

Fons signatus: A theological symbol in Christian doctrine and Marian iconography

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Abstract: Among the many metaphors with which Christian doctrinal tradition has designated the Virgin Mary, this article focuses on analyzing the “sealed fountain” (*Fons signatus*) from the *Song of Solomon*, as attested by numerous theological texts and some Marian images. The author begins by analyzing many testimonies from Fathers and medieval theologians of the Latin Church on this subject; secondly, he analyzes a large set of fragments of medieval liturgical hymns that poetically reconfigure this metaphor; in a third section, he analyzes five 15th-century Marian paintings that depict a sealed fountain invested with a clear symbolic intent. Finally, the author summarizes the results of the analysis of the texts and images, highlighting the essential relationship between the two.

Keywords: Mariology; divine motherhood; perpetual virginity; symbol.

ENG *Fons signatus*: Un símbolo teológico en la doctrina cristiana y en la iconografía mariana

Resumen: De entre las múltiples metáforas con las que la tradición doctrinal cristiana designó a la Virgen María, este artículo se focaliza en analizar la de “fuente sellada” (*Fons signatus*) del *Cantar de los Cantares*, tal como lo certifican numerosos textos teológicos y algunas imágenes marianas. El autor comienza por analizar muchos testimonios de Padres y teólogos medievales de la Iglesia latina al respecto; en segundo lugar, analiza numerosos fragmentos de himnos litúrgicos medievales que reconfiguran poéticamente esa metáfora; en un tercer apartado analiza cinco pinturas marianas del s. XV que reflejan una fuente sellada investida con una clara intención simbolizante. Para concluir, el autor sintetiza los resultados de los análisis de los textos y de las imágenes, poniendo en luz la relación esencial existente entre ambos.

Palabras clave: Mariología; maternidad divina; virginidad perpetua; símbolo.

Sumario: 1. Introducción. 2. The biblical metaphor *Fons signatus* in the medieval patristic and theological tradition. 3. The Biblical Metaphor *Fons signatus* in Medieval Liturgical Hymns. 4. The biblical metaphor *Fons signatus* in some 15th-century Marian images. 5. Conclusions. 6. References.

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1. Introduction

A long and in-depth investigation into medieval religious iconography has allowed us to confirm that almost all Christian images produced in the Middle Ages are inspired by and justified by numerous primary sources: among them, passages from the Old and New Testaments, exegeses of Fathers, Doctors and theologians of the Eastern and Western

Churches, stanzas of medieval liturgical hymns, and even some apocryphal writings from the first centuries of our era stand out. In this order of ideas, since immemorial time and throughout the centuries, Christian doctrinal tradition has designated the Virgin Mary with numerous symbols and metaphors, many of them inspired by Old Testament texts considered prophetic prefigurations of the Mother of God. Among

these countless Marian metaphors, this article¹ focuses on the “sealed fountain” (*fons signatus*). This is taken from one of the lyrical praises that, in the *Song of Solomon*, the Bridegroom dedicates to his Bride, when he expresses: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus*². “A garden shut up is my sister, my bride; A spring shut up, a fountain sealed”³.

Now, it is surprising to note that this significant *Fons signatus* metaphor has not had a greater impact in traditional Mariology books: practically all of them omit it, as is the case in the monographs published by Stefano De Fiore⁴, Klemens Stock⁵, Miguel Ponce Cuéllar⁶, Dominique Cerbelaud⁷, Cándido Pozo⁸, Karl-Heinz Menke⁹, Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole¹⁰, Leo Scheffczyk¹¹, Antonio M. Calero de los Ríos¹², Jesús Casás Otero¹³, José C.R. García Paredes¹⁴, Luigi Bonarrigo¹⁵, Brian K. Reynolds¹⁶ and Manfred Hauke¹⁷.

Our purpose is to analyze the treatment of the *Fons signatus* metaphor by Christian writers and its reflection in medieval Marian iconography, in order to infer whether there is an essential relationship between those texts and these images. Therefore, we will divide our article into three main sections: in the first, we will analyze what the Church Fathers and medieval theologians expressed on this subject; in the second, we will analyze many fragments of medieval liturgical hymns that poetically elaborate on this metaphor; in the third, we will analyze five Marian paintings that, with varying degrees of prominence, reflect the presence of a sealed fountain. In the conclusions, we will summarize the results we can infer from the analysis of the texts and images, attempting to shed light on the essential relationship between them.

2. The biblical metaphor *Fons signatus* in the medieval patristic and theological tradition

In the second half of the 4th century, Saint Ambrose of Milan (330-397), in a book on Mary's perpetual virginity, after stating that “virginity is a closed door; virginity is a closed garden; virginity is a sealed fountain”¹⁸, proclaimed in reference to Mary:

You are a closed garden, O virgin, preserve your fruits: do not let thorns grow on you, but let your grapes flourish. [...] You are a paradise, O virgin, take care of Eve. You are a sealed fountain, O virgin, let no one contaminate your water, let no one disturb it; so that you may always contemplate your image in your source¹⁹.

Two or three decades later, Saint Jerome (c. 347-420) in his Epistle 48 asserts that Christ is a virgin and his mother is a perpetual virgin, mother and virgin, a closed garden, a sealed fountain, a virgin after childbirth and a mother before marriage²⁰.

In the mid-6th century, Saint Justus of Urgell states in an exegetical writing on the *Song of Solomon* that we can understand the mother of the Lord as a closed garden and a sealed fountain; that is because, conceiving as a virgin and giving birth as a virgin, she showed in herself the pure splendor of the closed garden and the sealed fountain²¹.

Some three generations later St. Isidore of Seville (c. 556-636) expresses in a book on the birth and death of the Fathers that Mary is interpreted in a varied series of poetic figures: as Lady or Illuminator, as the clear lineage of David, the stem of Jesse, the closed garden, the sealed fountain, the mother of the Lord, the temple of God, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, virgin before childbirth, and virgin after childbirth, and, receiving the greeting of the angel, knew the mystery of conception²². In Appendix 20 of

¹ This article has been written as part of the research work in the Doctorate in Philology at the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED).

² Cant. 4,12. In *Biblia Sacra iuxta Vulgatam Clementinam*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005, 616.

³ Song of Songs 4,12. American Standard Version (ASV).

⁴ Stefano De Fiore. *Maria madre di Gesù. Sintesi storico salvifica (Corso di Teologia Sistemática)*. Bologna: Edizioni Deboniane, 1992.

⁵ Klemens Stock. *Maria, la madre del Signore, nel Nuovo Testamento*. Roma: Apostolato della Preghiera, 1997.

⁶ Miguel Ponce Cuéllar. *Maria, Madre del Redentor y Madre de la Iglesia*. Barcelona: Herder, 2001.

⁷ Dominique Cerbelaud. *Maria. Un itinerario dogmático*. Salamanca: Ed. San Esteban / Madrid: Edibesa, 2005.

⁸ Cándido Pozo. *Maria, nueva Eva*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2005.

⁹ Karl-Heinz Menke. *Maria en la historia de Israel y en la fe de la Iglesia*. Salamanca: Sígueme, 2007.

¹⁰ Benoît-Dominique de La Soujeole. *Initiation à la théologie mariale: “Tous les âges me diront bienheureuse”*. Paris: Parole et silence, 2007.

¹¹ Leo Scheffczyk. *Maria, Madre y acompañante de Cristo*. Valencia: EDICEP, 2010.

¹² Antonio M. Calero de los Ríos. *Maria, signo de esperanza cierta. Manual de Mariología*. Madrid: Editorial CCS, 2010.

¹³ Jesús Casás Otero. *Tota Pulchra. María, esplendor de la belleza divina*. Salamanca: Secretariado Trinitario, 2015.

¹⁴ José C.R. García Paredes. *Mariología*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, 2015.

¹⁵ Luigi Bonarrigo. *Maria Sposa dello Spirito Santo nella teologia contemporanea*. Lugano: Eurpress / Siena: Cantagalli, 2018.

¹⁶ Brian K. Reynolds. *Gateway to Heaven. Marian Doctrine and Devotion. Image and Typology in the Patristic and Medieval Periods. Volume I. Doctrine and Devotion*. New York: New City Press, 2019.

¹⁷ Manfred Hauke. *Introduction to Mariologie*. Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021.

¹⁸ “Porta ergo clausa virginitas est: et hortus clausus virginitas: et Fons signatus virginitas.” (Ambrosius Mediolanensis, *De Institutione Virginis et S. Mariae virginitate perpetua. Liber Unus*. Caput IX. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 16, 321).

¹⁹ “60. Hortus clausus es, virgo, serva fructus tuos: non ascendat in te spinæ, sed uvæ tuæ floreant. [...] Paradisus es, virgo, Evam cave. 61. Fons signatus es, virgo, nemo aquam tuam pollutat, nemo conturbat; ut imaginem tuam in fonte tuo semper attendas.” (Ambrosius, *De Institutione Virginis et S. Mariae virginitate perpetua. Liber Unus*, In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 16, 335-336).

²⁰ “Christus virgo, Mater virginis nostri Virgo perpetua, mater, et virgo. [...] Hortus conclusus, fons signatus (Cant. 4, 12) [...]. Virgo post partum, mater ante quam nupta. Igitur, ut dicere coeperamus, Christus virgo, virgo Maria, utriusque sexui virginitatis dedicavere principia.” (Hieronymus Stridonensis, *Epistola XLVIII*, 21. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 22, 510).

²¹ “Potest etiam hortus conclusus et fons signatus, ipsa mater Domini S. Maria intelligi; quæ virgo concipiens virgoque generans, conclusi horti et signati fontis intemeratum in se decus exhibuit.” (Justus Urgellensis, *In Cantica Canticorum Explicatio*, 91. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 67, 978).

²² “Maria (quæ interpretatur Domina, sive Illuminatrix), clara stirps David, Virga Jesse, Hortus conclusus, Fons signatus, Mater Domini, Templum Dei, Sacrum Spiritus sancti, Virgo sancta, Virgo leta, virgo ante partum, virgo post partum, salutationem ab angelo accepit, et mysterium conceptionis agnovit.” (Isidorus Hispalensis, *De ortu et obitu Patrum. Caput LXVII*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 83, 148).

that book, Saint Isidore exalts Mary, designating her with a sequence of poetic figures, including

star of the sea [...], stem of Jesse, rose without thorns, nourishing olive tree, golden pillar, dawn of the sun, queen of women, spouse of the Savior, daughter of the living God, handmaid of the supreme prince, enclosed garden, sealed fountain, marriage bed of the Trinity, mother of the Lord Almighty, mother of the sun and the flower, mother of the lamb and the lion, mother of life and the vine, mother of light and peace, mother of the way and truth, mother of the servant and the king, mother of God and man, mother of the shepherd and bread, temple of God, tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, holy virgin, pregnant virgin, virgin before childbirth, virgin in childbirth, virgin after childbirth [...]. She became the mother of a man without the union of a husband; the mother nursed the child and remained an incorruptible virgin²³.

Some four decades later, Saint Ildefonsus of Toledo (607-667), in a first sermon on the Assumption of Mary attributed to him²⁴, says that the Virgin is the closed garden and the sealed fountain of the *Song of Songs*, the well of water for the living, the reparation of life, the door to heaven, the honor of women and the roof of all virgins²⁵. In his fourth sermon on the Assumption (if this writing, which is also attributed to him, is his)²⁶, Ildefonsus reiterates similar praises of the Virgin: in this sense he says that Mary is the mother of Christ according to the flesh, of the descendants of Abraham from the tribe of Judah, the stem of the root of Jesse, the star of the sea, the handmaid of God, the lady of kings, the spouse of the Lord, the temple of the Creator, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit, the seal of faith, the gate of heaven, the honor of women, the head of virgins, the closed garden, the sealed fountain, and the well of living waters²⁷. In

his seventh sermon on the Assumption, which is also unfoundedly attributed to him²⁸, Ildefonsus (if he is the author of this sermon) states:

This, I say, is the temple of God, that sealed fountain and the closed door. Therefore, the Holy Spirit descended upon her; the power of the Most High overshadowed her, and from her sprang Christ, mighty in virtue (Luke 1:55). This woman is undefiled by sexual intercourse, fruitful in childbirth, a virgin in chastity; she conceived as a virgin, not of man but of the Holy Spirit; she gave birth not in pain but in joy; she ate the food of angels and men²⁹.

In the second half of the 8th century, the monk Paul the Deacon (+799) proclaimed Mary's divine virginal motherhood in a hymn on the Assumption in these verses:

2. This is the rod of Jesse, the pregnant virgin, the garden planted with the heavenly seed, the sealed fountain conse- crated with a sublime gift, blessed the world with a celibate womb.	2. Haec virga lesse, virgo puerpera, Hortus superno germine consitus, Signatus alto munere fons sacer, Mundum beavit viscere caelibi. ³⁰
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Already in the 9th century, Paschasius Radbertus, abbot of the monastery of Corbie (c. 792-865), stated in a book on Mary's birth that, when the Word of God became flesh, the Virgin is the closed garden and the sealed fountain of the *Song of Solomon*: "It is a closed garden indeed, because when God entered it, He found it incorrupt, and the fountain remained sealed, when God and man were born from it without violating her virginity"³¹. In another exegetical writing on the Gospel of Matthew, Radbertus interprets the saying of the Bridegroom in the *Song* as referring to Mary:

²³ "Maria, quae interpretatur domina, vel illuminatrix, aut stella maris, sive stella, stirpe clara, David regis filia, Jesse virga, rosa sine spina, oliva alma, columna aurea, solis aurora, feminarum regina, Salvatoris sponsa, Dei vivi filia, principis ancilla alti, hortus conclusus, fons signatus, Trinitatis thalamus, mater Domini omnipotentis, mater solis et floris, mater agni et leonis, mater vitae et vitis, mater lucis et pacis, mater viae et veritatis, mater servi et regis, mater Dei et hominis, mater pastoris et panis, templum Dei, sacrarium Spiritus sancti. Virgo sancta, virgo feta, virgo ante partum, virgo in partu, virgo post partum [...]. Facta est mater viri sine copulatione mariti, mater infantem lactavit, et virgo incorrupta permansit." (Isidorus Hispalensis, *Appendix XX. De ortu et obitu Patrum. Caput LXVII*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 83, 1285).

²⁴ J.-P. Migne places this sermon among the *Sermones Dubii* of St. Ildefonsus.

²⁵ "Haec namque est hortus conclusus, fons signatus (Cant IV, 12), puteus aquarum viventium, reparatio vitae, janua coeli, decus mulierum, fastigium omnium virginum, quae ut cedrus Libani quotidie in terris multiplicatur, dilataturque ramis, et in coelo radicibus, ut crescat amplius, solidatur." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Sermo Primus. De Assumptione beatissimae et gloriosae Virginis Mariae*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 96, 242).

²⁶ Migne also places this sermon among the *Sermones Dubii* of St. Ildefonsus.

²⁷ "Est igitur sancta et venerabilis virgo Maria, mater Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum carnem, ex semine Abrahae orta ex tribu Juda, virga de radice Jesse, clara ex stirpe David, filia Jerusalem, stella maris, ancilla Dei, regina gentium, domina regum, sponsa Domini, mater Christi, Conditoris templum, Spiritus sancti sacrarium, velut columba speciosa, pulchra ut

luna, electa ut sol (Cant. IV), signaculum fidei, reparatio Evae, introitus vitae, janua caeli, decus mulierum, caput virginum, hortus conclusus, Fons signatus, puteus aquarum viventium." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Eiusdem Sermo IV. In Assumptione beatae Mariae Quartus*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 96, 258).

²⁸ J.-P. Migne also places this sermon among the *Sermones Dubii* of St. Ildefonsus.

²⁹ "Haec est, inquam, Dei templum, fons ille signatus, et porta clausa. In eam itaque sanctus descendit Spiritus: hanc virtus obumbravit Altissimi, et ex ea potens virtutum Christus egreditur (Luc, 1, 55). Haec est immaculata coitu, fecunda partu, virgo castitate; haec concepit virgo, non ex viro, sed de Spiritu sancto: haec peperit, non dolore, sed gaudio; haec nutrit angelorum et hominum cibum." (Ildefonsus Toletanus, *Eiusdem Sermo VII. In Assumptione beatae Mariae Septimus*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 96, 268).

³⁰ Paulus Diaconus, *Hymnus 97. (3.) Hymnus in Assumptione B. Mariae V*. AHMA 50, 123.

³¹ "Sic itaque totum factum est, ut fieret novum super terram quando Verbum caro factum est, vocatum est Emmanuel, quod est nobiscum Deus (Matth. 1, 45). Hic est itaque hortus ille conclusus in Canticis, fons signatus (Cant. iv): hortus siquidem conclusus, quia quando Deus ingressus est et eam incorruptam invenit; sed fons signatus permansit, quando Deus et homo natus est ex ea; nec tamen fontem pudoris aut sanguinis integritatem violavit." (Paschasius Radbertus, *De Partu Virginis. Liber I, Caput I*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 120, 1374).

a closed garden, because the Virgin's womb was in every sense whole and incorrupt. But it is called a garden because all the delights of paradise were poured out in it, and the womb of virginity, where the fountain of our redemption shone, is sealed. Sealed, I say, because the blood existed uncontaminated and incorrupt, from which flowed a wave of liquor. Therefore, because it was sealed with the seal of virginity, it was found pregnant by her husband, not from any other source than the Holy Spirit, so that the same investigator of the mystery could also become a witness of chastity³².

Towards the middle of the 11th century, the Benedictine St. Peter Damian (1007-1072) asserts in a sermon on Mary's birth: the Virgin, impregnated without the semen of a man and fertilized only by the Holy Spirit, obtained the dignity of a mother without losing her virginal chastity, conceived without contamination, and gave birth to a son without pain³³. In another later passage of this homily, the author states that whoever remained a virgin when conceiving could not have felt pain when giving birth, because whoever came out of her ineffably did not corrupt the seal of virginity: he entered (was conceived) into her as a virgin, and when he came out (was born) he left her a virgin, for she is the closed garden and the sealed fountain of the *Song of Solomon*, which produced the fruit of fertility without diminishing her virginity³⁴.

In the first half of the 12th century, the German polymath Honorius of Autun or Regensburg (c. 1080-c. 1157), in a famous work on the Virgin Mary expresses: "She herself was a garden of herbs or trees, that is, full of virtues; which was closed at childbirth, that is, by the seal of the Holy Spirit. A garden closed again, because after childbirth the

seal of virginity was not opened"³⁵. Then Honorius goes on to confirm that the Virgin was also "A sealed fountain. She too was a fountain, that is, the first example of virginity. This fountain was sealed, that is, consecrated by the passion of Christ"³⁶.

Around the same time, Hugh of Saint-Victor (c. 1096-1141), in a writing on animals and other things, notes that "the blessed Virgin Mary was humble, obedient, and calm [...] the bridegroom's chamber, Solomon's temple, Aaron's rod [...] the enclosed garden, the sealed fountain, the triclinium of the Trinity"³⁷.

Almost in parallel with Hugh, Saint Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153) asserts in a homily on Mary's birth that she "was a holy virgin in body and spirit [...] The enclosed garden, the sealed fountain, the temple of the Lord, the sanctuary of the Holy Spirit"³⁸. In another sermon, Bernard reiterates that the Virgin is "A closed garden, a sealed fountain. This saying certainly signifies the confinement of modesty in a virgin, and the inviolable protection of holiness, if it were such, that she be holy in body and spirit"³⁹.

Some four decades later, Adam of St. Victor (1122-1192), in a poem on Mary's Purification, alludes to her virginal divine motherhood with these suggestive expressions:

And the fire did not burn it,	Et hunc ardor non urebat,
nor did it damage its greenery.	Nec virorem nocuit.
Thus, the Virgin gave birth to God	Sic ardore spiritali,
with spiritual ardor,	Non attactu conjugali:
not with conjugal contact.	Virgo Deum genuit.
This is that sealed fountain,	Hae est ille fons signatus,
the enclosed garden, fertilized	Hortus clausus, fecundatus
with the seeds of virtue.	Virtutum seminibus. ⁴⁰

³² "Ait enim Sponsus ita: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea; hortus conclusus, fons signatus* (Cant. iv, 12). Itaque *hortus conclusus*, quia uterus Virginis modis omnibus integer atque incorruptus fuit. Hortus autem ideo est appellatus, quia universi deliciae paradisi in eo efforuerunt, et signatus est venter pudoris, ubi fons emicuit nostrae redemptionis. Signatus, inquam, quia incontaminatus atque incorruptus exstitit sanguis, ex quo manavit unda liquoris. Ergo quia signatus fuit sigillo pudoris, inventa est a sponso habens in utero, non aliunde quam de Spiritu sancto, ut idem investigator mysterii, etiam testis fieret castitatis." (Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Mattheum. Liber II. Caput I. In Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 120, 106).

³³ "beatissima Virgo nullo viri semine gravida, sola sancti Spiritus gratia fecundatur. Quae et dignitatem Genitricis obtinuit, et virginalem pudicitiam non amisit. Quae et dignitatem Genitricis obtinuit, et virginalem pudicitiam non amisit. Quae sine contaminatione concepit, et sine dolore filium procreavit." (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia in Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae (VIII Sept.)*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 144, 760).

³⁴ "Quae enim Virgo permansit concipiendo, dolorem sentire non potuit pariendo. Ille quippe, qui ex ea ineffabiliter prodit, claustrum virginalis pudicitiae non corrumpit. Virginem denique veniens, introivit, Virginem nihilominus exiens, dereliquit. Haec enim est hortus conclusus, fons signatus (Cant. IV), quae et fructum fecunditatis edidit, et virginitatis meritum non imminuit." (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI. Homilia in Nativitate Beatissimae Virginis Mariae (VIII Sept.)*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 144, 760-761).

³⁵ "*Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa*, ipsa erat herbarum vel arborum hortus, id est plena virtutibus; quae erat in partu conclusus, scilicet signaculo sancti Spiritus. *Hortus conclusus* iterum, quia post partum non est reclusum virginitatis signaculum." (Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi exponuntur Cantica Canticorum. Caput IV*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 172, 507).

³⁶ "*Fons signatus*. Ipsa etiam erat fons, id est primum exemplum virginitatis. Qui fons erat signatus, id est Christi passione consecratus." (Honorius Augustodunensis, *Sigillum Beatae Mariae ubi exponuntur Cantica Canticorum. Caput IV*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 172, 507).

³⁷ "Beata Virgo Maria fuit, humilis, obediens, quieta [...] thalamus sponsi, templum Salomonis, virga Aaron [...] hortus conclusus, fons signatus, triclinium Trinitatis". (Hugo de S. Victore, *De Bestiis et aliis rebus. Liber Quartus. Caput I*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 177, 138-139).

³⁸ "Erat enim virgo sancta corpore et spiritu cui specialiter esset dicere: *Conversatio nostra in coelis est* (Philipp. iii, 20). Sancta, inquam, corpore et spiritu, ne quid forsitan super hoc dubites aquaeductu. Sublimis equidem valde, sed nihilominus integerrimus manet. Hortus conclusus, fons signatus, templum Domini, sacrarium Spiritus sancti." (Bernardus Claraevallensis, *In Nativitate B. Virginis Mariae Sermo*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 183, 442).

³⁹ "Et habes: Hortus conclusus, fons signatus. Quod utique claustrum pudoris signat in virgine, et inviolatae custodiam sanctitatis, si tamen talis fuerit, quae sit sancta corpore et spiritu." (Bernardus Claraevallensis, *Sermón 47*, 3-5, In *Obras completas de San Bernardo*, Madrid: La Editorial Católica, 1987, vol. V, 619).

⁴⁰ Adamus a Sancto Victore, *Sequentiae. XIX. In Purificatione Beatae Mariae*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 196, 1482.

Some years later, Alain de Lille and Peter of Blois reflected on the metaphor under study. Alain de Lille (c. 1128-1202), in an exegetical work on the *Song of Solomon*, after stating that the Virgin Mary was a fruitful abundance from which ineffable mercy flows and from which all graces are irrigated, goes on to say that she is “A fountain that receives in the bosom of her piety the outpouring of our tears. Sealed with the seal of the truth of the evangelical faith and the bolt of virginity”⁴¹.

On the other hand, Peter of Blois (1135-1204) says in his sermon 38 that Mary, because of the integrity of her virginity, is the closed garden, the sealed fountain, the closed door; because of her holiness, she is the temple of God, the door of the sanctuary, the beloved of God, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit. And by her glory she is the king's palace, the chamber of aromas, the fountain of gardens, the paradise of delights⁴².

About two decades later, Adam de Perseigne (c. 1145-1221) stated in a writing about the Virgin Mary that she is a closed garden, a sealed fountain: the integrity of her inviolable virginity makes her a closed garden; she is a fountain because she springs from the fullness of grace, and she is sealed because she admits nothing foreign to the sign of faith⁴³. In another passage of that writing, the author goes on to say that the fountain of gardens is Mary, open and accessible by the profusion and ease of mercy⁴⁴.

Almost around the same time, Helinand of Froidmont (c. 1160-1230), in a sermon on the Assumption, states about the Virgin Mary:

For she was not called a closed garden, nor a sealed fountain, nor a closed door, solely because of her chastity, but because of the perfect protection of holiness and the absence of all offense, for her body and heart were so protected with every protection that the stain of sin could never enter her from anywhere, from the moment of her first sanctification⁴⁵.

Almost half a century later, the prestigious Franciscan master Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1217/21-1274), in his fourth sermon on the Assumption, begins by stating that the Virgin is compared to a sealed fountain because of the integrity of her chastity, and the enclosure of the garden and the sealing of the fountain are united, because whoever desires chastity must also have modesty⁴⁶. Then he goes on to say:

These things enclose the garden of the blessed Virgin; she was fruitful, yet she was a virgin; a closed garden, because it was intact, unpolluted, and uncontaminated; it was a sealed fountain, because it was closed. It says twice: a closed garden, because it was of the most rigid discipline and of the most beautiful modesty, because, if someone is modest, they do not voluntarily give themselves over to the filth of lust⁴⁷.

In his second sermon on the Annunciation Saint Bonaventure specifies that the praise of the Bridegroom in the *Song* we are analyzing mentions “her closure” to demonstrate that the Virgin was incorrupt at her conception, birth, and adulthood, contrary to the heretics who claimed that she had later intercourse with male; on the contrary, it is very admirable that she was closed, yet still fertile⁴⁸.

3. The Biblical Metaphor *Fons signatus* in Medieval Liturgical Hymns

We will now present chronologically a numerous series of fragments of medieval liturgical hymns that allude to the metaphor under scrutiny, grouping them by century.

Eleventh-Twelfth-Century Hymns

At an imprecise date between these two centuries, we have found, written by an anonymous monk of the Cistercian abbey of Cambron in Hainaut (Belgium),

⁴¹ “Et tu, Virgo Dei genitrix, fuisti uber (fecunda) copia plenitudinis, fons in quo ineffabilis misericordiae fluentum, in quo gratiarum omnium irriguum. Fons qui in sinu suae pietatis recipit lacrymarum nostrarum profluvium. Signatus fidei evangelicae veritatis signaculo, et virginitatis pessulo; ita ut nec haeretici vel daemones in te fidem vel Evangelii veritatem possint infirmare.” (Alanus de Insulis, *Elucidatio in Cantica Cantorum*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 210, 82).

⁴² “propter virginitatis integritatem hortus conclusus, fons signatus, porta clausa, Libanus non invictus, propetr sanctitatem templum Dei, porta sanctuarii, cara Dei, sacrarium Spiritus sancti; propter gloriam aula regis, cella aromatum, fons hortorum, paradisi deliciarum.” (Petrus Blesensis. *Sermo XXXVIII*, In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 207, 673).

⁴³ “Est enim ‘hortus conclusus, fons signatus (Cant. iv)’. Hortum facit eam inaudita fecunditatis fertilitas; conclusum reddit inviolati pudoris integritas. Fons est, quia de plenitudine gratiae fluenta misericordiae fundit; signatus, quia alienum a signo fidei non admittit.” (Adamus Perseniae, *Mariale*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 211, 739).

⁴⁴ “Fons Hortorum, puteus aquarum viventium, quae fluunt impetu de Libano (ibid.).’ Fons est Maria, patens et accessibilis ex profusione et facilitate misericordiae; puteus est altus et capax ex mysterii admirabilis profunditate.” (Adamus Perseniae, *Mariale*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 211, 739).

⁴⁵ “Neque enim propter solam pudicitiam vocata est hortus conclusus, vel fons signatus, aut porta clausa: sed propter perfectam sanctitatis custodiam, et propter carentiam omnis

offensionis, quia ita custoditum est corpus ejus et cor ejus omni custodia: ut ex nulla unquam parte intrare potuerit in eam peccati macula, a tempore primae sanctificationis ejus.” (Helinandus Frigidi Montis, *Sermo XIX*. In *Assumptione B. Mariae I*. In *Patrologiae cursus completus, Series Latina*, edited by Jacques-Paul Migne, vol. 212, 639).

⁴⁶ “Tertio comparatur beata Virgo fonti signato propter pudicitiae integritatem; unde in Canticis: Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus. Emissiones tuae paradisi. Clausio horti et signatio fontis coniuncta sunt, quia qui vult habere pudicitiam castitatis, oportet, quod habeat et venustatem verecundiae.” (Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV*: Q IX, 697a).

⁴⁷ “Ista claudunt hortum beatae Virginis; fecunda fuit, sed tamen virgo fuit; hortus conclusus, quia intacta, impolluta et incontaminata fuit; fuit fons signatus, quia clausus. Dicit bis: hortus conclusus, quia fuit rigidissimae disciplinae et venustissimae verecundiae, quia, si aliquis est verecundus, non libenter diffundit se in turpitudinem libidinis.” (Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *De Assumptione B. Virginis Mariae. Sermo IV*: Q IX, 697a).

⁴⁸ “Unde Sponsus Virginem Mariam alloquens Canticorum quarto dicit: Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa; hortus conclusus, fons signatus; emissiones tuae paradisi.—Ter dicit clausionem ipsius, ut ostendat, quod incorrupta fuit in conceptu, in partu et in progressu, contra haereticos, qui dixerunt, postea ipsam a viro fuisse cognitam. Et in hoc est tamen valde mirabile, quod sit clausa, et tamen fecunda erat fecunditate summa.” (Bonaventura de Balneoregio, *De Annunciatione. Sermo II*, 2, In *Obras de San Buenaventura. Edición bilingüe*. Madrid: Biblioteca de Autores Cristianos, Vol. IV, 597).

Hymnus 103. (1.) Rhythmus Primus, which expresses Mary's divine virginal motherhood in this stanza:

The sealed fountain, this is	Fons signatus, hoc est Dei
The one that bears the seal of God,	Possidens signaculum,
Which irrigates with its fertility	Ubertate sua rigans
the space of the earth's globe.	orbis terrae spatium. ⁴⁹

Twelfth-Century Hymn

The monk Bernard of Morlaix or Cluny (c. 1140) expresses in *Hymnus 323. (1.) Mariale. Rythmus VIII* Mary's supernatural virginity in these terms:

10a. The sealed fountain, this is	18. Fons signatus, non turbatus
The one that bears the seal of God,	Bestiarum pedibus,
Which irrigates with its fertility	Non confusus, sed conclusus
the space of the earth's globe.	Divinis virtutibus. ⁵⁰

Thirteenth-Century Hymns

Dating from the thirteenth century, we have found the following six hymns alluding to the topic under analysis:

Hymnus 126. De beata Maria Virgine proclaims the virginal divine maternity of Mary through these paradoxical concepts:

7a. You are a sealed fountain,	7a. Tu fons signatus
You are the mother of God,	Es, Dei mater,
Immune to darkness.	Immunis ad nubila.
7b. He who was born from you.	7b. Qui de te natus.
Is the father to you,	Est tibi pater,
You are [his] virgin daughter.	Tu virgo filia. ⁵¹

Hymnus 136. De beata Maria Virgine manifests the divine maternity and perpetual virginity of Mary in these verses:

1a. Hail, Mother of the Lord.	1a. Ave, mater Domini.
Flower of double fragrance,	Flos odoris gemini,
unique virgin mother,	Virgo mater unica,
1b. Sealed fountain of grace,	1b. Fons signatus gratiae,
Garden of chastity,	Hortus pudicitiae,
You will be called a closed door.	Sera clausa diceris. ⁵²

Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virgine. Tertia Quinquagena sings to the virginal mother of God in these consonances:

Sealed fountain, fountain of the gardens.	Fons signatus, fons hortorum.
From which the choir of angels drinks,	De quo bibit angelorum
always thirsty,	Chorus semper sitiens,
who receives from heaven,	De caelo suscipiens,
whom the father's womb gave birth to,	Quem profudit sinus patris,
Virgin, you have a mother's name,	Virgo tenes nomen matris,
Without knowing a mother's work.	Matris opus nesciens. ⁵³

Hymnus 105. De Beata Maria Virgine states Mary's virginal divine motherhood with these Old Testament prefigurations:

10a. Burning bush, wet fleece	10a. Rubus ardens, madens vellus
In Gideon's field	Gedeonis area,
10b. Sealed spring, fertile land	10b. Fons signatus, ferax tellus
Grain without chaff.	Granum sine palea. ⁵⁴

St. Edmund of Abingdon, archbishop of Canterbury (c. 1174-1240), in *Hymnus X. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Prima Quinquagena*, proclaims Mary's virginal motherhood and perpetual virginity in these rhymes:

4. Hail, virgin, sealed fountain, whom Christ, at birth, sealed with the light of his face,	4. Ave, virgo, fons signatus, Quem signavit Christus natus
while in the Creator's dawn	Vultus sui lumine,
the untouched flower of virginity rises	Dum in ortu creatoris
covered by the shadow of the Breath [the Holy Spirit]	Stat illaesus flos pudoris
	Obumbrante flamine. ⁵⁵

Unfoundedly attributed to St. Bonaventure of Bagnoregio, *Hymnus XII. Psalterium beatae Mariae Virginis. Tertia Quinquagena* affirms the perpetual virginity of God the Son's mother in this stanza:

6. Rejoice, virgin, sealed fountain,	6. Gaude, virgo, fons signatus,
from whose never-violated womb	Cuius nunquam violatus
sprang the Redeemer,	Venter fudit redemptorem,
the Liberator of the oppressed.	Oppressorum ereptorem. ⁵⁶

Fourteenth-Century Hymns

Written in the 14th century we have found the following six liturgical hymns alluding to our theme:

Hymnus 53. De conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis celebrates the conception of the virginal mother of the Redeemer in these resounding terms:

A sealed fountain, a closed garden,	Fons signatus, clausus hortus
is a sign of this,	Hujus est indicium,
that the present birth of Mary	Quod Mariae praesens ortus
is the destruction of death,	Mortis est exitium,
which, being a haven of salvation,	Quae, cum sit salutis portus.
gives rise to life.	Vitae dat initium. ⁵⁷

Hymnus 15. De conceptione Beatae Mariae Virginis. In 3. Nocturno. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae describes the virginal divine motherhood and the perpetual virginity of Mary in these brief verses:

⁴⁹ Anonymus Camberonensis, *Hymnus 103. (1.) Rhythmus Primus*. AHMA 48, 113.

⁵⁰ Bernhardus Morlanensis, *Hymnus 323. (1.) Mariale. Rythmus VIII*. AHMA 50, 438.

⁵¹ *Hymnus 126. De beata Maria V*. AHMA 10, 99.

⁵² *Hymnus 136. De beata Maria V*. AHMA 10, 104

⁵³ *Hymnus I. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Tertia Quinquagena*. AHMA 36, 22.

⁵⁴ *Hymnus 105. De Beata Maria V*. AHMA 40, 105.

⁵⁵ Edmundus Cantuariensis, *Hymnus X. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Prima Quinquagena*. AHMA 35, 137. Also published anonymously, with the title *Hymnus 89. Meditatio de BMV*, in AHMA 15, 109.

⁵⁶ Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (attributed), *Hymnus XII. Psalterium beatae Mariae V. Tertia Quinquagena*. AHMA 35, 177.

⁵⁷ *Hymnus 53. De conceptione BMV*. AHMA 4, 40.

This is that sealed fountain, the garden enclosed and ventilated by the south wind that blows from above, with which he conceived, covered with its shadow.	Haec est ille fons signatus, Hortus clausus et perlatus A supernis austro flante, Quo concepit obumbrante. ⁵⁸
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Hymnus 103. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem greets the perpetual virgin Mary with these simple verses:

10. Hail, full of charity, sealed fountain, vein of life, oh, how sweet, how serene.	10. Ave, caritate plena, Fons signatus, vitae vena, O quam dulcis, quam serena. ⁵⁹
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Hymnus 98. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem implores the effective help of the virtuous Mary, whose perpetual virginity he praises in this stanza:

Enclosed, watered garden of abundant harvest, pure, sealed fountain, overflowing river, bubbling spring, inexhaustible, distilling goodness, I beg you, compassionate virgin, to grant me your protection.	Hortus conclusus, perfusus, messis abundans, Fons illibatus, signatus, flumen inundans, Fons saliens, indeficiens, stillans bonitate, Praesidium, pia virgo, tuum tribui precor a te. ⁶⁰
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Hymnus 380. De beata Virgine Maria exalts the virginal mother of God in these succinct verses:

A closed garden, a sealed fountain, a land from which fruit is produced, a food for the faithful.	Hortus clausus, fons signatus, terra, de qua fructus datus cibus est fidelium. ⁶¹
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The Cistercian Guillaume de Deguileville, prior of the abbey of Chaalis, France (1295-*ante* 1358), in *Hymnus 361. (16.) Praefatio in opus sequens super cantica canticorum*. Caput IV, celebrates the sublime perpetual virginity of the virginal mother of the Savior with these well-polished rhymes:

35. You are the sealed fountain of forgiveness and mercy to redeem the unfortunate, sealed with the seal of grace that the citizens of my homeland know along with the celestial beings, the only fountain among others sealed for posterity, that never runs dry, that sends forth waves of prosperity, without ever knowing others to give it to your family.	35. <i>Fons signatus</i> es veniae Atque misericordiae Ad adaequandum miseros, Signo signatus gratiae, Quod cives meae patriae Cognoscunt apud superos, Fons solus inter ceteros Signatus propter posteros, Non desinens ullo die, Fluctus emittens prosperos, Nesciens unquam alteros Dare tuae familiae. ⁶²
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Fifteenth-Century Hymns

Composed in the 15th century, we have recorded these eight liturgical hymns referring to the Mariological theme under analysis.

Hymnus 21. Historia de Domina in sabbato. In 3. Nocturno. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae celebrates the Virgin Mary for the exaltedness of her virtues with these lyrical concepts:

You are a garden of fragrances that delights the beloved, a sweet fountain of charms that sweetens affection. You are a closed garden Blossoming from the south wind, a sealed, placid fountain, a haven in storms.	Hortus es aromatum Delectans dilectum, Dulcis fons charismatum Dulcorans affectum. Austro flante floridus Es conclusus hortus, Fons signatus, placidus, In procellis portus. ⁶³
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Hymnus 14. In Nativitate Domini Nostri praises Mary for her perpetual virginity in these brief verses:

Closed door, sealed fountain, Flowering rod, breeze of the south wind, Rose, saffron, lily.	Porta clausa, fons signatus, Virga florens, austri flatus, Rosa, crocus, lilium. ⁶⁴
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Hymnus 50. De Nominibus Beatae Mariae Virginis lauds the sublimity of the Virgin's virtues in these brief verses:

Model of morals, standard of virtues, Mary, Sealed fountain, dripping honeycomb, divine Mary.	Exemplar morum, virtutum norma, Maria, Fons signatus, favus stillans, divina Maria. ⁶⁵
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Hymnus 100. Ad Beatam Mariam Virginem exalts the perpetual virgin and virginal mother of God through these consonances:

A sealed and immaculate fountain, a closed and fenced garden, full of sacred fruits. And fertilized with pigments.	Fons signatus illibatus, Hortus clausus et vallatus, Fructu sacro cumulatus. Et pigmentis fecundatus. ⁶⁶
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Hymnus 364 congratulates the virtuous perpetual virgin Mary in this stanza:

1. Be well, Virgin, enclosed garden, Drizzled by heaven For the use of the guilty Sealed fountain of the gardens, Remove evils. Like a lily among thorns. Thus you shine, among the divine Queens And you also do not know the stain Of guilt in you	1. Vale hortus, virgo, conclusus, Coelitus perfusus Ad usus Reorum Signatus fons hortorum, Mala terge. Sicut lilium inter spinas. Sic inter divinas Reginas Candescis, Maculam quoque nescis In te culpae. ⁶⁷
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⁵⁸ *Hymnus 15. De conceptione BMV. In 3. Nocturno. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae.* AHMA 5, 58.

⁵⁹ *Hymnus 103. Ad B. Mariam V.* AHMA 15, 129.

⁶⁰ *Hymnus 98. Ad B. Mariam V.* AHMA 15, 125.

⁶¹ *Hymnus 380. De b. V. Maria.* Mone, 74.

⁶² Guillelmus de Deguilevilla, *Hymnus 361. (16.) Praefatio in opus sequens super cantica canticorum*. Caput IV. AHMA 48, 348.

⁶³ *Hymnus 21. Historia de Domina in sabbato. In 3. Nocturno. Ad Laudes. Antiphonae.* AHMA 5, 74.

⁶⁴ *Hymnus 14. In Nativitate DN.* AHMA 10, 18.

⁶⁵ *Hymnus 50. De Nominibus BMV.* AHMA 15, 63.

⁶⁶ *Hymnus 100. Ad B. Mariam V.* AHMA 15, 132.

⁶⁷ *Hymnus 364.* AHMA 20, 194.

Hymnus 9. Super Ave Maria asks for the saving help of Mary, whose virginal divine motherhood it celebrates with these consonances:

Sealed fountain, dripping with oil,	Fons signatus distillans oleum,
Prepare for us heavenly food, and the sweet dew of piety, and cleanse our hearts from gall.	Para nobis cibum aethereum, Pietatis et rorem melleum Et emunda cor nostrum felleum.
Blessed are you among women,	Benedicta (tu) in mulieribus,
Who always fills your chaste womb with heavenly gifts,	Quae de tuis castis visceribus, Plena semper donis caelestibus,
giving birth to peace for men.	Peperisti pacem hominibus. ⁶⁸

Hymnus 124. Super Ave Maria praises the virtuous mother of God with these lyrical rhymes:

4. Blessed mother of morals, medicine for our death, you are the sealed fountain of the gardens, a sweet melody to the ear.	4. Benedicta mater morum, Nostrae mortis medela, Tu signatus fons hortorum, In aure dulcimela. ⁶⁹
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The famous German hymnographer Ulrich Stöcklins von Rottach, abbot of Wessobrunn Abbey from 1438 to 1443, offers his praises to the perpetual virgin Mary in *Hymnus XII. Psalterium Tertium. Quinquagena III*, when he expresses:

150. Hail, virgin, enclosed garden, sealed fountain, and stick of incense. May the servant who sings this poem praise you and God forever.	150. Ave, virgo, conclusus hortulus, Fons signatus turisque virgula. Carmen istud qui cantat, famulus Te ac Deum laudet per saecula. ⁷⁰
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Undated Hymns

Written at some unknown date, we have discovered these two hymns referring to the metaphor under analysis:

Hymnus 531. Alia sequentia proclaims the virginal and most holy mother of God the Son in these flowery rhymes:

Blooming garden, pleasing to the sick, sealed fountain of purity, giving forth streams of grace. Throne of the true Solomon, Whom the King of glory adorned with the glorious gifts of heaven.	Florens hortus, aegris gratus, puritatis fons signatus, dans fluentia gratiae. Thronus veri Salomonis, quem praeclaris coeli donis ornavit rex gloriae. ⁷¹
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Hymnus 607. Laus Mariae implores the saving protection of God the Son's virginal mother in these consonances:

O Mary, Star of the Sea, healthy medicine for bodies and hearts, sealed fountain, enclosed garden, way of peace, harbor of life, help of the poor, in this valley of tears, in this place of darkness, against the deceptions of the enemy, guard us, defend us, be our help and provide, whatever is necessary. Amen.

O Maria, stella maris, medicina salutaris corporis et cordium, fons signatus, clausus hortus, via pacis, vitae portus, pauperum suffragium, in hac valle lacrimarum, in hoc loco tenebrarum contra fraudes hostium nos custodi, nos defende, sis adiutrix et impende, quod est necessarium. amen.⁷²

4. The biblical metaphor "Fons signatus" in some 15th-century Marian images

We will now analyze five 15th-century paintings of the Virgin Mary that reflect the Mariological symbol of reference.



Figure 1. Westphalian Master, *The Virgin and Child in the Hortus Conclusus*, c. 1410. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid

Source: Meisterdrucke

A work by a Westphalian master, *The Virgin and Child in the Hortus Conclusus*, c. 1410, now in the

⁶⁸ *Hymnus 9. Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 196.

⁶⁹ *Hymnus 124. Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 238.

⁷⁰ Udalricus Wessofontanus, *Hymnus XII. Psalterium Tertium. Quinquagena III*. AHMA 38, 168.

⁷¹ *Hymnus 531. Alia sequentia*. Mone, 318.

⁷² *Hymnus 607. Laus Mariae*. Mone, 426. Also published, with a couple of small variations and with the title *Hymnus 90. Jubilus de singulis membris BVM*, in AHMA 15, 110.

Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid (Figure 1), is a good example of the theme under study. With a luxurious crown and rich attire, wearing a halo with the inscription *Sancta Maria*, and carrying the Child Jesus in her arms, the Virgin appears as the Queen of Heaven.

What is most interesting to note in this panel is the fact that Mary is seated in a garden enclosed by a wicker fence and with a closed wooden gate –symbolizing Ezekiel’s *porta clausa* (Ez 44:1-3)⁷³– with a keyless lock. This information is used to identify the Virgin with the *hortus conclusus* from the *Song of Solomon*⁷⁴, to symbolize her divine virginal motherhood and perpetual virginity, as deciphered by the Fathers, theologians, and medieval liturgical hymnographers analyzed in the two previous sections.

To reinforce this fundamental Mariological meaning, the mastermind of this painting surrounds the central motif with other biblical symbols of similar significance⁷⁵: on the left, from top to bottom, the gate of heaven (*porta coeli*⁷⁶, with God peering over the wall), the ark of the covenant (*foederis arca*)⁷⁷, and, at the foot of the *porta clausa* of the enclosed garden, an element which appears to be a red rose with its petals unfurled, hiding the stem with its thorns, probably in reference to the “rose without thorns”, a metaphor with which many medieval Christian thinkers praised Mary.

On the right, and from top to bottom, we see the biblical symbols of Aaron’s dry rod flourishing in the tabernacle among the other eleven rods of the chiefs of the tribes of Israel, the bush that burned without being consumed before Moses (with the head of God in the flames), and the sealed fountain (*fons signatus*) from the *Song of Solomon*⁷⁸. Finally, in the center of the painting’s base, below the Virgin, we see the sheepskin of Gideon’s fleece⁷⁹, another well-known symbol of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood.



Figure 2. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Martelli Annunciation*, c. 1440. Cappella Martelli, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence.

Source: Wikipedia

Fra Filippo Lippi stages *The Martelli Annunciation*, c. 1440, from the Cappella Martelli at the Basilica di San Lorenzo in Florence (Figure 2), in the porticoed gallery of a large palace, whose wings frame a long enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*). Framed by the arch in the foreground, the archangel Gabriel and Mary enact the narrated episode: bending his right knee and carrying a long stem of lilies, Gabriel respectfully communicates his message to the Virgin. Standing, and breaking verticality, as if she had suddenly risen from her kneeler at the unexpected visit of the archangel, Mary seems surprised and confused by the message from the Almighty being announced to her. Focused by the left arch, two other standing angels, who serve as Gabriel’s escort, amplify the celestial nature of the event depicted.

Now, aside from the narrative-compositional elements foreseen in this pictorial account, it is worth highlighting a significant detail in this *Martelli Annunciation*: in the intermediate planes of the *hortus conclusus*, at the base of the frontispiece of the right wing of the palace, a semi-cylindrical fountain or well can be seen. Located in this enclosed garden, this fountain is a clear representation of the *fons signatus*, a reference to the theses of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity, which the learned Carmelite friar and priest Fra Filippo Lippi was perfectly familiar with. As if that were not enough, Gabriel’s lilies overlap/coincide with this *fons signatus*, which may not be a mere coincidence. Could the theologian painter have intended that way to further reinforce the Mariological meanings of this “sealed fountain”?

Neri di Bicci staged *The Annunciation among Saints Apollonia and Luca*, 1458, from the Benedictine nunnery of St. Niccolò di Cafaggio, now in the Accademia Gallery in Florence (Figure 3), in a monumental Renaissance palace. The Archangel Gabriel and Mary appear kneeling in a coffered vaulted room, at the top of which God the Father casts a fertilizing beam of rays upon the Virgin, in whose wake the Holy Spirit shaped as a dove flies.

⁷³ See José María Salvador-González. “The doctrinal metaphor *porta clausa* in medieval liturgical hymns and its reflection in the iconography of the Annunciation”. *De Medio Aevo* 14/1 (2025): 103-128. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/dmae.97930>.

⁷⁴ Salvador-González, José María. “*Hortus conclusus*. A Mariological Metaphor in Some Quattrocento Annunciations According to Church Fathers and Theologians”. *Religions* 15(2), 143 (2024): 1-17. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15020143>; y “*Hortus conclusus*—A Mariological Metaphor in Some Renaissance Paintings of the Annunciation in the Light of Medieval Liturgical Hymns”. *Religions* 14/36 (2023), 1-25. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14010036>

⁷⁵ In his commendable commentary on this work by Thyssen-Bornemisza, Mar Borobia (“Anónimo alemán activo en Westfalia, La Virgen y el Niño en el Hortus Conclusus (ala izquierda), hacia 1410. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid” <https://www.museothyssen.org/coleccion/artistas/anonimo-aleman-activo-westfalia/virgen-nino-hortus-conclusus-ala-izquierda>), explains the meaning of these symbols appropriately, although it is not correct in a couple of cases, which we will mention later.

⁷⁶ See José María Salvador-González. *Ianua Coeli. María mediadora de la humanidad. Explicación doctrinal e iconográfica*. Valencia: Tirant Lo Blanch, 2023.

⁷⁷ José María Salvador González. “*Foederis arca*. The Ark of the Covenant, a biblical symbol of the Virgin Mary”. *Religions* 15/1 (2025): 1-38. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel16010017>

⁷⁸ Mar Borobia interprets this source not entirely correctly as “the well of living water”.

⁷⁹ Mar Borobia has not noticed this fleece of Gideon.



Figure 4. Martin Schongauer, *The Annunciation with mystic Hunt*, c.1480. Two panels from the *Altarpiece of the Dominicans*, Unterlinden Museum, Colmar.

Source: Wikimedia Commons



Figure 3. Neri di Bicci, *L'Annunciazione tra i ss. Apollonia e Luca*, 1458. Galleria dell'Accademia, Florence

Source: Wikimedia Commons

Through the arched opening in the back wall of the room, one can see an enclosed garden (*hortus conclusus*), in the middle of which stands a white marble fountain or well. This fountain in the enclosed garden once again alludes to the *fons signatus* of reference. It seems evident that the intellectual author of this painting—probably an ecclesiastic linked to the Benedictine monastery for which the painting was made—intended this detail to convey the Mariological meanings already explained.

A highly significant example of the theme under scrutiny is Martin Schongauer's *The Annunciation with Mystic Hunt*, c. 1480, which is a part of the *Altarpiece of the Dominicans*, originally in the Dominican convent in Colmar and now in the Unterlinden Museum in that town (Figure 4). Set within the walls surrounding the *hortus conclusus*

and complemented by the imaginative legend of the mystical unicorn hunt, this unusual Colmar *Annunciation* is divided into two panels. In the left panel, the hunter archangel Gabriel blows his hunting horn, from which a phylactery bearing the greeting *ave gracia plena dominus tecum* unfurls, while in front of him another phylactery unfurls bearing the Isaiah prophecy *ecce virgo concipiet*. With his left hand, in which he holds a long spear, Gabriel holds four metaphorical greyhounds on a leash, each of which bites a phylactery bearing the virtue that identifies them individually: *misericordia*, *iustitia*, *pax*, *veritas*. The door that closes the *hortus conclusus* is the “closed door of Ezekiel” (*porta clausa*), as indicated by the corresponding phylactery. In the center of the scene on this panel, the “sealed fountain” stands out, with its identifying phylactery, *fons signatus*.

In the right panel, where the seated Virgin caresses a unicorn⁸⁰, other Marian symbols are seen, namely: Aaron's rod flourishing in the tabernacle among the other eleven rods of the chiefs of the tribes of Israel⁸¹, the burning bush of Moses, in whose flames the bust of God can be seen; the golden urn containing manna, marked with the phylactery *urna auria* (sic)⁸², a large tower with three windows, which can be interpreted as one or the other of the two Marian metaphors: “ivory tower” (*turris eburnea*) or “tower of David” (*turris davidica*); and, at the Virgin's feet, Gideon's fleece, pointed out by the incorrect inscription on the phylactery (*vellus gedionus*) (sic)⁸³.

Given the abundance, complexity, and conceptual richness of the Marian symbols introduced in these two panels, it is logical to think that Martin Schongauer received the necessary instructions to paint these symbols from a theologian, probably a Dominican friar at the Colmar convent for whom this complex *Altarpiece of the Dominicans* was painted.

⁸⁰ Hymnus 124. *Super Ave Maria*. AHMA 30, 238.

⁸¹ Interestingly, the painter made the mistake of having painted thirteen rods instead of twelve. Aaron's rod, representing the tribe of Levi, was one of the twelve rods.

⁸² Instead of *auria*.

⁸³ Instead of *Gedeonis*.



Figure 5. Master of La Seu d'Urgell, *The Annunciation*, c. 1495. Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

Source: Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya

The Master of La Seu d'Urgell structures *The Annunciation*, c. 1495, from the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya (Figure 5), according to an unusual composition, placing the Virgin on the left side of the painting and the archangel on the right. Gabriel kneels while unfurling a phylactery with the inscription *AVE GRATIA PLENA DNS* and points his right index finger upward to indicate the origin of his announcement. Holding the prayer book open on her left thigh, the Virgin raises her right hand in an oath-taking pose, as if to suggest her acceptance of the Almighty's will communicated by the heavenly messenger.

For our purposes, the most important aspect of this work is the fountain in the center of the enclosed garden, which can be seen through the open door of the room where the episode takes place. It seems clear that this fountain in this *hortus conclusus* alludes to the *fons signatus* at stake and to its Mariological meanings, already explained.

5. Conclusions

The analyses of the texts and images we have conducted in this article allow us to draw the following basic conclusions:

All the Church Fathers, theologians, and medieval liturgical hymnographers who reflect on the biblical expression *Fons signatus* agree that it metaphorically designates the Virgin Mary, and, more specifically, her virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity. For them, the expression "sealed fountain" unfolds

manifests these two meanings: first, the Virgin Mary was "sealed" (her virginity "was not opened") neither when she conceived nor gave birth to God the Son incarnate as man; second, she remained forever "sealed," never "being opened," for not having had sexual relations with a man after the birth of Christ.

Therefore, almost all these Christian writers combine—in essential parallelism, as in the *Song of Solomon*—the analogy *Fons signatus* with the twin analogy *Hortus conclusus*, which contains the same Mariological meanings of Mary's virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity: the "closed garden" of the Virgin's womb remains closed at the conception and birth of Christ, and remains closed forever after the birth of Christ.

Inspired by the centuries-old patristic, theological, and hymnographic tradition on the subject under study, the intellectual authors of the five Marian paintings analyzed include a fountain in their scene, as a *visual metaphor* that makes visible the invisible Mariological meanings contained in the *textual metaphor Fons signatus*. This is especially evident in the cases of the Westphalian Master's painting in the Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza and that of Martin Schongauer: in fact, in these two paintings the representation of the "sealed fountain" is complemented by other metaphors or symbols of Mary's virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity, such as the *hortus conclusus*, the *porta clausa* of Ezekiel, the burning bush of Moses, the flowering rod of Aaron, and the fleece of Gideon.

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