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Thronus Dei. An Iconographic Interpretation of this Mariological Metaphor in the Light of the Christian Narrative

Thronus Dei. Interpretacja ikonograficzna metafory mariologicznej w świetle narracji chrześcijańskiej

Abstract. This article aims to illuminate the possibility of correctly interpreting the various ways of artistically representing the Virgin Mary as *thronus Dei*. To do this, the author follows a double, complementary methodological strategy. First, he examines a series of texts through which, for almost a millennium, many Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers of the Eastern and Western Churches agreed to identify Mary as the throne of God or some other similar symbolic figure. Secondly, the author analyzes ten European paintings and sculptures between the 12th and 15th centuries, in which the Virgin is represented as the throne of God. Thus, based on these concordant doctrinal testimonies, the author justifies his iconographic interpretations of these Marian artistic images.

Abstrakt. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu naświetlenie możliwości prawidłowej interpretacji różnych sposobów artystycznego przedstawiania Maryi Panny jako *thronus Dei*. Aby to osiągnąć, autor stosuje podwójną, uzupełniającą się strategię metodologiczną. Po pierwsze, analizuje szereg tekstów, w których przez prawie tysiąc lat wielu Ojców Kościoła, teologów i hymnografów liturgicznych Kościołów Wschodniego i Zachodniego zgadzało się identyfikować Maryję z tronem Boga lub inną podobną postacią symboliczną. Po drugie, autor analizuje dziesięć europejskich obrazów i rzeźb z okresu od XII do XV wieku, w których Maryja jest przedstawiana jako tron Boga. W ten sposób, opierając się na tych zgodnych świadectwach doktrynalnych, autor uzasadnia swoje ikonograficzne interpretacje tych maryjnych przedstawień artystycznych.

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Słowa kluczowe: mariologia, boskie macierzyństwo, niebiańska królestwość, patrystyka, hymny liturgiczne, ikonografia maryjna.

Introduction

Among the innumerable metaphorical names through which Christian thinkers praise the Virgin Mary for her status as mother of God and for her sublime virtues, we want to focus in this article on *thronus Dei*,¹ as well as other similar metaphors that allude to some prestigious elements conceived as containers or seats of divinity.² In this regard, the *thronus Dei* metaphor is strictly equivalent in its doctrinal meanings and its iconographic projections to that of *sedes Sapientiae*. As we will see later, these textual expressions are reflected in numerous artistic images in which Mary appears in some way represented as the throne of God.

Now, these metaphorical figures –despite the essential Mariological and Christological meanings that, as we will see in this article, they contain— have not been considered with the due depth nor interpreted with arguments based on primary sources of Christian doctrine by the Mariologists we have consulted (Merkelbach 1939; Roschini 1953–1954; Laurentin 1954; Carol 1955–1957; Graef 1964; De Fiores, and Meo 1986; De Fiores 1987; de La Potterie 1988; Pikaza 1989; Forte 1989; De Fiores 1992; Bastero de Eleizalde 1995; Stock 1997; Fernández 1999; Ponce Cuéllar 2001; Cerbelaud 2005; Pozo 2005; De Fiores 2006–2008; de La Soujeole 2007; Menke 2007; De Fiores, Ferrari Schiefer, and Perrella 2009; Scheffczyk 2010; Calero de los Ríos 2010; Casás Otero 2015; García Paredes 2015; Bonarrigo 2018; Reynolds 2019; Hauke 2021). On the other hand, their figurative reflection in Marian paintings or sculptures has not been taken into account by renowned experts in Christian iconography (Mâle 1988 [1898]; Mâle 1967 [1924]; Bréhier 1928; Trens 1947; Panofsky 1966 [1953]; Réau 1957; Toscano 1960; Schiller 1971; Schiller 1980; Grabar 1979).

¹ This article is a part of the PhD Thesis according to the form “Compendium of Articles” in the International Doctorate in Humanities: Language and Culture at the Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid.

² We wish to sincerely thank the two peer reviewers of our article for their careful and pertinent remarks, which we have considered in its final version.

In contrast to such silences and omissions by scholars in both fields,, we will try to justify our iconographic interpretations of these Marian images based on an abundant *corpus* of texts by Church Fathers and theologians, as well as an uncountable number of medieval liturgical hymns, in which the Virgin Mary is exalted as *thronus Dei* or some metaphor analogous to the seat, dwelling or container of divinity.

In this order of ideas, we will proceed methodologically following a double comparative analysis. In section 2, we will investigate a series of testimonies from Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers of the Eastern and Western Churches who designated Mary as the throne of God. In section 3, we will analyze a set of medieval and Renaissance paintings and sculptures that somehow represent the Virgin Mary as the throne of God. Thus, the comparative analysis between these texts and those artistic images will allow us to justify our iconographic interpretation of those images.

1. The *thronus Dei* metaphor and other analogous symbolic figures in the writings of some Church Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers

To better understand the scope of the answers given to this question, in the first subsection we will consider the testimonies of Eastern Churches' Fathers and theologians, in the second we will present those provided by Western Church's Fathers and theologians, while in the third section we will bring a huge number of fragments of medieval liturgical hymns alluding to the metaphor under study.

1.1. Some testimonies of Eastern Churches' Fathers and theologians on the *thronus Dei* metaphor

Towards the end of the 7th century or in the first third of the 8th, Saint Germanus, patriarch of Constantinople (635–732), is one of the Eastern Fathers most interested in highlighting the reference metaphors. Thus, in a homily on the Annunciation, he hails the Virgin Mary as the exalted and elevated throne of the Creator and Redeemer of everybody, who fosters everything in Heaven and on earth. Moreover, he also hails her as the living temple of the glory of

God the Son, who became man and put on flesh to save us.³ In another homily on the Presentation of the Virgin to the temple, Germanus of Constantinople exalts Mary as the holy throne of God, the divine altar, the house of glory, the most beautiful ornament, the chosen treasure, and the mercy seat of the entire world, that narrates the glory of God.⁴

Almost two decades later, Saint John Damascene (675–749), in his first homily on the Mary's Birth, extols her as the sublime throne erected in glory and the animated seat of God.⁵ Some years later, Saint Cosmas of Maiuma, also known as St. Cosmas of Jerusalem (ca. 680–ca. 760), asserts in a hymn that the Virgin Mary has been constituted on the cherubic throne, which bears the King of glory, and that she is also the luminous cloud which carries the incarnate Son of God.⁶

Already in the 9th century, the famous Byzantine poet Saint Joseph the Hymnographer (816–886), is the Eastern theologian who, in his *Mariale* –a collection of hymns in honor of the Virgin—, deals with the metaphors above more frequently and enthusiastically. Thus, in one of those poems, he acclaims Mary, saying that she has been converted by divine grace into the completely brilliant bed, the all-gold candelabra, the highest throne of God's sanctification, and the most spacious palace of God the Son. In another poem, he expresses similar concepts by stating that the purest Virgin has been made the throne of God and his most famous palace, and the bed on which the Lord reclined so that the first Father (Adam) could revive and rise,⁷ namely that humanity could be redeemed from sin. In another ode from this hymnal, the Byzantine bard asks the Virgin to pray to Christ, whom she conceived as on a throne of fire, so that her Son and Lord may grant peace to the people who proclaim “Blessed be the God of our fathers.”⁸

In another hymn from his *Mariale* Joseph the Hymnographer asks Mary to rejoice for having given birth ineffably, for being the chariot and clouds of the divine Word and the throne of God, and for being a Virgin who did not have intercourse with any man.⁹ In another ode from this poetic anthology, the Byzantine composer expresses that all human beings acclaim Mary together with the angelic choirs with the greeting “Hail, Mother of God,” for being the animated

³ Germanus Constantinopolitanus, In Annunciationem SS. Deiparae. PG 98, 322

⁴ Germanus Constantinopolitanus, In Praesentationem SS. Deiparae. I, XVII. PG 98, 307

⁵ Joannis Damascenus, Homilia I. In Nativitatem B.V. Mariae. PG 96, 691.

⁶ Cosmas Hierosolymitanus, Hymni. PG 98, 522.

⁷ Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale. PG 105, 1097

⁸ Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale. PG 105, 1112

⁹ Josephus Hymnographus, Mariale. PG 105, 1182

Heaven, the most glorious palace, and the throne of fire in which Christ rested according to the flesh.¹⁰ Finally, in another song from his *Mariale* Joseph the Hymnographer asserts that the whole world acclaims Mary for having begotten God in human flesh, for being God's patrimony, his joyful palace and his divine throne, in which, residing Word of God, prepared the heavenly seat for all.¹¹ A couple of paragraphs later, he goes on to say that we all acclaim together with the voices of the angels the Virgin, for being the palace and throne of God, and through her, we have been made worthy of the kingdom of Heaven, from which we had been expelled, in ancient times because of our corruption.¹²

1.2. Some testimonies of Western Church Fathers and theologians on the thronus Dei metaphor

Also, in the Western Church some several medieval Fathers, Doctors and theologians refer to the metaphors under study. Thus, in the 7th century Saint Ildefonsus, archbishop of Toledo (607–667), in the *Little Book on the Crown of the Virgin* which is attributed to him,¹³ acclaims the Virgin Mary for being the true salvation of the faithful, the throne and seat of the divine Majesty, the temple, the house and triclinium of Christ, the path of life and the lily of modesty.¹⁴ In another subsequent paragraph of that *Crown of the Virgin*, the archbishop of Toledo says that Mary is the imperial throne, the seat of the Holy Trinity, and the bedroom of Christ, consecrated, sanctified, and adorned by the Holy Spirit.¹⁵

¹⁰ Josephus Hymnographus, *Mariale*. PG 105, 1070.

¹¹ Josephus Hymnographus, *Mariale*. PG 105, 1170.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ In his *Patrologia Latina* Jacques-Paul Migne places this *Libellus de Corona Virginis* among the opera supposita of St. Ildefonsus of Toledo.

¹⁴ "Salve, vera salus fidelium,
Majestatis thronus et solium,
Templum Chrii,
Domus, triclinium,
Via vitae, pudoris lilium." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Libellus de Corona Virginis*. Caput IX. Oratio. PL 96, 208). Important note: All verbatim translations and paraphrases of the Latin texts into English are our own.

¹⁵ "Tu thronus imperialis, et sedes sanctae Trinitatis, dormitorium Jesu Christi, a sancto Spiritu consecratum, sanctificatum, et adornatum." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Libellus de Corona Virginis*. Caput XVIII. PL 96, 308).

Finally, in another paragraph of this book, Ildefonsus (if he were the author of that *Crown of the Virgin*) acclaims Mary as the throne of the divine Majesty, the flower of humility and the lily of candor, the temple and the tabernacle of the unbounded charity of all divinity.¹⁶

In the 11th century, the Benedictine Saint Peter Damian (1007–1072), bishop of Ostia and cardinal, requested the protection of the Virgin Mary for the devotees, whom he hailed as the Queen of the world, the ladder to heaven, the throne of God and the door of Paradise.¹⁷

In the 12th century the prestigious Cistercian Saint Bernard, abbot of Clairvaux (1090–1153), known as *Doctor Mellifluus*, affirms in his first sermon on the Annunciation that in Mary and from Mary Wisdom built her house, in her (Mary) and from her she (Wisdom) prepared for herself a throne, with her (Mary) and from her she (Wisdom) adjusted a body so that it would be perfect and congruent for everything; Wisdom made all this with the purpose that the house would serve to rest, the throne to judge, the original tabernacle to fight, and the throne to teach.¹⁸

1.3. The *thronus Dei* metaphor in medieval Latin liturgical hymns

Based on the solid exegetical tradition established by Fathers and theologians of Eastern and Western Churches on the metaphorical figures mentioned above, many medieval poets composed a vast set of Latin liturgical hymns that allude

¹⁶ “Ave, thronus majestatis,
Ave, flos humilitatis,
Et candoris lilium,
Totius divinitatis,
Illibatae charitatis,
Templum et sacrum.” (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Libellus de Corona Virginis*. Caput XIX. Oratio. PL 96, 310).

¹⁷ “O Regina mundi, scala coeli, thronus Dei, janua paradisi, audi praeces pauperum, ne despicias gemitum miserorum.” (Petrus Damianus, *Carmina et Preces*. LI. Lectio tertia. PL 145, 935–936)

¹⁸ “In ipsa quippe et ex ipsa [the Virgin Mary], Sapientia aedificavit sibi domum (Prov. ix, 1), in ipsa et ex ipsa paravit sibi thronum, cum in ea et ex ea corpus aptavit sibi ita ad omnia perfectum et congruum, ut et domus ei sit ad quiescendum, et thronus ad judicandum, quod primo tabernaculum ei fuit ad pugnandum, et cathedra ad docendum.” (Bernardus Claraevallensis, *De Annuntiatione Domini*. Sermo I. PL 185, 117).

in various ways to the *thronus Dei* metaphor, and other similar symbols already referred to. We will now analyze only the stanzas or fragments of those hymns that deal with those metaphors. Furthermore, to make the conceptual evolution in treating such metaphorical tropes visible, we will present the hymns in strict chronological order, grouping them by centuries.

10th-century hymns

From the 10th century we have documented only *Hymnus 3. Cantio de Domina*, which acclaims the Virgin Mary with several biblical prefigurations, such as the flowering Aaron's Rod, Gideon's Fleece, and Solomon's throne, in this stanza:

You are the warehouse of wines,	Cella es vinaria,
That defeats the pigments,	Vincens pigmentaria,
You are Solomon's throne,	Tu thronus Salomonis,
Jesse's flowering stem,	Virga Jesse florida,
You are Gideon's Fleece	Rore coeli madida,
Irrigated with the dew of Heaven.	Tu vellus Gedeonis. ¹⁹

12th-century hymns

From the 12th century we have found these three hymns:

Hymnus 14. De conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 2 Nocturno. Antiphonae, referring to the Annunciation, asserts that, through the mouth of the angel Gabriel, God announced to Mary her election as the throne/mother of Christ, with these rhymes:

The angel of divinity	Eructavit verbum bonum
Uttered the good word,	Angelus divinitus,
While predicting a son	Dum praedixit partus donum
Made man as a gift from Mary,	Mariae humanitus,
Whom God chose	Quam elegit sibi thronum
For himself as his throne.	Dei unigenitus. ²⁰

¹⁹ Hymnus 3. Cantio de Domina. AHMA 2, 150. See also Hymnus 93. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 40, 97; Hymnus 191. AHMA 20, 150; Hymnus II. In Nativitate Domini. AHMA 37, 22; Hymnus 205. In Assumptione Beatae M. V. Ascribitur Adamo de S. Victore. AHMA 54, 325.

²⁰ Hymnus 14. De conceptione BMV. In 2 Nocturno. Antiphonae. AHMA 5, 54–55.

St. Anselm, archbishop of Canterbury (1033–1109), in *Hymnus XVII. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena* praises the mother of the Redeemer, who was incarnated to save us, in this stanza:

6. Hail, throne of divinity, In which the God of majesty, After deigning to become a man, Turned to commiserate. From where he also snatched Our souls to grace, And those whom he freed, He saved them in glory.	6. Ave, thronus deitatis, In quo Deus maiestatis Dignatus homo fieri, Se convertit misereri. Unde et nostras animas Eripuit in gratia Et, quas effecit liberas, Salvas fecit in gloria. ²¹
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In *Hymnus 245. De Beata Maria Virgine* Adam of St. Victor (1033–1109) –if he is the author of this hymn attributed to him— exalts the virtuous mother of God with these poetic metaphors:

13. You are Solomon's throne, To which no throne is equal Neither in art nor in matter.	13. Tu thronus es Salomonis, Cui nullus par in thronis Arte vel materia;
14. Whitening ivory of chastity, Yellow gold of charity, They are the mysteries that prefigure [you].	14. Ebur candens castitatis, Aurum fulvum caritatis Praesignant mysteria. ²²

13th-century hymns

From the 13th century we have registered these twelve hymns:

Hymnus 21, inspired by two biblical prefigurations, celebrates the Virgin for her condition as virginal mother of God the Son, stating:

²¹ Hymnus XVII. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. auctore Anselmo Cantuariensi. Prima Quinquagena. AHMA 35, 254.

²² Hymnus 245. De Beata Maria V. Ascribitur Adamo de S. Victore. AHMA 54, 384.

1. Solomon's throne,
 Gideon's fleece
 Is irrigated with the gifts
 Of heavenly rain.
 The creator of the universe
 Bowed the heavens,
 As he entered the hall [the womb]
 Of the mother and the daughter.

1. Thronus Salomonis,
 Vellus Gedeonis
 Irrigatur donis
 Coelestis pluviae.
 Cuncta qui creavit,
 Coelos inclinavit,
 Aulam dum intravit
 Matris et filiae.²³

Hymnus 210 greets the Virgin with several Old Testament tropes, in these terms:

Hail, sun of justice,
 Consolation of sadness,
 Hail, true
 Gideon's Fleece,
 You are the bedchamber of modesty,
 You the throne of Solomon

2. Ave, sol justitiae,
 Solatium moestitiae,
 Ave, verum
 vellus Gedeonis,
 Tu pudoris thalamus,
 Tu thronus Salomonis.²⁴

Hymnus 252 refers to Mary with the biblical metaphor under study, indicating:

1. Temple of our Redeemer,
 Sun of justice,
 Gate of Heaven, hope of the prisoners,
 Throne of glory.

2. Templum nostri redemptoris,
 Sol justitiae,
 Porta coeli, spes reorum,
 Thronus gloriae.²⁵

Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena celebrates the Virgin Mary for having been chosen and prepared by the divine Trinity to be the mother of God the Son, with this stanza:

²³ Hymnus 21. AHMA 20, 52. See also Hymnus 175. De V Gaudiis BMV. AHMA 31, 179.

²⁴ Hymnus 210. AHMA 20, 165.

²⁵ Hymnus 252. AHMA 20, 188.

9. Hail, Virgin,
 Foresaw by Heaven
 From eternity
 Like the throne arranged,
 Whom the Paraclete
 Decorated inside,
 and did not find
 until the most deep
 Other than you,
 In which the Only Begotten of the
 Father
 was placed.

9. Ave, virgo,
 praevisa caelitus,
 Ab aeterno
 thronus dispositus,
 Quem ornavit
 intus paraclitus,
 Non invenit
 praeter te penitus,
 In qua patris
 se unigenitus
 Collocaret.²⁶

Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Secunda Quinquagena extols the virginal mother of God in these poetic terms:

40. Hail, Virgin, to whom the King
 Who rules us chose as a throne,
 Nobody did a work of such category
 When he joined like this in you,
 Because he didn't break the ivory
 Of virginity when ascending.

40. Ave, virgo, quam elegit
 Rex in thronum, qui nos regit,
 Opus tale nullus egit,
 Cum sic in te se collegit,
 Quod pudoris non effregit
 Ebur, cum ascenderet.²⁷

Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Secunda Quinquagena congratulates the mother of God with these lyrical rhymes:

50. Hail, throne of the new King,
 You are the column of the new law,
 That touch the Sun under the cloud,
 From you the guide of his flock
 Now gives a voice to his colleagues
 through his only begotten.

50. Ave, thronus novi regis,
 Tu columna novae legis,
 Quae sub nube solem tegis,
 De te ductor sui gregis
 Vocem suis nunc collegis
 Dat per unigenitum.²⁸

²⁶ Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena. AHMA 36, 12.

²⁷ Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Secunda Quinquagena. AHMA 36, 20.

²⁸ Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Secunda Quinquagena. AHMA 36, 21.

Hymnus 248. De Beata Maria Virgine exalts Mary's sublime virginal divine motherhood, after her immaculate womb was chosen by the Almighty to become the sublime throne of God the Son, through these romantic metaphors:

1. The virginal uterus Is the ivory throne Of King Solomon,	1. Uterus virgineus Thronus est eburneus Regis Salomonis,
2. An admirable throne, Different and unlike To all the thrones.	2. Thronus admirabilis, Dispar et dissimilis Universis thronis.
3. Peaceful Solomon, Only begotten of the supreme Father, Chose this throne.	3. Salomon pacificus, Summi patris unicus Hunc elegit thronum;
4. The Virgin existed as the throne to whom God granted Such an excellent gift.	4. Virgo thronus exstitit, Cui Deus praestitit Tam praecellens donum.
5. This is the seat of grace, The house of modesty, The seat of the supreme God.	5. Haec est sedes gratiae, Domus pudicitiae, Sedes summi Dei. ²⁹

Hymnus 277. De Beata Maria Virgine refers to the mother of God with the figure in reference, saying:

8. Throne of the true Solomon To whom the illustrious King of glory Ornamented.	8. Thronus veri Salomonis, Quem praeclaris Ornavit rex gloriae. ³⁰
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Edmund of Abingdon, archbishop of Canterbury (1174–1240), in *Hymnus X. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena*, names the Savior's mother with the reference metaphor in this stanza:

²⁹ Hymnus 248. *De Beata Maria* V. AHMA 54, 389.

³⁰ Hymnus 277. *De Beata Maria* V. AHMA 54, 418.

9. Hail, Virgin throne of God,
In which the only good one seats,
Which has no equal,
and brought my cause to completion
While he left through a closed door
Assuming a fragile flesh.

9. Ave, virgo, Dei thronus,
In quo sedet solus bonus,
Qui non habet similem,
Qui perfecit meam causam,
Dum per portam exit clausam,
Carnem sumens fragilem.³¹

Stephan Langton, cardinal and archbishop of Canterbury (ca. 1150–1228), in his *Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae, Prima Quadrageña* implores the saving protection of the Virgin Mary, whose election as virginal mother of God and temple of the Holy Trinity he celebrates through these lyrical metaphors:

9. Hail, throne of grace,
mother of Jesus Christ,
you, the only one who deserved
to conceive as a virgin,
I confess to the Lord,
whom you thus begot,
that not even among the virgins
you lost the name.

[...]

13. Hail, temple of grace,
Temple of holiness,
Temple of the Holy Spirit,
throne of majesty,
Save me by grace,
Save me, I ask you, freely,
so I can get in
to the kingdom with the blessed.

[...]

9. Ave, thronus gratiae,
mater Iesu Christi,
Quae sola concipere
virgo meruisti,
Confitebor Domino,
quem sic genuisti,
Quod nec inter virgines
nomen amisisti.

[...]

13. Ave, templum gratiae,
templum sanctitatis,
Templum sancti spiritus,
thronus maiestatis,
Salva me per gratiam,
salva, quaeso, gratis,
Ut sortiri valeam
regnum cum beatis.

[...]

³¹ Hymnus X. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquageña. auctore Edmundo Cantuariensi. AHMA 35, 137.

15. Hail, throne of grace
Prepared for the King,
Of which the happy lawyer
proceeded for us,
Christ, born of you,
Became our inheritance.
May he preserve his servants,
Condone the sin.

15. Ave, thronus gratiae
regi praeparatus,
Ex qua nobis prodiit
felix advocatus,
Nostra fit hereditas
Christus ex te natus.
Conservet qui famulos.
Condonet reatus.³²

The same Stephan Langton, in other part of his *Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae, Secunda Quadrigena*, once again asks for the Virgin's beneficent help, proclaiming:

48. Hail, who cover with a cloud
The sun of justice,
You have been made the throne of grace,
Throne of the supreme King,
I ask you, look after
Our flock,
So that the fullness of the law
Be valid in us.

48. Ave, quae justitiae
solem nube tegis,
Thronus facta gratiae,
thronus summi regis,
Nostri, quaeso,
ad tutelam gregis,
Ut in nobis vigeat
plenitudo legis.³³

Finally Stephan Langton, in another fragment of his *Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae. Tertia Quadrigena* requests once again the benevolent intercession of the Virgin, stating:

³² Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae, auctore Stephano Cantuariensi. Prima Quadrigena. AHMA 35, 154.

³³ Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae, auctore Stephano Cantuariensi. Secunda Quadrigena. AHMA 35, 162.

50. Hail, praise of the faithful,
Radiance of holiness,
Triclinium of the Lord,
throne of majesty,
Appease us to your Son
With your blessed prayers,
Rewarding your servants
With the gift of freedom.

50. Ave, laus fidelium,
iubar sanctitatis,
Domini triclinium,
thronus maiestatis,
Placa nobis filium
precibus beatis,
Servos tuos munerans
dono libertatis.³⁴

14th century hymns

Datable in the 14th century we have found the following eleven hymns:

Hymnus 69. De beata Maria Virgine applauds the virtuous mother of God as the throne that divine Wisdom carved for herself and the throne of supreme majesty, in these stanzas:

6a. He who through a septiform gift
Made for himself a throne,
Wisdom did not sculpt
Other of such category or so good.
6b. In you the candor of chastity stands,
In you the brilliance of clarity,
The throne of the Supreme Majesty
Was built with this material.

6a. Qui per septiforme donum
Sibi fecit ex te thronum,
Nullum tale vel tam bonum
Sculpsit sapientia.
6b. In te candor castitatis.
In te fulgor claritatis,
Thronus summae maiestatis
Ex hac fit materia.³⁵

Hymnus 491. De Beata Maria Virgine hails Mary with several symbolic figures, including the divine Emperor's throne, through these stanzas:

2a. You, wife of the Creator,
are the King's palace,
the Emperor's throne,
the husband's kneeler.
2b. Oh consolation of the poor,
Remedy of languor,
Worthy tabernacle of God,
Vase of eternal splendor.

2a. Summi regis palatium,
Thronus imperatoris,
Sponsi reclinatorium,
Tu sponsa creatoris.
2b. O pauperum solatium,
Remedium languoris,
Dignum Dei sacrarium,
Vas aeterni splendoris.³⁶

³⁴ Hymnus XI. Psalterium beatae Mariae, auctore Stephano Cantuariensi. Tertia Quadragena. AHMA 35, 166.

³⁵ Hymnus 69. De beata Maria V. AHMA 8, 63.

³⁶ Hymnus 491. De b. Maria v. Mone, 211. Published also, with the title Hymnus 91. De Beata Maria V., in AHMA 9, 74.

Hymnus 123. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem greets the mother of God with several Old Testament prefigurations in these rhymes:

8. Hail, temple of majesty,
Work of supreme dignity,
Throne of the King of glory,
Oh, sanctuary of virtues,
Make us a safe entrance
To such a great curia of the King.
[...]

12. Hail, throne of Solomon,
Gideon's dry fleece,
With the area [surrounding it] moistened by the sky,
You are the door of Ezekiel,
The closed lake of Daniel,
The flowering stem of Jesse.

8. Ave, templum majestatis,
Opus summae dignitatis,
Thronus regis gloriae,
O sacrarium virtutum,
Aditum fac nobis tutum
Tantae regis curiae.
[...]

12. Ave, thronus Salomonis,
Siccum vellus Gedeonis,
Area coelo rorida,
Porta tu Ezechielis,
Lacus clausus Danielis,
Virga Jesse florida.³⁷

Hymnus 20. De Conceptione beatae Mariae Virginis. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria celebrates Mary for having been constituted the throne of the Redeemer with these verses:

3. The big
and admirable throne
is collected by its act, its form
and its virtue,
The just, the pious,
The powerful and the humble,
Stays in it,
the faults of the fallen
are removed by it.

3. Thronus grandis
et admirabilis
Actu, forma,
virtute legitur,
Justus, pius,
potens et humilis
in eo sistitur,
Culpa lapsus
per eum tollitur.³⁸

³⁷ Hymnus 123. Ad B. Mariam V. AHMA 15, 150. See also Hymnus 90. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 37, 84; Hymnus 108. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 40, 107; Hymnus XII. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. sancto Bonaventurae tributum. Secunda Quinquagena. AHMA 35, 175.

³⁸ Hymnus 20. De Conceptione BMV. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria. AHMA 24, 64.

Hymnus 104. Super Ave Maria sings the saving protection of the Virgin, the true throne of the King of glory, in this stanza:

Hail, mother of grace,
Fountain of mercy,
Savior of the sinner,
Throne of the King of glory
Temple of the Redeemer.

1. Ave, mater gratiae,
Fons misericordiae,
Salus peccatoris,
Thronus regis gloriae,
Templum redemptoris.³⁹

Hymnus 121. De Nativitate Beatae Mariae Virginis exalts the mother of God with these tropes:

1. The throne of supreme clemency,
The House of Wisdom
Is built,
is established,
when the vase of cleaning,
the mother of mercy,
spreads to the world.

1. Thronus summae clementiae
Domusque sapientiae
Fabricatur,
Instauratur,
Cum mundo vas munditiae
Mater misericordiae
Propagatur.⁴⁰

Hymnus 201. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis celebrates the heavenly exaltation of the mother of God with these rhymes:

1. David's throne is elevated,
While it is exalted in heaven,
Virgin, mother of grace;
This woman, who is shown,
Is lifted up dressed in the sun
As a sign of victory.

1. Thronus David elevatur,
Dum in caelis exaltatur
Virgo, mater gratiae;
Mulier haec, quae monstratur,
Amicta sole levatur
Ut signum victoriae.⁴¹

³⁹ Hymnus 104. *Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 211.

⁴⁰ Hymnus 121. *De Nativitate BMV*. AHMA 31, 127.

⁴¹ Hymnus 201. *In Assumptione BMV*. AHMA 31, 206.

Hymnus II. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena designates the mother of God with the reference metaphor, indicating:

9. Hail, throne,	9. Ave, thronus,
And seat of grace,	et sedes gratiae,
Because	Thronum enim
the judge of justice	iudex iustitiae
Prepared your uterus	Tuum sibi
As a throne for himself,	paravit uterum,
Not forgetting	Non oblitus
the cry of the poor	clamorem pauperum. ⁴²

Hymnus 81. De Beata Maria Virgine exalts God's virginal mother, whose immaculate uterus became the throne of the supreme and eternal King, through these lyrical verses:

3a. The King without beginning, God before all ages, Honors this one with a Son By whom all things are made, So that the one born of a virgin Join him.	3a. Rex sine principio, Deus ante saecula, Hanc honorat filio, Per quem fiunt omnia, Ut sit ei unio Natus de puell[ul]a
3b. Virginal uterus Which generates a new flower, The famous throne of Solomon Radiant in gold, Is the heavenly conjugal bed That associates the highest with the lowest.	3b. Virginalis uterus Florem novum generans, Salomonis inclitus Thronus auro radians, Caelestis est thalamus Ima summis socians. ⁴³

⁴² Hymnus II. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena. AHMA 36, 28.

⁴³ Hymnus 81. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 40, 88.

Hymnus 85. De Beata Maria Virgine celebrates the mother of God with these imaginative metaphors:

4a. This throne,
magnificent throne,
in which our peaceful
Resided;
4b. Eminent dignity
From this seat,
whom the divinity itself
Illustrates.

4a Thronus iste
thronus magnificus,
Quo resedit
noster pacificus;
4b. Sedis huius
praeclara dignitas,
Quam illustrat
ipsa divinitas.⁴⁴

Hymnus 209. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis praises Mary with the figure under study, pointing out:

13. Throne of the King,
Book of the Law
Treasure house.

13. Thronus regis,
Liber legis,
Domus thesauraria.⁴⁵

Hymnus 236. De Beata Maria Virgine alludes to the mother of the Savior with these biblical figures:

2. Noah's Ark is manufactured
By which the world is liberated,
The King's throne is prepared
From where salvation is repaired.

2. Arca Noe, fabricatur,
Per quam mundus liberatur,
Thronus regi praeparatur,
Unde salus reparatur.⁴⁶

Konrads von Haimburg († 1360), in his *Hymnus 4. Thronus Beatae Mariae*, hails the Virgin Mary for her excellent virtues with several symbolic figures, including the throne of Christ and the model throne of the new Solomon (Christ), in these stanzas:

⁴⁴ Hymnus 85. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 42, 92.

⁴⁵ Hymnus 209. In Assumptione Beatae M. V. AHMA 54, 331.

⁴⁶ Hymnus 236. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 54, 373.

2. All things,
Heaven, Earth, the seas,
Obey you, dominating royal
On a heavenly throne.
Christ, the one who subdued all things
And stood for you
By a distinguished gift,
Founded this throne.
3. [Christ] prepared you here
wonderfully
as the throne
of his glory so exemplary
by the light of virtue,
like the mystical, authentic,
and typical throne of King Solomon
figured it in past times.

2. Tibi parent omnia,
Polus, tellus, maria,
Dominatrix regia,
In coelesti throno.
Thronum Christus edidit
Hunc, qui cuncta subdidit
Seque tibi indidit
Pro insigni dono.
3. Hic in thronum gloriae
Suae tam eximiae
Te virtutis numine
Mire praeparavit,
Regis ut authenticus
Salomonis typicus
Olim thronus mysticus
Pulchre figuravit.⁴⁷

A few stanzas later of this *Hymnus 4*, Konrads von Haimburg insists on the idea of designating the mother of God as the throne on which the Lord installed himself during the nine months of her gestation, expressing:

The Lord comes closely
through these steps to the throne,
in which the king sat
on a golden
and purple seat
for nine months [of pregnancy]
in a flesh dress
with serene movements.

Per hos gradus Dominus
Thronum intrat cominus,
In quo nihilominus
Mensibus novenis
In sedili aureo
Sedit rex purpureo
In vestitu carneo
Nutibus serenis.⁴⁸

The Italian Raimundo de Vineis or Raymond of Capua, General of the Dominican friars (1330–1399), in his *Hymnus 45. In Visitatione Beatae Mariae Virginis. Ad Vesperas*, congratulates Mary on her visit to her cousin Elizabeth, identifying the Virgin as the throne of God's glory with these rhymes:

⁴⁷ Conradus Gemnicensis, *Hymnus 4. Thronus Beatae Mariae*. AHMA 3, 28.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

1. The day of great joy
Shone upon us heavenly,
Mary, throne of glory,
Went to the mountains divinely.

1. Magnae dies laetitiae
Nobis illuxit caelitus,
Maria, thronus gloriae,
Montes petit divinitus.⁴⁹

Datable towards the 14th century *Hymnus 531*. *Alia sequentia* designates the Virgin Mary as the throne of the true Solomon (Christ) in these short verses:

Throne of true Solomon,
Whom the King of glory
Adorned with the preclar gifts of
Heaven.

Thronus veri Salomonis,
quem praeclaris coeli donis
ornavit rex gloriae.⁵⁰

13th–14th century hymns

From an uncertain date between the 13th and the 14th century we found this hymn:

Hymnus 65. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis asks for the protection of the mother of God, the royal seat of the supreme Sovereign, with these stanzas:

2a. So that my heart,
My language, my mind and my cus-
tom, be dedicated
to your liking,
2b. Be propitious to me,
Virgin, you do not know a man,
Temple of the Holy Spirit,
Throne of the King of glory.

2a. Ut in tuum libitum
Sit cor meum deditum,
Lingua, mens et habitus;
Et tu, plena gratiae,
2b. Sis mihi propitia,
Virgo, viri nescia,
Templum sancti spiritus,
Thronus regis gloriae.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Hymnus 45. In Visitatione Beatae M. V. Ad Vesperas. Hymnus Raymundi de Vineis, Magistri Generalis. AHMA 52, 51. See also Hymnus 404. In festo visitationis b. Mariae v. ad primas vespas. Hymnus. Mone, 114.

⁵⁰ Hymnus 531. *Alia sequentia*. Mone, 318.

⁵¹ Hymnus 65. In Assumptione BMV. AHMA 42, 75. See also Hymnus 65. In Assumptione BMV. AHMA 42, 75; Hymnus 610. Oratio ad beatam virginem. Mone, 430; Hymnus 82. De beata Maria V. AHMA 9, 68.

13th–15th century hymns

Datable to some date in the three hundred years between the 13th and 15th centuries, we have documented these three hymns alluding to the metaphors mentioned above:

Hymnus 145 alludes to the decision of the Son of God to establish in Mary the divine throne on which to settle himself, saying:

Because the Son does not deny	Nam filius non negat
His Mother's gift,	Suae matris donum,
He who established in you	Qui in te stabilivit
Divinity's throne.	Deitatis thronum. ⁵²

Hymnus 188 acclaims the Virgin Mary as the Trinity's exalted throne manufactured since the eternity, expressing:

Hail, white throne	Ave candens thronus
Of the excellent Trinity,	Celsae Trinitatis,
Possessed by God	A Deo possessus
And made since ancient times.	Factus ab antiquis. ⁵³

Hymnus 15 praises Mary designating her with several biblical prefigurations, including Solomon's throne, in these rhymes:

You are delivered to the King,	Regem es enixa
Remaining entirely virgin,	Virgo manens fixa,
Solomon's throne,	Thronus Salomonis,
Gideon's fleece,	Vellus Gedeonis,
You are the triclinium of God,	Tu Dei triclinium,
The white lily,	Candens lilium,
Chaste, remain standing	Casta, asta
Before the Son.	Ante filium. ⁵⁴

⁵² Hymnus 145. AHMA 1, 148.

⁵³ Hymnus 188. AHMA 1, 171.

⁵⁴ Hymnus 15. AHMA 1, 57. See also Hymnus 613. De b. V. Maria. Mone, 434; Hymnus 113. De B. Maria V. AHMA 15, 139; Hymnus 38. De Conceptione BMV. Ad Tertiam. AHMA 30, 93; Hymnus 127. Super Ave Maria. AHMA 30, 240; Hymnus 130. De Nominibus BMV. AHMA 31, 132; Hymnus 98. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 42, 102; Hymnus 157. De Beata Maria V. AHMA 46, 210.

14th–15th centuries hymns

Written on some imprecise date between the 14th and 15th centuries we have documented these five hymns:

Hymnus 597. Laudes Mariae praises the Virgin with several symbolic designations, among them, throne of divine glory, in these verses:

Temple of our Redeemer,	Templum nostri redemptoris,
Sun of justice,	sol justitiae,
Gate of heaven, hope of the prisoners,	porta coeli, spes reorum,
Throne of glory.	thronus gloriae. ⁵⁵

Hymnus 596. Laudes Mariae applauds the virtuous Virgin, designating her as the throne of the universal King, expressing:

Glorious Virgin,	Virgo gloriosa,
virginal form,	forma virginalis,
Model of the virgins,	exemplar virginum,
special throne	thronus specialis
From the King of the universe.	regis omnium. ⁵⁶

Hymnus 74. De Gaudiis Beatae Mariae Virgini. In Nativitate Beatae Mariae Virginis exalts the virginal divine motherhood of Mary in these verses:

8. Hail, happy hosting,	8. Ave, felix hospitium,
Who knew no sordidness,	Nullius sordis consciunt,
Thalamus and palace	Thalamus et palatium
And throne of the King of the universe.	Thronusque regis omnium. ⁵⁷

Hymnus XIV. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena greets the powerful mother of God in these rhymes:

⁵⁵ Hymnus 597. *Laudes Mariae*. Mone, 409.

⁵⁶ Hymnus 596. *Laudes Mariae*. Mone, 409. See also Hymnus 3. In *Sanctificatione Conceptionis BMV*. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria. AHMA 17, 23;

⁵⁷ Hymnus 74. *De Gaudiis BMV*. In *Nativitate BMV*. AHMA 15, 101.

20. Hail, to whom the gift
of the Holy Spirit cultivated,
the sun set in the sun
and God placed his throne in you,
the Trinity wanted
that you were its house
for which Leviathan
vomited his deceit.

20. Ave, quam excoluit
spiritus sancti donum,
Sol in sole posuit
Deus in te thronum,
Trinitas te voluit
suam esse domum,
Per quam suum vomuit
Leviathan dolum.⁵⁸

Hymnus XIV. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Tertia Quinquagena asks for the saving protection of the mother of the Universal Judge with these emotional verses:

31. Voice of confession
Of our fullness,
you are the judge's court,
the seat throne,
grant us that,
stripped of lubricious dresses
and confused,
We may be renewed with the good.

31. Nostrae plenitudinis
vox confessionis,
Tu tribunal iudicis,
thronus sessionis,
Tribue, ut lubricis
et confusionis
Nudati exuviis
renovemur bonis.⁵⁹

15th century hymns

Dated in the 15th century we have documented the following thirty hymns that allude to the *thronus Dei* metaphor and other similar symbolic tropes:

Hymnus 507. Oratio, quae dicitur crinale beatae Mariae Virginis lauds the mother of God as the ivory throne prepared by God the Father for his divine Son, in this stanza:

⁵⁸ Hymnus XIV. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena. AHMA 35, 202.

⁵⁹ Hymnus XIV. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Tertia Quinquagena. AHMA 35, 212.

Rejoice, throne,
 To whom God, while covering it,
 Adapted the white ivory,
 And decorated it with shining gold,
 on which He placed
 His Son, the King.

Gaude thronus,
 quem dum stravit,
 ebur candens adaptavit,
 auro fulvo decoravit
 Deus, in quo collocavit
 Regem suum Filium.⁶⁰

Hymnus 511. Salutationes beatæ Mariæ Virginis proclaims Mary with various symbolic figures, including the throne of God, in these rhymes:

Hail, venerable
 Mother of mercy,
 admirable mother,
 Trinity Lily,
 incomparable flower,
 pleasant garden,
 ineffable splendor,
 throne of divinity.

Ave venerabilis
 mater pietatis,
 mater admirabilis,
 lilium Trinitatis,
 flos incomparabilis ,
 hortus voluptatis,
 splendor ineffabilis,
 thronus deitatis.⁶¹

Hymnus 547. Flores beatæ Mariæ Virginis, ad nonam. *Hymnus* invokes the saving protection of the mother of God, whom it designates with various symbolic tropes, including the throne of glory, in these stanzas:

You are the lily of chastity,
 The domicile of the virtues,
 The vessel of life, the fountain of mercy,
 The dew of Heaven, the throne of glory.
 Friend, wife, companion
 And daughter of God the Father,
 Be a help to us
 Before God the Father and God the
 Son.

Tu castitatis lilium,
 virtutum domicilium,
 vas vitae, fons clementiae,
 ros coeli, thronus gloriae,
 Amica, sponsa, socia
 Dei patris et filia,
 tu nobis sis auxilium
 apud patrem et filium.⁶²

⁶⁰ Hymnus 507. Oratio, quae dicitur crinale beatæ Mariæ virginis. Mone, 269.

⁶¹ Hymnus 511. Salutationes b. Mariæ virginis. Mone, 288.

⁶² Hymnus 547. Flores b. Mariæ V. ad nonam. Hymnus. Mone, 342.

Hymnus 616. Laus beatæ Virginis Mariæ requests the saving aid of the virtuous mother of God, whom it calls the throne of divinity and other symbolic expressions, in these rhymes:

In this valley of misery	In hac valle miseriae
There is no one without sins,	nemo sine peccatis,
But you are dew, you are the vessel of	sed tu ros, tu vas gratiae,
grace,	tu fervor caritatis,
You are the fervor of charity,	tu thronus deitatis,
You are the throne of divinity,	tu fons misericordiae,
You are the source of mercy.	sceptrum affer clementiae
Carry the scepter of mercy,	in hac valle prostratis,
To those prostrate in this valley	pro fructu poenitentiae
Giving them to be with the blessed	dans esse cum beatis. ⁶³
For the fruit of penance.	

Hymnus 619. Thronus beatæ Mariæ lauds the Virgin for having carried the Savior of the world in her womb/throne for nine months, through these rhymes:

But the virgin womb	At venter virgineus
Is the ivory throne	thronus est eburneus,
In which the King of Heaven,	in quo rex aethereus
The holy man-God,	sanctus homo-Deus
Remained bodily,	mansit corporaliter,
Supernaturally,	supernaturaliter,
So that the guilty man	ut spiritualiter
Can live spiritually.	vivat homo reus. ⁶⁴

Hymnus 48. De Beata Virgine Maria greets the Virgin as the throne that God prepared for himself, in these verses:

Hail, throne of God,	Ave Dei thronus,
Whom the good Creator	Quam creator bonus
Completely consecrated	Totam consecravit
And adapted for himself.	Sibi que aptavit. ⁶⁵

⁶³ Hymnus 616. Laus b. v. Mariæ. Mone, 438.

⁶⁴ Hymnus 619. Thronus b. Mariæ. Mone, 444. Published also, with the title Hymnus 4. Thronus Beatae Mariæ, in AHMA 3, 28.

⁶⁵ Hymnus 48. De B. V. Maria. AHMA 4, 37.

Hymnus 108. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem exalts the mother of God with these vivid images:

1. Rejoice, praise and joy,
Light of jocundity.
Triclinium of the Lord,
throne of majesty,
Rose, flower and lily,
House of fertility,
Appease us to your Son,
mother of mercy.

7. Gaude, laus et gaudium,
Lux jucunditatis,
Domini triclinium,
Thronus majestatis,
Rosa, flos et lilium,
Domus ubertatis,
Placa nobis filium,
Mater pietatis.⁶⁶

Hymnus 183 celebrates the Virgin Mary for her unmatched sublimity, by formulating:

3. He himself constituted you
The throne of his kingdom,
And it was not found
among women no one whom
is granted to enjoy
of such an excellent privilege,
because the fruit of your womb
Is blessed.

3. Ipse te constituit,
thronum regni sui,
Nec in mulieribus
est inventa, cui
Detur privilegio
tam excelso frui,
Quia benedictus est
Fructus ventris tui.⁶⁷

Hymnus 23. De Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria exalts the mother of God for the excellency of her virtues in this stanza:

1. Hail, Virgin Mary,
You shined being born
Of a royal lineage,
You enlightened yourself being gifted
With the grace of virtues,
Honor and clarity of health,
You are the tabernacle of the Trinity.
V. The gift of the Holy Spirit
Impregnated you with the fruit of life.
It prepared you like the most deign throne
For the King of kings.

1. Salve, Maria virgo,
Tu de stirpe regia
Refulsisti genita,
Tu virtutum gratia
Claruiisti praedita,
Decus et claritas sanctitatis,
Tu tabernaculum trinitatis.
V. Te spiritus sancti donum
Fructu vitae fecundavit.
Te dignissimum thronum
Regi regum praeparavit.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Hymnus 108. Ad B. Mariam V. AHMA 15, 135.

⁶⁷ Hymnus 183. AHMA 20, 141.

⁶⁸ Hymnus 23. De Conceptione BMV. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria. AHMA 24, 71.

In its Second Nocturn, this *Hymnus 23. De Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 2. Nocturno. Antiphonae* requests the beneficent protection of Mary, in these terms:

1. You are the most worthy
Throne of divinity,
We ask you to be helped
against sins and be saved.

1. Tu thronus divinitatis
Dignissimus,
Nos juvari a peccatis
Et salvari petimus.⁶⁹

Hymnus 24. De Conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 3. Nocturno. Responsoria exalts the mother of God with these poetic similes:

1. This is the stem of the eternal
And true salvation,
From which
the flowered branches of virtue come
And from there the fruit grows
in which the true Son
Rest from God.
V. The best throne of Christ
Is created and rejoiced here.

1. Hic stipes est aeternae
Et verae salutis,
Ex quo procedunt floridi
Rami virtutis,
Ibique fructus crescit,
In quo verus filius
Dei requiescit.
V. Christi thronus summe bonus
Hic creatur et beatur.⁷⁰

Hymnus 25. De Praesentatione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria salutes the virginal mother of God, whose immaculate womb is the splendid throne of the Lord of the universe, with this stanza:

1. The pious Virgin
Was humble
And holy minded
Resplendent with everything
The ornament of grace,
Where she, being marriageable,
Would be the worthy throne
of the King of glory;
V. The virginal womb
With a prudent heart
Is the ivory throne
With shining gold.

1. Mente sancta
fuit et humilis,
Omni splendens
ornatu gratiae
Virgo pia,
unde fit, nubilis
Thronus dignus
sit regis gloriae;
V. Thronus eburneus,
Cum auro fulvido
Venter virgineus
Cum corde provido.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Hymnus 23. De Conceptione BMV. In 2. Nocturno. Antiphonae AHMA 24, 72.

⁷⁰ Hymnus 24. De Conceptione BMV. In 3. Nocturno. Responsoria. AHMA 24, 75.

⁷¹ Hymnus 25. De Praesentatione BMV. In 1. Nocturno. Responsoria. AHMA 24, 77.

Hymnus 57. Horae beatae Mariae Virginis. Ad Nonam praises the virtuous mother of God with these verses:

You are the lily of chastity,	1. Tu castitatis lilium,
The domicile of virtues,	Virtutum domicilium,
The vessel of life, the fountain of	Vas vitae, fons clementiae,
mercy,	
The dew of heaven, the throne of glory.	Ros caeli, thronus gloriae. ⁷²

Hymnus 107. Super Ave Maria requests the saving help of the Virgin through these expressive metaphors:

Mary, throne of the supreme king,	2. Maria, thronus summi regis,
sealed book of his law,	Signatus liber suae legis,
You cover the prisoner in your bosom	Sinu tuo reum tegis
And you comfort the weak;	Et confortas debiles;
Mary, pure mass of the Father,	Maria, patris massa pura,
Clothing of the Son,	Filiique vestitura,
Impression of the Paranymp[h] [Holy	Paranymp[h] impressura
Spirit]	
Remove stains from sad people.	Labes aufer flebiles. ⁷³

Hymnus 130. De Nominibus Beatae Mariae Virginis asks for the protective help of the mother of God in these verses:

11. Hail, throne, pious royal hall,	11. Salve, thronus, aula pia,
Path, direct road,	Semita, directa via,
Breathe out prayers, oh Mary,	Funde preces, o Maria,
To your Son in our favor.	Pro nobis ad filium. ⁷⁴

Hymnus 38. In Visitatione Beatae Mariae Virginis extols the virginal mother of God the Son with several biblical figures in these rhymes:

⁷² Hymnus 57. *Horae beatae Mariae V. Ad Nonam*. AHMA 30, 127.

⁷³ Hymnus 107. *Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 215. See also Hymnus 613. *De b. V. Maria*. Mone, 434; Hymnus 113. *De B. Maria V.* AHMA 15, 139; Hymnus 38. *De Conceptione BMV. Ad Tertiam*. AHMA 30, 93; Hymnus 127. *Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 240; Hymnus 130. *De Nominibus BMV*. AHMA 31, 132; Hymnus 98. *De Beata Maria V.* AHMA 42, 102; Hymnus 157. *De Beata Maria V.* AHMA 46, 210.

⁷⁴ Hymnus 130. *De Nominibus BMV*. AHMA 31, 132.

3a. Throne of true Solomon,
Gideon's dry fleece,
Filled with all the goods,
Our hope and glory;
8b. Enclosed garden, sealed fountain,
For you Jesus Christ, born of you,
Who created all things,
May be appeased in our favor.

3a. Thronus veri Salomonis,
Vellus siccum Gedeonis,
Omnibus repleta bonis,
Nostra spes et gloria;
8 b. Hortus clausus, fons signatus,
Per te nobis sit placatus
Iesus Christus ex te natus,
Qui creavit omnia.⁷⁵

Hymnus 90. De beata Maria Virgine recalls several biblical prefigurations of Mary, including the golden throne of God, in these stanzas:

3a. Virginal uterus,
Orchard fountain, well
Of living waters.
3b. Yes, indeed, golden throne,
in which the King of Heaven
Crowned his Son.

3a. Uterus virgineus,
Fons hortorum, puteus
Aquarum viventium,
3b. Immo thronus aureus,
In quo rex aethereus
Coronavit filium.⁷⁶

Hymnus 101. In Assumptione Beatae Mariae Virginis exalts Mary's bodily incorruptibility, for her body having been the throne and bed of the divine King, by rhetorically asking:

5a. Being the throne of the King,
The egregious thalamus
Where the King rested,
5b. Why the one who offered a house
to God, in which He became man,
should be corrupted?

5a. Cum sit thronus regius,
Thalamus egregious,
In quem rex declinavit,
5b. Cur corrumpi debuit,
Quae domum Deo praebuilt
In qua se humanavit.⁷⁷

Hymnus 110. De beata Maria Virgine commends the virginal mother of God for her sublime virtues with various symbolic figures, including Solomon's throne, through these stanzas:

⁷⁵ Hymnus 38. In Visitatione BMV. AHMA 39, 45.

⁷⁶ Hymnus 90. De beata Maria V. AHMA 8, 74. Also published, with the title Hymnus 80. De Beata Maria Virgine, in AHMA 37, 79.

⁷⁷ Hymnus 101. In Assumptione BMV. AHMA 10, 85.

7a. You are Solomon's throne,
 The favorite of the throne of Heaven,
 You are Gideon's Fleece,
 You are the bush of [Moses'] vision.
 7b. You are the bedchamber of modesty,
 You are the balm of the smell,
 You are the Lebanon of candor,
 You are the furnace of burning.

7a. Tu thronus Salomonis,
 Praelata coeli thronis,
 Tu vellus Gedeonis,
 Tu rubus visionis.
 7b. Tu thalamus pudoris,
 Tu balsamus odoris,
 Tu libanus candoris,
 Tu clibanus ardoris.⁷⁸

Hymnus 49. De Annuntiatione Beatae Mariae Virginis mentions several Old Testament figures that anticipate the Virgin, through these stanzas:

3a. The signs of the law are declared:
 This [Mary] is the throne of the
 supreme king,
 The closed door of the Lord.
 3b. The [Aaron's] rod that greens and
 expands,
 That bears fruit without irrigation
 Resembles the Virgin.

3a. Declarantur signa legis,
 Haec est thronus summi regis,
 Porta clausa Domini.
 3b. Virga virens et pertingens,
 Sine rore fructum ferens
 Similatur virgini.⁷⁹

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, abbot of Wessobrunn between 1438 and 1443, in his *Hymnus 14. Super Ave Maria*, extols the Virgin, calling her the ivory throne that God prepared for Himself, with this stanza:

The ivory throne of your womb,
 Ornamented with these [precious]
 stones,
 Becomes the seat of Solomon,
 Who is the true peaceful,
 Just like the magnificent God,
 And the return of the fugitive.

Ventris thronus eburneus,
 Ornatus his lapidibus
 Fit Salomonis sessio,
 Qui est verus pacificus
 Nec non Deus magnificus,
 Ac profugi regressio.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Hymnus 110. De beata Maria V. AHMA 10, 90.

⁷⁹ Hymnus 49. De Annuntiatione BMV. AHMA 8, 48.

⁸⁰ Udalricus Wessofontanus, Hymnus 14. Super Ave Maria. AHMA 6, 46.

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 18. Saluatorium Beatae Mariae Virginis*, requests the saving protection of Mary, whom he designates as the precious throne of the Savior, by indicating:

Hail, Virgin, you are the greening stem
of Jesse, who does not know the
manly bed,
through you the grace of Heaven
is presented to us.
Hail, whose virginal womb
was the ivory throne of Christ,
through you a place in Heaven
be ordered to us.

Ave, virgo, tu virga Jessea
Virens, thori virilis nescia,
Per te nobis superna gratia
Praesentetur.
Ave, cujus venter virgineus
Thronus Christi fuit eburneus,
Per te nobis locus aethereus
Ordinetur.⁸¹

Quite a few paragraphs later in *Hymnus 18*, Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach insists on similar praise, stating:

Oh, Mary, heavenly splendor,
And golden throne,
The whole heavenly court praises you
For eternity.

O Maria, splendor sidereus,
et thronus aureus,
Te conventus laudat aethereus
In aeternum.⁸²

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 24. Centimonium Beatae Virginis. Primae partis*, takes up similar concepts, designating Mary for her virtues as the eburnean throne of God, in these terms:

The ivory throne
Is worthy of the same
to which the title of chastity
Completely adorns,
great in grace
And virtues,
Extraordinarily gifted
With the gold of love.

Ejusdem dignus es
thronus eburneus,
Quem castimoniae
perornat titulus,
Grandis in gratia
atque virtutibus,
Auro praecipue
amoris praeditus.⁸³

⁸¹ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus 18. Saluatorium B.M.V.* AHMA 6, 51.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 53.

⁸³ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus 24. Centimonium Beatae Virginis. Primae partis.* AHMA 6, 78.

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus 50. Rosarium III, IV*, congratulates Mary for having been chosen by God as his magnificent throne, expressing:

Rejoice, oh sincere star,
And shining star,
That the Creator of the universe chose
Like his marvelous throne,
When he offered himself as Savior
At the end of time.

Euge, sidus o sincerum
Sidusque splendiferum,
Quod elegit sator rerum
In thronum mirificum,
Cum in fine se dierum
Praebuit salvificum.⁸⁴

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in his *Hymnus X. Psalterium Primum. Quinquagena II* requests the protection of Mary, stating:

Hail, Virgin, ivory throne
From the King of the angelic hierarchy,
May the infernal enemy not defeat us
In the fight, let oppose yourself.

55. Salve, virgo, thronus eburneus
Regis hierarchiae angelicae,
In conflictu ne nos tartareus
Hostis vincat, te ipsam obice.⁸⁵

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in *Hymnus XII. Psalterium Tertium. Quinquagena I* implores the saving intercession of the mother of the Universal Judge with these emotional supplications:

1. Hail, mother, royal hall, throne and
bedchamber
Of our peaceful King,
Make us submit to the law of the same
Whose temple we wish to be had.
[...]
9. Hail, mother and throne of grace,
With which the hearts of the sad are
consoled,
Appease us to the King of justice,
When the Last Judgment arrives.

1. Ave, regis nostri pacifici
Mater, aula, thronus et thalamus,
Fac nos legi ipsius subici,
Cuius templum haberi cupimus. (159)
[...]
9. Ave, mater et thronus gratiae,
Qua solantur corda maerentium,
Regem nobis placā iustitiae,
Cum finale erit iudicium.⁸⁶ (160)

⁸⁴ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus 50. Rosarium III, IV*. AHMA 6, 162.

⁸⁵ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus X. Psalterium Primum. Quinquagena II*. AHMA 38, 140.

⁸⁶ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus XII. Psalterium Tertium. Quinquagena I*. AHMA 38, 159–160.

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in *Hymnus XIII. Psalterium "Tituli praeconiorum". Secunda Quinquagena* requests the protection of Mary in this stanza:

51. Hail, throne of the King of justice
And mother of grace,
For these your praises
Grant us sponsorships.

51. Ave, regis iustitiae
Thronus et mater gratiae,
Tua per haec praeconia
Nobis fer patrocina.⁸⁷

Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in *Hymnus XIV. Psalterium "Iubilus Beatae Mariae Virginis". Quinquagena I* requires the restorative help of the mother of God in these verses:

Hail, mother of grace,
divine mother,
Main throne of the King
of the heavenly curia,
May this special praise
of your mercy
return us to innocence
And redeem us from evils.

6. Ave, mater gratiae,
Mater divinalis,
Regis caeli curiae
Thronus principalis.
Laus tuae clementiae
Haec nos specialis
Reddat innocentiae,
Redimat a malis.⁸⁸

Finally, Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, in *Hymnus XVII. Psalterium. Quinquagena I* implores the beneficent help of the mother of the Redeemer, expressing:

18. Hail, Virgin, balm of health,
That are the bedchamber of the heavenly Husband,
And his worthiest throne,
Take away our evils, we pray devoutly.
[...]

24. Hail, the worthiest throne of God,
The terrible enemy bothers us
And we failed almost completely,
However, we always trust you.

18. Ave, virgo, salutis balsamus,
Quae es sponsi caelestis thalamus
Atque thronus eius dignissimus,
Mala aufer, devote petimus.
[...]

24. Ave, thronus Dei dignissimus,
Inimicus nos vexat pessimus,
Et omnino quasi deficimus,
De te tamen semper confidimus.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus XIII. Psalterium "Tituli praeconiorum". Secunda Quinquagena*. AHMA 38, 174.

⁸⁸ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus XIV. Psalterium "Iubilus BHV". Quinquagena I*. AHMA 38, 182.

⁸⁹ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus XVII. Psalterium. Quinquagena I*. AHMA 38, 229.

15th–16th centuries hymns

From an imprecise date between the 15th and 16th centuries we have documented these two hymns:

Hymnus 56. Horae beatae Mariae Virginis. Ad Primam celebrates the mother of God for her excellent virtues through these rhymes:

Hail, throne of divinity,	1. Salve, thronus deitatis,
Ark full of holiness,	Arca plena sanctitatis,
with rosaceous beauty,	Venustate rosea,
Hail, mirror of the saints,	Salve, speculum sanctorum,
Mother of the King of heaven,	Mater regis supernorum,
Of igneous charity.	Caritate ignea. ⁹⁰

Hymnus XVI. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena exalts the Virgin for the sublimity of her person, indicating:

25. Hail, house of the Lord,	25. Ave, domus Domini,
eternal decorum,	decor aeternalis,
whom the singular honor	Cuius est in gloria
is in glory,	honor singularis,
the one who is equal to the Father	Quae in Dei filio
in the Son of God,	patri est aequalis
and is the Holy Spirit's	Et est sancti spiritus
triumphant throne.	thronus triumphalis. ⁹¹

Undated hymns

From an unknown date we have registered the following two hymns that allude to the metaphors under study:

Hymnus 90. Jubilus de singulis membris Beatae Mariae Virginis exalts the virginal mother of God in these rhymes:

⁹⁰ Hymnus 56. Horae beatae Mariae V. Ad Primam. AHMA 30, 124.

⁹¹ Hymnus XVI. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena. AHMA 35, 241.

15. Hail, virgin conjugal bed,
Fragrant and royal cell,
Throne of Wisdom,
Solomon's flowery bed,
Gideon's fleece getting wet,
Palace of justice.

15. Salve, thorus virginalis,
Cella flagrans et regalis,
Thronus sapientiae,
Lectus florens Salomonis,
Vellus madens Gedeonis,
Thalamus justitiae.⁹²

Hymnus 59. (44.) De Beata Maria Virgine sings the mother of God through these metaphoric figures:

Ladder and throne of God, brightness
of the orb, gate of heaven,
Hail, mother of Christ, ladder and
throne of God

Scala thronusque Dei, nitor orbis,
ianua caeli,
Mater, ave, Christi, scala thronusque
Dei.⁹³

2. An approach to the Marian iconography of the *thronus Dei*

After exposing the concepts developed by the Eastern and Western Church Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers on the metaphor *thronus Dei* and other analogous symbolic tropes mentioned above, we will show in section 2 that these doctrinal concepts are reflected directly and essentially in some images of the Virgin with Child. Therefore, we will now show a small selection –from among the huge set of similar artistic works– of ten paintings and sculptures from the 12th–15th centuries in which Mary is represented as the throne of God. We will analyze these works of art in strict chronological order to see if any evolution is perceived in their compositional narrative and/or conceptual treatment.

Before beginning the iconographic analysis of the ten paintings and sculptures we have selected, we believe it is necessary to emphasize that our interpretation according to which they all represent the Virgin Mary as “the throne of God” seems reasonably justified based on these two complementary facts. First, from a purely objective-visual point of view, in all of them the divine Child appears seated on the thighs or lap of his seated mother Mary or supported by her arms, as if he were “enthroned” on her, in a position that clearly shows her

⁹² Hymnus 90. Jubilus de singulis membris BMV. AHMA 15, 110.

⁹³ Hymnus 59. (44.) De Beata Maria V. AHMA 48, 57.

to be the true support or “throne” of God the Son (*thronus Dei*). Secondly, the numerous testimonies from Eastern and Western Church Fathers and medieval theologians, and especially Latin liturgical hymnographers, we have explained in the preceding section demonstrate that for over a millennium all this Christian thinkers agreed in designating the Virgin Mary as the throne of God due to her privileged status as the virginal mother of God the Son. Therefore, the synthetic relationship between these doctrinal texts and these Marian images allows us to consider reasonably justified the iconographic interpretations that we will give about them, when we affirm that these ten Marian images are the *visual metaphors* that illustrate the *textual metaphor* of the Virgin Mary as *thronus Dei*.

This French carving *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca.1150–1200, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 1)⁹⁴ –whose rigidity, somatic and facial inexpressiveness, frontality, monoaxial symmetry, and serialized treatment



Fig. 1. Anonymous French sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca.1150–1200. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

of the draperies reveal its Romanesque style—perfectly illustrates the *thronus Dei* metaphor. The Virgin Mary appears rigidly seated on a chair in a frontal position while her little Son is seated on her lap as if she were his throne. Thus, the testimonies of the medieval Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers become evident when they affirm that the Virgin Mary became the throne of God (*thronus Dei*) and the seat of divine Wisdom (*sedes Sapientiae*) because God the Son settled/resided for nine months (of pregnancy) in Mary’s virginal womb. With her double gesture of protecting and exhibiting her divine Son “enthroned” in her lap, the Virgin shows in this sculpture at the same time her co-redemptive function, having given birth and having brought the divine Redeemer before humanity. Not in vain, the Child adopts the pose of the future Panto-

⁹⁴ Anonymous French sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, c. 1150–1200, walnut with gesso, 68.6 × 28.6 × 27.9 cm. Coll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471853> Public domain

crator/Universal Judge of the Last Judgment, with the double gesture of holding the book of the Law with his left hand and blessing or cursing with his right hand.

This beautiful Spanish ivory carving *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1200–50, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 2)⁹⁵ –with a proto-Gothic treatment of partial naturalism– is another perfect iconographic model of *thronus Dei*. Also, the Virgin rests on a seat while her Child appears frontally “enthroned” on her mother’s lap. She holds an apple in her right hand (a symbol of original sin in the Earthly Paradise) to mark her parallelism/antithesis with Eve, the origin of sin and death, as she now becomes the New Eve, who gives birth to the Redeemer, who brings us grace and eternal life. This role of New Eve is reinforced here by the fact that Mary steps on a reptile (the devil) with both feet, in allusion to Jahwe’s promise in *Genesis*, when he curses the tempting serpent, saying: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”⁹⁶ In turn, the Child appears “enthroned” over his mother (on her womb, which was his “throne” on which he rested during the nine months of her pregnancy), while the terrestrial globe in his left hand and his gesture of blessing/cursing with his right hand outline his future role as enthroned Pantocrator/Universal Judge.



Fig. 2. Anonymous Spanish sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1200–50. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

⁹⁵ Anonymous Spanish sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, c. 1200–50, ivory, 13.2 × 5.4 × 3.7 cm, Coll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/470005> Public domain.

⁹⁶ “Inimicitias ponam inter te et mulierem,
Et semen tuum et semen illius.
Ipsa conteret caput tuum,
Et tu insidiaberis calcaneo eius.” (Gén 3: 15. *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*. Nova Editio, Madrid, Biblioteca de Sautores Cristianos, 12th ed., 2005, 4).



Fig. 3. Anonymous German sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1280. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

This German Proto-Gothic carving *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1280, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York (Fig. 3)⁹⁷ is another outstanding example of a Virgin/throne of God. With greater facial and bodily expressiveness and with greater naturalism in the treatment of clothing and anatomical proportions than in the two preceding exemplars just analyzed, this smiling seated Virgin holds her divine Child “enthroned” on her left thigh. He seems to be playing with his tiny earthly orb in his right hand, alluding to his status as King of the Universe and Universal Judge. The circumstance that the right arm of the Virgin and the left of Jesus have disappeared prevents us from guessing what gestures and/or objects both hands had, thus making its doctrinal interpretation impossible. However, the fact that the Virgin crushes two dragons/devils with her throne

seems to illustrate the sentence of Psalms 91:13, which firmly states: “You will tread on the lion and the cobra; you will trample the great lion and the serpent.”⁹⁸

The Gothic panel *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1345–50, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York by an anonymous Bohemian painter (Fig. 4)⁹⁹ displays the iconographic model we study with even greater eloquence and communicative effectiveness than in the three preceding cases. Here, the Vir-

⁹⁷ Anonymous German sculptor, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1280, oak with paint, 128.3 × 48.3 × 41.6 cm. Coll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/463785> Public domain

⁹⁸ Ps 91:13. Bible. New International Version. Online <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ps+91%3A13&version=NIV>. “Super aspidem et basiliscum ambulabis, et conculcabis leonem et draconem.” (Ps 90 (91): 13. Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam. Nova Editio, Madrid. Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 12th ed., 2005, 531).

⁹⁹ Anonymous Bohemian painter, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, c. 1345–50, Oil (?) and gold on wood, 25.8 × 20.2 × 1.1 cm. Coll. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Photo The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York <https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/838076> Public domain

gin Mary, richly dressed and wearing a huge golden crown as the Queen of Heaven appears seated on a throne embedded in a niche in the shape of a luxurious two-story palace. She protects her divine Child and looks at him tenderly while keeping him seated on her lap, thus serving him as *thronus Dei* and *sedes Sapientiae*. In this way, the painter illustrates the doctrinal meanings that the medieval Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers highlighted when referring to Mary as the throne of divinity.

In the tiny panel (15.5 × 11.4 cm) *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, ca. 1433, from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (fig. 5),¹⁰⁰ the Flemish master Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1399/1400–1464) offers an exquisite interpretation of the iconographic type we are analyzing. The Virgin, with a splendid gold crown, appears seated on a throne shaped as a Gothic apsidal niche, decorated with sculptures of prophets on the jambs and high reliefs with scenes from the life of Mary and Jesus and the Coronation of the Virgin on the frieze on top. According to the *Virgo lactans* type, Mary is breastfeeding



Fig. 4. Anonymous Bohemian painter, *Enthroned Virgin and Child*, ca. 1345–50. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York



Fig. 5. Rogier van der Weyden, *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, ca. 1433. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

¹⁰⁰ Rogier van der Weyden, *Virgin and Child Enthroned*, c. 1433, oil on panel, 15,5 × 11,4 cm. Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid. Photo Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid <https://www.museothyssen.org/en/collection/artists/weyden-roger-van-der/virgin-and-child-enthroned>. Public domain



Fig. 6. Fra Angelico, *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1440. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

her Child to reinforce the idea of being the begetting, nurturing, and sustaining mother (seat = throne) of her divine Son. It is not in vain that the Child appears here half-seated on the right arm of the Virgin, as if she were his “throne.” Van der Weyden thus brings to light the diverse meanings that the multi-secular patristic, theological, and liturgical tradition established when referring to the metaphor *thronus Dei*.

In the lunette-shaped panel *Madonna and Child*, ca. 1440, from the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam (Fig. 6),¹⁰¹ Fra Angelico (1395–1455) offers a simple version of the theme of Mary as the throne of God. Sitting on a low canopied throne, the Virgin keeps her divine Child seated on her left arm.

At the same time, she carries in her right hand a lily stem, which, more than representing Mary’s chastity, symbolizes, on the contrary, her virginal divine motherhood, as we have demonstrated in other studies.¹⁰² For his part, the Child, haloed with his golden cruciferous nimbus, gently caresses his mother’s cheek with his right hand and her breast with his left, as if asking to be breastfed, in a double gesture that indicates his need for protection and sustenance (seat=throne) by his Mother. In any case, it is logical to assume

¹⁰¹ Fra Angelico, *Madonna and Child*, c. 1440, tempera and gold on panel, 74 × 52 cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam. Photo Wikipedia: https://de.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Datei:Fra_Angelico_-_Madonna_van_Nederigheid_001.JPG Public domain.

¹⁰² We have explained the Mariological and Christological meanings of this lily stem in the following papers: “Flos de radice Iesse. Aproximación hermenéutica al motivo del lirio en la pintura gótica española de La Anunciación a la luz de fuentes patrísticas y teológicas”, *Eikón Imago* 2/2, (2013), 183–222; “Flos campi et lilium convallium. Third interpretation of the lily in the iconography of The Annunciation in Italian Trecento art from patristic and theological sources”, *Eikón Imago* 3/1 (2014), 75–96; “In virga Aaron Maria ostendebatur. A new interpretation of the stem of lilies in the Spanish Gothic Annunciation from patristic and theological sources”, *De Medio Aevo* 5/2 (2016), 117–144.

that the cultured Dominican friar and priest Fra Angelico knew perfectly well the doctrinal meanings manifested by the multi-secular patristic, theological, and liturgical tradition when interpreting the metaphorical designation of the Virgin Mary as *thronus Dei*. These meanings are ignored by some commentators on this work, such as John Pope-Hennessy.¹⁰³

In this *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1440, from the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC (Fig. 7),¹⁰⁴ Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1469) offers a simplified version of the topic under study. Framed by an apse niche whose upper quarter sphere takes the shape of a shell – a symbol of femininity related to Venus – the three-quarter figure of the Virgin suggests her seated position on a domed throne. Delicately pro-



Fig. 7. Fra Filippo Lippi, *Virgin and Child*, ca. 1440. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC

protected by his mother, the Child appears sitting on a curb, which seems to be an analogy of the Virgin's legs, as if implying that Jesus is sitting on the legs of Mary, defined as the throne of God. After all, the cultured Carmelite friar and priest Fra Filippo Lippi was well-aware of the ancient tradition established by the concordant testimonies of the Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers on the symbolic identification of the Virgin Mary as *thronus Dei*. This doctrinal significance is ignored by the commentators we know of this work,

¹⁰³ John Pope-Hennessy, *Fra Angelico*, London, Phaidon, 1974, 220.

¹⁰⁴ Fra Filippo Lippi, *Virgin and Child*, c. 1440, tempera on panel, 79 × 51.1 cm. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Photo The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC <https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.433.html> Public domain.



Fig. 8. Hans Memling, *Virgin Enthroned with Child and Angel*, ca. 1480. Gemäldegalerie. Berlin.

such as Bernard Berenson,¹⁰⁵ Adolfo Venturi,¹⁰⁶ Giuseppe Marchini,¹⁰⁷ Jeffrey Ruda,¹⁰⁸ and Megan Holmes.¹⁰⁹

In the panel *Virgin Enthroned with Child and Angel*, ca. 1480, from the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (Fig. 8),¹¹⁰ Hans Memling (ca. 1436–1494) brings a refined version of the topic under study. Following the highly realistic vision typical of the Flemish school of the 15th century, Memling stages the topic in a luxurious bourgeois residence with splendid furniture and generously open to the landscape. The very human Virgin appears seated on an attractive marble semi-detached throne, whose backrest is a brocade tapestry, and her seat is an oriental rug, while on the right side of the painting, a domed metal vase with

lilies stands out, a vase whose crucial symbolic meaning we have explained in another context.¹¹¹ Mary holds utterly naked in her arms his Son, who tries to take the red carnation (symbol of her future Passion), which an angel offers

¹⁰⁵ Bernard Berenson, *The Florentine Painters of the Renaissance*, 2nd ed. New York and London, Putnam, 1900, 123.

¹⁰⁶ Adolfo Venturi, *Storia dell'arte italiana*. Vol. VII, *La pittura del Quattrocento*. Parte II, Milano, Hoepli, 1913, 374, 378.

¹⁰⁷ Giuseppe Marchini, Filippo Lippi. Milan, Electa, 1975, 98, 208.

¹⁰⁸ Jeffrey Ruda, *Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work with a complete catalogue*. London: Phaidon Press, 1993, 53, 182, 186, 244–245, 254, 406, 408–409, 434, 436.

¹⁰⁹ Megan Holmes, *Fra Filippo Lippi. The Carmelite Painter*. New Haven–London: Yale University Press, 1999, 147, 248 n. 71, 269 n. 109.

¹¹⁰ Hans Memling, *Virgin Enthroned with Child and Angel*, c. 1480, oil on panel, 66 × 46,5 cm. Gemäldegalerie. Berlin. Photo Wikipedia https://fr.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fichier:Hans_Memling_-_Virgin_Enthroned_with_Child_and_Angel_-_WGA14913.jpg Public domain

¹¹¹ We have studied the symbolism of this vase in this Marian event in the paper “The Vase in Paintings of the Annunciation, a Polyvalent Symbol of the Virgin Mary”, *Religions* 13 (12), 1188 (2022), 1–43.

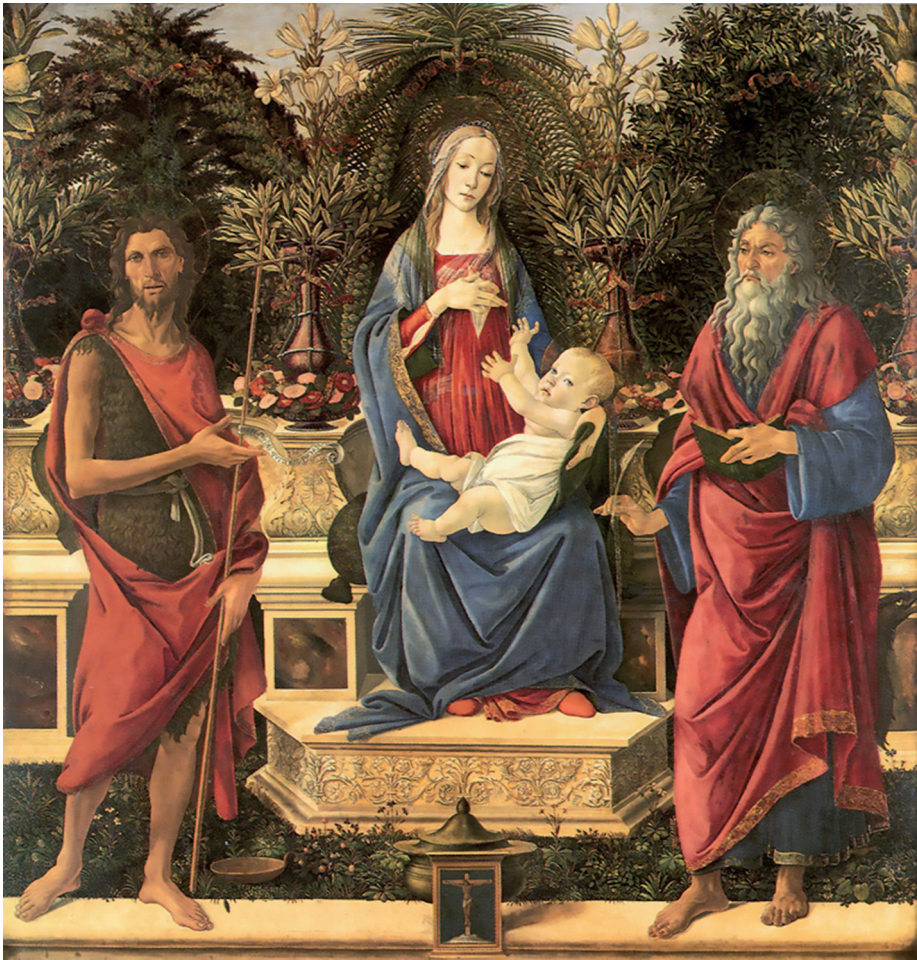


Fig. 9. Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna Bardi*, ca. 1485. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin

him. The posture of Jesus sitting on Mary's arms undoubtedly manifests her as a symbolic throne of God. This doctrinal symbolism has gone unnoticed by Erwin Panofsky.¹¹²

In the *Madonna Bardi*, ca. 1485, from the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin (Fig. 9),¹¹³ Sandro Botticelli (1445–1510) presents a complex version of the subject under

¹¹² Erwin Panofsky, *Les Primitifs Flamands*, Paris: Hazan, 2010 [1953], 637.

¹¹³ Sandro Botticelli, *Madonna Bardi*, c. 1485, tempera on panel, 185 × 180 cm. Gemäldegalerie, Berlin. Photo Wikipedia, https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Madonna_Bardi#/media/File:Botticelli,_madonna_bardi_01.jpg Public domain



Fig. 10. Giovanni Bellini, *San Giobbe Altarpiece* (*Pala di San Giobbe*), ca. 1487. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice

study. Mary is seated on a marble throne richly decorated with phytomorphic reliefs, uncovering her left breast to breastfeed her child, whom she holds in her lap. On both sides of the protagonist couple, Saint John the Baptist, with his staff and camel skin, and Saint John the Evangelist, with his book (Gospel) and his pen, stand out, performing the iconographic type of the *Sacra Conversazione*.

There is no interest now in stopping to explain the symbolic meanings that underlie the different species of plants and flowers in the three vegetal niches that frame the characters. What is essential here is to bring to light the double facet that the Virgin exhibits in this painting, first as a nurturing mother and protector of her divine Child and, above all, as his seat/throne (*thronus Dei*).

In *San Giobbe Altarpiece* (*Pala di San Giobbe*), ca. 1487, from the Gallerie dell'Accademia in Venice (Fig. 10),¹¹⁴ Giovanni Bellini (1430–1516) shows a splendid version of the theme under study, complemented by the iconographic type of the *Sacra Conversazione*. The painter stages the event in a coffered vaulted nave with an apse with a quarter-sphere cap decorated with brilliant mosaics. In this monumental setting, Mary appears seated on a high, luxurious marble throne, holding her naked Child on her right thigh, while three angel musicians play their instruments on the throne's steps. On both sides, in *Sacra Conversazione* with Mary and Jesus, the saints Francis of

¹¹⁴ Giovanni Bellini, *San Giobbe Altarpiece* (*Pala di San Giobbe*), c. 1487, oil on panel, 471 cm × 258 cm. Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice. Photo Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/San_Giobbe_Altarpiece Public domain

Assisi, John the Baptist, and Job, to the left of the painting, and on the right the saints Dominic of Guzman, Sebastian, and Louis of Toulouse, stand with respectful attitudes. It is interesting again to highlight that this brilliant representation of Mary as the throne of God undoubtedly responds to the desire to highlight the Mariological and Christological meanings that, for almost a millennium, the Fathers, theologians, and liturgical hymnographers of Eastern and Western Churches unanimously discovered, by metaphorically designating the Virgin Mary as *thronus Dei*.

Conclusions

At the end of this research, we believe it is legitimate to draw the following conclusions:

- 1) For over six centuries, many Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches agreed to designate the Virgin Mary with the *thronus Dei* metaphor or other similar symbolic figures alluding to containers or supports of divinity.
- 2) With such analogies, these Christian thinkers want to signify the virginal divine motherhood of Mary, in the sense that God chose her to become a seat in which his divine Son could be conceived as a man and settle during the nine months of her gestation.
- 3) Furthermore, these interpretations of the Eastern and Western Fathers and theologians were assumed by numerous Latin poets, who between the 10th and 15th centuries wrote countless liturgical hymns, in many of whose stanzas they designated the Virgin with the metaphorical figure “throne of God,” or some similar symbolic tropes, alluding to elements that contain or sustain divinity.
- 4) In turn, many painters and sculptors in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance represented the Virgin Mary in a seated position, with her divine Child sitting on her lap, or thighs, or held in her arms, as if he were “enthroned” on his mother, who seems to manifest herself as the throne of God.
- 5) From the comparative analysis between the patristic, theological, and liturgical texts that interpret Mary as the throne of God and the pictorial and sculptural images analyzed, we can infer that the later clearly illustrate as *visual metaphors* the exegetical tradition established for almost a thousand years by the texts of the Eastern and Western Fathers, theologians, and hymnographers when they identify the Virgin Mary through the *textual metaphor thronus Dei*.

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