

ZDZISŁAW KLIŚ

## THE ANNUNCIATION SCENE IN THE OLKUSZ POLYPTYCH

Among many Annunciation scenes represented in panel painting in Little Poland – which is especially abundant in iconographic motifs “describing” the mystery of the Incarnation – is a panel of the polyptych (1485) in St. Andrew’s Church in Olkusz. The polyptych was painted in fulfilment of a request by Anna Sperhoczowa of Olkusz, before her death. It is the work of Jan Wielki, a nephew of the late founder of the church. When Jan was battered by Jan Waligóra, and it seemed he would not survive, the work was completed by Jan Stry. A brother of Jan Wielki’s wife Katarzyna – Jan Wolny, bachelor of arts, subsequently St. Pantaleo’s altarist in Our Lady’s Church in Krakow and altarist of the Most Holy Virgin Mary in Olkusz – arranged all the legal formalities for the recognition of the altarpiece as the Family Worship Altar in St. Andrew’s Church<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore rather certain that the ideological aspect of the altarpiece was provided by a theologian with a personal interest in this particular work of art.

Several elements of the polyptych show the indirect influence of Netherlands art: the Annunciation scene; the landscape and architectural elements; the smiling angel of the Roger type; the copes of the Eyck – like angels with figures of saints in architectural framings pictured in the border; and the Holy Infant with a Cross on his shoulder, which is found in France and in the Netherlands in, for example, the works of the Master of Flémalle and of Roger van der Weyden<sup>2</sup>. However, in respect to iconography, as stated in A. Labuda’s discussion of Wrocław’s Madonna in her Chamber, it is not connected with forms of representation specific to the

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<sup>1</sup> B. Przybyszewski, *Powstanie i autorstwo polipytyku olkuskiego*, „Folia Historiae Artium” 2, 1965, p. 87–92; *Krakowskie środowisko artystyczne czasów Wita Stwosza*, wybrał i opracował B. Przybyszewski, [in:] *Cracovia artificum. Suplementa*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 1990, p. 47–48.

<sup>2</sup> K. Gutmanówna, *Wpływy niderlandzkie na średniowieczne malarstwo cechowe w środowisku krakowskim*. Kraków 1933, p. 7, 14–15; M. Waliński, *W kwestii flamizmu w malarstwie cechowym krakowskim XV i XVI w. (Na marginesie pracy K. Gutmanówny, Wpływy niderlandzkie na średniowieczne malarstwo cechowe w środowisku krakowskim)*, „Przegląd Historii Sztuki” 3, 1932/1933, p. 17–19; J. Gądomski, *Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1460–1500*, Warszawa 1988, p. 142–144 (it will be quoted as vol. 2).

above mentioned Netherlands school, but remains at the level of symbolic-naturalistic imagery<sup>3</sup>. This means that the Annunciation scene has some of the above mentioned characteristics of Netherlands painting, but lacks effects of the type present, for example, in Jan van Eyck's *Madonna in the Church* (now in the Museum in Dahlen). Here in order to show Mary as God's dwelling place, the painter magnified her figure in relation to the size of the church interior, and to point to God's light entering the temple, oriented the cathedral-type presbytery (surrounded by a radial arrangement of chapels) to the west and not to the east. Thus the sunlight, coming from the north, through its violation of the laws of nature, appeared somehow supernatural and transcendental. Also of some importance was the side from which the light was falling. The right part of the temple was positive, so the presbytery was directed to the west<sup>4</sup>. In contrast to traditional Church symbolism, with its established modes of imagery, the Netherlands painter, making use of the Christian "world of ideas" and symbols, through elements adopted from the surrounding world, expressed "new areas of reality", "latent, sacral, ideal, supernatural, celestial", which he alone attempted to create, and which the Olkusz painting lacks.

It seems that the search for the message present in the Olkusz panel can be aided, apart from existing studies of the iconography of the pre-Netherlands period and of Netherlands painting, by ideas contained in the Liturgy of the Hours and in the rite of Holy Mass in preserved fifteenth and early sixteenth century Polish liturgical manuscripts, particularly those from Krakow Cathedral.

The top quarter on the face of the polyptych's left inner wing represents the Annunciation scene. On the left side, the Archangel Gabriel, down on his right knee, is clothed in an alb and a burgundy cope and is supported from behind by two assisting angels clad in dalmatics (deacons' vestments). In his hand, he is holding a letter with three seals hanging from it on strings. He is turned towards Mary, who, kneeling on a double top kneeler, turns back to him. The words of greeting spoken by the Archangel enter her right ear. She is dressed in a long green mantle. Her right hand is raised in the "speech gesture" and with her left hand she is touching a book lying on the kneeler under which we see her sandals. A dove is flying from above towards Mary's head, and a naked Holy Infant with a cross on his shoulder follows it in a cloud. On Mary's right side, in a cupboard (cabinet) there are a water container and a saucer, a closed box, and a vessel in the shape of a ciborium. In the background, behind Mary, there is a piece of cloth hanging over a wall with a sill along its top, running across the full width of the scene, and a bench standing in front of it. Behind the wall, on Mary's side, there is a glimpse

<sup>3</sup> A. Labuda, *Program ikonografii i funkcji wrocławskiego obrazu "Madonna w komnacie"*. Z zagadnień recepcji malarstwa niderlandzkiego w Polsce w XV wieku, [in:] *Sztuka i ideologia XV wieku*, pod red. P. Skubiszewskiego, Warszawa 1978, p. 331-334, 348-349.

<sup>4</sup> E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting. Its Origins and character*, New York-Hagerstown-San Francisco-London 1971, p. 145-148; *Reality and Symbol*, [in:] E. Panofsky, *Studia z historii sztuki*, wybrał i opatrzył postaniem J. Białostocki, Warszawa 1971, p. 137-141.

of the lower part of a mountain, shaded by the golden background of the sky. At its foot, to the left side of the scene, above the group of angels, is a church with surrounding buildings.

The Annunciation scenes with a letter bearing seals, including the one held by the angel in the Olkusz painting, are divided into scenes showing the open letter and those in which the letter is closed<sup>5</sup>. From among Polish representations, only the quarter in the Grudziądz polyptych<sup>6</sup> and the Annunciation painting from Dębno Podhalańskie (in the Archbishops' Palace in Krakow)<sup>7</sup> show a closed letter with a single seal affixed to it. In all the other representations, the letter with three seals on strings hanging from it, is open: in the panel of the Our Lady of Sorrows triptych in the Holy Cross Chapel of the Wawel Cathedral in Krakow<sup>8</sup>; in the Kalisz polyptych<sup>9</sup>; in a miniature contained in the Missal (KP 4) kept in the Chapter archives of the Krakow Cathedral<sup>10</sup>; and in the Pontifical of Erazm Ciołek, Bishop of Płock (from around 1515), kept in the Czartoryski Library in Krakow<sup>11</sup>.

Comments on the symbolic meaning of the seal come, among others, from such Fathers of the Church as St. Proculus, St. Andrew of Crete, St. Germanus, St. John of Damascus, and St. Ambrosius. All of them related this symbol to Mary's virginity<sup>12</sup>.

In the Olkusz panel, the Archangel Gabriel, whose liturgical vestment (cope) is held by the hem by two angels<sup>13</sup> in the way that in the fifteenth century the chasuble was held during the Elevation<sup>14</sup>, has in his hand a document with three seals attached to it. The inscription on the document reads: "Ecce concipies et paries fili-

<sup>5</sup> L. Kalinowski, *Der Versiegelte Brief. Zur Ikonographie der Verkündigung Mariä*, [in:] *Ars auro prior. Studia Joanni Białostocki sexagenario dicata*, Warszawa 1981, p. 161–169 (in translation to polish: *List zapieczętowany. Przyczynek do ikonografii Zwiastowania Marii*, [in:] *Speculum artis. Treści dzieła sztuki średniowiecza i renesansu*, Warszawa 1989, p. 651–666).

<sup>6</sup> T. Dobrzeńcki, *Malarstwo tablicowe. katalog zbiorów*, Warszawa 1972, p. 87–100, il. 32C3.

<sup>7</sup> J. Gadomski, *Gotyckie malarstwo tablicowe Małopolski 1420–1470*, Warszawa 1981, p. 49, il. 27 (it will be quoted as vol. 1).

<sup>8</sup> J. Gadomski, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 152–156, il. 123.

<sup>9</sup> T. Mroczo, *Polyptyk kaliski a rzeźby ze Stawiszyna. Próba rekonstrukcji*, "Biuletyn Historii Sztuki" 24, 1962, Nr 1, p. 58–72; *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, vol. 5, part 6, il. 79.

<sup>10</sup> *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, vol. 4, part 1, p. 133, il. 474; St. Sawicka, *Nieznanym krakowski rękopis iluminowany z początku XVI w.*, "Studia Renesansowe" 2, 1957, p. 45, il. 35.

<sup>11</sup> L. Kalinowski, *List zapieczętowany...*, p. 659.

<sup>12</sup> *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy. Teksty o Matce Bożej*, przełożył i poprowadził wstępem ks. W. Kania, Niepokalanów 1981, p. 109, 177, 238; *Ojcowie Kościoła łacińscy. Teksty o Matce Bożej*, przełożył ks. W. Eborowicz i ks. W. Kania, poprowadził wstępem ks. W. Kania, Niepokalanów 1981, p. 67.

<sup>13</sup> Angels appeared also: in a picture of Annunciation from furriers chapel in Virgin Mary Church in Kraków (National Museum in Krakow), 1470–1480 (J. Gadomski, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 146, il. 97); on an altar wing from about 1475, painter Ulrich Maira (Zürich, Landesmuseum; A. Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik*, [in:] *Schweben in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500*, vol. 8, Nendeln/Lichtenstein 1969, p. 121, il. 254); in a picture of Annunciation from about 1480–1490, Master from Spiska Kapitula (K. Vaculik, *Dawna sztuka słowacka*, Bratislava, il. 123); in a miniature in Kutnohorsky Graduale (Prag, UK XXIII A2, fol. 198v) from 1471 (*Dějiny českého výtvarného umění*, red. R. Charduba, Praha 1984, col. 603–605, il. 99).

<sup>14</sup> P. Sczaniecki OSB, *Służba Boża w dawnej Polsce*, Poznań–Warszawa–Lublin 1962, p. 144.

um et nomen eius Jesu, erit magnus ( sic!) et fi (...)”, while the words of greeting spoken by the angel are painted in majuscule at the level of his mouth.<sup>15</sup>

The inscription comes from St. Luke’s Gospel (1, 31–32) and, as St. Matthew writes in his Gospel (1, 22–23), is the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies (Is 7, 14). It constitutes part of the prayers for the first Vespers to celebrate the Feast of the Annunciation, the Antiphonarium, composed by Mikolaj Seszeta for Adam of Bętkowo, Canon of the Krakow Chapter (1457, KP 48, np. 80 fol. 118r-v; 119r)<sup>16</sup>, although this verse had been spoken as early as the thirteenth century Officium of the Annunciation<sup>17</sup>. As concerns the Antiphonarium, it should be pointed out that the miniature representing the Annunciation to mark the Feast also has Isaiah’s text (Is 7, 14) written in the book held by Mary. In the Missal of Wrocław the excerpt from Is 7.14 is contained in the reading, whereas for Luke 1, 31–32, in the Gospel for the Feast In annunciacione beate Mariae simp(er) Virginis gloriosae, a miniature painting of the Annunciation is placed next to the name of the Feast (fol. 70v)<sup>18</sup>. The Fathers of the Church, in their sermons, drew on the texts of Luke, Matthew and Isaiah. Tertullian, in his treaty *De Carne Christi*, based on pericopes taken from Isaiah 7, 14, Matthew 1, 20–21, Luke 1, 31–32<sup>19</sup>, and St Basil the Great, in his Christmas Sermon, quotes excerpts from Is 7, 14 and Matthew 1, 21<sup>20</sup>.

L. Kalinowski, in his analysis of the meaning of the sealed letter held by Gabriel in the Annunciation scene in the Master of Heiligenkreutz’ altarpiece (ca. 1400, Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum), writes, following the idea of Theodor Hach, that in the times of Jacob of Serugh (ca. 451–521), Bishop of Natha in Syria, the Annunciation with a sealed letter was sometimes treated as a kind of a legal procedure. The Bishop says that “The Immaculate Virgin and the Radiant Angel concluded, in an admirable way, a peace treaty between the residents of the Earth and of Heaven. At the time the above mentioned Heiligenkreutz diptych was created, the writing brought by Gabriel was considered in German Marian poetry to be a letter and not a document”. Both the open letter and the sealed document, confirm the truth of the Angel’s mission. The content of the document, clear both to Mary and to the spectator, is the Revelation to the whole world and to all the faithful, of the decision to undertake the Work of Redemption<sup>21</sup>.

As in medieval theology, overshadowing by the Holy Spirit (Luke 1, 35) and the resulting consent given by Mary (line 38) must be understood as Mary’s conceiving and the incorporation of God. The image of the Holy Spirit in the shape of a dove was slowly winning its place in the Annunciation scenes, including the

<sup>15</sup> L. Kalinowski, *List zapieczętowany...*, p. 658.

<sup>16</sup> Kraków Chapter Archive.

<sup>17</sup> J. Wojtkowski, *Przedmiot liturgicznego kultu Matki Boskiej w Polsce XIII wieku*, „Studia Warmińskie” 2, 1965, p. 231–232.

<sup>18</sup> Wrocław, *University Library*, IF 361, fol. 70v, 71r.

<sup>19</sup> *Ojcowie Kościoła łacińscy...*, p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy...*, p. 76–77.

<sup>21</sup> L. Kalinowski, *List zapieczętowany...*, p. 653, 660.

Olkusz panel. The Dove was represented in the tympanum of the Norbertine Monastery of the Holy Trinity and Virgin Mary Church in Strzelno, in the last decades of the twelfth century<sup>22</sup>, on the outer side of the late twelfth century Dąbrówka chalice from the Virgin Mary Church at Trzemeszno kept in the treasury of the Primate's Basilica in Gniezno<sup>23</sup>, and in the Lubin St Hedwig Code from 1353, in the John Paul Getty Museum, Malibu, California<sup>24</sup>.

In the field of early Christian art, the mosaic in Santa Maria Maggiore is the only preserved example with the dove represented in the Annunciation scene, and in early medieval art it can be found first in a Psalter illustration. In the Stuttgart Psalter, which is most probably an early ninth century manuscript from northern France, there is a verse taken from Psalm 72[71], 6: "He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass" which is illustrated with the Annunciation scene, where Mary looks in awe at a dove approaching her from the side. In the context of the Annunciation scene, this verse could point to the descent of the Holy Spirit, the more so in that it comes among the readings for the Annunciation Feast. It has not been established, however, whether the author of the illustrations in the Psalter, in painting an in - flying dove (as was common practice from the eleventh century), did this simply under the influence of the Psalm's contents, or referred back to the old eastern tradition in painting, connected with the Santa Maria Maggiore mosaic.

The remaining elements of this illustration reflect the influence of the East, i.e. the throne bench with large cushions, a spindle on Mary's lap, a basket full of wool, and Archangel Gabriel's long step. From the ninth to the end of the eleventh century, a dove is absent in the Annunciation scenes and so no connection between the Stuttgart Psalter and the later works can be established and they show no evidence of following the Psalter model<sup>25</sup>. In the eleventh century, the dove comes down vertically towards Mary's head. This is the case in the Coronation Gospels of 1085 and on the bas-relief from the Płock door (now in Nowogród)<sup>26</sup>. In the twelfth century, in West-European paintings, a dove is still rare. It is also not found in French cathedral art. In Romanesque art we come across one example, on the tympanum of the southern vestibule portal of St. Magdalene's Church in Vezelay<sup>27</sup>. The bas-relief from Bamberg Cathedral, dating from 1230-1240, shows a dove flying with outspread wings from a cloud<sup>28</sup>. In the ninth century, apart from the dove,

<sup>22</sup> Z. Świechowski, *Strzelno, rzeźba romańska*, Strzelno 1987, p. 8, il. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Sztuka polska przedromańska i romańska do schyłku XII wieku*, red. M. Walicki, Warszawa 1971, p. 279, il. 1036.

<sup>24</sup> A. Karłowska-Kamzowa, *Malarstwo śląskie 1250-1450*, Wrocław-Warszawa-Kraków-Gdańsk 1979, p. 110-111.

<sup>25</sup> G. Schiller, *Ikographie der christlichen Kunst*, vol. 1, Gütersloh 1981, p. 53-54, il. 90.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54, il. 91.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 54; A. Katzenellenbogen, *The Central Tympanon at Vezelay. Its Encyclopedic Meaning and Its Relation to the First Crusade*, "Art Bulletin" 25, 1944, No 3, p. 145.

<sup>28</sup> O. von Simson, *Deutsche Plastik, [in:] Das Mittelalter. 2: Das Hohe Mittelalter, Propyläen Kunstgeschichte*, vol. 6, Frankfurt am Main-Berlin-Wien 1985, p. 235-238, il. 213.

stress was put on "Conceptio per aurem", and through a nod of her head, Mary's consent and her obedient readiness to receive God in faith.

All these elements are present in the Olkusz panel. As for "Conceptio per aurem", the Fathers of the Latin Church were using an acoustic metaphor according to which Mary conceived Christ through her right ear. On a Schwabian miniature, in the mid twelfth century Gospels of Gengenbach, the dove's wings touch Mary's halo, and a distinct red line leads from its beak to her ear. On a twelfth-century church mural in Sorpe in Catalunya, the dove flies in from the side towards Mary's ear. In the Stammheim Missal (1160–1180), the bending of Mary's head which expresses attentive listening, and the sign from Heaven, are connected, similarly as in the Schwabian miniature<sup>29</sup>. From among the Polish representations, this type would include: the Annunciation scene in which the Holy Spirit, in the form of a dove, touches the right side of Mary's head, found on the tympanum in Strzelno<sup>30</sup>; the scene on the so called Dąbrowka chalice from Trzemeszno; and the scene on the Holy Cross reliquary in the Sandomierz Cathedral, where the dove touches Mary's head with its beak on the side of her right ear. This way of conception was very clearly marked in a bas-relief in St. Martin's Church in Jaworzno – The Holy Father is sending the Holy Spirit who approaches Mary's right ear.

On the Olkusz panel, however, there is no Holy Spirit in the form of a dove touching Mary's right ear, but in its place we have the words of greeting AVE GRATIA, coming from Gabriel's mouth. In European art, we observe this type of composition in: Simone Martini's 1333 Annunciation altarpiece from Siena Cathedral (Florence, Uffizi)<sup>31</sup>; in The Adoration of the Lamb altarpiece (1432) by Hubert and Jan van Eyck in St. Bavons Cathedral, Ghent<sup>32</sup>; in the Annunciation from 1436–1437 by Jan van Eyck (Washington, The National Art Gallery, Andrew W. Mellon Collection)<sup>33</sup>; in the triptych by the Master of Aix-en-Provence, commissioned by Pierre Corpici for the Saint Sauveur Cathedral and created between December 1442 and July 1445, now in Mary Magdalene's Church in Aix<sup>34</sup>; on the wing of the altarpiece c. 1458–1459 from St Colomba's Church in Cologne, by Roger van der Weyden<sup>35</sup>; on the wing of the altarpiece c. 1462 to 1465/66, by Friedrich Herlin, from St. Georg's Church in Nördlingen (Städtliche Sammlungen,

<sup>29</sup> G. Schiller, op. cit., p. 54, il. 86, 92, 95.

<sup>30</sup> Z. Świechowski, *Nieznane rzeźby romańskie w Strzelnie*, „Biuletyn Historii Sztuki” 1987, No 1/2, p. 165.

<sup>31</sup> H. Egger, *Verkündigung. Meisterwerke christlicher Kunst*, Müdling–Wien 1987, p. 19–20, il. 23.

<sup>32</sup> E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting...*, p. 205–207, il. 276; J. L. Ward, *Hidden Symbolism in Jan van Eyck's Annunciations*, „Art Bulletin” 57, 1975, No 2, p. 210–211, il. 13.

<sup>33</sup> H. Egger, op. cit., il. 31; J. L. Ward, op. cit., p. 205, il. 1.

<sup>34</sup> M. B. McNamee, *The Medieval Latin Liturgical Drama and the Annunciation Triptych of the Master of the Aix-Provence Annunciation*, „Gazette of Beaux-Arts” 83, 1974, p. 37–40; B. Hochstetler-Meyer, *A reexamination of the Triptych de L'Annonciation d'Aix*, „Gazette des Beaux-Arts” 95, 1980, p. 97–106.

<sup>35</sup> E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting...*, p. 286–287, il. 354; H. Egger, op. cit., il. 32.

Nördlingen) painted under the influence of the altarpiece from St. Colomba's Church in Cologne<sup>36</sup>; and in Poland, in a no longer surviving mural, dated later than the Olkusz polyptych (1500–1510), which was on the wall of one of the arcades of the Dominican cloisters in Krakow and is known from a preserved drawing<sup>37</sup>.

Whether conception is caused by a dove, an owl, or the words of the angel's greeting entering Mary's ear, seems to have no effect on the significance of the very act of conceiving through the ear. It is only a presentation of the exponent of God's Will. The origins of this metaphor go back to the deliberation on Adam/Christ and Eve/Mary typologies, for example in Justin and Irenaeus' writings, but the relation and the sequence of events between the act of listening and Mary's womb appears only in the statement of St. Augustine, who writes that "Deus per angelum loquebatur et Virgo per aurem impregnator"<sup>38</sup>. His opinion that "God spoke through the angel" means that each word heard by Mary was the semen which made her conceive. Other exegetes avoid the comparison applied by St. Augustine, and their metaphors are more based on the biological process.

Conception through the ear was commented on by St. Gaudentius, the Bishop of Brescia and friend of St. Ambrose ("Mary did not give birth to anyone else, but Him who entered through His mother's ear to fill her womb"), and in the fifth century by St. Eleuterius, Bishop and martyr in Tournai ("Oh Blessed Mary... made mother without knowing a man, as here the ear was the wife and the angel's word – the husband"). In the Carolingian period, the opinion of St. Agobard of Lyon (deceased in 816)<sup>39</sup>, points to the text being one of the Christmas responsoria *Ad matutinum* in the Bishop Zbigniew Oleśnicki Antiphonary (KP 47, fol. 44r-44v): "Descendit de cellis missus ab arce patris, introivit per aurem virginis in regionem nostrum indutus stola purpurea et exivit per aurem portam lux et decus universae fabricate mundi"<sup>40</sup>.

In the Olkusz panel, the dove was not engaged in "conception per aurem" because the author of the polyptych connected its action with another iconographic element relating to Mary. This is the mountain visible behind Mary, in the background behind the wall, but only in its lower part as the top is hidden from view by the gold of Heaven – a probable reference to Luke's Gospel, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee" (1, 35). The gold spreads not only over the mountain, but also around the head of Mary and the

<sup>36</sup> A. Stange, *Deutsche Malerei der Gotik. „Schwaben in der Zeit von 1450 bis 1500*, vol. 8, Nendeln/Liechtenstein 1969, p. 89, il. 183.

<sup>37</sup> M. Kornecki, H. Małkiewiczówna, *Małopolska*, [in:] *Gotyckie malarstwo ścienne w Polsce*, Poznań 1984, p. 60, 68, 201.

<sup>38</sup> L. Steinberg, "How shall This be?" *Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation in London*, Part I, [in:] *Artibus et Historiae. An Art Anthology*, Firenze–Wien 1987, No 16/VIII, p. 27.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 27–28.

<sup>40</sup> Kraków Chapter Archive.

dove placed within Mary's golden halo. St. Andrew of Crete, in his homily for the Feast of the Annunciation, expressed an idea in relation to which this scene becomes apposite, especially if we consider the presence of the Holy Trinity in the act of conception:

Vide qualiter manifestetur Trinitatis mysterium! Dicendo enim Spiritum sanctum, non alium dixit quam Paracletum. Per virtutem autem Altissimi, aperte Filium innuit. Nam voce hac, Altissimi, Patris pariter persona infertur. Illud autem, obumbrabit tibi, id mihi videtur dicere, quod olim puto perspicacibus oculis intuitus Habacuc, montem umbrrosum virginem appellavit: vix non suis coloribus pictam, quae ipsa admirabile quodam in ea velut tabernaculum, pro incarnationis ratione excitaverit: juxta quam, velut in deserto quodam affectionum, mundo illo alienoque ab omni vitiosa terrenorum affectione virginis utero, non manufactum templum illud corporis exstruxit, ut ex sequentibus liquet<sup>41</sup>.

St. Germanus, in his homily for the Feast of the Presentation of the Most Holy Virgin Mary, cried out:

Ave, Dei mons praepinguis et umbrosus: in quo enutritus rationalis Agnus peccata atque infirmitates nostras portavit; mons e quo devolutus ille, nulla manu praecisus, lapis, contrivit aras idolorum, et factus est in caput anguli, mirabilis in oculis nostris<sup>42</sup>.

This is similarly expressed in the Olkusz panel, and in many Polish representations, with a ray towards Mary, (usually following the dove) down which comes a naked Infant with the cross on his shoulder ( though in many cases this cross is absent)<sup>43</sup>.

David M. Robb, starting with the scene presented in Pacino da Bounaguida's painting *The Tree of Life* (1310) – which is an illustration to the literary text *Lignum Vitae* by Saint Bonaventure and perhaps also to *Meditationes vitae Christi* by pseudo-Bonaventure – points to numerous examples in Italian, French, Spanish,

<sup>41</sup> PG et L 97, 910; *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy*, p. 153.

<sup>42</sup> PG et L 98, 307; *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy*, p. 163.

<sup>43</sup> There are: miniature in Lubiń Codex from 1354 with a legend about St. Jadwiga; wall painting from about 1370–1380 in a parish church in Skotniki; one of two wings from XV c. of slesian painter (National Museum in Warsaw; Inw. No 186628); reverses sides of altar wings from 1468 Peter Wartenburg (National Museum in Warsaw); miniatures in: Conradus de Halberstadt, *Concordantiae Bibliorum*, from 1472, Mateusz from Oleśnica (from collegiate in Głogów, IF 88, fol. 1r); chalice from XV c. (Diocese Museum in Katowice); wall painting from 1481–1487, Virgin Mary chape in a parish church of Virgin Mary in Ziębice; poliptych wing from 1491 in a parish church in Książnice Wielkiej; triptych quarters from 4. quarter XV c. from Sławsk (Diocese Museum in Sandomierz); Annunciation painting with a knight of a Jastrzębiec coat of arms, from XV c. (Jagiellonian University Museum); Annunciation painting from about 1500 in a parish church in Zagórze near Sanok; Annunciation painting of a painter Jerzy, from 1517 (National Museum in Kraków).



Czech, German and Flemish painting of a naked Infant descending the rays from the Father towards Mary<sup>44</sup>.

The Crucifix in the Annunciation Scene may be a distant reminiscence of the connection with the Feast of the Annunciation (25 March), on which day, according to St. Geronimo's *Martyrologium*, the Day of the Crucifixion was also celebrated (until 772). St. Augustine writes in *De Trinitate*: "Octavo enim calendis conceptus creditus, quo et passus"<sup>45</sup>. The Infant bearing a cross on his shoulder was used, however, to underline the relation between the incarnation and the role of the mediator and the priest. In the Annunciation scene, the sequence of events is given by the above – mentioned full page miniature in the Silesian manuscript of Nicolaus of Pruzia. Here the illustrated legend of St. Hedwig is divided into two parts: "in the top part, God the Father, represented frontally on His Throne, is sending Gabriel to Mary, and in the bottom part – represented in the form of a bust – is holding, in His both hands, a little figure of Jesus (without a cross on his shoulder), with the Annunciation scene proceeding below"<sup>46</sup>.

In the Annunciation scene from the altarpiece by the Master of Flémalle, from the Merode collection, C. Gottlieb notices the function of the Infant with a cross on the shoulder, thanks to the additional symbolic elements which constitute the complete scene: a table with a candle and a book which plays here the role of an altar; an angel clad in the liturgical vestments of a deacon assisting at Holy Mass; and a piscina used as a lavabo. Christ is here the main celebrant of Holy Mass<sup>47</sup>. For L. Brand Philip, the Infant Jesus with a cross on his shoulder appearing in fifteenth century Annunciation scenes, is both a symbol of the Incarnation and a reference to the sacrifice of Christ and transubstantiation which takes place in Holy Mass. This is suggested by one of the miniatures in a late thirteenth century French missal, where the Infant Jesus is offered by the priest in place of the Host in an allegorical reference to Holy Mass<sup>48</sup>. The presence of the Infant with a cross in Mary's room, as a reference to the Eucharist, provides C. Gottlieb with grounds to suppose that the chamber represented in the altarpiece of the Master of Flémalle, is the interior of a sanctuary and a variant of the Host in the container motif, as represented in the miniature showing the Annunciation in the Gospel Book of Vysegrad, kept in the

<sup>44</sup> D. Robb, *The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries*, "Art Bulletin" 18, 1936, p. 524–526.

<sup>45</sup> L. Kalinowski, *Geneza Piety średniowiecznej*. Prace Komisji Historii Sztuki, 10, 1952, p. 217; E. Guldán, „*Et verbum caro factum est*”. Die Darstellung der Inkarnation Christi im Verkündigungsbild, „*Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte*“ 63, 1968, p. 162.

<sup>46</sup> T. Dobrzeński, *U źródeł przedstawień: Tron Łaski i Pietas Domini*, "Rocznik Muzeum Narodowego w Warszawie" 15, No 1, p. 230–232.

<sup>47</sup> C. Gottlieb, *Respiciens per Fenestras: The Symbolism of the Mérode Altarpiece*, [in:] *To Meyer Schapiro for his 65<sup>th</sup> birthday*, Oud Holland, 1970, p. 65–84.

<sup>48</sup> L. Brand Philip, *The Ghent Altarpiece and the Art of Jan van Eyck*, Princeton (New Jersey) 1971, p. 93–94 (quotation 191); U. Nilgen, *The Epiphany and the Eucharist: On the Interpretation of Eucharistic Motifs in Medieval Epiphany Scenes*, "Art Bulletin" 49, 1967, No 4, p. 3111–3116.

University Library in Prague (ms. XIV, A.13, fol. 20b). This Eucharist, contained in a pyx, is placed on the altar between Mary and the angel from the Annunciation. Like the church, the tabernacle is a symbol of Mary as the dwelling place for Christ, which was expressed by William Durandus thus: "quod ipsa, in qua hosiæ consecrate servantur, significant corpus virginis gloriosæ". In further discussion, this sanctuary becomes a celestial wedding feast chamber "cela vinaria" in which God makes a covenant with the people<sup>49</sup>.

The motif of a wall with a sill on top, shown in the Olkusz altarpiece, separates the foreground, where Mary and the angel kneel surrounded by household articles from the landscape behind the wall (the cupboard on the shelves on which we see a water container with a saucer, a sewing box and a container in the shape of a ciborium; a kneeler with its fabric cover; and behind Mary, a piece of cloth hanging over the wall and partly covering the bench placed in front of it), thus underlining that the Annunciation is taking place in some room. A similar wall specifying the venue of the action and separating it from the background of the painting, could be found in many altar panels of Silesia and Little Poland. In the painting of the Annunciation scene from Cięcina, now in the Szolayski Museum in Krakow and counted among works produced in the workshop of the Master of the Olkusz altar, apart from the wall, we also see a cupboard resembling the one from Olkusz and also standing to Mary's right<sup>50</sup>.

The origins of the cupboard and the pitcher in Mary's chamber can be traced to Roger van der Weyden, Dirk Bouts<sup>51</sup>, as well as the altar of the Master of Shöppingen and the Master of Liesborn<sup>52</sup>. It can therefore be concluded that the Annunciation scene in Olkusz depicts the Netherlands type of interior described by D. M. Robb, and is a room of a bourgeois family house<sup>53</sup>.

Coming down into such an interior, shown in the Olkusz polyptych, and heading towards Mary, is the Holy Infant with a cross on his shoulder, in a cloud symbolizing Mary<sup>54</sup>, surrounded by tracery in the shape of a half-rosette circle which resembles a chamber window. This supposition is supported by the same tracery in the scene of Mary's Dormition, where the chamber interior is suggested by a canopied bed, and inside the tracery, there is a representation of Mary ascending, body and soul, to Heaven. In the work of Pietro Lorenzetti (Pieve, Arezzo) the Infant appears in the lunette. In the Annunciation scene in the Mary Magdalene Church in Provence, the Infant is flying into the interior of the church through a rosette win-

<sup>49</sup> C. Gottlieb, op. cit., p. 74-75.

<sup>50</sup> J. Gadoński, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 148-149, il. 114.

<sup>51</sup> E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting...*, p. 173, 255, 315, il. 212-215, 309-310, 414; A. Chatelet, *Early Dutch Painting. Painting in the Northern Netherlands in the Fifteenth Century*, Lausanne 1988, p. 79, il. 62.

<sup>52</sup> A. Stange, op. cit., vol. 6, p. 7, 26-29, il. 11, 36.

<sup>53</sup> D. Robb, op. cit., p. 500ff.

<sup>54</sup> C. Gottlieb, op. cit., p. 79-80.

dow. In the altarpiece by the Master of Flémalle, the Infant enters the chamber through a circular window. In Italian painting, a circle is a symbol of the sun. In terms of geometry, it has no beginning and no end and as such, symbolizes God<sup>55</sup>.

Medieval theologians and poets, and St. Bernard in particular, often explained the mystery of the Incarnation in terms which compared the conception and birth of Christ from Mary's body to the sun's rays coming through window panes without affecting the glass structure. Christ is the light or the fire which Mary received and to which she gave birth, while at the same time preserving her virginity. She was considered to be a window through which the Holy Spirit descended to the earth. Similarly as the rays of light coming through coloured stained glass assume its colours, the Son of God assumes human shape from Mary's body having first entered her holy womb, termed a chamber or a temple<sup>56</sup>.

Behind the wall separating Mary from the surroundings, in the background of the Olkusz Annunciation scene, we see a church. Close examination of the other panels of the polyptych reveals elements such as buildings appearing in each of the scenes (The Annunciation to Anne, The Meeting of Joachim and Anne, The Presentation of Mary in the Temple, the Visitation, The Nativity, The Dormition, the Circumcision, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation of Christ in the Temple, the Slaughter of the Innocents) offer a fairly detailed picture of the venue for the events pictured in the foreground. This reasoning leads to the conclusion, that Mary's chamber is nothing else but the interior of a temple with which Mary is later identified as God's Temple. This idea was expressed in the hymn in the fifteenth century Psalter from Krakow Cathedral (KP 35, fol. 237r), next to a miniature representing the Annunciation to Mary, in the initial "V(eni)" before "die nativitas Domini": "Alvus tumescit virginis, claustra pudoris permanent, vexilla virtutum micant, versatur in templo Deus".

Many Church Fathers, on the basis of the Song of Songs, interpret this relationship between Mary and Christ as the love between Christ and the Church, pointing to the resemblance of Mary to the Church. C. Gottlieb explained the iconography of the triptych by the Master of Flémalle in terms of the reincarnational exegesis of the Song of Songs, according to which Christ dwells in Mary's womb<sup>57</sup>. This was not only reflected in the Master of Schöppingen's work, but also in the painting representing the Annunciation of Mary from the period after 1460 in the National Museum in Prague. A similar explanation was offered by Brand Philip who interpreted the Annunciation of Mary in Jan van Eyck's Adoration of the Lamb altarpiece in Ghent, as mystic nuptials<sup>58</sup>.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 78.

<sup>56</sup> M. Meiss, *Light as Form and Symbol in some Fifteenth-Century Paintings*, "Art Bulletin" 27, 1945, p. 176-177, 180-181.

<sup>57</sup> C. Gottlieb, *op. cit.*, p. 75-84.

<sup>58</sup> L. Brand Philip, *op. cit.*, p. 78-97.

A. Labuda, looking for connections between Madonna in her chamber and Netherlands painting, pays special attention to the work of the Master of Flémalle and artists from the Rhenish region. In Poland there are very few iconographic examples related to the new Netherlands trend, but both Madonna in her Chamber and the Annunciation of Mary in the triptych of Our Lady of Sorrows in the Wawel Cathedral ( an example of entirely symbolic-naturalistic representation as the Tower of David ), find explanation in the text of the Song of Songs<sup>59</sup>.

In the Olkusz representation, the Song of Songs provides an explanation of the cloud through which the Infant descends, and according to the interpretation of the Church Fathers, it is Mary herself, because from her – a cloud, along with the rain – comes the Righteous, the Saviour<sup>60</sup>. The pomegranates on the piece of cloth providing background for Maria and symbolizing the Son of God clad in Mary's body<sup>61</sup>, stand for the love of the Betrothed and her inner beauty<sup>62</sup>. The sandals under Mary's kneeler, underline the human nature of Christ, the body of Mary of whom Christ was born, and the earthly measures used by the Church to achieve the eternal, nonmaterial, spiritual objective, connected with the economy of salvation planned by God<sup>63</sup>.

According to M. B. McNamee, all the angels, including those in the Annunciation scene, wear Mass vestments ( alb, stole, dalmatic, cope, but never a celebrant's chasuble) and constitute the intentionally planned symbol of Holy Mass (the essence of the deed they form part of points to the Eucharist). In the Eucharist, Christ himself is the celebrant, clad in the chasuble of the body he received from Mary. Thus clothed the angel becomes a symbol analogous to a bundle of wheat, the ears of wheat, grapes and vine<sup>64</sup>.

The ties Mary has with Christ due to the Incarnation are acquired by the Church through participation in the Eucharist<sup>65</sup>. Hildegard of Bingen declared that

<sup>59</sup> A. S. Labuda, *Problem ikonografii...*, p. 335–351.

<sup>60</sup> Song of Songs 2, 11–12; St. Ambrosius (*Ojcowie Kościoła łacińscy...*, p. 60); St. German (*Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy...*, p. 162); the first letter R(orate) is connected with the scenes of Annunciation in Missals in Kraków Chapter Archive: KP 2, fol. 283v; KP 3, p. 186; KP 7, fol. 236v; C. Gottlieb, op. cit., p. 79–80.

<sup>61</sup> M. Michnowska, *Ze studiów nad poliptykiem toruńskim*, [in:] *Teka Komisji Historii Sztuki*, vol. 2, Toruń 1961, p. 160.

<sup>62</sup> D. Frostner OSB, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej*, Warszawa 1990, p. 122–123.

<sup>63</sup> St. Gregor Greate, *Homilie na Ewangelie*, VII 3 (D. Frostner, op. cit., p. 448); St. Ambrosius, *Expositio in Psalmum 118*, sermo 17, 14f. (PL 15, 1520f.; D. Frostner, op. cit., p. 448–449; *Ojcowie Kościoła łacińscy...*, p. 61–62); shoes on Arnolfini Betrothal painting by Master of Flémalle, Hugo van der Goes (E. Panofsky, *Early Netherlandish Painting...*, 203; Z. Kępiński, *Jana van Eycka Małżeństwo Arnolfinich czy Dawid i Betsabe*, "Rocznik Historii Sztuki" 1974, p. 142–146; in german and austrian painting, in Annunciation scenes (A. Stange, op. cit., vol. 5, p. 25–29, 109, il. 52, 233; *Ibidem*, vol. 9, p. 118–119, il. 246c; H. Egger, op. cit., il. 35).

<sup>64</sup> M. B. McNamee, *Further Symbolism in the Portinari Altarpiece*, "Art Bulletin" 45, 1963, No 2, p. 142–143; M. B. McNamee, *The Origin of the Vested Angel as a Eucharystic Symbol in Flemish Painting*, "Art Bulletin" 54, 1972, No 3, p. 263, 267; M. B. McNamee, *The Medieval Latin Liturgical Drama...*, p. 37.

<sup>65</sup> P. Evdokimov, *Prawosławie*, Warszawa 1964, p. 168, quotation 111; E. Ozorowski, *Kościół. Zarys eklezjologii katolickiej*, Wrocław 1984, p. 54–55.

the fiat spoken by the Virgin Mary corresponds to the words a priest says at the moment of Transubstantiation, and just as the Son of God was conceived in the Virgin's womb, He now descends onto the altar. The nineteenth century mystics shifted the stress from the comparison between the the Incarnation and Transubstantiation to the comparison between Mary's conceiving Christ and the faithful receiving the Eucharist, which found its reflection in the representations of the Annunciation on the tabernacle doors or altar retabulae, related to places where the Most Holy Sacrament was kept<sup>66</sup>. Our altarpiece in Olkusz was connected with the ciborium and was named Corpus Christi<sup>67</sup>.

In Olkusz, Archangel Gabriel and the Holy Infant with a cross on his shoulder, refer to the Eucharist. The sacral nature of the place ( a church) and the Eucharist, relate this scene to the "Celestial Jerusalem", as is similarly expressed in the Annunciation shown in the Adoration of the Lamb altarpiece in Ghent. This idea is also "expressed" by the Annunciation scene in the Altarpiece of Szaniec (1840)<sup>68</sup>, where in the chamber, on the table placed between the angel and Mary, we see a ciborium and a book, and in the background, on the back wall, three separate windows represent the Holy Trinity, while far behind the chamber is a city on a hill, surrounded by a wall with an extending forward gate (The Celestial Jerusalem).

This solution is also applicable to other, later, Polish representations of the Annunciation to Mary. The "Civitas Dei" is painted against the background of a mountainous landscape with the view limited by the window frame of Mary's chamber; in the polyptych of the Kalisz collegiate church (1500)<sup>69</sup>, on the reverse sides of the wings of the pentaptych in St. Bartholomew's Church in Konin Zagański (1507)<sup>70</sup> and on the reverse sides of the triptych (1517) in St. Catherine's Fitial Church at Gręboszów<sup>71</sup>.

In the Olkusz panel, next to the church standing behind the wall, we see towers and a mountain, which suggests that with the whole complex of buildings and a mountain, we are dealing with the concept of "the City of God", the more so that in St. Andrew's Church in Olkusz there is a fourteenth century representation of "Celestial Jerusalem"<sup>72</sup>. The polyptych presents the vertical dimension of the city based on the idea of its "coming down" ( Ap. 21, 2.10) and partially horizontal, due to the spatial topography of "Celestial Jerusalem" (Ap 21, 15-17)<sup>73</sup>. In the con-

<sup>66</sup> E. Guldán, op. cit., p. 163.

<sup>67</sup> B. Przybyszewski, *Powstanie i autorstwo...*, p. 87-92.

<sup>68</sup> J. Gadomski, op. cit., vol. 2, p. 160-161, il. 160.

<sup>69</sup> T. Mroczko, *Poliptyk kaliski...*, 58-72; *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, vol. 5, part 6, il. 79.

<sup>70</sup> H. Braune, E. Wiese, *Schlesische Malerei und Plastik des Mittelalters. Kritischer Katalog der Ausstellung in Breslau 1926*, Leipzig 1929, p. 68-69, il. 138; A. Ziomecka, *Śląskie malarstwo gotyckie. Zbiory Muzeum Narodowego we Wrocławiu*, Wrocław 1986, p. 60-62, il. 15c-d.

<sup>71</sup> *Katalog zabytków sztuki w Polsce*, vol. 7, p. 7, 14, il. 102.

<sup>72</sup> S. Kobielus, *Niebieska Jerozolima. Od sacrum miejsca do sacrum modelu*, Warszawa 1989, p. 128.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

text of the Apocalypse of St. John, the letter held by the angel, in addition to what had already been said about its contents, refers also to a verse from this book (Ap 21.3): "And I heard a great voice from the throne saying: Behold the tabernacle of God with men, and he will dwell with them. And they shall be his people; and God himself with them shall be their God". At the moment of the Annunciation to Mary, the heavens touch the earth. St. Germanus means Mary when he calls out: "the City of our God in His holy Mountain, Beautiful elevation, the joy of the whole world is Mount Zion, on the north sides the City of the Great King, God has shown himself in her citadels" (Ps 48)<sup>74</sup> "Since She was the living City of Christ our King, it is the righteous thing that Her Holy House which we are Blessing, is and be called the glorious city" (extract from a homily for the Blessing ceremony of the Church of Mary Mother of God)<sup>75</sup>.

In relation to the idea contained in the Olkusz scene, it seems justified to refer to the postcommunio prayer contained in the Missal from Krakow Cathedral, dating back to the 1440s, for the Feast of the Annunciation beate Marie Virginis (KP 7. fol.236v):

Gratiam tuam quesumus, Domine mentibus nostris infunde, ut qui angelo nuntiante Christi filii tui incarnationem cognovimus per passionem eius et crucem ad resurrectionis gloriam perducamur<sup>76</sup>.

In the Annunciation scene in Olkusz, the theological idea expressed through the symbols then used, conveys the fundamental message based on the pericope of the Luke's Gospel (1, 32–32), in turn based on Isaiah (7, 14) and quoted further by St John in his Apocalypse (21, 3). It was not unknown to Jan Wolny, as it appeared in liturgical texts which he himself contemplated.

Much as the iconographic motives used to represent the whole idea of the scene are nothing unusual – indeed were commonly used in the art of the time – the way they are put together reflects a somewhat erudite composition. For instance, in the distribution of functions in the Act of Incarnation among the respective characters, Gabriel participates in "conceptio per aurem", and the Holy Spirit (a dove) is related to the mountain (standing for Maria) and its "shading" (Lucas 1, 35). At the same time, this mountain (that is Mary), in the same way as the church with the buildings at its foot, point to the "Celestial Jerusalem". It seems that this composition links the scene in the Olkusz polyptych with the area of influence of Netherlands art, among others, through painters from the German-speaking countries (Germany and Austria), mentioned on the occasion of discussing respective iconographic motifs.

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<sup>74</sup> *Ojcowie Kościoła greccy i syryjscy...*, p. 162.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 200.

<sup>76</sup> Kraków Chapter Archive.