”

“The Protevangelium of James”, in *The Apocryphal New Testament*, J.K. Elliot (trans.), Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 58-61.

p. 61

“And she took the pitcher and went out to draw water, and behold, a voice said, ‘Hail, highly favoured one, the Lord is with you, you are blessed among women.’ And she looked round to the left and to the right to see where this voice came from. And, trembling, she went to her house and put down the pitcher and took the purple and sat down on her seat and drew out the thread. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before her and said, ‘Do not fear Mary, for you have found grace before the Lord of all things and shall conceive by his word.’”

J. de Caulibus, *Meditaciones Vite Christi*, M. Stallings-Taney (ed.), Turnhout, Brepols, 1997

pp. 19-20

“...vocavit Deus omnipotens Gabrielem archangelum et dixit ei: Vade ad dilectissimam filiam nostram Mariam deponsatam Ioseph, super omnes creaturas michi charissimam...Surgens igitur Gabriel iucundus et volitavit ab alto, et in humana specie in momento fuit coram virgine, in thalamo domuncule sue manente...O qualis est illa domuncula ubi tales sunt et talia exercentur...Ingressus ergo Gabriel paronymphus fidelis a virginem, dixit: Ave gracia plena: Dominus tecum: benedicta tu in mulieribus. Ipsa vero turbata, nichil respondit.”

J. de Voragine, *Legenda Aurea*, G. P. Maggioni (ed.), Edizioni del Galluzzo, Florence, 1998

pp. 326-327

“Cum ergo virgo beata a tertio anno etatis sue usque ad quartem decimum in temple cum aliis virginibus extisset et votum de servanda castitate emisisset nisi deus aliter disponeret, eam Ioseph desponsavit domino revelante et Ioseph virgo frondente, sicut in hystoria de nativitate virginis plenius continetur; et in Bethlehem unde oriundus erta necessaria nuptiis provisurus iuit, ipsa vero in Nazareth in domum parentum rediit...Ibi igitur ei angelus apparuit et ipsam salutavit dicens ‘Ave gratia plena, Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus.’”

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