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EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Clean Hands Are Not Enough: Lectio Divina for Novices in the Mérode Annunciation

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Abstract. Iconographic analysis of *The Mérode Annunciation* has traditionally ignored how the medieval mind forged chains of memory prompts to expand meditation. Even the recent focus on devotional themes has largely failed to accommodate the mental process of meditation itself. The meditating mind prefers to move smoothly between prompts so that it can take full advantage of recollection – a mental process hampered by discursive analysis. Recollection retrieves stored memories and then links them in a continuous chain of meaning. The Campin workshop used embellishments – including placement, color and materials – to enhance the ductus of the Annunciate reading sacred scripture with clean hands and a pure heart. Such mnemonics are open-ended and multilayered within the framework of a specific devotional theme. They are metaphorical steps available to all who hope to conceive Christ spiritually and receive the blessings of eternal life.
Keywords: Flemish Primitives; Mérode Altarpiece; Annunciation; Virgin Mary; Lay Devotion; Meditation; Lectio Divina; Mnemonics; Disguised Symbolism; Cryptography.

[es] Las manos limpias no bastan: Lectio Divina para las novicias en la Anunciación Mérode

Resumen. El análisis iconográfico de *La Anunciación Mérode* ha ignorado tradicionalmente cómo la mente medieval forjó cadenas de mensajes de memoria para expandir la meditación. Incluso el enfoque reciente en temas devocionales ha fallado en gran medida en adaptarse al proceso mental de la meditación en sí. La mente que medita prefiere moverse suavemente entre las indicaciones para poder aprovechar al máximo el recuerdo, un proceso mental obstaculizado por el análisis discursivo. El recuerdo recupera los recuerdos almacenados y luego los vincula en una cadena continua de significado. El taller de Campin usó adornos, incluida la ubicación, el color y los materiales, para realzar el conducto de la Anunciada leyendo las Sagradas Escrituras con manos limpias y un corazón puro. Tales mnemotécnicos son abiertos y de múltiples capas dentro del marco de un tema devocional específico. Son pasos metafóricos al alcance de todos los que esperan concebir a Cristo espiritualmente y recibir las bendiciones de la vida eterna.
Palabras clave: Primitivos flamencos; Retablo Mérode; Anunciación; Virgen María; devoción laica; meditación; Lectio Divina; mnemotecnia; simbolismo disfrazado; criptografía.

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1. Introduction

The central panel of the *Mérode Altarpiece* by the Tournai workshop of Robert Campin (ca. 1375–1444) (Fig. 1)[2] is often cited as one of the first Annunciations to take place in a contemporary home decorated with everyday objects that might, or might not, have a hidden

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[2] The Workshop of Robert Campin. Central Panel. *Annunciation Triptych* (Mérode Altarpiece). ca. 1427. Oil on oak. 64.1x63.2 cm. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Triptych_(Merode_Altarpiece)_MET_DT7253.jpg (accessed on 2 June 2022). public domain.

agenda.[3] The outsized figures, elemental colors, vivid details, steep perspective and abrupt shifts in viewpoint sacralize the late-medieval solar, or private sitting room, where God became man.[4] Instead of beginning with the angel Gabriel and his good news, we will start our walk through the Mérode Annunciation with the Virgin Mary and her spiritual conception of Christ. Mnemonic embellishments, such as the devotional texts, the smoking candle and the jug of lilies, will help us climb a metaphorical ladder to heaven – the ladder of sacred reading known as lectio divina.[5]

Fig. 1. The Workshop of Robert Campin. Central Panel. *Annunciation Triptych* (*Mérode Altarpiece*). c. 1427. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Wikipedia Commons

Erwin Panofsky –the eminent art historian who admired the author Conan Doyle and his detective Sherlock Holmes– viewed embellishments as clues in a mystery story.[6] More recently, art historians have dodged the controversy surrounding Panofsky's theory of disguised symbolism by focusing on the Mérode *Triptych as a tool of devotion.*[7] This focus on meditation rather than biblical commentary has led to more rewarding sources for the painting's symbolism, including the *Ladder of Monks* by the twelfth-century Carthusian, Prior Guigo II

[3] Luke 1:26-38. The Douay-Rheims translation of the Vulgate will be used throughout this paper. The interior of the triptych's central panel was the first clear statement of the domestic theme that would dominate Annunciation iconography for nearly two centuries in the Low Countries and Germany: David M. Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,» *The Art Bulletin* 18, no. 4 (1936): 503-504, note 73. The Annunciation Triptych was a group effort that merged the visual imagination of Rogier van der Weyden (1400-1464) and the clerical expertise of Jacques Daret (1404-1470) under the aegis of Robert Campin. According to dendrochronological analysis, the Annunciation panel was painted around 1427. Several years later, the votary and carpenter wings were probably commissioned by the buyer of the central panel. Some experts believe that the Annunciation and carpenter panels were the work of the same master. Most agree that the votary panel was painted by a different artist. For the problem of attribution in a workshop setting and issues specific to the Mérode Triptych, see: Stephan Kemperdick and Jochen Sander, *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier Van Der Weyden: An Exhibition Organized by the Städel Museum, Frankfurt Am Main, and the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin* (Ostfildern, DE: Hatje Cantz, 2009), 149-160, 192-201.

[4] The solar was a family sitting room usually on the top floor of wealthy homes in England and France. The name comes from the Latin words for sun or *sol* and alone or *solus*: Katherine L. French, *Household Goods and Good Households in Late Medieval London: Consumption and Domesticity After the Plague* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 23-25.

[5] The medieval mind's path through a work of art was a process of recollection. For the rhetorical concept of embellishments or *colores*, see: Mary Carruthers, "The Concept of Ductus, or Journeying Through a Work of Art," in *Rhetoric Beyond Words: Delight and Persuasion in the Arts of the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary Carruthers (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010): 198-206. For the ductus of walking through a building, see: Elizabeth Carson Pastan, "Representing Architecture in the Altarpiece: Fictions, Strategies, and Mysteries," in *Quid est sacramentum?: Visual Representation of Sacred Mysteries in Early Modern Europe, 1400–1700*, eds. Ralph Dekoninck et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019): 227-260.

[6] William S. Heckscher, „Erwin Panofsky: A Curriculum Vitae,» *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 28, no. 1 (1969): 19; and Michael Ann Holly, "Witnessing an Annunciation," in *Past Looking, Historical Imagination and the Rhetoric of the Image* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1996), 151-166.

[7] For the first published use of the term "disguised symbolism" and its application to the Mérode *Annunciation*, see: Erwin Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting: It's Origins and Character* I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 141-143. For a critique of Panofsky's theory and the use of vernacular texts to guide lay devotion, see: Reindert Falkenburg, „The Household of the Soul: Conformity in the Mérode Triptych,» in *Early Netherlandish Painting at the Crossroads: a Critical Look at Current Methodologies*, ed. Maryan Wynn Ainsworth (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2001): 2-17. For a more recent discussion of disguised symbolism, see: Bastian Eclercy, "On Mousetraps and Firescreens: The Problem of "Disguised Symbolism" in Early Netherlandish Painting," in *The Master of Flémalle and Rogier Van Der Weyden: An Exhibition Organized by the Städel Museum, Frankfurt Am Main, and the Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen, Berlin*, eds. Stephan Kemperdick et al. (Ostfildern, DE: Hatje Cantz, 2009): 133-148.

(died 1188/93), and the *Mountain of Contemplation* by the fifteenth-century theologian, Chancellor John Gerson (1363-1429).[8] New approaches to the analysis of symbols in Northern Renaissance painting, such as memory chains and parallel narratives, have also advanced our understanding of how everyday objects were used to shape devotion.[9] Campin broke with tradition when he chose the moment before *Ave to stress the importance of reading holy scripture with a pure heart.*[10] "Hands clean of evil deeds" were not enough to see God.[11] Novices were prompted to climb a figurative ladder to Heaven[12] (Fig. 2).[13] Guigo's ladder had four rungs – reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation:[14][15]

Fig. 2a-2b. Detail. Virginal Snails Climbing the Ladder to Heaven. In the *St. Omer Book of Hours*. ca. 1311-1325. London: British Library, Add MS 36684, fol. 61v. Page and detail

Reading is the careful study of the Scriptures, concentrating all of one's powers on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one's own reason for knowledge of hidden truth. Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness.[14]

A democratized form of *lectio* divina, or sacred reading, that became popular in the late Middle Ages provides the persuasive frame missing from earlier analyses of the *Mérode Annunciation.*[15] Seated on

[8] Guigo II was the ninth prior of the Grande Chartreuse, when he wrote his letter to Brother Gervais on the contemplative life. For an English translation, see: Guigo II, *The Ladder of Monks and Twelve Meditations*, trans. Edmund Colledge et al. (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1981), 67-86. The *Ladder of Monks* (*Scala claustralium*, *Scala Paradisi* and *Epistola de vita contemplativa*) was a Latin classic on spiritual exercise widely available in vernacular translations: Karl Baier, "Meditation and Contemplation in High to Late Medieval Europe," *Sitzungsberichte-Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-Historische Klasse* 794 (2009): 330-335. Gerson's Mountain of Contemplation was written in Middle French for his sisters, who chose to cloister at home: Jean Gerson, "The Mountain of Contemplation,» in *Jean Gerson: Early Works*, trans. Brian Patrick McGuire (New York/Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1998): 75-127. For Gerson's devotional manual as conduct literature for women, see: Robert L. A. Clark, "Constructing the Female Subject in Late Medieval Devotion,» in *Medieval Conduct*, eds. Kathleen M. Ashley et al. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001): 164-166. During the late Middle Ages, both clerics and laypeople began to rethink the distinction between the contemplative and active life. Devout individuals with leisure time who could read vernacular began to embrace the mixed life of prayer and work, which had previously been the exclusive domain of monks and nuns. *Lectio divina* or sacred reading shifted from public recitation in the choir to silent meditation in the heart: Glenn D. Burger, *Conduct Becoming: Good Wives and Husbands in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), 34-43.

[9] Based on the medieval art of memory, John Decker has articulated several tools developed by Netherlandish artists to frame and guide devotion during the late Gothic period: John R. Decker, «'By Stages Towards What We Mean to Say:' Diegetic Rupture as a Tool of Devotion,» *Word & Image* 36, no. 3 (2020): 284-298; and "Guides Who Know the Way," in *Audience and Reception in the Early Modern Period*, eds. John R. Decker et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 2022): 574-627. For additional information on *catenae*, or memory chains, see "Fishing for Thought" in: Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400-1200* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112-115.

[10] For Campbell's hypothesis that both the Brussels and Mérode Annunciations were based on a Campin design for a relief installed in the Tournai town hall around 1424, see: Lorne Campbell, "Robert Campin, the Master of Flémalle and the Master of Mérode," *The Burlington Magazine* 116, no. 860 (November, 1974): 644, note 79. The underdrawings of the two Annunciations indicate that the Brussels panel – a workshop piece – served as a model for the central panel of the Mérode Triptych by Robert Campin. The Brussels panel was copied almost exclusively in Westphalia, which argues that the earlier Annunciation was originally housed in that area: J. R. J. van Asperen de Boer, Jeltje Dijkstra, R. van Schoute, C. M. A. Dalderup and J. P. Filedt Kok, "Underdrawing in Paintings of the Rogier van der Weyden and Master of Flémalle Groups," *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 41 (1990): 48, 97-102 (Brussels), 103-116 (Mérode).

[11] Guigo, *Ladder*, 70. Because sea snails were thought to be impregnated by dew, the three snails slowly climbing the ladder to heaven in Fig. 2 might have been viewed as symbols of virginity: Helen S. Ettlinger, "The Virgin Snail,» *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41, no. 1 (1978): 316.

[12] For Jacob's dream of a stairway to and from heaven, see: Genesis 28:10-22.

[13] Detail. Virginal Snails Climbing the Ladder to Heaven. In the St. Omer Book of Hours. ca. 1311-1325. Tempera, ink and gold on parchment. 155 x 105 mm. London: British Library, Add MS 36684, fol. 61v. © British Library, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_36684_f061v (accessed on 2 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[14] Guigo, *Ladder*, 68.

[15] *Lectio divina* was fundamental to monastic life. Although the number and arrangement of steps varied, the four rungs outlined in the *Ladder of Monks* by Guigo II anticipated one of the most popular methods taught to pious laymen during the late Middle Ages: Duncan Robertson, *Lectio Divina: The Medieval Experience of Reading* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 224-230; and Baier, "Meditation," 335-337. In the *Didascalicon*, Hugh of St. Victor noted the first three steps of spiritual reading, but did not include contemplation, because the vast majority of devout souls could only hope to see God after death: Laura Sterponi, "Reading and Meditation in the Middle Ages: Lectio Divina and Books of Hours,» *Text & Talk* 28, no. 5 (September, 2008): 669-674. For more on the democratization of *lectio divina* in the late Middle Ages and the pervasive use of ladder imagery in the visual arts of the Low Countries, see: Ingrid Falque, *Devotional Portraiture and Spiritual Experience in Early Netherlandish Painting* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 167-206.

the ground next to a wooden bench, the Virgin Mary studies the gilded pages of her book with a pure and humble heart. She wears a white chemise under a red dress edged with gold – the respective colors of purity, charity and humility.[16] Her soul aglow, Mary is ready to conceive the Word of God in her virginal womb. Seen from a bird's eye or heavenly point of view, the table between Gabriel and Mary is set with memory prompts to guide novices up the heavenly ladder.[17] The delivery of Gabriel's message has been interrupted and the tabletop tilted forward to focus attention on the devotional texts, the smoking candle and the jug of lilies.[18]

2. The Measured Mind

Despite the Campin workshop's efforts to draw attention to the tabletop, which could be flipped to become the back of a chair, it has received almost no attention from art historians.[19] Carla Gottlieb speculated that the tabletop was a Hebrew altar whose facets referred to the sixteen prophets in the Old Testament.[20] Based on devotional literature of the period, Reindert Falkenburg located the table in the house of the soul, but made no comment on its shape.[21] The sixteen-sided polygon might refer to an insoluble geometric problem called squaring the circle with a straightedge and compass. No matter how many times the square rotates within the circle creating first an octagon, then a hexadecagon and so forth, the perimeter of the finite polygon never coincides with the circumference of the infinite circle[22] (Fig. 3).[23]

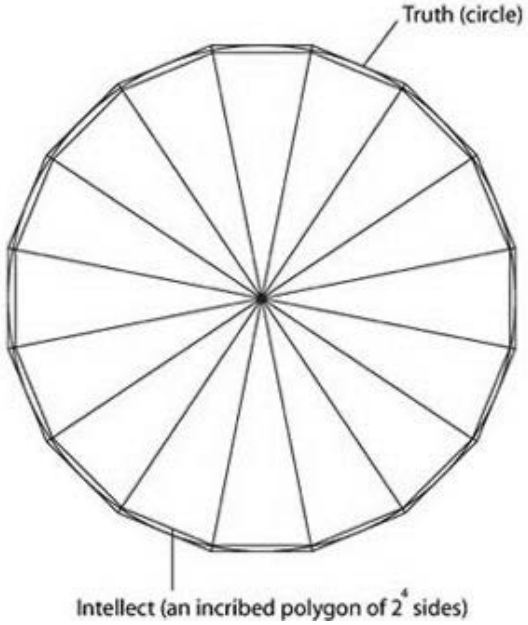

Fig. 3. Nicolas of Cusa. Geometric Illustration of Intellect Encircled by Truth. In *On the Quadrature of the Circle* by William F. Wertz, Jr. (fig. 1). © Schiller Institute

Many theologians likened this mystery to the Incarnation – the paradox of two natures, one divine and the other human, united in the person of Jesus Christ. Although the metaphor seems cold and abstract, Dante chose to end his *Divine Comedy* with the image of a geometer squaring the circle to express the limits of human reason:

> And as a geometer,
> obsessed to square the circle,
> can't see,

[16] Because gold was esteemed as the most noble metal, it was linked with humility, the most noble virtue. For gold as a symbol of power, wisdom, wealth, sunlight and sanctity, see one of the first two books on heraldic color symbolism published in Europe during the fifteenth century: Roy Osborne, *Renaissance Colour Symbolism* (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press, Inc., 2019), 20-23. In the left wing of the *Sacraments Altarpiece* by Rogier van der Weyden (Royal Museum of Fine Arts, Antwerp), the white angel is a symbol of faith and the sacrament of Baptism, because holy water purifies the soul. The red angel stands for twofold charity, which burns with the love of God and neighbor. Likewise, red signifies the sacrament of Penance, because Christ shed his blood to redeem our sins. The gold angel is a symbol of divine love as well as the sacrament of Confirmation, because the wisdom of pious and just men is more precious than riches (Proverbs 3:13-18): Maurice Basil McNamee, *Vested Angels: Eucharistic Allusions in Early Netherlandish Paintings* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 1998), 229-231.

[17] Decker analyzed the use of memory prompts to perfect the soul in an *Annunciation* by Joos van Cleve (ca. 1485-1541), which was painted one hundred years after the Mérode Triptych: Decker, "Guides," 574-582, 607-609.

[18] In addition to the steep perspective of the *Annunciation*, the figures in the central and right panels of the Mérode Triptych crowd their respective interiors. Such spatial distortions interrupt narrative flows, draw attention to multilayered content and facilitate contemplative expansion: Decker, "By Stages," 294-295.

[19] Combination furniture was common in Northern Europe during the fifteenth century. The polygonal table in the Mérode *Annunciation* resembles seventeenth-century English chair-tables with round tops and cleated feet: Courtney Knapp, "Chair-Tables: A History and Evolution of Form and Function That Created a Lasting Legacy" (Masters Thesis, George Mason University, 2016): 26-28, fig. 31. The feet of the chair-table are cleated like those of the reversible bench. Cleated or clawed lion paws often signified the lower or bestial nature of man: David Salter, Holy and *Noble Beasts: Encounters with Animals in Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 22, note 26. The upper half of the human body, especially the head or face, was associated with cleanliness and God; the lower half, with filth and sin: Fiona Whelan, *The Making of Manners and Morals in Twelfth-Century England: The Book of the Civilised Man* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 137-139.

[20] The wheel or rose window above the entrance to the north (Old Testament) transept of Notre Dame in Paris had sixteen prophets surrounding the Virgin and Child: Carla Gottlieb, „*Respiciens per Fenestras*: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece" (*Oud Holland* 85, no. 2, 1970): 73.

[21] For the table in the house of the soul, see: Falkenburg, "The Household," 6-7.

[22] Roughly a decade after the production of the Mérode Triptych, Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), a cardinal and theologian who stood at the juncture between the medieval and the early modern periods, compared the circle to truth and the polygon created by rotating squares to intellect (In Book I, Chapter III of *On Learned Ignorance*): Jasper Hopkins, *Nicholas of Cusa on Learned Ignorance: A Translation and An Appraisal of De Docta Ignorantia* (Minneapolis, MN: Banning, 1981), 52-53.

[23] Nicolas of Cusa. Geometric Illustration of Intellect Encircled by Truth. In *On the Quadrature of the Circle* by William F. Wertz, Jr. (fig. 1). © Schiller Institute, https://archive.schillerinstitute.com/fid_97-01/012_Cusa_quad_circ.html (accessed on 2 June 2022). public domain

as he studies, the key axiom,
so was I at this amazing sight,
wanting to see how the image
fits the circle, and was in it,
but I hadn't the wings for this:
but then my mind was struck
by lightning, so I got my wish.
Here conceptualization failed,
but all my mind and feelings
circled on that smooth wheel
love turns, with sun and
stars.[24]

If the sixteen facets of the tabletop, or mensa, represent the human mind, or mens, trying to grasp the mystery of Incarnation through reason, Dante's flash of insight, when his mind and feelings conformed to the smooth wheel of Charity, provides an important clue to the meaning of the tabletop's sixteen sides.[25] According to St. Paul in I Corinthians 13:4-8, Charity has sixteen qualities.[26] Love begins with patience and ends with eternity: Love never fails, because the wheel of Charity never stops turning.

3. *Lectio Divina*

3.1. Reading: Listening to God

Just as the table in the devotional guide of Hendrik Mande (ca. 1355-1431) provides food for thought in Falkenburg's article, so does the chair-table in the Mérode *Annunciation.* Mande's table serves "a roast lamb of godly love, seasoned with the salt of spiritual modesty, and a lit candle burning with love and desire for Christ."[27] Campin's table is set with sacred texts, a smoking candle and a jug of lilies. Each still life triggers memory. Such prompts were not dictated by commentary on the Vulgate. They were multilayered and open-ended within the frame of a specific devotional theme. In the Mérode Triptych, mnemonics guide those who wish to conceive the Word of God in their hearts by emulating the reading Annunciate[28] (Fig. 4).[29] When Gabriel arrived to announce the good news, Mary was thought to be studying a verse from Isaiah: "Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son and his name shall be called Emmanuel."[30] Mary heard God by reading Isaiah's prophecy, carefully considered the Old Testament text, asked how a virgin could conceive and then accepted the will of God with a pure heart.[31] The Word became flesh at the moment of her acceptance. "Although Mary's consent made the Word legible, her perpetual virginity contradicts logic."[32] The Mérode Triptych uses memory prompts based on scriptural metaphors to help bridge this mental gap. Just as Christ is the Book and the Reader, so Mary is the Reader and the Book.[33] In the *Rohan Book of Hours,* the new-born Christ is literally cradled in a codex with his mother praying beside him (Fig. 5).[34] Mary's imitation of Christ teaches novices how to sense scripture one verse at a time.[35]

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[24] For the translation of *Paradiso* 33:133-145, see: Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: A New and Revised Translation*, trans. Steve Ellis (London: Penguin, 2019), 639. For the geometrical problem of squaring the circle and the mystery of incarnation, see: Ronald B. Herzman and Gary W. Towsley, "Squaring the Circle: Paradiso 33 and the Poetics of Geometry,» *Traditio* 49 (1994): 96; and Guy P. Raffa, *Divine Dialectic: Dante's Incarnational Poetry* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 143-147.

[25] The Latin etymologies of *mensa* (tabletop) and *mens* (the mind) are not linked. However, *mensa* is the feminine past participle of *metior*, which means to measure. Measuring is an activity of the mind or *mens*: Patrick Boyde, *Perception and Passion in Dante's Comedy* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 175-180.

[26] For an overview of patristic and medieval exegesis on the fruits of Charity, see: Lapide, *The Great Biblical Commentary*, 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. The hexagonal floor tiles relate to the shape of the tabletop (6+10=16). Six is the number of Adam, who was perfect before his fall from grace. Six signifies the perfection of good deeds, because it is the only number that equals the sum and the product of its parts (1+2+3=6; 1x2x3=6). Ten stands for the Decalogue of Moses and is also a symbol of perfection, because the number 10 can be reduced to one – the law of Charity: Vincent Foster Hopper, *Medieval Number Symbolism: Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (Minneola, NY: Dover Publication, Inc., 2000), 89-135. According to Hildegard of Bingen, the sixteen stars that orbit the fiery circle of heaven teach the perfection of the Ten Commandments and the six ages of man (after the coming of Christ): Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works: With Letters and Songs*, ed. Matthew Fox (Santa Fe, NM: Bear & Company, 1987), 51 (Vision 2:42).

[27] Falkenburg's quote is taken from *Here Begins a Devout Book on the Preparation and Decoration of the Dwelling of Our Heart*, a guide written in Middle Dutch by Hendrik Mande, an Augustinian canon and Brother of the Common Life: Falkenburg, "The Household of the Soul," 6-7, note 16.

[28] The Annunciate's book began to replace the traditional distaff and spindle in the art of western Europe during the ninth and tenth centuries rather than the late medieval period as previously thought: Laura Saetveit Miles, "The Origins and Development of the Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation," *Speculum* 89, no. 3 (2014): 632-636. The idea that the Annunciate was reading Isaiah's prophecy was introduced by Ambrose of Milan (ca. 337-397) in his commentary on Luke 1:26-38. The identification of Mary's book with the prophet Isaiah rather than the Psalms did not take root until the thirteenth century, when popular devotional literature began to encourage readers to participate imaginatively in the life of Christ: Laura Saetveit Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation: Reading, Interpretation, and Devotion in Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2020), 79-85. Although the imagery of Mary's book springs from the same hermeneutics as Erwin Panofsky's "disguised symbols," memory prompts are multilayered and participate in a visual script: Decker, "Guides," 607-609.

[29] Detail. Virgin Mary Reading with Clean Hands. In the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Michael Hérold, https://brill.com/view/book/9789004395718/BP0000072.xml?language=en (accessed on 6 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[30] Isaiah 7:14. In the medieval English N-Town play of Mary's Presentation in the Temple, the precocious three-year-old hoped to become the handmaid of the future mother of God by concentrating all five of her bodily senses (9.239-41): Joseph Howard Morgan, "Glossing the Virgin: The Incarnational Hermeneutics of Mary in the English Middle Ages" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 2021): 208.

[31] Reading leads to the incarnation of Christ in the Mérode *Annunciation*. For a discussion of how the central panel processes time, see: Jack Hamilton Williamson, "The Meaning of the Merode Altarpiece" (Masters Thesis, Michigan State University, 1982), 114-117.

[32] Morgan, "Glossing the Virgin," 123.

[33] Jean Leclercq, "Mary's Reading of Christ," *Monastic Studies* 15 (1984): 105-116.

[34] Detail. Virgin Contemplating the Christ Child Cradled in a Book. In the *Rohan Book of Hours*. ca. 1418-1425. Tempera on parchment. 230 x 200 mm. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, BnF Lat. 9471, fol. 133r. © National Library, https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10515749d/f275.image (accessed on 3 June 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

[35] The early Church Fathers divided scriptural commentary into two senses – the literal and the spiritual. The spiritual sense had three aspects – allegorical, moral and anagogical: Robert M. Grant and David Tracy, *A Short History of Biblical Interpretation* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2005), 85-86.

Fig. 4. Detail. Virgin Mary Reading with Clean Hands. In the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Michael Hérold.

Fig. 5. Detail. Virgin Contemplating the Christ Child Cradled in a Book. In the *Rohan Book of Hours*. ca. 1418-1425. Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France.

3.2. Meditation: Considering his Words

The devotional texts on the Campin tabletop represent the second rung of *lectio divina, or meditation.*[36] Readers remove the husk of the letter from the spirit of the Word by imitating the Virgin Mary: "Hail, glorious virgin, you who are the comment and gloss of prophetic scripture."[37] The process of extraction is detailed by the empty purse, the breathing book and the unfurling scroll.[38] Like Mary's fertile womb, the green leather purse with red and gold trim carries and protects the Word of God.[39] The Gothic script of the open book is illegible except for several large initials that introduce important sections of text.[40] For example, the blue incipit on the first moving page might signal the beginning of Matins, the first canonical hour of the day: ***D**omine, labia mea aperies et os meum adnuntiabit laudem tuam ("Lord, open my lips: and my mouth shall declare thy praise").*[41] Scenes of the Annunciation often preceded the midnight office of Matins, as seen in an unfinished book of hours made for Charles, duke of Normandy and the brother of King Louis XI.[42] On the verso of the Annunciate page

[36] "Mary Had a Little Book" discusses the tradition of the reading Annunciate in English and French manuscript illuminations and the growing importance of private devotion exemplified by the various texts in the Mérode Triptych: Erik Kwakkel, *Books Before Print* (Leeds, UK: Arc Humanities Press, 2018), 92-97.

[37] The quote is from "Ave Virgo Mater Christi" – a Latin hymn by Walter of Wimborne, a poet who flourished in England during the 1260s: Morgan, "Glossing the Virgin," 22-23.

[38] During the fifteenth century, pages of an open book that flip as if moved by the Holy Spirit appeared in scenes of the Annunciation and visionary saints: Barbara Williams Ellertson and Janet Seiz, "The Painted Page: Books as Symbols in Renaissance Art," *The Independent Scholar* 1 (December 2015): 31-32. The breathing book probably alludes to the New Testament or other Christian texts such as the book of life: Hugh of St. Victor, "The Moral Ark," in *Hugh of Saint-Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings*, Aelred Squire (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2009): 87-89 (Book II, Chapter 12).

[39] For the mystical braid of Sister Diemût von Lindau (ca.1300-1350), who was told in a vision that the interlace of red and green silk stood for the union of divinity and humanity, respectively, see: Ane Preisler Skovgaard, "The Fabric of Devotion: A New Approach to Studying Textiles from Late Medieval Nunneries," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift/Journal of Art History* 90, no. 1 (2021): 44. For Mary as the carrier of the Word, see: Morgan, "Glossing the Virgin," 189-190. Green was often associated with the fertility of earth and the renewal of life in the spring, as well as the theological virtue of hope. For the medieval period's symbolic habit of mind and the meaning of green, red and gold, see a reprint from St. Louis University Studies, Series A, I (November, 1949): Joseph F. Eagan, *The Import of Color Symbolism in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing LLC, 2007), 19-21, 23-27.

[40] Medieval readers punctuated the words written on parchment with initials and rubrics to aid memory and improve learning. Punctuation marks wounded the parchment body of Christ and stimulated compunction: Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought*, 99-105. Illuminations also made prayer books easier to read by marking transitions. In the Mérode *Annunciation*, the black text and red rubrics in the breathing book and unfurling scroll are illegible. The book's lack of costly embellishments suggests that it belonged to a household of middling means: Virginia Reinburg, "An Archive of Prayer: The Book of Hours in Manuscript and Print," in *Manuscripta Illuminata: Approaches to Understanding Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, ed. Colum Hourihane (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2014): 221-240.

[41] Psalm 50:17. This antiphon traditionally opened the liturgy of the canonical hours and refers to the experience of God's merciful rescue and salvation. The *Miserere* was considered to be the most important of the seven penitential psalms. Although Mary is rarely mentioned in the New Testament, pre-Reformation commentators found her throughout the Old Testament, especially in the sapiential books: Rachel Fulton Brown, "Mary in the Scriptures: The Unexpurgated Tradition," in *Advancing Mariology: The Theotokos Lectures 2008-2017*, ed. Jame Schaefer (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2017): 9-10. Psalm 50:17 introduced three offices – the Hours of the Virgin, the Hours of the Cross and the Hours of the Holy Spirit: Susan Hathorn Jenson, "Books of Hours as Icons: Devotional Imagery and Penance in Early Fifteenth-Century Flemish Lay Prayerbooks" (PhD diss., University of Maryland, 1995): 113.

[42] The opening verses of Matins are written on a tablet hanging from the top of a frame that identifies the patron and date: Robert Schindler, "The Cloisters Annunciation by the Master of Charles of France," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 47, no. 1 (2012): 85-86. The book of hours appeared

before Matins, the incipit contains an image of the young Mary weaving gold cloth on a tablet loom (Fig. 6).[43] A host of angels spin thread, play music and sing lauds as they celebrate her miraculous pregnancy. The curve of the gold initial "D" has come full circle – a symbol of the virginal womb that now contains the uncontainable. The Virgin Mary has made the leap of faith that opened the door of Heaven.[44]

Fig. 6. Detail. Matins Incipit on Verso of the Annunciate Folio. In the *Hours of Charles of France*. 1465. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Just as Mary separates the spirit from the letter, so votaries copied sacred names, Latin scripture and vernacular prayers from devotional guides onto scraps of parchment that could be rolled and carried next to their hearts. In a prayer roll made for King Henry VIII of England when he was a Prince, angels wind the two columns of script that flank either side of the crucified Christ.[45] The texts have been cut from the parchment just as Christ's body was scored on the cross (Fig. 7).[46] These excerpts resemble the unfurling scroll next to the open book on the Mérode chair-table. Prayer rolls often contained amulets that helped laymen translate Latin into vernacular.[47] According to the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the Our Father, Hail Mary and other prayers written on parchment could be worn like holy relicts close to the heart as long as they were carried with devotion.[48] The initials of the scroll in the Mérode *Annunciation* signal that the text has been turned upside down so that the votary's prayers can be seen from above.

Fig. 7. Detail. The Tau Cross. In the *Prayer-Roll of Henry VIII*. ca.1485-1509. London: British Library.

in the thirteenth century to guide laymen in their daily devotions. Organized around seven, then eight canonical hours of the day, the texts of these guide books were personalized and therefore could vary greatly with respect to content and structure: Amir Hazem, Béatrice Daille, Marie-Laurence Bonhomme, Martin Maarand, Mélodie Boillet, Christopher Kermorvant and Dominique Stutzmann, "Books of Hours: the First Liturgical Corpus for Text Segmentation," in *Proceedings of the 12th Language Resources and Evaluation Conference* (Paris: European Language Resources Association (ELRA), 2020): 776-780.

43 Detail. Matins Incipit on Verso of the Annunciate Folio. In the *Hours of Charles of France*. 1465. Tempera, ink, and gold on parchment. 17.2 x 12.3 cm. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Metropolitan Museum, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471840 (accessed on 3 June 2022). Image in the public domain

44 The Church Fathers compared the Virgin Mary to the closed door of Ezekiel 44:2, who opened the gate of heaven to sinners when she consented to the incarnation of Christ. For the imagery of Mary as an ambiguous door that might be open or closed as well as the half-open, or half-closed door, see: José María Salvador-González, "The Symbol of Door as Mary in Images of the Annunciation of the 14th-15th Centuries," *Fenestella. Dentro l'arte medievale/Inside Medieval Art* 2 (2021): 99-106.

45 Written in Latin and English, the prayer roll of Prince Henry provided spiritual and physical protection through sympathetic logic. According to the rubric being unfurled by the angel under the right arm of Christ, the Tau cross – a symbol of divine power – was 1/15th the length of the actual cross. The rubric also asks for protection against evil spirits, more worldly goods and safe childbirth. Such parchment measurements were potent amulets often wrapped around the body as second skins to provoke God's forgiveness and intervention on behalf of petitioners who imitate Christ: Shannon Gayk, "'By Provocative Means': Power, Protection, and Reproduction in Prince Henry's Prayer Roll," *Exemplaria* 29, no. 4 (2017): 302-306; and Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 264-267.

46 Detail. The Tau Cross. In the *Prayer-Roll of Henry VIII*. ca.1485-1509. Tempera, ink, and gold on parchment. 12.7 x 300 cm. London: British Library, Add MS 88929, fol.2br. © British Library, https://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=add_ms_88929_f001ar (accessed on 3 June 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

47 During the late Middle Ages, pious laymen who could not read Latin were deemed illiterate. Books of hours and prayer rolls often mixed Latin scripture with vernacular rubrics to prompt the memory of unlettered laymen, especially women. Both formats could be worn close to the heart – the medieval seat of mind and memory – as protective amulets: Skemer, *Binding Words*, 268-278. For an illuminating discussion of codices and rolls as well as other devotional aids in the Mérode Triptych, see: Don C. Skemer, "Amulet Rolls and Female Devotion in the Late Middle Ages," *Scriptorium* 55, no. 2 (2001): 213-222.

48 For the question – "Whether it is unlawful to wear divine words at the neck?" – see St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, The Second Part of the Second Part, Question 96, Article 4 (accessed on 26 May 2022): https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Summa_Theologiae/Second_Part_of_the_Second_Part/Question_96.

3.3. Prayer: Asking for Pardon

The smoldering candle at the center of the Mérode *Annunciation* represents the third stage of lectio divina, or prayer. Fire imagery was ubiquitous among medieval mystics and theologians.[49] Jean Gerson compared the flame amid smoke to illumination, which comes from penitential prayer according to his *Mountain of Contemplation* – an early work written in Middle French for his sisters, whom he encouraged to cloister at home:

> Similarly, the person who wants to live in the contemplative life does not have perfection at the start. She must first get rid of the smoke, which is frustration with one's life, a smoke that makes her weep and troubles her, providing hardly any consolation. Then the flame of love will appear together with the smoke, and finally the fire will be pure and devoid of smoke.[50]

Although an unlikely source, Bianco da Siena (ca. 1350-1399) used similar imagery in a popular prayer of praise that supports the penitential interpretation of the smoking candle:

> Come down, O Love divine,
> Seek Thou this soul of mine,
> And visit it with Thine own ardour glowing;
> O Comforter, draw near,
> Within my heart appear,
> And kindle it, Thy holy flame bestowing.
> O let it freely burn,
> Till earthly passions turn
> To dust and ashes in its heat consuming;
> And let Thy glorious light
> Shine ever on my sight,
> And clothe me round, the while my path illuming.[51]

Doubtless both of these writers were inspired by the twelfth-century theologian, Hugh of St. Victor (ca. 1096-1141), who compared penitent souls to green logs full of moist lust, which smoke when they first encounter the flame of Divine Love and then burn more brightly as their purified hearts leap toward contemplation.[52] Elsewhere in his *Moral Ark,* smoke drifting toward heaven signifies desire transformed into longing by the flame of compunction: "For just as compunction resembles a flaming fire, so is longing like the smoke that is born of the fire, that goes straight up, and the higher it goes, the wider it spreads until, lost in the heavens, it disappears from view."[53]

The idea that light comes from smoke is not entirely new.[54] Minott first suggested that the smoldering candle referred to the "smoking flax" in Isaiah 42:3 and quoted St. Jerome's *Letter to Algasias* on the soul's tiny spark of conscience:

> The smoking flax shall he not quench; that is the people gathered out of the nations, who, when the fire of natural law had been put out, were constantly caught up in error, as in bitter, blinding smoke and ashes. But He did not extinguish them, or reduce them to ashes, on the contrary, from a tiny spark, nearly dying, He struck great fires so that all the world would be aflame with the fire of our Lord and Saviour, the fire that He comes to send upon the earth to burn in all things.[55]

Without a unifying theme such as *lectio divina,* it is impossible to decide if the smoking flax will soon die or burst into flame. The blue and white smoke drifting toward the jug of white lilies suggests that the smoldering wick and melting candle belong

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[49] Although we disagree with the author's characterization of the smoking candle in the Mérode Annunciation as overwhelmed by divine light, the discussion of mystical fire imagery in other Campin paintings was helpful: Elliott D. Wise, "Robert Campin and Jan van Ruusbroec: Spiritual Conflagrations and Ekphrastic Mysticism," in *Ekphrastic Image-Making in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, eds. Arthur J. DiFuria et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2021): 363-365. For a brief summary of the various interpretations of the smoking wick, including the idea that the light of the Holy Spirit has just snuffed the candle, see: Eclercy, "On Mousetraps and Firescreens," 141-142. If the Mérode candle had been extinguished by the divine light shining through the two wheel windows high on the left wall, the smoke would be moving toward the Virgin Mary instead of the jug of lilies. In several Annunciations of the period, including one by Rogier van der Weyden in the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art, the praying Virgin holds a wax-impregnated ball of flax burning with love and desire for Christ. Ideally, penitential prayer leads to enkindling or contemplation, the last stage of Guigo's *lectio divina*: Charles Ilsley Minott, "The Theme of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 51, no. 3 (1969): 270.

[50] Jean Gerson wrote his treatise on contemplation in 1400, when he was recovering from an illness in Bruges. Gerson returned to the imagery of smoke and fire several times as he described the soul's threefold ascent to God – meditation, illumination and contemplation. His second step of illumination corresponds to the third stage of *lectio divina*, where the flame of the Holy Spirit or Divine Love begins to turn the sins of the contrite soul into ashes: Gerson, "The Mountain," 102.

[51] Bianco da Siena was a young Italian wool carder who became a vernacular poet after joining the *Gesuati*, a lay order of praise singers. A condensed version of Bianco's eight-verse laud was translated into English by the Anglo-Catholic, Richard Frederick Littledale (1833–1890), in 1867 and set to music by Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872-1958) in 1906: Bruce Hindmarsh, ""Come Down, O Love Divine" Christian Spiritual Formation through a Medieval Hymn." *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 3, no. 1 (2010): 81. For the full Italian text of Bianco's song of praise XXXV, see: *Laudi Spirituali Del Bianco Da Siena: Povero Gesuato Del Secolo XIV*, ed. Telesforo Bini (Lucca, Italy: Dalla Tipografia di G. Giusti, 1851): 93.

[52] Hindmarsh, "Come down," 81-82. For an excellent discussion of the burning log allegory and its influence well into the early modern period, see: Clément Sclafert, "L'Allégorie de la Bûche Enflammée dans Hugues de Saint-Victor et Saint Jean de la Croix," *Revue d'Ascétique et de Mystique* 33 (1957): 242-246.

[53] Hugh of St. Victor, "The Moral Ark," in *Hugh of Saint-Victor: Selected Spiritual Writings*, intro. Aelred Squire (Eugene, OR: WIPF and Stock Publishers, 2009): 105-106 (Book III, Chapter 7).

[54] Hugh of St. Victor's smoke and fire imagery might have come from one of the few classical texts that was widely read during the Middle Ages. In verse 143 of *The Art of Poetry*, Horace praises the genius of Homer for beginning his epic poem with the heroic voyage of Ulysses rather than the burning of Troy: "…do not give smoke from the flame, but light from the smoke" (*non fumum ex fulgore, sed ex fumo dare lucem*). During the early modern period, the epigram *EX FUMO LUCEM* signaled sorrow for sin and the acquisition of virtue: Filippo Picinelli, *Mundus Symbolicus: In Emblematum Universitate Formatus, Explicatus, et Tam Sacris, Quam Profanis Eruditionibus ac Sententiis Illustratus*, Augustin Erath, trans., Vol. II (Cologne: Von Cöllen & Huisch, 1729), 28 (LUCERNA, Chapter XV, 111).

[55] Minott's quote is from St. Jerome's *Letter to Algasias*, which discusses differences between Matthew 12:20 and Isaiah 42:3: Minott, "The Theme of the Merode Altarpiece," 270, note 28.

to contrite hearts longing to reach the last rung of Guigo's spiritual ladder.[56]

Candles made from white beeswax burn slower and more sweetly than those made from yellow tallow or animal fat. Beeswax candles were the only votives allowed in medieval churches, where the devout lit tapers as prayers in exchange for blessings. Because bees were thought to die while making the sweet-smelling wax, melting white candles stood for the dying Christ as well as penitent votaries.[57] Candle holders with sockets rather than spikes called prickets were thought to be more appropriate supports for purified souls than the wrought-iron brackets on the Mérode chimney mantle[58] (Fig. 8).[59] Their prickets – one with and the other without a tallow candle – are suggestive, especially when linked with the sexually aroused couple that decorates the corbels on either side of the soot-stained chimney. The bracket concealed under Joseph's hat in a *Holy Family* painted by Barthelemy d'Eyck (active 1440-1469) implies that prickets in the sphere of the Campin workshop stood for male bodies consumed by lust[60] (Fig. 9).[61] The brackets in both paintings caution votaries to keep their beeswax candles in brass sockets if they wish to avoid the tarnish of original sin.

Fig. 8. Socket Holder. Fifteenth Century. Germany. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 9. Barthelemy d'Eyck. *Holy Family*. ca. 1450. Le Puy-en-Velay: Cathedral of Our Lady.

3.4. Contemplation: Immersion in the Trinitarian Life

The majolica jug filled with white lilies represents the fourth rung of *lectio divina,* or contemplation, where the purified soul is immersed in the fruition of Trinitarian life.[62] To achieve fruition, or the flowering of perfection, votaries must be as pure as the Virgin Mary. Throughout the *Mountain of Contemplation,* Gerson oscillates between metaphors of fire and plant growth to articulate how imperfect souls reach perfection:

> Similarly, the person who wants to live in the contemplative life does not have perfection at the start. She must first get rid of the smoke, which is frustration with one's life, a smoke that makes her weep and troubles her, providing hardly any

[56] Recent scholarship has placed the memory prompts of the Mérode *Annunciation* within the context of vernacular devotion – a context largely ignored by followers of Erwin Panofsky, who depended more heavily on the allegorical than the moral sense for their analyses. For example, DuRette identified Minott's smoking flax with the Paschal candle, whose burning marks the beginning and end of the liturgical cycle of Christ's life on earth. For an overview of the smoking candle's interpretation before DuRette, see: B. Underwood DuRette, "The Smoking Candle of the Mérode Altarpiece,» *Athanor* 6 (1987): 10-11.

[57] Sarah Blick, "Votives, Images, Interaction and Pilgrimage to the Tomb and Shrine of St. Thomas Becket, Canterbury Cathedral,» in *Push Me, Pull You: Imaginative, Emotional, Physical, and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, eds. Sarah Blick et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2011): 32-36.

[58] For the trope of liquid metal poured through a pipe into a mold and souls liquefied in the furnace of divine love to shape them in Christ's image, see: Sclafert, "L'Allégorie de la Bûche Enflammée," 243. In the hierarchy of metals, brass was ranked higher than iron and lower than gold, because it does not rust. Moreover, brass does not tarnish as quickly as bronze, a close copper cousin. In alchemy, copper represented the planet Venus, the goddess of love and beauty: Luigi Fabbrizzi, "Communicating About Matter with Symbols: Evolving from Alchemy to Chemistry,» *Journal of Chemical Education* 85, no. 11 (2008): 1503, fig. 5.

[59] Socket Holder. Fifteenth Century. Germany. Copper alloy. 23.5 x 10.8 cm. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Metropolitan Museum, https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/471832 (accessed on 3 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[60] In addition to St. Joseph's hat covering the candle bracket, the closed fireplace behind the Holy Family suggests that the marriage between the couple was chaste and that Mary remained a Virgin before, during and after the birth of Christ: Nicole Reynaud, „Barthélemy d›Eyck avant 1450,» *Revue de l'Art* 84, no. 1 (1989): 22. For the symbolism of the sealed fireplace, see: Cynthia Hahn, "'Joseph Will Perfect, Mary Enlighten and Jesus Save Thee': The Holy Family as Marriage Model in the Mérode Triptych," *The Art Bulletin* 68, no. 1 (1986): 60-61.

[61] Barthelemy d'Eyck. *Holy Family*. ca. 1450. Oil on wood. 24.0 x 19.9 cm. Le Puy-en-Velay: Cathedral of Our Lady. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Barth%C3%A9lemy_d%27eyck,_sacra_famiglia.jpg (accessed on 3 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[62] Fruition or contemplation was often symbolized by ripening fruits and/or blooming flowers: Reindert L. Falkenburg, *The Fruit of Devotion: Mysticism and the Imagery of Love in Flemish Paintings of the Virgin and Child, 1450-1550*, trans. Sammy Herman (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1994), 3-4. The immersion metaphor is a paraphrase of "the immersion into the fruition of the Trinitarian life" from *Van Seven Trappen* by the Flemish mystic, Jan van Ruusbroec (ca. 1293/94-1381): Falque, *Devotional Portraiture*, 172.

> consolation. Then the flame of love will appear together with the smoke, and finally the fire will be pure and devoid of smoke. In the first stage the person will mortify her past carnal life. In the second she will germinate and grow out of the earth. In the third she will bear a perfect fruit. And so I say that like a plant this person will be transplanted from the bad earth of a worldly life, which will cause great pain and travail. In being replanted the person will still to some extent suffer grief, but when she finally has put down her roots, then she will become perfect and bear fruit.[63]

In the Mérode *Annunciation,* the lily bulb was transplanted from the earth of worldly life –represented here by a dull mix of green and red hexagonal floor tiles – and grown in a blue and white majolica jug.[64] Just as God made man in his image from slime on the sixth day of creation, so ceramics are made from earth mixed with water, hardened by fire and cooled by air: "And the Lord God formed man of the slime of the earth: and breathed into his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul."[65] The colors of the ceramic tiles and majolica jug refer to the four natural elements of Antiquity – brown/green earth, red fire, blue water and white air.[66] These elements were the stuff of life in an illumination of universal man or the microcosmos inside the macrocosmos from the *Book of Divine Works* by the twelfth-century mystic, Hildegard of Bingen[67] (Fig. 10).[68] Hildegard's cosmology specifies the same elemental colors that embellish the Mérode *Annunciation.*

Many previous analyses have linked the three white lilies in the *Annunciation Triptych* to the Virgin Mary's purity. However, as José María Salvador-González has so expertly shown in recent years, the stalk of lilies in western Europe was a double metaphor of Mary's divine motherhood and Christ's human incarnation.[69] Mary was the green shoot from the root of Jesse and the verdant staff of Aaron, while her son was "the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys."[70] In the Campin *Annunciation,* a single bud between two blooming lilies stands for God the Son between God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.[71] The trefoil lip of the tin-glazed jug – whose blue and white colors signal the hope of Heaven and faith in God, respectively – also alludes to the Trinity.[72] The jug itself, fired at high temperatures and therefore impervious to the moisture of lust, represents not only the Virgin's womb, but also the human heart purified in the furnace of Divine Love.[73] Just as longing transforms the lover into the beloved, so the majolica jug decorated with a blue bird, round berries and stylized oak leaves represents those who strive to become as

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63 Gerson, "The Mountain," 102.

64 Lily bulbs can be transplanted and grown in a mix of 70% alcohol and 30% water: Merel M. Langens-Gerrits and Geert-Jan M. De Klerk, "Micropropagation of Flower Bulbs: Lily and Narcissus," in *Methods in Molecular Biology: Plant Cell Culture Protocols*, ed. R. D. Hall (Totowa, NJ: Humana Press Inc., 1999): 142-144.

65 Genesis 2:7. For the creation of man on the sixth day, see: Genesis 1:27-31.

66 In the *Etymologies* (Book XIII, chapter iii.1) matter is compared to brown wood or green woodland, a product of seasonal earth: Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. Stephan A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, UK: University of Cambridge Press, 2010), 272. The color brown – a mix of green and red – is also associated with humus or earth: Eagen, *The Import of Color Symbolism*, 30-31.

67 Moving inward, the first circle is the red fire identified with the Holy Spirit. The second smaller circle is the black fire of God's judgement, where the Sun of Justice resides just below the heads of God the Father and the Holy Spirit. The third circle is the pure ether of penitent sinners, which separates the celestial and terrestrial spheres. The fourth circle of watery air or good works is the beginning of the terrestrial sphere. The fifth circle is hard white air and stands for moral discretion, which strengthens holy works. Below this circle, water combines with air to create thin air, which surrounds green and brown earth. Notice that the earth's atmosphere is milky and full of blue water. Fire permeates both spheres, whereas watery air moisturizes everything within the terrestrial sphere: Hildegard of Bingen, *Book of Divine Works*, 22-55.

68 Hildegard of Bingen. The Cosmic Spheres and Human Being. In the *Book of Divine Works* I:2. ca. 1210-1230. Tempera, ink and gold on vellum., 390 x 255 mm. Luca: Biblioteca Statli di Luca. MS 1942, fol. 9r. © Ministry of Cultural Heritage and Activities and Tourism, https://arthistory-project.com/artists/hildegard-von-bingen/book-of-divine-works-part-1-vision-2-the-cosmic-spheres-and-human-being (accessed on 3 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

69 Patristic and medieval exegetes used asexual plant imagery to compare the Virgin Mary's conception of Christ to the animal lust of procreation. Christ was the pure flower that sprouted from the green stem of Jesse's root (Isaiah 11:1) and the miraculous budding of Aaron's dry rod (Numbers 17:8): José María Salvador-González, «*Flos de Radice Iesse*: A Hermeneutic Approach to the Theme of the Lily in the Spanish Gothic Painting of the Annunciation from Patristic and Theological Sources,» *Eikón Imago* 4 (2013 / 2): 183; and «*Sanctitate Vernans Virga Aaronis*: Interpretation of the Stem of Lilies in the Medieval Iconography of the Annunciation According to Theological Sources,» *Art Studies and Architectural Journal* 10, no. 9 (2015): 16-29. An anonymous early Christian exegete called Pseudo Augustine noted that the Latin for rod or *virga* differed by only one letter from the Latin word for virgin or *virgo*, which means made from man or *vir*: José María Salvador-González, «*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, no. 2 (2016): 136-137.

70 The spotless flower that grew without human intervention in the Virgin Mary's womb was Christ (Canticles 2:1), whereas the whiteness of "the lily among thorns" of the next verse (Canticles 2:2) represented Mary's divine motherhood and perpetual virginity: José María Salvador-González, «*Flos Campi Lilium Convallium*: Third Interpretation of the Lily in the Iconography of The Annunciation in Italian Trecento Art from Patristic and Theological Sources," *Eikón Imago* 5 (2014 / 1): 91-94; and «*Sicut Lilium inter Spinas*: Floral Metaphors in Late Medieval Marian Iconography from Patristic and Theological Sources,» *Eikón Imago* 6 (2014 / 2): 26-28.

71 For Christ as the bud of salvation (St. Ambrose, An Instruction for a Virgin XIII, 81-84), see: Gottlieb, "*Respiciens*," 80.

72 In early Netherlandish painting, white symbolized faith; blue or green, hope; and gold or red, charity. Blue symbolized not only the hope of heaven, but also matrimony, fidelity, loyalty, truth, constancy and devotion: McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 229-231; and Matthew Ward, "True Blue: The Connection between Colour and Loyalty in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval History* 46, no. 2 (2020): 135-145.

73 Majolica jugs imported from Tuscany were often linked to Mary's virginal womb, which was believed to contain the water of life or *aqua vitae*. Aqua vitae, a concentrated ethanol solution distilled from wine, has the high alcohol content needed to grow bulbs in a jug: Ellen Callmann, "Campin's Maiolica Pitcher,» *The Art Bulletin* 64, no. 4 (1982): 629.

perfect as the Annunciate[74] (Fig. 11).[75] The hope of heaven might explain why most of the bird – an ancient symbol of the soul – is hidden from view. The bird holds a berry in its beak to remind votaries that they are more likely to taste the sweetness of contemplation in heaven than in this life.[76] Perhaps hope instead of pride prompted the Campin workshop to hide an anagram in the vertical band of Hebrew and Greek letters next to the jug's handle. Perhaps the atelier hoped that the anagram – *DVPAYMKN (DV KAMPYN)* – would intrigue beginners and focus their attention on heaven's gate.

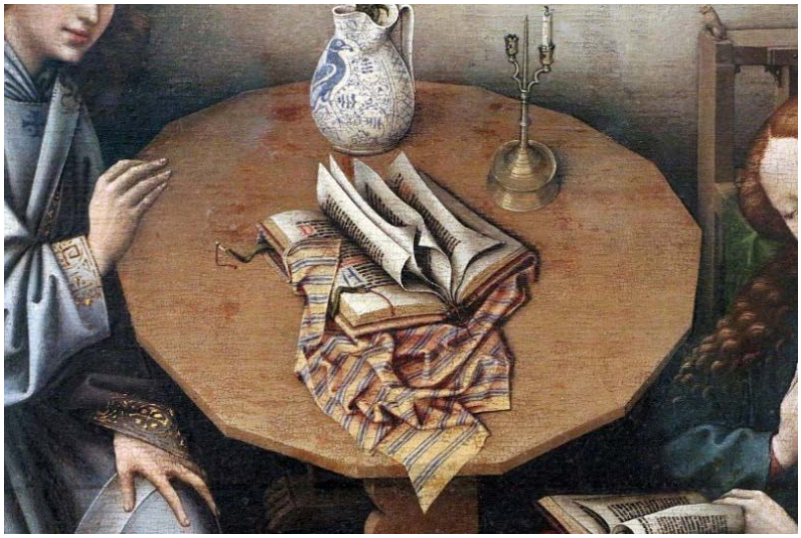

Fig. 11. Detail. Majolica Jug with Oak Leaf Decoration. In the Master of Flémalle Annunciation.

Fig. 10. Hildegard of Bingen. The Cosmic Spheres and Human Being. In the *Book of Divine Works* I:2. ca. 1210-1230. Luca: Biblioteca Statli di Luca.

3.5. The Campin Anagram

During the Middle Ages, children studied ciphers to learn grammar as well as the secrets of Nature.[77] Cryptography focused and exercised their minds. It taught them to be observant. If our interpretation of the mix of Hebrew and Greek letters that decorate the majolica jug in the central panel of the *Annunciation* Triptych proves to be correct, art historians will have a painting signed by Robert Campin for art historical analysis and perhaps renewed appreciation for Panofsky's theory of disguised symbolism.[78] The crypto-signature was probably composed by Jacques Daret, the tonsured apprentice of Robert Campin, to validate the panel's memory prompts[79] (Fig. 12).[80] The hybrid alphabet stood for the Old

[74] I would like to thank Philippe Bousquet, who questioned my identification of the blue bird on the majolica jug as a peacock. Too much of the blue bird is hidden to determine its species. For the ancient metaphor of the soul that flies like a bird toward heaven and sings the language of divine love, see: A. S. Lazikani, *Emotion in Christian and Islamic Contemplative Texts, 1100–1250* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 5-10. The mighty oak stood for Fortitude, one of the four cardinal virtues: Frei Isidoro de Barreira, *Tractado das Significaçoens das Plantas, Flores, e Fructos que se Referem na Sagrada Escritura* (Lisboa: Pedro Craesbeeck de Mello, 1622), 308-314.

[75] Detail. Majolica Jug with Oak Leaf Decoration. In the Master of Flémalle Annunciation. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Maestro_di_flemalle,_forse_robert_campin,_annunciazione,_04_tavolo_libro.JPG (accessed on 4 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[76] Blue is the color of the sky and therefore associated with God and contemplation. For example, the joining of snow white and sapphire blue in the wings of the dove symbolized purity of flesh and love of contemplation, respectively: Rita Castro, Maria J. Melo and Adelaide Miranda, "The Secrets behind the Colour of the Book of Birds," in *Portuguese Studies on Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts*, eds. Maria Adelaide Miranda et al. (Barcelona-Madrid: Fédération Internationale des Instituts d'Études Médiévales, 2014): 46; and Willene B. Clark and Hugo of Fouilloy, *The Medieval Book of Birds: Hugh of Fouilloy's "De Avibus"* (Warsaw: Andesite Press, 2017), 131.

[77] Literacy begins with the consideration of letters and ends with the internalization of grammatical authority: Katherine Ellison and Susan M. Kim, "Introduction: Ciphers and the Material History of Literacy," in *A Material History of Medieval and Early Modern Ciphers*, eds. Katherine Ellison et al. (New York, London: Routledge, 2017): 7-8.

[78] With the caveat that we often see what we want to see, I would like to thank Francesco Perono Cacciafoco and Giuseppe Greco for their help in vetting the Campin crypto-signature.

[79] A cleric who received his tonsure from the bishop of Cambrai in 1423 during his first apprenticeship with Campin (1418-1425), Jacques Daret probably had some training in Latin, theology and church history. In three of the four extant panels of the *Arras Altarpiece* that he painted shortly after his second apprenticeship (1427-1432), Daret inscribed fragments of a Latin antiphon sung at the Feast of the Purification along the hems of Mary's clothing: Penny Howell Jolly, "Learned Reading, Vernacular Seeing: Jacques Daret's Presentation in the Temple," *The Art Bulletin* 82, no. 3 (September, 2000): 428-429, 435-439; and Vera F. Vines, "A Reassessment of Jacques Daret in the Context of Robert Campin's Workshop in Tournai," in *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship*, ed. Susan Foister et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996): 197-198.

[80] Detail. Majolica Jug Turned on Its Side. In the Mérode *Annunciation* © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Triptych_(Merode_Altarpiece)_MET_DT7255.jpg (accessed on 7 June 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

and New Testaments, which could be read spiritually after the incarnation of Christ. Hebrew was the oldest and least understood of the biblical languages and therefore, the most esteemed.[81] The mere presence of Hebrew letters in the Mérode *Annunciation* – a painting thought to have been produced without a patron – burnished the Campin workshop's reputation for learning.

Fig. 12. Detail. Majolica Jug Turned on Its Side.
In the Mérode *Annunciation*.

81

Over fifty years ago, Take Luite de Bruin – a University Professor from Amsterdam – decoded the Mérode anagram as *DVPAYMKN (DV KAMPYN),* which can mean DU KAMPYN in French or V(an) D(er) KAMPYN in Dutch.[82] Both decryptions translate as "OF CAMPIN" in English. With the majolica jug turned on its side, De Bruin's transliteration reads from left to right as follows: D (Hebrew phoneme ד for dalet), V (upside down Greek lower case letter of υ upsilon), P (obverse of the Greek π pi fragment that looks like the number 7), A (Hebrew character א for aleph), Y (Greek upper case letter of Y upsilon), M (Hebrew character מ for mem), K (obverse of Greek K Kappa), N (Greek N Nu). A system of Yiddish transliteration in Ashkenazi script similar to the characters for A (aleph) and the M (mem) in the Campin anagram may be found among the titles of the cross held by an angel standing next to the altar of the Mystic Lamb in the *Ghent Altarpiece* and the sacred name of Maria on St. Peter's cloak in the Diest Last Judgement, where the M (mem) character in the Mérode Annunciation is turned upside down.[83] The striking resemblance between the Hebrew for aleph and the Greek for Nu is probably more playful than significant.[84] The letters DV might also stand for *D(eo) V(olente) or* "God Willing" in English. This Latin abbreviation was a pre-Christian nod to the will of the gods that made its way into the Vulgate via St. Paul (1 Corinthians 4:19) and the Epistle of James (James 4:15).[85] "God Willing Campin" is probably the most suitable translation of DV KAMPYN, because it conveys hopeful humility rather than artistic pride.

Erwin Panofsky loved mysteries. For many years, he was fascinated by the Voynich manuscript in the Beinicke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University.[86] Hand-written in an indecipherable language during the fifteenth century, this illustrated text was attributed to Roger Bacon (1214-1292), an English philosopher and Franciscan monk known for his interest in cryptography. During the European Middle Ages and Renaissance, Bacon was thought to have written a thirteenth-century letter entitled *Concerning the Marvelous Power of Art and Nature and the Nullity of Magic* that described seven ways to encrypt sensitive messages.[87] The fourth of these methods recommended the creation of anagrams by mixing Hebrew, Greek and Latin letters like the As-

81 Susan Frances Jones, "Jan van Eyck's Greek, Hebrew and Trilingual Inscriptions,» in *Jan Eyck Studies, Papers Presented at the Eighteenth Symposium for the Study of Underdrawing and Technology in Painting, Brussels, 19-21 September 2012*, eds. Christina Currie et al. (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2017): 295-296.

82 Before the letter U was introduced in the Late Middle Ages, the shape V stood for both the vowel U as well as the consonant V. DU is a contraction of the preposition *de la* or "of the" in French. De Bruin also points out that DV when reversed can stand for *V*(*an*) *D*(*er*) or "of the" in Dutch. We have not had the opportunity to confirm the Campin crypto-signatures mixed with religious texts that were found by De Bruin in other paintings attributed to the Master of Flémalle: T. L. de Bruin, "Le Maitre de Flémalle et sa Crypto-Signature," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 67 (Janvier 1966): 5-6, note 2.

83 Jones, "Jan van Eyck's Trilingual Inscriptions," 296-297 (fig. 20.5) and 301 (fig. 20.8).

84 Although a less striking resemblance than the Hebrew for aleph and the Greek for Nu, the Ashkenazi character for E (a'yin) or צ looks like the upper case Greek letter for upsilon or Y on the Mérode jug. If we substitute Y for V (second letter) and E for Y (fifth letter) in the De Bruin transliteration, the anagram – DYPAEMKN (*DE KAMPYN*) – would still translate into English as the signature OF CAMPIN. For a contemporary example of the character for E (a'yin) or צ, see the titles of the cross in the *Mystic Lamb* of the *Ghent Altarpiece*: Jones, "Jan van Eyck's Trilingual Inscriptions," 296-297 (fig. 20.5).

85 The phrase is roughly equivalent to the Arabic *inshallah*: Jelle Wytzes, "*Der Letzte Kampf des Heidentums in Rom* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1977): 50; and Anthony G. Roeber and Paul B. Harvey, «"God Willing": Really? A Note on the Ambiguities of an Interfaith Expression,» *Neophilologus* 95, no. 3 (2011): 374.

86 For more on the Beinecke MS 408 (accessed on 16 May 2022): https://orbis.library.yale.edu/vwebv/holdingsInfo?bibId=11167038.

87 Roger Bacon, *Roger Bacon's Letter: Concerning the Marvelous Power of Art and Nature and the Nullity of Magic*, trans. Tenney Lombard Davis (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2010), 40-41. For Bacon's unique reconstruction of the Hebrew alphabet, including vowels, see: Roger Bacon, *The Greek Grammar of Roger Bacon and a Fragment of his Hebrew Grammar*, eds. Edmond Nolan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1902), 199-208.

tronomer Ethicus. Also known as Aethicus Ister, this fictitious pagan purportedly wrote a travel guide called the *Cosmography,* which was censored and published by an eighth-century Christian pretending to be St. Jerome (ca. 342-420), the Church Father who translated the Old and New Testaments into Latin from Hebrew and Greek, respectively.[88] In the name of poetic license, Ethicus turned Hebrew characters on their backs and bent Greek letters forward so that only the wise could decode his ciphers.[89] According to the most recent decryption of the Voynich manuscript, Panofsky came closest to identifying the medieval plaintext – Galician Portuguese – when he suggested in the early 1930s that the readable language might be a southern Spanish dialect influenced by the Jewish Kabbala.[90] Given Panofsky's fascination with the Voynich manuscript, we wonder why he never decrypted the Campin anagram – a fairly simple substitution cipher using three phonetic alphabets. Perhaps he viewed the inscription as a clue that would involve us in the mystery of disguised symbolism. Or perhaps he thought that his followers would become more observant by decrypting Campin's pious affirmation by themselves.

4. Purification and Lust

4.1. Between the Sexes

Fig. 13. Detail. Brass Laver, Chimney Corbels and Bench Finials. In the Mérode *Annunciation*.

Fig. 14. *Lavabo*. ca. 1400. Southern Netherlands: Valley of the Meuse.

The Campin workshop also juxtaposed memory prompts that were unlike one another to expand meaning. In contrast to the objects on the wooden tabletop that detail purification of the heart, clear references to lust and procreation decorate the lavabo, fireplace and bench (Fig. 13).[91] The brass laver, which holds clean water to wash dirty hands, has two serpent spouts that flank opposing busts of the same person[92] (Fig. 14).[93] Serpents were often portrayed as composite creatures with dog heads, lion paws and reptile bodies.[94] A symbol

[88] The *Cosmography* of Aethicus Ister might be based on Lucan's lost *Orpheus*, a Latin poem written during the age of Nero: Richard Matthew Pollard, "Denuo on Lucan, the Orpheus and "Aethicus Ister": Nihil Sub Sole Novum," *The Journal of Medieval Latin* 20 (2010): 58-69.

[89] Michael W. Herren, *The Cosmography of Aethicus Ister: Edition, Translation, and Commentary* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), no. 73, 164-165.

[90] Alisa Gladyševa, "Voynich Manuscript-Analysis Of The Codification Algorithm With The Encryption Methods Known In The Medieval Time And Results Of The Marginalies That Were Not Encrypted,» *Revista Científica Arbitrada De La Fundación Menteclara* 5, no. 128 (2020): 13. In *Military Cryptanalysts: Panofsky's Responses of 1954*, Panofsky guessed that the underlying language was provincial French (accessed on 16 May 2022): https://voynichrevisionist.com/2019/01/19/military-cryptanalysts-panofskys-responses-of-1954/.

[91] Detail. Brass Laver, Chimney Corbels and Bench Finials. In the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Steven Zucker, Smarthistory, https://www.flickr.com/photos/profzucker/25055146741 (accessed on 4 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[92] Cast in bronze and copper alloys using the lost-wax method, the fifteenth-century laver in the Cleveland Museum of Art is a sub-type of medieval aquamaniles or pouring vessels to wash dirty hands. For this ancient purification ritual as a gesture of innocence, see Pilate washing his hands of Christ's blood (Matthew 27:24): Peter Barnet, "Beasts in Every Land and Clime: An Introduction to Medieval Aquamanile," in *Lions, Dragons, and Other Beasts: Aquamanilia of the Middle Ages, Vessels for Church and Table*, eds. Peter Barnet et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): 3-10. For more context on the brass lavabo in the Cleveland Museum of Art, see Amanda Mikolic's "The Art of Hand Washing" (accessed on 24 January 2022): https://medium.com/cma-thinker/the-art-of-handwashing-515bf9ea5343.

[93] *Lavabo*. ca. 1400. Southern Netherlands: Valley of the Meuse. Brass. Diameter: 23.8 cm. Overall: 36.9 x 46.4 cm. Cleveland Museum of Art. Norman O. Stone and Ella A. Stone Memorial Fund:1965.22. © Cleveland Museum of Art, https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1965.22 (accessed on 4 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[94] For the significance of the serpent imagery, see: Christian Heck and Rémy Cordonnier, *The Grand Medieval Bestiary: Animals in Illuminated Manuscripts* (New York and London: Abbeville Press, 2012), 526-536; and Thomas Honegger, *Introducing the Medieval Dragon* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2019), 29-41. For the origins of the dog-headed serpent, see: Giuseppe Delia, "Wolf vs. Dragon. What if Medieval Dragons Were Wolf-Headed Snakes from Antiquity?," *New Frontiers in Archaeology* 383 (2019): 200-208. The handles of many flame-tailed aquamaniles were serpents with dog heads and no legs similar to the spouts of the Mérode laver: Ursula Mende, "Late Gothic Aquamanilia from Nuremberg," in *Lions, Dragons, and Other Beasts: Aquamanilia of the Middle Ages, Vessels for Church and Table*, eds. Peter Barnet et al. (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006): 19-22.

of Satan, the double-headed amphisbaena was identified with the two-faced serpent that seduced Eve in the Garden of Eden[95] (Fig. 15).[96]

Fig. 15. Detail. Amphisbaena (amphivena). In the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. England. ca. 1200.

A sexually aroused couple decorates the corbels on either side of the soot-stained chimney. Soot is the residue of lust – symbolized here by the cold hearth that signals Mary's perpetual virginity.[97] Alternating lion and dog finials mark the corners of the bench, which has a reversible back.[98] The movable back is in the summer position so that the bench faces the room instead of the fire. Here lions signal male courage and strength, whereas dogs refer to female fidelity.[99] The lion finial on the right front corner not only shows men where to sit, but also echos the position of the male corbel on the chimney breast. The finials turn away from each other to signal sexual restraint. Images of restraint are appropriate decorations for a love seat that separates the cold hearth from the Annunciate.[100] Wearing red, the color of charity – Mary sits on the ground between the two sexes and leans against the settle. Blue velvet cushions her arm rest and shields her from drafts, just as the iron nails that plug the holes of the fire screen block the soot of sin. The Virgin has kept the Word of God unsullied. She holds the pristine cover of her book with clean hands – hands washed in pure water poured from the brass laver and dried with white linen hanging on the red towel rail.[101]

4.2. White Linen, Blue Stripes and the Jews

Bleached linen often stood for moral innocence "without stain or taint."[102] Although white linen was rich in Christian allegory, the widespread use of fine napery in handwashing rituals is arguably just as important in the Mérode *Annunciation.*[103] Cleanliness was next to godliness after

95 Genesis 3:1-6. The amphisbaena is a snake so-named because it has heads at both ends of its body and moves easily in either direction: Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies*, 256 (XII.iv.20). For an overview of the double-headed snake, see: George Claridge Druce, "The Amphisbaena and its Connections in Ecclesiastical Art and Architecture," *Archaeological Journal* 63, no. 1 (1910): 285-317. For references to an amphisbaena aquamanile in a private collection, see: Joanna Olchawa, „Aquamanilien und ihr Gebrauch in Islamischen, Christlichen und Jüdischen Handwaschungsriten," in *Handgebrauch: Geschichten von der Hand aus dem Mittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Robert Jütte et al. (Leiden and Boston: Verlag Wilhelm Fink, 2019): 48.

96 Detail. Amphisbaena (amphivena). In the *Aberdeen Bestiary*. England. ca. 1200. Tempera, ink and gold on vellum. 300 x 210 mm. Aberdeen, Scotland: Special Collections, University Library. MS 24, fol. 68v. © University of Aberdeen, https://bestiary.ca/beasts/beastgallery144.html (accessed on 4 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

97 Fire is a bivalent metaphor. Depending on context, fire can refer to divine love or sinful lust. Black smoke, ashes and soot are the unclean residue of sin. For a detailed description of the sexual arousal of the man and woman that decorates the corbels, see: Hahn, "'Joseph Will Perfect," 61.

98 Long benches with and without movable backs could be used for sleeping as well as sitting: Jozef de Coo, "A Medieval Look at the Merode Annunciation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 44, no. 2 (1981): 123, fig. 16; and Jean Guyer Godard, "Medieval Domestic Furniture of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries in England, France, and the Low Countries as Portrayed in Selected Manuscript Illuminations" (Masters Thesis, Oregon State University, 1975), 57-61.

99 For the symbolism of these two animals on the tombstones of married couples, see: Felix Thürlemann, *Robert Campin: A Monographic Study with Critical Catalogue* (Munich and New York: Prestel, 2002), 68. During the late Middle Ages, dogs stood for both good and bad human behavior. In the Mérode *Annunciation*, for example, the female dog – a traditional symbol of gluttony and lechery – turns away from the male lion to show sexual restraint as opposed to the dog-headed serpent that seduced Eve: John B. Friedman, "Dogs in the Identity Formation and Moral Teaching Offered in Some Fifteenth-Century Flemish Manuscript Miniatures," in *Our Dogs, Our Selves: Dogs in Medieval and Early Modern Art, Literature, and Society*, ed. Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2016): 337-341.

100 A bench for two that was designed for intimate conversation was not called a love seat until the seventeenth century. Settles for heterosexual couples were clearly associated with married life (*Holy Family* by Barthelemy d'Eyck, Figure 9) and love games during the late medieval period as seen in the Cluny Museum's glass panel of the unmarried chess players, who are seated on a lion bench similar to the settle in the Mérode Annunciation. Notice that married couples such as Joseph and Mary were usually represented in the heraldic position with the man on our left and the woman on our right (accessed on 25 May 2022): https://www.musee-moyenage.fr/en/collection/chess-players.html. For more on seats designed for two as well as the source of our Fig. 5, see: Michel Hérold, "Windows in Domestic Settings in France in the Late Middle Ages: Enclosure and Decoration in the Social Living Space," in Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass, eds. Elizabeth Carson Pastan et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019): 139, 162 (fig. 8.3); and Dany Sandron, "Le Jeu de l'Amour et des Échecs: Une Scène Courtoise dans Le Vitrail Lyonnais au XV Siècle," La Revue du Louvre et des Musées de France 1 (1998): 35-45.

101 Devotional books were covered with soft kid, silk or velvet that extended beyond the corners of the text. The extra fabric was gathered at the corners to form a bag, such as the white chemisette that covers Mary's book in the Mérode Annunciation: Maria L. Brendel, "Deluxe Devotional Prayer Books: A McGill Book of Hours,» *Fontanus* 8 (1995): 110. The practice of draping the extended fabric of the chemise over the hands when holding a sacred text signaled piety and veneration: Frederick Bearman, "The Origins and Significance of Two Late Medieval Textile Chemise Bookbindings in the Walters Art Gallery,» *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 54 (1996): 170-174.

102 After communion, the priest washed and dried his hands with a linen towel or purificator. Bleached linen was identified with the innocent body of Christ, which was pounded like flax into the pure white cloth of the corporal: Thomas M. Izbicki, „*Linteamenta altaria*: The Care of Altar Linens in the Medieval Church," in *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 12, eds. Robin Netherton et al. (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2016): 45. The Mérode lavabo has also been linked with the sacristy, where priests wash their hands before Mass. For the identification of Campin's lavabo as a Christian piscina, see: Gottlieb, "*Respiciens*," 65-67.

103 Twelfth-century monks associated water with spiritual cleansing and moral hygiene: James L. Smith, "Caring for the Body and Soul with Water: Guerric of Igny's Fourth Sermon on the Epiphany, Godfrey of Saint-Victor's Fons Philosophiae, and Peter of Celle's Letters,» in *Bodily and Spiritu-*

the Black Death devastated Europe in the mid-fourteenth century.[104] Children were taught to wash their hands and face during morning prayers.[105] Hand washing before grace and after meals was also mandatory, because people ate with their fingers. Monks and nuns washed their hands in stone troughs outside refectories before eating their only meal of the day.[106] Elite households retained servants dedicated to the ceremonial washing of hands with scented water.[107] At wedding banquets, brides were careful to leave the water clear and the towels spotless as signs of their virtue.[108] Their private linen was probably as rumpled as the blue-striped towel in the Mérode Triptych.

White napery edged with blue was pervasive in sacred and profane paintings of the late Middle Ages and Renaissance.[109] It appeared not only in banqueting scenes such as the Last Supper, but also in other settings where purification of the body was important.[110] Indeed, the blue-striped linen in the foreground of the *Circumcision of Christ* by a Regensburg Master (active 1435-1445) suggests that the towel in the Mérode Annunciation might also refer to ritual cleansing before the era of grace[111] (Fig. 16).[112] Although the resemblance might be accidental, the long towel with blue stripes at both ends looks like the fringed prayer shawls that Jews call *tallits*.[113] The blue thread – which reminded Jewish men to lead a heavenly life by obeying the Law – links the Mérode lavabo to the bronze lavers in the Temple forecourt, where Levites washed the hands and feet of the High Priest before he offered young animals on the altar of holocausts.[114] Blood sacrifice for sin prefigured the crucifixion, where the body of Christ turned white on the

al Hygiene in Medieval and Early Modern Literature: Explorations of Textual Presentations of Filth and Water, ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2017): 166-169.

104 House cleaning – symbolized by a whisk broom in the Brussels version of the Campin *Annunciation* – was compared to confession, which prepares the soul for contemplation: French, *Household Goods and Good Households*, 103. The Brussels infrared reflectogram indicates that the whisk broom replaced a lavabo niche next to the fireplace: Asperen de Boer, "Underdrawing," 98-99 (Figure 83). According to conduct manuals of the period, clean bodies and fresh linen define the virtuous life. Cleanliness was also critical to health and the prevention of disease: Susan North, *Sweet and Clean?: Bodies and Clothes in Early Modern England* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 52-54, 82-90.

105 The washing of hands and face with cold water in the early morning was recommended by the *Regimen sanitatis salernitanum*, a popular poem on healthy living written in the twelfth or thirteenth century: North, *Sweet and Clean?*, 42. An early French conduct book, written by Geoffrey de la Tour Landry for his three daughters in 1372, recommended the washing of face and hands with morning prayer: Rebecca Barnhouse, *The Book of the Knight of the Tower: Manners for Young Medieval Women* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 53, 91. The *Decor puellarum* – a Venetian spiritual guide for young women published around 1470 – suggests praying to the Trinity while washing their hands and face in the early morning: Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 63-64.

106 In deference to austerity, the lavabo hand towels were only changed twice weekly: Alison I. Beach, "Living and Working in a Twelfth-Century Women's Monastic Community,» in *The Cambridge Companion to Hildegard of Bingen*, ed. Jennifer Bain (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 46-48.

107 Medieval courtesy books linked manners to morals. For an overview of medieval hand washing etiquette, see: Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976), 165-169. The wearing of towels over the arm and other forms of deference at court banquets were derived from the liturgy of the Church: Kim M. Phillips, "The Invisible Man: Body and Ritual in a Fifteenth-Century Noble Household,» *Journal of Medieval History* 31, no. 2 (2005): 144-158. For an excellent discussion of Tudor dining, including the maintenance of ewers, basins and fine linens, see: David Malcolm Mitchell, "Fine Table Linen in England, 1450-1750: The Supply, Ownership and Use of a Luxury Commodity" (PhD. diss., University College of London, 1999): 57-77.

108 A contemporary of Dante advised brides to wash their hands before wedding banquets and eat sparingly so that they would not bedim the water or mark the towels: Francesco da Barberino, "Of the Government and Conduct of Women," in *Queene Elizabethes Achademy, A Book of Precedence with Essays on Italian and German Books of Courtesy*, trans. William Michael Rossetti, Part II (London: N. Trübner & Co., 1869): 51-52; and Iris Origo, *The Merchant of Prato: Francesco di Marco Datini, 1335-1410* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2020), 194. I would like to thank Amanda Mikolic, Curatorial Assistant at Cleveland Museum of Art, for her help in locating these citations.

109 The white linen towel with blue stripes in the Mérode *Annunciation* was probably made locally. During the early fifteenth century, good quality plain linen came from France and the Low Countries, including *Dorniks* from Tournai: David M. Mitchell, «*By Your Leave My Masters*: British Taste in Table Linen in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,» *Textile History* 20, no. 1 (1989): 51-52. The white lozenge twill from Perugia with decorative blue borders that was so popular in Italian Renaissance paintings was woven with a linen warp and a cotton weft. This absorbent weave was exported from Venice and widely imitated in southern Germany around the end of the fourteenth century: Walter Endrei, "Les Etoffes Dites de Perouse, leurs Antecedents et leurs Descendance," *CIETA Bulletin* 65, 1987: 61-65; and Rosamund Garrett and Matthew Reeves, *Late Medieval and Renaissance Textiles* (London: Sam Fogg, 2018), 140-147. The leaching of blue dye from the stripes might have obviated the need to add bluing to the laundry: North, *Sweet and Clean*, 165.

110 For the furniture of hygiene in quattrocento households, see: Peter Thornton, *The Italian Renaissance Interior 1400-1600* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1991), 242-245.

111 Sometimes the white cloth with blue stripes was placed on the Temple altar as in the Circumcision of Christ from a small triptych painted around 1490 by a Master from Lower Austria (accessed on 19 March 2022): https://www.stift-klosterneuburg.at/collection/beschneidung-christi/.

112 A Regensburg Master. *Circumcision of Christ*. ca. 1420. Mixed media on wood. 51.5 x 42.5 cm. Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle. Accession Number: 2197. © Staatliche Kunsthalle, https://www.kunsthalle-karlsruhe.de/kunstwerke/S%C3%BCddeutscher-Meister-Regensburg/Die-Beschneidung-Christi/1F1BDBE74DE40A01E1D19FB674275404/ (accessed on 6 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

113 The white linen towel with white fringe and blue stripes associates the Campin lavabo with ritual cleansing before the advent of Christ (Numbers 15:37-41): Dilshat Harman, "Striped Jews: The Offering of the Jews in the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum,» *Ars Judaica* 15 (2019): 35-42; To prevent intermarriage, the Fourth Lateran Council of 1251 stipulated that Jews be distinguished from Gentiles by their clothes. Soon thereafter, Rome instituted new laws that required Jewish men to wear circular yellow badges and married women, two blue stripes on their veils: Barbara Wisch, "Vested Interest: Redressing Jews on Michelangelo's Sistine Ceiling,» *Artibus et Historiae* (2003): 148. The gaudiness of striped clothes was viewed as a sign of deviance: Michel Pastoureau, *The Devil's Cloth: A History of Stripes and Striped Fabric* (New York: Washington Square Press, 2003), 7-32.

114 Maimonides (1135-1204) compared the blue thread of *tallits* to the sea, the sky and God's Holy (sapphire) Throne. It is a symbol of divine law as opposed to the white fringes, which represent the rational universe: Baruch Sterman, "The Meaning of Tekhelet," *B'Or Ha'torah* 11, 1999: 191-192. For a Christian perspective on the blue thread of *tallits*, see: Lapide, *The Great Biblical Commentary*, Matthew 23:5. Campin's laver probably refers to the copper and bronze basins in the Tabernacle (Exodus 30: 17-18) and Solomon's Temple (1 Kings 7:23–26), where priests washed their hands and feet before sacrificing on the altar of holocaust, because it was irreverent to approach the sacred with the dirt of everyday life: Meinolf Schumacher, „*Lavabo in innocentia manus meas*: Zwischen Schuldanerkennung und Schuldabwehr: Händewaschen im Christlichen Kult," in *Handgebrauch: Geschichten von der Hand aus dem Mittelalter und der Frühen Neuzeit*, eds. Robert Jütte et al. (Leiden and Boston: Verlag Wilhelm Fink, 2019): 63-68.

stretcher of the cross.[115] Medieval Christians believed that hands clean of innocent blood were not enough. Only the penitent who was pure of heart would see God.[116]

4.3. Father Sol, Astrology and the Gentiles

The fiery end-piece of the wooden towel rail broadens ritual cleansing to include the Gentiles. The bearded carving represents Father Sol, the Roman god of the Sun, whom the Greeks called Helios.[117] The image was inspired by German block-books on the seven planets, which became popular during the fifteenth century[118] (Fig. 17).[119] Printed from woodcuts and written in vernacular, planet books simplified the complex natal charts of astrologers by linking the twelve signs of the zodiac to children born under the influence of each planet and then adding jingles that were easy to remember. The children of Sol prayed in the morning and played in the afternoon. They were the noble children of light:

Fig. 16. A Regensburg Master. *Circumcision of Christ*. ca. 1420. Karlsruhe: Staatliche Kunsthalle.

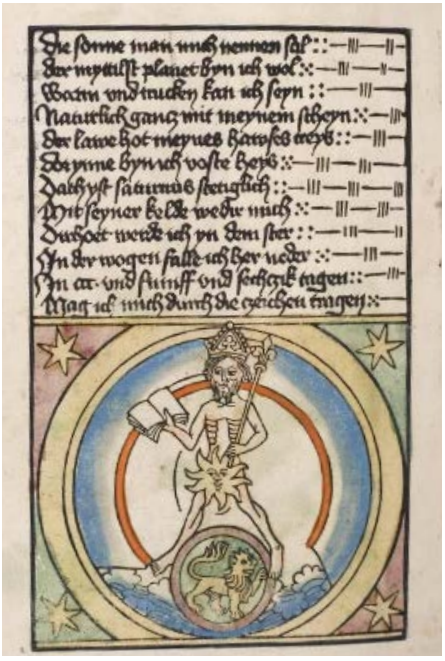

Fig. 17. Anonymous. *Father Sol*. In *Planetenbuch*. 1455/1458. Heidelberg: University Library, Codex Palatina germ. 438, Volume 2.1, fol. 149v.

Noble am I and fortunate,
so it is my children's fate.
Good beards, large foreheads, bodies
fair, ruddy lips, of brains their share.
Happy, kindly, well-borne, strong,
fond of harps, viols, and song.
All morning long to God they pray,
and after noon they laugh and play.
They wrestle and they fence with
swords, they throw large stones
and serve great lords. Manly exercises are
their sports, they have good luck
in princely courts.[120]

The planet Sol encouraged piety and was therefore an appropriate choice to represent Gentiles before the

[115] One of the most popular female donations to local parish churches during the Middle Ages, fine white linen represented purity of heart as well as penance for the bloodless body of Christ stretched on the wood of the cross. Napery donations were used to make vestments and altar cloths. Pious women who could not afford to donate textiles washed the parish laundry for deacons, who were responsible for the upkeep of liturgical linens: Joanne Sear, "To the Chapel of St. Andrew...A Broken Basin of Silver Out of Which a Chalice Is To Be Made: The Importance of Material in Late Medieval Religious Bequests," *Proceedings of the Suffolk Institute of Archeology* 44 (1), 2017: 42-43; and Nicola A. Lowe, "Women's Devotional Bequests of Textiles in the Late Medieval English Parish Church, c. 1350–1550,» *Gender & History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 407-429.

[116] This phrase refers to the eighth beatitude: Matthew 5:8. Allegorically, the bright sound of the brass laver was the confession of sins and the bleached white linen towel, a pure heart adorned with the works of penance: Schumacher, "Lavabo," 72-76.

[117] The end piece of the towel rail was recently identified as a wild man, probably because the image contrasts the unclean with the clean and therefore encourages good hygiene. Although cleanliness is an important theme in the Mérode *Annunciation*, the bright red color of the end piece and its placement near the towel and lilies reinforces the Father Sol interpretation. Similar end pieces, both sacred and profane, were produced in northern Germany and the Netherlands during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries: French, *Household Goods*, 107-108. For a bawdy end piece in the Victoria & Albert Museum, see (accessed on 18 March 2022): https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O122830/towel-holder-unknown/.

[118] Five houses or planets – Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn – ruled two signs each. The Sun brought light and the Moon, darkness. Together they ruled their respective signs of Leo and Cancer: Ilja M. Veldman, "Seasons, Planets and Temperaments in the Work of Martin van Heemskerck: Cosmo-Astrological Allegory in Sixteenth-Century Netherlandish Prints," *Simiolus* 11: 164. For illustrations of Sol and his children, see (accessed on 31 March 2022): https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/cpg438/0310.

[119] Anonymous. *Father Sol*. In *Planetenbuch*. 1455/1458. Block book. 27 x 20 cm. Heidelberg: University Library, Codex Palatina germ. 438, Volume 2.1, fol. 149v. © University Library, https://doi.org/10.11588/diglit.236#0310 (accessed on 6 June 2022 and modified by the author). Image in the public domain.

[120] Zdravko Blazekovic, "Variations on the Theme of the Planets' Children, or Medieval Musical Life According to the Housebook's Astrological Imagery,» in *Art and Music in the Early Modern Period. Essays in Honor of Franca Trinchieri Camiz*, ed. Katherine A. McIver (Birmingham, AL: The University of Alabama, 2003): 259. Rather than the cosmos choosing children based on birth dates, individuals began to identify with a planet based on personality or profession: Geoffrey Shamos, "Astrology as a Social Framework: The 'Children of Planets', 1400–1600,» *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 7, no. 4 (2013): 435-437.

advent of Christ. The bright red face of the pagan sun god also refers to the element Fire. The warmth of the sun not only dries wet towels, but also makes white lilies bloom.

5. The Missing Dove

In the Mérode *Annunciation*, the traditional sign of the Holy Spirit – the white dove – is replaced by a tiny infant amid rays of divine fire as described by St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1221-1274) in his influential *Tree of Life:*

> On the sixth day the power and wisdom of the divine Hand created men out of clay. Similarly, it was at the beginning of the sixth age of mankind – *when came the fullness of time* – that the archangel Gabriel was sent to the Virgin. After she consented to his word, the Holy Spirit descended upon her in the form of a divine fire that instantly enflamed her soul and sanctified her body in perfect purity, and the power of the Most High overshadowed her, to enable her to bear such fire. Instantly, by the operation of that power, a body was formed, a soul created and both were united to the Godhead in the Person of the Son; so that this same Person was God and man, with the properties of each nature unimpaired.[121]

The tiny cross-bearing infant descending on golden rays of light, is the spirit of Christ bringing the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, godliness and fear of the Lord to penitent sinners[122] (Fig. 18).[123] The small spirit is heading straight for his mother's virginal womb. The Virgin's red dress hemmed with gold thread reflects the white light that has enkindled the Annunciate and sanctified the union of God and man. The gold is echoed in the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the fiery wings of Gabriel, the tiny spark of conscience, the beaded trim of the purse and the gilt-edged pages of the two books.[124]

Fig. 18. Detail. Spirit of Christ, Angel Gabriel and Three Windows. In the Mérode *Annunciation*.

Dressed in liturgical garments, the angel Gabriel is kneeling to herald the advent of Christ. Gabriel's amice and alb are made of the same bleached white linen as the towel hanging on the red towel rack.[125] Gabriel's stole – worn diagonally across his chest like that of a deacon – is a liturgical blue embroidered with gold thread and studded with rubies and sapphires.[126] During the late Middle Ages, blue not only symbolized the hope of Heaven, but also the Sacrament of Matrimony.[127] Gabriel has come to assist in the mystical marriage of Divine Love with human nature. As Gabriel starts to kneel, he raises his hand to greet the Virgin Mary. His right hand overlaps the sixteen-sided tabletop made of the same material as the wood of the tiny cross borne by the spirit of Christ. Wood represents mortal flesh – the bait that will trap the Devil when Christ dies on the cross.[128] The incarnation of Christ and his cru-

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121 For *Jesus Sent Down from Heaven*, see Branch I, Fruit 3 of St. Bonaventure's *Tree of Life*: Bonaventure, *The Works of Bonaventure: Cardinal, Seraphic Doctor, and Saint* (I Mystical Opuscula), trans. José de Vinck (Mansfield Center, CT: Martina Publishing, 2016), 105. Robb cited this passage in his discussion of the homunculus flying toward the Virgin Mary in scenes of the Annunciation as the spirit of divine love sent from heaven: Robb, "The Iconography of the Annunciation," 523-526. According to St. Augustine, the embryo of Christ was fully formed and perfect from the moment of conception. Unlike fetuses conceived in sin, the infusion of Christ's soul and the separation of his limbs were not delayed, but present from the moment that he was generated by spirit: Jacqueline Tasioulas, "'Heaven and Earth in Little Space': The Foetal Existence of Christ in Medieval Literature and Thought," *Medium Aevum* 76, no. 1 (2007): 41-45. The homunculus in the Mérode Annunciation was probably inspired by pre-Eyckian manuscript illumination: Maurits Smeyers and Bert Cardon, "Campin and Illumination," in *Robert Campin: New Directions in Scholarship*, eds. Susan Foister et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 1996): 159-169.

122 Isaiah 11:1-3.

123 Detail. Spirit of Christ, Angel Gabriel and Three Windows. In the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Triptych_(Merode_Altarpiece)_MET_DT7254.jpg (accessed on 6 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

124 Originally the sky of the Mérode *Annunciation* was silver foil glazed yellow to look like gold. It was soon replaced with sky blue, probably at the request of the votary who purchased the central panel and commissioned the wings: William Suhr, "The Restoration of the Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin*, New Series 16, no. 4 (December, 1957): 144.

125 Gabriel's white linen garments are made of the same fabric as the lavabo towel and probably refer to spiritual purification as opposed to ritual cleansing before the advent of Christ: Minott, "The Theme," 271. Deacons supervised the upkeep of liturgical linens, including the towels that priests used before and after Mass: Izbicki, "*Linteamenta altaria*," 43. Similar robes were worn by catechumens to signal their spiritual purity. For the ritual treading on sackcloth before baptism and the assumption of spotless white linen garments afterward, see: Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Garments of Shame," *History of Religions* 5, no. 2 (1966): 224-233. On the significant difference between garments of wool spun from the fleece of sheep and goats as opposed to garments of linen spun from the fibers of regenerating flax, see: Walter J. Burghardt, "Cyril of Alexandria on "Wool and Linen"," *Traditio* 2 (1944): 484-486.

126 For the identification of Gabriel's vestments and the difference between how deacons and priests wear their stoles, see: McNamee, Vested Angels, 126-131, 211.

127 For blue as the color of Matrimony, see the right wing of the *Seven Sacraments Triptych* by Rogier van der Weyden: McNamee, *Vested Angels*, 230-231.

128 The significance of wood as a symbol of Christ's mortal flesh that baited the Devil's mousetrap is thoroughly explored in the carpenter wing of the Mérode Triptych: Meyer Schapiro, "Muscipula Diaboli, the Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1945): 182-187.

cifixion make redemption possible if votaries are willing to imitate the reading Annunciate and savor the spiritual banquet of *lectio divina.*

6. Warmed by the Sun, Cooled by the Shade

6.1. The Sun of Justice, Oblique Windows and Contemplation

The seven rays of gold in the Mérode *Annunciation*, which signify the gifts of the Holy Spirit, are visual metaphors of the divine fire that will soon bring salvation to a world mired in sin. The Sun of Justice has just passed through the leaded glass of the near wheel window set high in the eastern wall of Mary's private chamber.[129] As light passes through glazed windows without damaging the glass, so Mary's virginity was preserved before, during and after the birth of her son.[130] A sermon on the Annunciation attributed to Richard of St. Victor (died 1173) details the spiritual meaning of glazed windows:"

> Brothers, this (is) therefore the mystical meaning of glazed windows: wood is the body; glass, the spirit; iron, austerity; lead, moral restraint; each pane, the senses of the soul; the purity of glass, the virtues that were given to us by nature (cardinal virtues); the colors added to glass, the virtues conferred by grace (theological virtues) and the example of saints. So let us, dearest spiritual brothers, be irradiated by the rays of the Sun of Justice and spiritually conceive and give birth to Christ, the son of a Virgin Mary, so that we may come to receive the blessings of eternal life, by (virtue of) the one who presently comes and reigns.[131]

Glass and light – represented here by the tiny infant accompanied by seven golden rays – both represent spirit and therefore can mix without changing their essence.

The surrounds of the two wheel windows placed high in the eastern wall of Mary's solar are wider on the inside than the outside. The sills of the glazed windows on either side of the reading Virgin in a later version of the Campin *Annunciation are also oblique*[132] (Fig. 19).[133] Although Richard of St. Victor wrote an historical commentary on Ezekiel's vision of the restored Temple complex, he failed to mention the spiritual significance of oblique windows in his sermon on the Annunciation. The splayed windows channeled light into the three little chambers that lined either side of the northern gatehouse of Ezekiel's Temple.[134] According to the *Rationale Divinorum Officiorum* of William Durand, Bishop of Mende (ca.1230–96), oblique windows signify the two Testaments, which can be read spiritually in the light of the cross:

> The glass windows of the church are the divine Scriptures that repel the wind and rain, that is, they prevent harmful things from entering; and when they transmit the brightness of the true sun (that is, God) into the church (that is, the hearts of the faithful), they illumine those dwelling there. These windows are larger on the inside of the church because the mystical sense is broader and surpasses the literal sense. The five corporeal senses are also signified by the windows, which must be well structured on the outside, lest they allow in the vanities of the world; and they are open within to acquire more freely the spiritual gifts.[135]

Durand's spiritual commentary was based on a homily by the Church Father and Pope St. Gregory the Great (ca. 540-604), who wrote his gloss long before glazed windows became common in Europe during the late Renaissance:

> In slanting windows the part whereby the light enters is a narrow gate but the inner part which receives the light is wide because the contemplatives, although they only catch a faint glimpse of the true light, are nevertheless stretched inwardly to great breadth. These minds, forsooth, barely avail to seize only the few things which they perceive. The glimpse of eternity which the con-

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For a recent reading of St. Augustine's muscipula minus the rodents, see: David Scott-Macnab, "Augustine's Trope of the Crucifixion As a Trap for the Devil and Its Survival in the English Middle Ages," *Viator* 46, no. 3 (2015): 17-20.

129 The wrought-iron crosses that divide the wheel windows into quadrants are ancient symbols of the Sun: Gottlieb, "*Respiciens*," 78. The Sun of Justice is one of many light metaphors signifying Christ, who was born to redeem mankind from the darkness and error of sin. For the beam of Christ's spirit that warms and illumines the reading Annunciate, see: José Maria Salvador-González, "The Symbol of Light's Ray in Images of the Annunciation of the 14th and 15th Centuries According to Greek Patrology,» *História Revista* 25, no. 3 (2020): 347-348.

130 Millard Meiss, "Light as Form and Symbol in Some Fifteenth-Century Paintings,» *The Art Bulletin* 27, no. 3 (1945): 176-181.

131 *In haec itaque, fratres, mystica significatione vitreae fenestrae lignum est corpus, vitrum spiritus, ferrum severitas, plumbum gravitas, singulae laminae singuli sensus animae, puritas vitri virtutes nobis datae per naturam, colores additi, virtutes nobis collatae, per gratiam, picturae imaginum exempla sanctorum. Simus igitur, fratres charissimi spirituales ut irradiemur radio solis justitiae, et spiritualiter concipiamus et pariamus Christum filium virginis Mariae, ut sic perveniamus ad gaudium retributionis aeternae, ipso praestante qui venit et regnat*. The eighteenth of one hundred Victorine sermons on the Annunciation to our Lady was attributed to Richard of St. Victor. The last paragraph of the sermon was translated into English by the author: Hugo of St. Victor, "*Sermo* XVIII: *In Annunciatione Dominica*," in *Sermones Centum*, *Ad Appendix Hugonis Opera Mystica* III, ed. Jacques-Paul Migne (Paris: Garnier Fratres, 1879): PL 177:934D.

132 For an extensive discussion of oblique windows, glass as an apotropaic filter and other metaphors, including the splayed sills of the windows on either side of the Virgin Mary in the Prado *Annunciation* by Robert Campin, see: Herbert L. Kessler, ""Consider the Glass, It Can Teach You": the Medium's Lesson," in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass*, eds. Elizabeth Carson Pastan et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019), 143-151; and "*Fenestra Obliqua*: Art and Peter of Limoges's Modes of Seeing," in *Optics, Ethics, and Art in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries: Looking Into Peter of Limoges's Moral Treatise on the Eye*, eds. Herbert L. Kessler et al. (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2018): 139-158.

133 Robert Campin. *Annunciation*. ca.1420-1425. Oil on oak. 76 x 70 cm. Madrid: The Prado Museum. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Anunciaci%C3%B3n,_por_Robert_Campin.jpg (accessed on 6 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

134 Ezekiel 40:16. Ezekiel's Temple was difficult to envision because it contained no elevation information. Richard of St. Victor nonetheless made a valiant effort to interpret Ezekiel's prophecy literally: Karl Kinsella, "Richard of Saint Victor's Solutions to Problems of Architectural Representation in the Twelfth Century," *Architectural History* 49 (2016), 6-15.

135 William Durand, *The Rationale Divinorum Officiorum of William Durand of Mende: A New Translation of the Prologue and Book One*, ed. Timothy M. Thibodeau (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), Book I, Chapter 1.18-19.

templatives see is exceedingly small, but even from this trifle the fold of their minds is opened to the increase in fervor and love so that they are enlarged and admit the light of truth as it were through the narrows. This magnitude of contemplation, because it can only be conceded to those who love, is described as slanting windows in the chambers, or in these that are said to be not now outside near the chambers but inside.[136]

Fig. 19. Robert Campin. *Annunciation*. ca.1420-1425. The Prado Museum.

Divine light does not quench the smoking flax as so many have speculated, but ignites the tiny spark of conscience already burning in the penitent soul.

6.2. The Casement Window and Lattice

The sky of the Mérode *Annunciation* was originally silver foil glazed with yellow paint that was similar to the background of an earlier painting by the Master of Flémalle, often identified as Robert Campin[137] (Fig. 20).[138] The change from simulated gold to sky blue was probably made around 1430, when the two wings were added to the central panel of the *Annunciation Triptych.* Currently housed in the Brussels Royal Museums of Fine Arts, the earlier version has two casement windows inserted in the back wall with no oculi in the door wall. The window that would be replaced by the lavabo niche so that Mary could wash her hands is shuttered except for one open panel. It probably stands for the Old Testament, which could only be read literally before the coming of Christ. The other window is more or less the same in both Annunciations. In the Mérode panel, the window behind Mary has two hinged shutters that open sideways below panes of colored glass with the lower part of the left shutter closed and the other, fully open.[139] The respective shutters signify the Old and the New Testaments, which can be read spiritually after the coming of Christ.

As Carla Gottlieb suggested in her discussion of the Mérode casement window, the wooden screen in front of the open shutter probably refers to the lattices or nets through which the bridegroom looks at his bride in Canticles 2:9: "Behold he standeth behind our wall, looking through the windows, looking through the lattices."[140] St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1091-1153) interpreted the wall of the bride's house as mortal flesh and the bridegroom's drawing near, as the Incarnation of the Word, whereas the bride's awareness of her groom as he peers through the lattice refers to contemplation, or the spiritual union of Divine Love and human nature.[141] The lattice provides the cool shade needed by a human bride such as Mary to bear the Sun of Justice. The heraldic glass at the top of the casement window suggests that the votaries in the triptych's left wing hope to glimpse eternity in this life, albeit dimly through a lattice.[142]

7. Apotropaic Grids

Similar to modern crossword puzzles, grid poetry fashioned by cruciverbalists such as the ninth-century Carolingian monk Hrabanus Maurus (ca. 780-856) used geometry to achieve conformity or personal communion with God[143] (Fig. 21).[144] The point

136 *Homilae in Ezechielem*, II, hom. 5, 17: Gregory the Great, *The Homilies of St. Gregory the Great on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel*, ed. Theodosia Gray (Etna, CA: Center for Traditionalist Orthodox Studies, 1990), 347.

137 Based upon underdrawing analysis with infrared reflectography, the Brussels panel (F10) was clearly executed before the Mérode *Annunciation* (F11): Asperen de Boer, "Underdrawing, 97-116. For the attribution history of the Brussels panel, see Jochen Sander's catalogue entry number 3: Kemperdick, The Master of Flémalle, 188-191.

138 Master of Flémalle. *Annunciation*. ca. 1415-1425. Oil on oak. 61.0 x 63.7 cm. Brussels: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Campin_006.jpg (accessed on 6 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

139 Glazed casement windows usually defined important private spaces as opposed to the barred windows of the first floor and the crude shuttered windows in the eaves, where servants were often quartered: Hérold, "Windows in Domestic Settings," 132-134.

140 As in the Mérode *Annunciation*, wooden rafters (Canticles 1:16) and lattices (Canticles 2:9) embellished the wedding chamber of the bride and bridegroom in the Song of Songs. For the spiritual meaning of the lattices in St. Bernard's Sermon LVI on Canticles as well as the contrast between the clouds behind the casement window and the bright light outside the wheel windows, see: Gottlieb, "*Respiciens*," 76-78.

141 For St. Bernard's sermons on the wall of mortal flesh and the divine fire shining through the lattices, see sermons LVI and LVII on Canticles 2:9-10 in a reprint of the original translation into English: Bernard of Clairvaux, *St. Bernard's Sermons on the Canticle of Canticles*, trans. Priest of Mount Melleray, II (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., 1921), 134-156.

142 For Mary as the window of Heaven and the concept of architectural ductus, see: Pastan, "Representing Architecture," 227-260.

143 Perhaps no other pattern has greater meaning for Christians, yet has been so misunderstood by so many because of their enthusiasm for the illusion of window perspective. For a comparison between the node– and field-based grids of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, respectively, see: Jack H. Williamson, "The Grid," *Design Issues* 3.2 (1986): 15-21. For the derivation of the term cruciverbalist, see: Hilary Drummond, "Poet, Geometer, Architect, Scribe: The Medieval Cruciverbalist and the Art of Grid Poetry,» *Yapp* 1, no. 1 (2013): 79-80.

144 Detail. Hrabanus Maurus Adoring the Cross. In *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*. ca. 950. Tempera and ink on parchment. 42.5 x 34.0 cm. Cambridge: Trinity College, MS B.16.3, fol. 30v. © Wren Digital Library, https://mss-cat.trin.cam.ac.uk/manuscripts/uv/view.php?n=B.16.3&n=B.16.3#?c=0&m=0&s=0&cv=67&xywh=-2618%2C-462%2C11538%2C9184 (accessed on 7 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

of intersection – the crossing of vertical heaven and horizontal earth – was charged with meaning. The in-text, or text written within the buff-colored cross, can be read in either direction: *ORO TE RAMUS ARAM ARA SUMAR ET ORO ("O cross, I adore you as an altar, and I request to be taken up on this altar").*[145] A point-based grid constructed with a straightedge and compass also underpins the design of the Mérode *Annunciation.*[146] Despite the grid's importance to the painting's structure, the Latin cross only manifests twice – in the mullions of the casement window and the matchstick cross carried by the spirit of Christ.[147] The vertical mullion aligns with the tiny spark of conscience in the glowing wick of the melting candle to mark the moment when Christ entered time and did not quench the smoking flax[148] (Fig. 22).[149]

To the left of this invisible line is time past; to the right, time future. The diagonal that runs along the length of the Christ's little cross meets the vertical line of the mullion on the floor tiles directly beneath the folds of Mary's red dress to create a wedge that includes most of the tabletop, the far wheel window, the lavabo and the left half of the casement window. Inside this wedge of the eternal present, the polished brass of the laver and candle holder reflect sunlight coming from both wheel windows. The double reflections stand for the light of Christ in the Old and New Testaments. The two diagonals that run from the center of the New Testament oculus along the respective top and bottom rays of the Holy Spirit end with Mary's book of prophecy and the a star-shaped reflection above her virginal womb.[150] The reflected light might refer to the fabled star of Bethlehem, which burned more brightly than the wheel of the Sun and freed the will of man from the tyranny of his horoscope.[151] Diagonal grids also reinforce the leaded glass of the wheel windows, the gilt-edged pages of the breathing book, the wood lattice of the casement window, the wicker back of the settle and the fire screen studded with nails.[152] Woven into the fabric of the Temple curtain that was torn at the moment of Christ's death, the lozenge pattern – a symbol of the starry firmament that divides heaven and earth – protects those who imitate the reading Annunciate. The relationship between the diagonal grid, net of stars and prayer is clearly illustrated in the diaper background of the illumination from the *Rohan Book of Hours* where the Virgin Mary contemplates her son literally cradled in a codex (Fig. 5).[153]

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145 The last of twenty-eight grid poems written in the ninth-century by Hrabanus Maurus praising the Holy Cross contains the first devotional self-portrait in the post-classical art of Western Europe: David Ganz, "Individual and Universal Salvation in the *In honorem sanctae crucis*,» *Florilegium* 30 (2013): 181. A rare Egyptian blue was used to color the robe of Hrabanus Maurus in the tenth-century Anglo-Saxon copy of the Crossbook in the Trinity College Library, Cambridge (MS B.16.3, f. 30v). Blue was the color of contemplation: Stella Panayotova and Paola Ricciardi, "Painting the Trinity Hrabanus: Materials, Techniques and Methods of Production,» *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society* 16, no. 2 (2017): 241-247.

146 We do not agree with Williamson's Millennial analysis of the Campin *Annunciation Triptych*. His approach to nodal pattern language, criticism of lexical symbolism and focus on devotional literature was nonetheless prescient and deserves careful consideration. Unfortunately, Williamson's pattern analysis failed to recognize that the central panel was designed as a standalone entity several years before the wings were added, probably at the behest of the votary: Williamson, "The Meaning," 94-104, 278-294.

147 Although the tiny cross carried by the spirit of Christ is not part of the grid infrastructure, it does link the casement mullions to Christ's salvific sacrifice. The solar or Greek crosses identify the wheel windows as portals for the pagan Sol/Helios as well as the Christian Sun of Justice: Kevin Duffy, *Christian Solar Symbolism and Jesus the Sun of Justice* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022), 77-79.

148 Williamson, "The Meaning," 98.

149 Photoshop Overlay Detailing Critical Alignments in the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Triptych_(Merode_Altarpiece)_MET_DT7253.jpg (accessed on 7 June 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

150 For an apt discussion of the gold rays of heavenly light that settle on the Madonna's womb in Italian Annunciations of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see: Leo. Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?'" Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation in London, Part I." *Artibus et Historiae* (1987): 34-41. The shape of the white light on Mary's red dress in the Mérode *Annunciation* resembles a pentangle. Known as Solomon's endless knot, a five-pointed star can be drawn without removing pen from paper: Williamson, "The Meaning," 111-115. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologica*, 1a 76.3 corpus) and Dante (*Convivio*, IV.vii.14), the pentangle stands for the moral perfection of the rational soul: Richard Hamilton Green, "Gawain's Shield and the Quest for Perfection," *ELH* 29, no. 2 (1962): 126-139; and David N. Beauregard, "Moral Theology in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight: The Pentangle, the Green Knight, and the Perfection of Virtue," *Renascence: Essays on Values in Literature* 65, no. 3 (2013): 146-148. For man's five senses and the five wounds of Christ, see: E. James Mundy, "*Franciscus Alter Christus*: The Intercessory Function of a Late Quattrocento Panel," *Record of the Art Museum, Princeton University* 36, no. 2 (1977): 11.

151 *The Golden Legend* identified the star of Bethlehem as a pentangle: Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William G. Ryan (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 1:14, 82. For the star of Bethlehem's triumph over astrology, see: Tim Hegedus, "The Magi and the Star in the Gospel of Matthew and Early Christian Tradition," *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 59, no. 1 (2003): 89-95. In the *Vision of the Magi* of the *Bladelin Triptych* by Rogier van der Weyden, an infant surrounded by a pentangle of light rays represents the star of Bethlehem. For the original Syriac text of the apocryphal star-child of the Magi and the theme of purification before contemplation (vision), see: Brent Landau, *Revelation of the Magi: The Lost Tale of the Wise Men's Journey to Bethlehem* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 50-59. For the two most influential sources of the legend in medieval Europe, see: Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin, "The Wise Men from the East in the Western Tradition," in *Papers in Honour of Professor Mary Boyce*, eds. Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin et al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1985): 155-156.

152 Diagonal grids are stronger than horizontal grids because of their resistance to sheer action at hinge points: Sarah Brown, "The Medieval Glazier at Work," in *Investigations in Medieval Stained Glass: Materials, Methods, and Expressions*, eds. Brigitte Kurmann-Schwarz et al. (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019): 19.

153 The Temple curtain and its lozenge pattern marked the threshold between earth and heaven (Hebrews: 9:8): Herbert L. Kessler, *Spiritual Seeing: Picturing God's Invisibility in Medieval Art* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 56-63. For the grid, lozenge and trellis as becoming, reproduction and the power of creation see: Barbara Baert, *About Sieves and Sieving: Motif, Symbol, Technique, Paradigm* (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2019), 63-70.

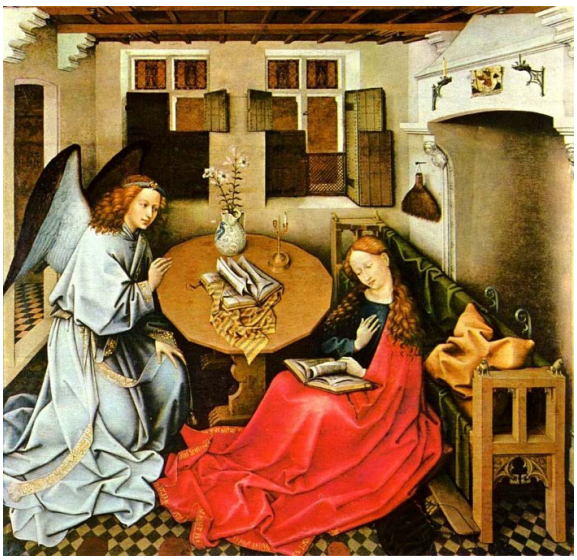

Fig. 20. Master of Flémalle. *Annunciation*. ca. 1415-1425. Brussels: Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium.

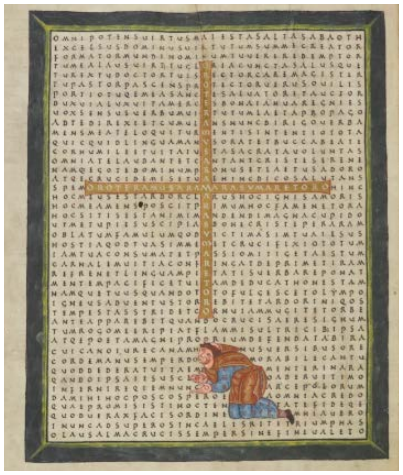

Fig. 21. Detail. Hrabanus Maurus Adoring the Cross. In *De Laudibus Sanctae Crucis*. ca. 950. Cambridge: Trinity College, MS B.16.3, fol. 30v.

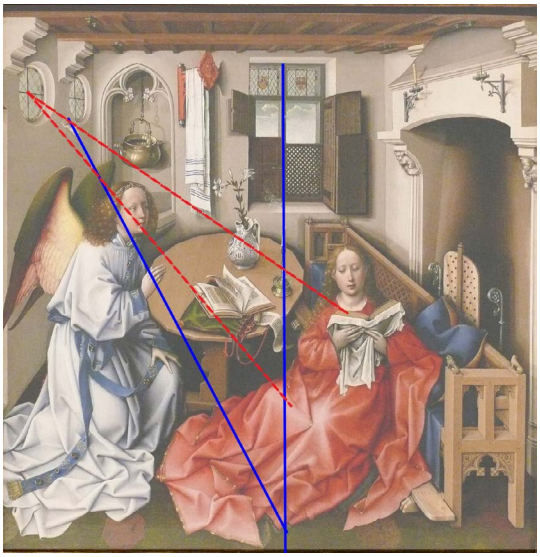

Fig. 22. Photoshop Overlay Detailing Critical Alignments in the Mérode *Annunciation*.

8. Creating a New Visual Language

8.1. The Campin Workshop and Jan Van Eyck

How did the Campin workshop and its patrons translate poetic metaphors such as the protective lozenge into memory prompts? Jacques Daret – the educated cleric and son of a sculptor who was apprenticed to Robert Campin between 1418 and 1432 – probably supplied semiotic feedback as the workshop's visual language was being developed.[154] Certainly, the interior space, city view, lavabo niche, household goods, oblique window and reflections of candlelight on the verso of the Ghent Altarpiece suggest that Jan van Eyck (ca. 1390-1441) not only saw but also understood the mnemonics of the Mérode Annunciation, when he visited Tournai for a guild banquet in his honor on the feast day of St. Luke, October 18, 1427[155] (Fig. 23).[156] At the time of Jan van Eyck's visit, Robert Campin had been the dean of the painters'

[154] Technically, Daret had two Campin apprenticeships. He made a pilgrimage to Aachen in 1426 and then rejoined the Campin workshop in 1427: Jolly, "Learned Reading," 433, note 18.

[155] Panofsky was convinced that Jan van Eyck was the *Johannes pointre* who feasted with the Tournai painters' guild on the 18th of October, 1427, and returned the following year: Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 165, 204. The Mérode *Annunciation* seen by Jan van Eyck in Tournai clearly influenced the *Annunciation* of the *Ghent Altarpiece*: Benjamin Binstock, "Why was Jan van Eyck here? The Subject, Sitters, and Significance of The Arnolfini Marriage Portrait," *Venezia Arti* 26 (2017): 123-127; and Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 173-77.

[156] Jan van Eyck. *Annunciation*. In the *Ghent Altarpiece* (closed position after restoration). 1432. Oil on oak. 90.2 x 34.10 cm. Ghent, Belgium: St. Bavo Cathedral. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ghent_Altarpiece_(closed,_after_restoration).jpg (accessed on 7 June 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

guild and a member of the town council for several years.[157] He was doubtless delighted to show the eminent court painter from Burgundy the innovative *Annunciation that his workshop had produced without a patron.*[157]

Fig. 23. Jan van Eyck. *Annunciation*. In the *Ghent Altarpiece* (closed position after restoration). 1432.

The Campin panel's open-ended prompts inspired Jan van Eyck to create related mnemonics in the *Ghent Altarpiece.* Unlike the ambiguity of the Mérode Annunciation, Van Eyck leaves no doubt that the incarnation portrayed on the verso of the altarpiece wings has already occurred, with the dove of the Holy Spirit directly above Mary's head and her words of consent – "Ecce ancilla dei ("Behold the handmaid of God") – inverted so that they could be read from above.[159] Three of the four household items stored in the wall niche behind the Virgin also appear in the Mérode *Annunciation* and probably reference Mary's miraculous womb, which now contains the uncontainable.[160] The Romanesque window and Gothic lavabo flank the small gap where the wings of the closed altarpiece meet and the Old Dispensation becomes New.[161] This narrow space also marked the moment when Mary's virginal womb was sealed as prophesied by Ezekiel in his vision of the Temple's eastern gate: "And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it..."[162]

As discussed by Felix Thürlemann in his monograph on Robert Campin, the open window and closed lavabo in the foreground of Jan van Eyck's composition have been repositioned and refer to different eras before and after grace than on the back wall of the Mérode *Annunciation.*[163] The sealing of Ezekiel's door in the gap between the central panels of the Ghent *Annunciation* prompted the opening of a spiritual window, or squint, in the Annunciate panel on the far right. Often set high in chancel walls, squints were oblique windows that allowed anchorites to view commu-

[157] Robert Campin remained politically prominent until the patricians returned to power in 1428, fined him in 1429 and later sentenced him to a year of pilgrimage for adultery in 1432. Although given a reprieve from pilgrimage, Campin lost several critical apprentices shortly after his indictment,including Rogier van der Weyden and Jacques Daret, who were made Masters by the painters' guild: Theodore Rousseau, "The Merode Altarpiece," *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin* 16, no. 4 (1957): 117; and Campbell, *Robert Campin*, 634.

[158] A recent symbolic analysis of the Mérode Triptych assumes the supervision of a traditional patron and theological advisor. Although we disagree with this hypothesis, the historical overview of the painting's stylistic analysis was most helpful: Bernhard Ridderbos, "Choices and Intentions in the Mérode Altarpiece," *Journal of the Historians of Netherlandish Art* 14:1 (Winter 2022): 5-6 (13), 19 (55).

[159] Luke 1:38.

[160] Containers such as the jug, candleholder and book covers might refer to the Virgin Mary's womb. The receptacle next to the books has been tentatively identified as an oil vessel, because similar wall tabernacles called aumbries often stored chrism as well as other liturgical items. For more on the medieval aumbry, see: Leonard E. Boyle, "An Ambry of 1299 at San Clemente, Rome," *Mediaeval Studies* 26 (1964): 331-332; and Barbara G. Lane, *The Altar and the Altarpiece: Sacramental Themes in Early Netherlandish Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 27-35.

[161] For the contrast between Romanesque and Gothic styles of architecture in scenes of the Annunciation as symbolic of the transition between the Old and the New Testaments, see: Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 132-133.

[162] Ezekiel 44:2. For the exegesis of the Greek Fathers on Ezekiel's closed gate and the double symbol of Mary as an open and shut door in Annunciations of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, see: José María Salvador-González, "*Haec porta Domini*. Exegeses of some Greek Church Fathers on Ezekiel's *porta clausa* (5th-10th centuries)," *Cauriensia* XV (2020): 615-633; and "The Symbol of Door," 94.

[163] Thürlemann, *Robert Campin*, 173-174.

nion from their cells[164] (Fig. 24).[165] Although the squint in the Ghent *Annunciation* is hidden, it projects northern or supernatural light through twin lancets onto the dark wall behind the Virgin, as opposed to the painting's natural light, which comes from the right.[166] The shape of the candlelights bespeak an opening with less tracery than the Gothic window directly behind Mary in the Annunciate panel. Shaped like candles similar to the lancets of the Gruuthuse spy window in Bruges, these fractured reflections probably refer to St. Gregory's "faint glimpse of true light" that illuminates contemplation[167] (Fig. 25).[168] Indeed, before proceeding to the high altar during consecration, anchorites were given two burning candles that symbolized their ardent love of God.[169] The candlelights pair nicely with the illuminated carafe on the ledge underneath the Gothic window behind the Virgin Mary. Richard of St. Victor compared crystal containers filled with water to meditation that becomes contemplation when penitent souls see heavenly light and respond with insight.[170]

Fig. 24. View Through a Squint of the Altar in the Chantry Chapel. Fourteenth Century. Compton, Surrey: St. Nicholas Church.

Fig. 25. View of St. Bonifacius Bridge from a Gothic Spy Window. Fifteenth Century. Bruges: Gruuthuse Palace. © Birgit Verplancke, https://birgitverplancke.be/project/gruuthuse-brugge/

8.2. Three Questions, One Answer

To counter skepticism about the theory of disguised symbolism, Erwin Panofsky asked three questions:

> …(1) whether or not the symbolical significance of a given motif is a matter of established representational tradition…(2) whether or not symbolic interpretation can be justified by definite texts or agrees with ideas demonstrably alive in the period and presumably familiar with its artists…and (3) to what extent such a symbolic interpretation is in keeping with the historical position and personal tendencies of the individual master.[171]

[164] The Annunciate's chamber on the exterior of the *Ghent Altarpiece* is as cramped as some anchorite cells, where the recluse had to kneel or lie down to see communion. Anchorholds were attached to churches at an oblique angle so that the altar could only be seen indirectly. The squints of female recluses were often shaped like crosses to purify and control their carnal gaze. White linen crosses sewn into the thick black fabric that covered the cell windows overlooking the churchyard constantly reminded female anchorites that Christ died because of Eve's lust for an apple: Sauer, Michelle M. "Architecture of Desire: Mediating the Female Gaze in the Medieval English Anchorhold." *Gender & History* 25, no. 3 (2013): 546-548, 552-560. Like the Virgin Mary's room at the time of the Annunciation, anchorite cells were visited by angels and became angelic spaces: Joshua S. Easterling, *Angels and Anchoritic Culture in Late Medieval England* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2021), 3-5. The reading Annunciate modeled solitary contemplative devotion. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries, female anchorites also became ideal readers of sacred scripture. Enclosure offered both the Virgin Mary and the enclosed "a refuge for sanctified concentration": Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book*, 42. Female anchorites were often compared to wise women such as the two sibyls above the Ghent *Annunciation*: Liz Herbert McAvoy, *Authority and the Female Body in the Writings of Julian of Norwich and Margery Kempe* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 215.

[165] View Through a Squint of the Altar in the Chantry Chapel. Fourteenth Century. Compton, Surrey: St. Nicholas Church. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:St_Nicholas_Compton_squint_in_chantry_chapel.jpg (accessed on 7 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[166] For Jan van Eyck's supernatural light from the north that illuminates the City of God versus the light of the natural world that moves from east to west, see: Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 147, 208. The anchorhold was often attached to the north side of the church: Roberta Gilchrist, *Contemplation and Action: The Other Monasticism* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 191-192.

[167] See St. Gregory's commentary on oblique windows, note 117.

[168] View of St. Bonifacius Bridge from a Gothic Spy Window. Fifteenth Century. Bruges: Gruuthuse Palace. © Birgit Verplancke, https://birgitverplancke.be/project/gruuthuse-brugge/ (accessed on 30 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[169] For the sprinkling, censing and giving of lighted tapers after the recitation of the enclosure litany, see: Eddie A. Jones, "Ceremonies of Enclosure: Rite, Rhetoric and Reality," in *Rhetoric of the Anchorhold: Space, Place and Body within the Discourses of Enclosure*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2008): 38.

[170] In *The Mystical Ark* (Book V; Chapter xi), Richard of Saint Victor (died 1173) described such light-filled containers as symbols of contemplation or the ecstasy of union with God. Sealed glass carafes filled with water in scenes of the Annunciation have traditionally been interpreted as symbols of Mary's perpetual virginity: Brian Madigan, "Van Eyck's Illuminated Carafe," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 49 (1986): 227-228.

[171] Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting*, 142-143.

The stumbling block for many art historians of early Netherlandish painting has been Panofsky's second question, specifically how could medieval artists have been familiar with Latin commentaries on sacred scripture. During the early and high Middle Ages, iconographic programs depended on learned monks and university theologians who were proficient in Latin. However, as literacy increased and devotional manuals written in vernacular became more widely available during the late Middle Ages, laypeople could access symbolic content without a middleman.[172] The *journées chrétiennes* – prayer guides written by male confessors initially for women in the fourteenth century – became the meditation and conduct manuals that flourished throughout Europe over the next two hundred years.[173] These spiritual guides urged men and women to attend Mass daily, listen to sermons in vernacular and lead mixed lives of prayer and work so that they could purify their hearts and see God after death. Prayer began in the morning with the washing of hands and face and ended in the evening after a several hours of silent meditation.[174]

8.3. Prayer and Work in the Mérode Triptych

Fig. 26. The Workshop of Robert Campin. *Annunciation Triptych* (Mérode Altarpiece). 1427-1432.

Fig. 27. Detail. Mismatched Door and Door Jamb of the Votary and Annunciation Panels. In the *Annunciation Triptych*.

Fig. 28. Detail. The Rumpled White Linen and Red Towel Rail. In the Mérode *Annunciation*.

[172] For specific information on the development of literacy in medieval Europe, see: Roberta L. Krueger, "Introduction: Teach Your Children Well, Medieval Conduct Guides For Youths," in *Medieval Conduct Literature: An Anthology of Vernacular Guides to Behaviour for Youths, with English Translations*, ed. Mark D. Johnston (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009): xix-xxii.

[173] Burger, *Conduct Becoming*, 33-74.

[174] During the fifteenth century, the most common genres for shaping religious identity were books of hours for women and devotional portrait diptychs for men: Andrea Pearson, *Envisioning Gender in Burgundian Devotional Art, 1350–1530: Experience, Authority, Resistance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 192-194.

The Campin workshop addressed mixing the contemplative and active life in the votary and carpenter wings of the *Annunciation Triptych* – which represent prayer and work, respectively. The wings offer novices one stairway to heaven (Fig. 26).[175] The unlocked door directly in front the votaries invites the couple to ascend three steps before entering the house of the soul and climbing a long flight of stairs to Mary's solar.[176] The right jamb tucked into the left corner of the central panel offers no insight as to whether the door at the top of the stairs is open or closed[177] (Fig. 27).[178] A symbol of the virginal womb, the door to the solar was physically sealed at the moment of Incarnation, yet remains spiritually open to those who wish to conceive Christ in their hearts.[179] Midway between the courtyard and Mary's room, St. Joseph makes wooden traps to bait the devil – the two-faced serpent of the brass laver – in a shop overlooking a medieval town in Flanders.[180] The door to his carpenter shop – clearly accessed via an outside stairway – is not just closed. It is blocked by the high back of Joseph's settle. The blocked doorway cautions votaries that good deeds must be combined with prayer to experience a foretaste of heaven.

9. Conclusions

Iconographic analysis of the Mérode *Annunciation* has traditionally ignored how the medieval mind forged chains of memory prompts to expand meditation. Even the recent focus on devotional themes has largely failed to accommodate the mental process of meditation itself. The meditating mind prefers to move smoothly between prompts so that it can take full advantage of recollection – a mental process hampered by discursive analysis. Recollection retrieves stored memories and then links them in a continuous chain of meaning.[181] The Campin workshop used embellishments – including placement, color and materials – to enhance the theme of sacred reading with clean hands and a pure heart. Our study of couple dynamics quickly separated physical lust from spiritual love. White – the color of purity – forged another link between the Virgin Mary drying her clean hands with a bleached linen towel and unfolding the spotless cover of her book (Fig. 28).[182] More extensive chains of memory link natural light to spiritual illumination in the solar, where Father Sol, who controls the fate of his children, is outshone by the Sun of Justice. The Christ child in Mary's virginal womb – symbolized here by the white star on her red dress – has come to liberate mankind from astrology so that votaries can freely climb the celestial ladder of *lectio divina.* The mnemonics of the Campin Annunciation are open ended. They are metaphorical steps available to everyone who hopes to purify his or her heart and move beyond the reading Virgin toward imageless devotion.

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[175] The Workshop of Robert Campin. *Annunciation Triptych* (Mérode Altarpiece). 1427-1432. Oil on oak. 64.5 x 117.8 cm. New York: The Cloisters, Metropolitan Museum of Art. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Robert_Campin_-_Triptych_with_the_Annunciation,_known_as_the_%22Merode_Altarpiece%22_-_Google_Art_Project.jpg (accessed on 7 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[176] The Mérode Triptych outlines a path of spiritual ascent to God: Falque, *Devotional Portraiture*, 107-110, 182-190. For more on locational imagination and the upward thrust of spiritual ascent in early Netherlandish art, see: Thor-Oona Pignarre-Altermatt, "What Approach to Flemish Annunciations?,» *Arts* 2022, 11(1), 33, 14-16 of 20: https://www.mdpi.com/2076-0752/11/1/33. Medieval theologians used images of the cross, ladder and tree to help the individual Christian move from the visible to the invisible: Christian Heck, "Raban Maur, Bernard de Clairvaux, Bonaventure: Expression de l'Espace et Topographie Spirituelle dans les Images Médiévales," in *The Mind's Eye: Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger et al. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006): 112-132.

[177] The key dangling from the lock of the open door in the votary wing bears the IHC monogram of Christ. The key inserted in the lock therefore probably refers to Mary as the *ianua coeli* or the *porta paradisi* who shares responsibility for the keys to the eternal gates of heaven with her son (Psalm 23: 7-10): Salvador-González, "The Symbol of Door," 93-107.

[178] Detail. Mismatched Door and Door Jamb of the Votary and Annunciation Panels. In the *Annunciation Triptych*. © Steven Zucker, Smarthistory, https://www.flickriver.com/photos/profzucker/25122072256/ (accessed on 30 June 2022). Image in the public domain.

[179] Mary's solar was a heterotopia – a privileged space that was both open and closed. Like light passing through a window pane without damaging the glass, Mary's chamber could only be accessed spiritually after the incarnation: Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book*, 41-42; and Hana Gründler and Itay Sapir, "The Announcement: Annunciations and Beyond. An Introduction," in *The Announcement: Annunciations and Beyond*, eds. Hana Gründler et al. (Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2020): XVI-XVIII. For the foundational paper on heterotopias where rituals such as purification were used to open sealed spaces spiritually, see: Michel Foucault and Jay Miskowiec, "Of Other Spaces," *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (1986): 26.

[180] For more on traps and trapping, see: Meyer Schapiro, "A Note on the Merode Altarpiece," *The Art Bulletin* 41, no. 4 (1959): 327-328; and Malcolm Russell, "The Woodworker and the Redemption: The Right Shutter of the" Merode Triptych"," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art* 39, no. 4 (2017): 348-350.

[181] See the memory chain of Maimonides, note 98.

[182] Detail. The Rumpled White Linen and Red Towel Rail. In the Mérode *Annunciation*. © Wikipedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Annunciation_Triptych_(Merode_Altarpiece)_MET_DT7254.jpg (accessed on 3 July 2022 and modified by author). Image in the public domain.

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