The Virgin Annunciate, Human and Divine:

The Annunciation to Mary in Fifteenth-Century Florentine Art

By
Sara E. Lombardi

[Master of Philosophy
Faculty of Arts
University of Glasgow]

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The Annunciation to Mary, the moment of Christ's Incarnation and the moment in which Mary becomes divine in addition to human, and her humility and strength become recognized, is a theme loaded with significance in fifteenth-century Florence.

I will examine the theme of the Annunciation and explain and illustrate the various roles and character traits of Mary reflected in the scene and how several artists portrayed them in various media. I will attempt to demonstrate how her roles and character traits served as behavioral models in fifteenth-century Florentine society. I will also provide examples of the scene, which illustrate each of the five categories of "Angelic Colloquy" of Mary's response to the proposal of Gabriel, God's messenger, as conceived by Fra Roberto Caracciolo. I will consider how different portrayals were intended for particular locations and why patron and artist chose specific depictions.

The Annunciation is an interesting theme to look at in our current time as it is the change of the Millenium and there is much contemplation about Christ's Second Coming.

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Virgin Mother

Virgin Mother, daughter of thy lowly and
exalted more than any creature, fixed goal of the
eternal counsel, thou art she who didst so ennoble
human nature that its Maker did not disdain to be
made its making. In thy womb was rekindled the
love by whose warmth this flower has bloomed thus
in the eternal peace. Here thou art for us the noonday
torch of charity, and below among mortals
thou art a living spring of hope. Thou, Lady, art
so great and so prevailing that whoso would have
grace and does not turn to thee, his desire would
fly without wings. Thy loving-kindness not only
succours him that asks, but many times it freely
anticipates the asking. In thee is mercy, in thee
pity, in thee great bounty, in thee is joined all
goodness that is in any creature.

Dante
Paradiso, Canto XXXIII, vv. 1-21.

The Annunciation is one of the most popular religious scenes represented in all of Christian art, and is arguably the most popular scene depicted from the life of Mary, specifically (1). Its significance is well illustrated in the deeply religious fifteenth-century Florentine society's many portrayals in various types of media, such as panel painting, fresco, manuscript illumination, and sculpture. Each representation served a particular function within Christian society. The Feast Day of the Annunciation was the start of the Florentine calendar, a tradition there from the Middle Ages through the end of the eighteenth century. Indeed, the city was home to the unique Church of Santissima Annunziata, the Virgin Annunciate, founded by nuns of the Servite Order in 1244. The nuns, calling themselves 'Servants of Mary', had a fresco painted in their church, of the Annunciation, the moment when Mary agreed to become the Mother of Christ the Redeemer (2). Legend claimed that while the painter, Fra Bartolomeo, rested after painting the body of Mary to gain courage to paint the her face, an angel intervened and finished it for him. This miracle created a special reputation for the church. Additional miracles were believed to have occurred when people prayed in the chapel for pregnancy and healthy childbirth, among other things, which magnified the Church of Santissima Annunziata's otherworldly reputation (3). The 'miraculous' fresco was copied several times over the next centuries by well-known artists such as Gentile Da Fabriano in his smaller version, dated c. 1420, (tempera on wood, 45.8 x 54.4 cm, in the Private Collection of Mrs. Barbara Piasecka Johnson, **Cat. 1**).

The fifteenth century, 'Quattrocento', in Florence is well known for being a unique time in the history of Italian and European societies. Florence was the largest city in Europe. It was a time of considerable wealth and interest in the culture and its history, as well as a very religious time. The humanists of the fourteenth century onwards, who had a particular curiosity in man and his place in the world and who looked to the classics for inspiration, brought to light treasures of moral writing as well as classical artwork. These studies encouraged spiritual, intellectual and political growth, which complemented the growing monetary wealth of society. Over time the Florentines acquired a stronger and stronger sense

of being, both individually and communally. They became active civically as a community, everyone possessed equal political rights, and continued their search for knowledge and truth.

The term 'Renaissance' has been used for centuries to describe this period, and while it may seem fitting in the respect that the Florentines did indeed look to the past for influence and answers, and hence classic philosophy and art was having a rebirth of sorts, it is not entirely apt. Original thought abounded, not only in natural response to this looking backwards, but also in combination with Florence's growing sense of community and power, which made it unlike any society in the history of European culture. More than ever, mercantile and banking families were using their money to fund religious projects. Certainly the practice of Christian art patronage was not a new idea in the history of art in Europe, but the changing societal dynamic of Florence was making certain advantageous reasons more obvious. As suggested by Florentine merchant Giovanni Rucellai, commissions were beneficial to the patron for political and for pious reasons as they advertised the family's power and wealth and religious generosity, and insured the patron was in good-standing with God (4).

As a result, religious images proliferated in various locations, public and private. While indeed there was a fascination with the classical ideal, the Christian society kept artistic images of a religious content, rather than mythological themes, in the forefront of artistic production. Classical mythological themes were significantly portrayed in certain contexts, however. This was a time when a Florentine artist of religious images, in accordance with his patron and commission, could pay tribute to the work of the ancients through the representation of classical forms and ornament and/or idealized figures, while he simultaneously addressed his current culture and tangible place in life with single-point perspective and architectural settings for his figures. During this period for example, Donatello felt confident in sculpting a very classical looking Virgin and Angel and a flat patterned background devoid of depth in his *Cavalcanti Annunciation*, (1428-33, sandstone, 420 x 240 cm, Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence, **Cat. 2**)(5), while panel and fresco painters

continually chose to set the Virgin and Gabriel in a feasible architectural setting, in order to make the scene more familiar to the viewer (6). The latter is evident in Fra Angelico's *Cortona Annunciation* of c.1435 (tempera on wood, 175 x 180 cm, Museo Diocesano, Cortona no. A9, **Cat. 5**). The Florentine Quattrocento was a period which incorporated both tradition and innovation into its practices (7). However, towards the end of the century it became more conservative and rigid in its practices and beliefs because of several political and plague-related events that disrupted Florentine life and artistic production. Artistic tendencies began to change once again, and the Florentine Quattrocento as we know it came to an end.

The Annunciation is the moment when Mary was visited by Gabriel, God's messenger and told she was the woman chosen to bear God's son who would redeem the sins of humanity and hence enable humans to rise to Heaven after death. The scene is fundamental to the Christian religion. The original Biblical text that described the Annunciation was that of the evangelist Luke in the New Testament. Subsequently, the Apocryphal writings embellished this account and provided artists with another source of description for their depictions. The oldest artistic portrayals of the Annunciation known were found in the catacombs of Priscilla, Saint Peter, and Saint Marcellinus in Rome, dating to the fourth century.

Throughout the Middle Ages and in Byzantine art, the Annunciation's main significance lay in the fact that it was the moment of Christ the Redeemer's Incarnation (8). Over time, the significance, while still acknowledging and respecting the moment of Christ's Conception, shifted to include Mary's importance in the scene as well. Both women and men respected and looked up to her as a woman who fulfilled an admirable womanly, Christian, and motherly role. The story of the Annunciation illustrates all of the attributes of Mary's character in a single scene (9). She was the *pious* woman who upon reading her Book of Hours, a collection of prayers for different times of day, was visited by Gabriel and told " Hail, O favoured one, the Lord is with you! Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favour

with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus." (Luke 1: 28-32). *Humbly*, she answered, "How can this be, since I have no husband?" (Luke 1: 34). Gabriel replied, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you." (Luke 1: 35). She then exclaimed in *obedience* and with *courage*, "Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be unto me according to thy word." (Luke 1: 38). At this moment she became divine in addition to human, able to conceive and bear the Savior. She was chosen by God as the instrument in the Incarnation of Christ the Redeemer of all sins, due the fact that she was a virgin and possessed an exceptional character. (10). Moreover, Mary was associated with Eve, the figure first tempted to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden. Mary's virginity and divine motherhood in a sense rectified the sins of Eve and subsequent female humanity. She was an essential complement to Christ and his mission. Finally, Mary's *human and divine* role in the Annunciation enabled her to be seen by Christian believers as a mediator between the mortals and God (11).

The Virgin's character and behavioral traits in the Annunciation scene can be understood as a general model of preferred behavior for women (12). The fourteenth and fifteenth-century humanists' focus on the concept of man and his perfection, reinforced this appetite for a role model (13). Her character traits of humility, piety, obedience, and courage due to her acceptance of God's extraordinary plan, inspired everyone. She was a role model for submissive, obedient, gentle, courageous and humane mothers and wives (14). This satisfied men as it served as a positive reinforcement for the way that they wished woman to behave towards them, their children and society (15). As one who had faith in God's plan, she provided an example for having faith in God in general (16). Her virginity was important to fifteenth-century Florentine society that valued chastity and other types of self-restraint such as those related to food and vanity. Self-restraint in general, has always been a prominent component of Christian practice (17). Chastity, in particular, meant monogamy and the ability to produce and preserve a tightknit family. Children were needed to produce heirs to new family fortunes and to carry on family names.

Christian sermons were a prominent and important component in the daily lives of fifteenth-century Florentines. An example of how Mary's esteemed behavioral characteristics were conveyed through the spoken word, is exemplified in a sermon of Fra Roberto Caracciolo, an influential priest, on the five admirable conditions of the Virgin's behavior, or 'Angelic Colloquy' (18). His theme now provides a tool with which to examine Mary's reaction to Gabriel's visit as depicted by different artists, and hence, sheds further light on her behavioral character. According to scholar Michael Baxandall, the first category of the Virgin's response to Gabriel's visit and message is 'disquiet' as is exemplified in the *San Lorenzo Annunciation* by Fra Filippo Lippi, (c.1440, tempera on wood, 175 x 182 cm, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence, Martelli Chapel, **Fig. 1**), where the Virgin is depicted in an agitated stance (19). The second category, 'reflection', is represented in *The Annunciation* by the Master of the Barberini Panels, (c.1448, tempera on wood, 88 x 62 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington, Kress Collection, **Fig. 2**), which illustrates the Virgin thinking calmly about what Gabriel has told her. Alessio Baldovinetti's *Annunciation* in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, (c.1457, tempera on wood, 167 x 137 cm, Inv. no. 483, **Fig. 3**), demonstrates the third category of her response, 'inquiry', for Mary is depicted at the subsequent moment in which she asks Gabriel how it will be possible. The next category of 'submission' is exemplified in Fra Angelico's *Cell 3 Annunciation*, (c.1440-43, fresco, 176 x 148 cm, Convent of San Marco, **Cat. 6**), a particularly humble depiction of Mary kneeling close to the floor and devoid of noble attributes. And the last category of the Virgin's condition, 'merit', which actually illustrates her condition before and after Gabriel has departed, cannot be illustrated through a depiction of the Annunciation, but rather through a depiction of the Virgin alone, possibly praying or reading a Book of Hours in her worthiness.

The church, over the centuries, developed an iconographical language from which artists could draw to convey messages particular to biblical scenes and Christian doctrine in general. Fifteenth-century Florentine art had its own preferences and distinctions in iconographical language. In Quattrocento Annunciations, the Holy Spirit, as represented by

the dove, is usually conveyed hovering above Mary (20), Gabriel is often shown holding a lily which symbolized Mary's purity, (21) and there was often some allusion to the enclosed garden or *hortus conclusus* symbolizing Mary's untainted virginity as referred to in the Apocryphal Song of Songs. In addition, each specific component of the garden such as the palm that symbolized peace or roses that symbolized life and light, alluded more specifically to elements of Paradise. These and other iconographical references served constantly to remind the viewer of the virtuous character attributes of the Virgin who became the mother of Christ. Often Annunciation altarpieces included a representation of Adam and Eve at the time of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, as an iconographical reminder of the theme of redemption and Christ's and Mary's redemptive roles in it.

In fifteenth-century Florentine society, religious images and the Annunciation in particular, were encountered in virtually all places, public and private. They could be found in churches, private chapels, and serving various functions in assorted positions in monasteries, hospitals, civic buildings, houses, in Books of Hours, and decorating roadside shrines (22). Public locations of the Annunciation scene shed light on its consequential functions, and by examining these factors one can gain insight into public society and its values. Moreover, images of a more private nature provide insight into the influence of Christianity outside of the public sphere. This exhibition is focused on the artistic production of the Annunciation scene in the Quattrocento until the early 1490s when society and art production were disrupted.

The Annunciation as Altarpiece

Religious pictures in public religious settings in Quattrocento Florence served institutional ends. This concept is explained eloquently by thirteenth-century 'Catholicon' dictionary writer John of Genoa. He defined the purposes of religious pictures as being to teach the illiterate or simple people the stories of the Bible through lucid pictures, to illustrate

the stories in a recognizable and memorable fashion, and to "excite feelings of devotion, these being aroused more effectively by things seen than heard." (23). Significantly, where religious images were manufactured for more private settings, these general depictive guidelines were altered, as will be illustrated later in this essay.

The Renaissance altarpiece was designed as a complement to the altar in a church (24). The altar was the table-like structure that lent itself to the celebration of the Eucharist during Catholic masses. The high altar was at the east end of the church and each smaller chapel within had a separate altar at which more intimate masses and ceremonies could be performed. People often prayed individually in front of the altars outside of masses. The altarpiece could take the form of a painted panel, a sculpture, or a shrine or tabernacle, on or behind the altar. It was not solely decorative but rather served to reflect, the key Christian figures, stories, beliefs, and practices, and often to "work" with the sermons to communicate lessons. Two-dimensional painted panels and relief sculptures functioned primarily in the emotive and evocative power of their image, and three-dimensional shrines or tabernacles had extra functions as either niches in which sacred images or items were placed, or as containers which held the relics of saints or the items used in the celebration of the Eucharist (see Fra Angelico's reliquary tabernacle of the Annunciation, c.1430s, tempera and gold on wood, 84 x 50 cm, Museo San Marco, Florence, no. 276, **Cat. 3**).

Patronage of altarpieces was much coveted. Certainly an altarpiece designated for the high altar was more prestigious than one for a side chapel altar, however, patrons were always readily available. Chapels and their altarpieces were commissioned for several reasons such as for funerary commemoration of the patron and his family, to honor the patron saints of the church or other saints, or simply for the church to acquire money through the sale of the space to the patron (25). The patron's Coat of Arms often was represented on the framing device of a panel painting or sculpture so that all would know who the benefactor was.

The particular subject matter for an altarpiece was the decision of the church for which it was made and the patron who funded it. The scene of the Annunciation was frequently used

for side chapels, as the comparatively static depictions of the Virgin and Child with Saints or the Crucifixion of Christ, were commonly used for high altars. (26). Sometimes a representation of the donor was included outside of the main scene of the altarpiece. Often, the church's patron saint(s) was/were included in the scene. This was a popular convention in portrayals of the Virgin and Child with Saints, where an extra saint or donor figure would not disrupt the image. In depictions of the Annunciation, most often only Mary and Gabriel, the two main characters were pictured, as the scene, in its power, illustrated the relationship between the actions and words of Gabriel and Mary. However, occasionally other figures were represented as in Fra Fillippo Lippi's *San Lorenzo Annunciation* **(Fig. 1)**, where there are two (mysterious) angels standing behind Gabriel.

Altarpieces, in general, were seen by many different people including clergypeople, laypeople, men, women and children. The important high altarpiece was often difficult to see because it was behind the high altar at the end of the long nave. Often the priest or officiating person in masses and other ceremonies might obstruct its view as well (27). Significantly, due to its position in a smaller chapel space in the church, the chapel altarpiece was a more intimate pictorial device for the viewer than the high altarpiece. Being closer to an altarpiece, the viewer, man, woman or child, could see for instance, in a portrayal of the Annunciation, the Virgin's obedient gesture in Alessio Baldovinetti's *Annunciation* commissioned for the Church of San Giorgio alla Costa, Florence, **(Fig. 3)**, or the Virgin's surprised humble reaction to Gabriel's proposal in Botticelli's *Cestello Annunciation*, (c.1489, tempera on wood, 150 x 156 cm, commissioned for a side chapel in the Cistercian church called the Cestello, Florence, c. 1489, now in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 1608, **Cat. 14**).

The painted panel altarpiece type that was developed in fifteenth-century Florence was the *tavola quadrata* or *pala*, the rectangular shaped panel. The polyptych, or partitioned, and often hinged, Gothic painted altarpiece, had previously been the convention and was still preferred in Sienese altarpiece painting (28). The new, Florentine tradition developed from the humanists' admiration for classical forms and ornamental motifs (29). The *tavola*

quadrata was framed on either side by the representation of a classical inspired pilaster (see Fra Angelico's *Cortona Annunciation*, **Ill. 2**). This differed significantly from the Gothic pinnacle frame of the polyptych altarpiece. The backgrounds of scenes, a direct result of the rectangular panel likened to a window looking into space by Leon Battista Alberti in his 1434 treatise on painting, were painted in single-point perspective in contrast to the flat gold backgrounds of the Gothic style painted altarpiece (30). In fifteenth-century Florentine art, the tradition was to portray the Annunciation in a familiar space, often a loggia off of a garden, with a suggestion of the Virgin's bedroom, as demonstrated in Lorenzo Di Credi's *Annunciation*, (late 15th C., tempera on wood, 88 x 71 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 1597, **Fig. 4**), while in French art the scene was usually portrayed in an ecclesiastical setting of the French Gothic style so thoroughly exemplified/embraced throughout France, and in Netherlandish art, in a house interior to highlight the new bourgeois society (31). In addition, commonly, Florentine artists presented a stylized or idealized image of the Virgin and Gabriel so as not to compete with the viewer's imagined picture and thus upset the purpose of the image as an aid to devotion and contemplation (32). The patron or church often requested 'ultramarine' a color derived from the precious stone lapis lazuli, to color the Virgin's cloak, and gold to accent details and create the allusion of illumination such as the golden glow of Gabriel in the Fra Angelico's *Cortona Annunciation*, (**Cat. 5**), in order to make the picture more impressive to the public. The painted panel altarpiece was supported by a predella at its base that also served as a narrow surface, which in Quattrocento Florence, was usually divided into five panels and painted with narrative scenes from the life of Mary or the saints included in the image of the main panel (33)(see Fra Angelico's *Prado Annunciation*, c.1430s, tempera on wood, 194 x 194 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid, no. 15, **Fig. 5**, and Domenico Veneziano's *Annunciation* predella panel, 1461, tempera on wood, 27.3 x 54 cm, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, no. 1106, **Cat. 10**).

Sculptural altarpieces were less common and often more expensive than painted panels (34). Donatello's *Cavalcanti Annunciation* was commissioned by the Cavalcanti family

as the altarpiece for a chapel of their name in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Florence (**Cat. 2**). It was carved in relief from gray sandstone and gilded with gold to highlight certain details. Its stunning ideal beauty is reminiscent of classical sculpture. Another particularly beautiful Florentine depiction of the Annunciation was sculpted by Andrea Della Robbia for the Niccolini Chapel of the Annunciation in the Basilica at La Verna (c.1475, tin-glazed terracotta, 210 x 210 cm, **Cat. 12**). This sculpture was made of terracotta and colored with a tin-based glaze, a technique pioneered by the artist's uncle, Luca Della Robbia. The technique allowed for the sculpture to have a shiny white surface and added colored details. The style of the representation is very classicizing in similarity to the *Cavalcanti Annunciation.*

The Annunciation as Aid to Private Devotion

We have seen that chapel altarpiece Annunciations could serve as public and, dependent upon circumstances such as the number of people in a chapel at a given moment, as private devotional aids in fifteenth-century Florentine society. However, there were other types of renderings of Annunciations, which were always private in nature and most often not patronized as public projects. The Annunciation as depicted in a Book of Hours and in a private portable devotional painting for an individual or household, are examples of images paid for directly by the owner. An image in a solitary friar's cell in a convent or monastery, while part of a public commission, served a very private function. Private devotional images primarily functioned to inspire their viewer to pray and meditate, less to instruct as altarpieces and many other more public images tended to do.

A Book of Hours, a bound manuscript of various prayers for different times of the day, was used as an aid to prayer and private devotion on a very intimate level. It was often associated with the Virgin and her honorable pious behavior and became an item popular among women especially during the fifteenth century (35). The Book of Hours was represented as being read by Mary in most depictions of the Florentine Annunciation in any medium (36). From the late Middle Ages onwards, the Book of Hours was illuminated in

color and with gold and silver leaf, on parchment. These precious and expensive illuminated versions were especially popular among the multiplying well to do in fifteenth-century Florentine society. Families ordered a book from a bookseller or stationer who in turn executed contracts with scribes and illuminators (37). Many of the illuminated manuscripts were produced within religious institutions like monasteries and nunneries, while others were produced outside in lay artists' workshops. The art of book illumination was respected and recognized as a difficult task and many manuscript illuminators were panel and fresco painters as well. An attractive representation of the Annunciation in a Book of Hours is illuminated by Zanobi Strozzi, a follower of Fra Angelico, commissioned for the Adimari family in the mid-fifteenth century (now in the Walters Art Gallery in Baltimore, MS W. 767, **Fig. 6**). Its general scheme is very similar to other paintings by Strozzi namely the *Annunciation* panel now in the National Gallery, London, (c.1445, tempera on wood, 103 x 142 cm, no. 1406, **Fig. 7**), and to Fra Angelico's *Prado Annunciation*, (**Fig. 5**).

The Annunciation was frequently portrayed on portable devotional paintings and images. These devotional images were available at a range of prices and were coveted by all people in society. In general private devotional images depicted Mary or the saints (38). These objects were smaller than the rather monumental altarpieces we have seen, and though sometimes they were copies of more well-known works, such as the *Annunciation* by Gentile Da Fabriano, which was a copy after the 'miraculous' image in the Church of Santissima Annunziata in Florence, (**Cat. 1**), often their size was more on par with Books of Hours, as exemplified in the precious *Annunciation* portrayed by Pesellino (c. 1450-55, 20x14.3 cm, Courtauld Gallery, London, 1967 no. 136, **Cat. 8**). This, as many other portable devotional images, is comprised of two panels which probably originally formed a hinged diptych that could be closed. On the backside of each panel there is a Coat of Arms, probably that of a wealthy family that owned the work at one time. An example of a slightly larger, single-paneled Annunciation is the anonymous painting by an artist also of the Florentine school (c. 1430, tempera on wood, 70 x 45 cm, Courtauld Gallery, Storage, **Fig. 8**). Private devotional

images were used within the house or taken to a church or another religious setting to help inspire prayer and devotion. When they were not in use, they were probably kept as decoration in the *camera*, or bedroom, the most used room of more well-to-do Florentine houses. There is evidence that some of these images were commissioned for weddings (39) as part of the collection of house and bedroom furnishings in particular, acquired at marriage in Quattrocento Florence, which we will examine later in this essay.

Another, very significant, example of a type of private devotional image, is a painting or fresco in the sequestered cell of a cleric in a convent. While it was the product of a public commission, it served a very personal, private purpose and therefore did not include the lavish details of an altarpiece. This is best exemplified by Fra Angelico's breathtakingly simple representation of the Annunciation scene in fresco, in Cell 3, at the Dominican Convent of San Marco, Florence (**Ill. 3**). This fresco was intended to stimulate divine meditation in its viewer in the absolute solitude of his cell. It was not intended to instruct the already knowing friar in any way. A representation of Dominican Saint Peter Martyr stands to one side of the scene with his hands held in the gesture of prayer to remind the friar of his preferred behavior before God. The Virgin is portrayed kneeling on a crude wooden bench low to the floor, which serves to reiterate her virtue of humility (40). Any expensive gold or ultramarine additions are absent from the representation. In this instance, the patron, Cosimo de' Medici, paid for the artwork within the convent more out of respect for the convent than out of self-advertisement or self-commemoration.

The Annunciation in Other Ecclesiastical Settings

There are various other ecclesiastical settings in which a representation of the scene of the Annunciation could be encountered in Quattrocento Florence. The Annunciation was represented in Missals and Graduals, books of a liturgical nature, that were used in church masses and other services, but not commissioned publicly, and usually only seen by individuals of the clergy. The Annunciation was also encountered portrayed in church fresco

cycles, in church sacristies, as a panel on the doors of a baptistry, and in other more public locales in convents and monasteries, as products of commissions for public purposes.

Books and manuscripts not possessed and consulted on such a personal, private level as the Book of Hours, but not seen simultaneously by the general public, were those of a liturgical nature such as Missals and Graduals. The Annunciation depictions in these books were only *seen* privately by the clergy, though their content in general was *spoken* to many. The Missal was the 'Book of the Mass' (41). It included the 'ordinary' text used in all masses and the texts specific to the day and time of year. An example of a beautiful miniature Annunciation illustrated in a Missal is that by Francesco Rosselli (Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, Missal no. 1874, folio no. 13v, **Fig. 9**). The initial 'R' introduced the 'indroit' or the opening hymn for the service or mass on the Feast of the Annunciation (42). Thus many of these initial 'R's were illuminated with a depiction of the Annunciation scene in and around them as in the charming example by Fra Angelico in Missal no. 558 (c.1430, tempera on parchment, leaf 47.5 x 33.7 cm, Museo di San Marco, Florence, **Fig. 10**).

The Gradual was a songbook for the choir. At certain stages during the mass, the choir sang hymns alone (43). A frontispiece, or front page, of a Gradual commissioned for nuns of the Bridgettine Order, illustrated by Lippo D'Andrea in the 1430s, (tempera on parchment, 55.5 x 37 cm, Bernard H. Breslauer, New York, **Cat. 4**), illustrates the Annunciation scene in the top half of the page, and a choir of Bridgettine nuns in the bottom half. Surely the reason the image of the Annunciation was used in conjunction with the image of the nuns of the Order is because Mary served as a patent role model for the nuns who took vows of chastity and obedience and more blatantly even, of piety, upon entering the convent.

Publicly, in the church setting, other Annunciation images were conveyed as scenes in narrative fresco cycles. Religious fresco cycles were very popular in Renaissance Florence although frescoing as a practice had been prevalent in Italy since the Roman Empire. Frescoing was the practice of painting on wet lime plaster with water-based pigments. As the plaster dried the painting was sealed into the wall and as a result, the picture was very durable.

The tradition of painting the walls of the main church and its chapels with religious narrative cycles, was one made popular by Giotto in the fourteenth century and the artists that succeeded him (44). Fresco narratives, which told the stories of the Bible in chronological and/or any other significant order (45), functioned to instruct the illiterate people, and again, inspire devotion and contemplation amongst all who viewed them.

A poignant example of an Annunciation scene in a monumental fresco cycle is that by Piero Della Francesca in the Basilica of San Francesco, Arezzo, (c. 1452-66, 329 x 193 cm, **Cat. 9**). The scene is on the level with the high altar, behind the altar and to its left, a prominent location for the scene. Piero's interpretation of the story includes the iconographical rendering of the *porta clausa*, signifying the door through which the Holy Spirit entered, next to Mary, and her bedroom, an allusion to the Virgin bedchamber, behind her. As Mary stands in response to the angel's appearance, she holds her place with a finger in her Book of Hours, a very human action that the painter succeeded in capturing. Piero's well-respected use of severe perspective and ornate architectural detail, lend a sense of paramount importance to the scene. This scene sustained a pre-eminent chronological and iconographical position in the overall narrative cycle illustrating the stories of the Legend of the True Cross to the visitors of the church.

The sacristy of a church provided another space in which to depict religious scenes including the Annunciation. Sacristies were important multi-purpose chambers in Quattrocento Florence, and their patronage was coveted. Over time their purpose changed and now they are solely chambers in which to store liturgical objects and to act as a changing room for the clergy (46). The sacristy of the Basilica of Santa Maria del Fiore, otherwise known as the *Duomo* or cathedral in Florence, houses, in its interior architecture, a fifteenth-century representation of the Annunciation scene, among other images. The entire sacristy program, of which the Annunciation panel is a part, was designed by Brunelleschi during his concurrent project on the church's famous dome, and was rendered in 'perspective wood inlay', by using different pieces and tones of wood to convey perspective and detail (**Fig. 11**).

This technique had no real precedent in wood or any other medium in Florence prior to the Quattrocento (47). It provided a nice complement to the wooden benches and cupboards that furnished the sacristy room. The panel of the Annunciation was made by Giuliano and Benedetto Maiano in c.1463-65 (approximately 121 x 243 cm, **Fig. 12**). The scene occupied a prominent space in the middle of the upper register of the wood paneling as seen directly from the doorway. Other religious scenes depicted in the room are the Nativity, the Circumcision of Christ, and the Bishop and Saints. Around the room, in the same scheme, are classicizing representations of cherubs, garlands, and *trompe l'oeil* cupboards.

In the very beginning of the fifteenth century, the city of Florence held a competition to decide which sculptor would design and make the doors for the Baptistry opposite the *Duomo*. The artist and architect Lorenzo Ghiberti won the competition for the commission of the North Doors, and worked on it for some time between 1403 and 1424. The doors, comprised of individual bronze panels, 15 3/8 cm squared, represented stories from the New Testament, and the Four Evangelists. The Annunciation panel, on the left side of the left door, the third row from the bottom, is reminiscent of International Gothic style in the 's-curve' of the Virgin's body, while it simultaneously employs elements of the early Florentine Renaissance style as illustrated by the architectural structure which frames the Virgin (**Fig. 13**). The representation also includes the popular fifteenth-century customary bust of God in the upper left corner, and the dove of the Holy Spirit flying towards Mary. It was viewed by many continually due to the fact that it occupied a public place on the outside of the doors of an important building in the city's main square. The scenes portrayed were indeed instructive but also significantly decorative in their function. They were not necessarily intended to inspire devotion as such.

Images displayed in a public position within a convent setting had their own place in the Quattrocento history of location of religious images. The Annunciation scene served as an acceptable illustration in a communal area of a convent as exemplified by the monumental fresco painted by Fra Angelico in the upper north corridor leading to the friars' cells in the

Convent of San Marco, Florence (c. 1450, 216 x 321 cm, **Fig. 14**). The fresco is the first image confronted upon climbing the staircase to the friars' cells. It depicts the humble Virgin on a wooden bench facing Gabriel. The representation is devoid of much detail although the classical column capitals are defined surely in homage to the past. Fra Angelico included the iconographical element of the barred window that related to an idea of the contemporary Prior of the convent who said "(S)in comes in at the windows, if they are not closed as they ought to be." (48). A Latin inscription at the base of the scene reminded the viewer to say his "Hail Mary" prayer. This in a sense endowed the depiction of the scene with an added function for the friars in the convent.

The Annunciation in Other Secular Settings

Religious images abounded in numerous locations in addition to those we have seen thus far. With each location came a different set of circumstances and reasons for the image's display. In secular settings, images of the Annunciation were exhibited in different ways as part of the fabric of the Florentine *camera*, as components of the scenery of outdoor shrines, in civic buildings, and in hospital settings.

The *camera* in a successful merchant or banking family's house, for example, contained many religious images (as well as secular ones). These depictions though not part of a public commission, had both public and private purposes. Unlike the bedroom used in Italy today, the fifteenth-century *camera* was a public room where guests were welcomed and life inside was lived (49). It was a place to display wealth as well as to please and benefit its regular occupants. The room typically included a bed, a pair of wedding chests or *cassoni da nozze*, mirrors, daybeds, tapestries, painted wall cornices, and panel paintings both hung on walls and attached to the backs of chests on components called *spalliere*.

The wedding chest was an important element in the marriage ritual in affluent fifteenth-century Florentine society. Tradition marked the carrying of a chest full of the bride's dowry and personal items to the house of the father of the groom, (often also the house of the

groom), in a public procession. These long, narrow chests used later as storage chests and as benches to sit on, were painted or inlaid with religious, secular, and mythological scenes often narrative in nature. Religious subject matter was chosen for specific reasons such as for its ability to convey desired moral attributes to both the bride and groom, later, mother and father (50). Again the qualities of chastity, piety, humility, obedience and courage were transmitted through pictorial impressions, a significant communicative scene being the Annunciation. A painted panel similar to Leonardo Da Vinci's long, horizontally-oriented *Annunciation* (c. 1475, oil and tempera on wood, 98 x 217 cm, the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 1618, **Cat. 11**) could have been a *spalliera* to one such chest (51). Certainly the image's significance and iconography lend strength to this theory, as well as the fact that it is understood that the long panels, in particular, of chests could often be religious in subject at any time during the century (52).

The Fra Filippo Lippi *Annunciation*, one of two similar lunette-shaped painted panels in the National Gallery, London, (c. 1448-50, tempera on wood, 68.5 x 152 cm, no. 666, **Cat. 7**), is thought to have been part of the collection of furniture in a Florentine *camera*. Its shape and the fact that it has a companion piece depicting seven name saints related to the Medici family, suggest that it and its companion may have been painted as bedheads for Medici family members (53).

An outdoor shrine served as another location for an image of the Annunciation. The shrine was decorated with a sacred religious image or several images to remind its viewer(s) of the Bible and the saints. It could be situated anywhere outdoors that was deemed to be special and visible, often on the side of a traveled road or along a river. The *Shrine of the Visitation*, painted by Benozzo Gozzoli to reside on a patch of land at the Minorite Nunnery of Santa Maria in Castelfiorentino in 1491, (now in the Biblioteca Comunale, Castelfiorentino, **Fig. 15**), depicted the Annunciation and other scenes on its sides, back, and on the inside of its arch. The paintings were later detached due to water damage and have since been reattached to a similar support structure in a museum. The general position of the

angel Gabriel on the left side of the central arch facing the Virgin on the right side of the arch and God the Father sending golden rays to Mary, is intact as it was. If the viewer were to stand directly in front of the shrine, the two images immediately recognizable would be those of the angel and Mary in a depiction of the Annunciation. This is a prominent position for a portrayal of the scene and serves to further confirm its importance to the Christian faith.

The Annunciation image also found its place in hospital settings, where the sick or abandoned were cared for. The famous Spedale degli Innocenti for orphans in Florence was presented with a portrayal of the Annunciation in the shape of a lunette over an altarpiece in its chapel, by Andrea Della Robbia in the early 1490s (tin-glazed terracotta, 154 x 285 cm, **Fig. 16**). Its subject matter while typical for a church altarpiece, was also appropriate to the foundling hospital in its allusion to the notions of conception, childbirth and motherhood. The sculpture, produced by the same technique as Andrea's earlier *Annunciation* at La Verna, (**Cat. 12**), is again white with a blue background and green lily stems. There are precious cherub heads spanning the arch of the lunette, which also allude to the theme of children. The image is beautifully sculpted with a balanced combination of detail and simplicity. Another example of the Annunciation in a hospital setting is Botticelli's fresco, *The San Martino Annunciation*, for the Spedale di San Martino, a plague hospital (in 1481, 243 x 550 cm, now in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. Deposit 201, **Cat. 13**). The fresco was painted on a wall above a doorway into the hospital from the loggia. It may have been painted in commemoration of the end of the latest bout of plague (54). The Annunciation scene was probably chosen as it was related to conception, and hence, to regeneration.

As we have seen, the theme of the Annunciation occupied a prominent position in fifteenth-century Florentine society. It was chosen as subject matter by church and patron alike for its instructional, devotion-invoking, and decorative properties. Its representation was found in so many diverse places and functional roles in society that its monumental significance is undeniable. Moreover these locations and functions overlapped in many ways

due to the fact that Christianity was ingrained in almost every aspect of society and its practices. The city of Florence had so much faith in the Annunciation and its example and influence, that her calendar started on the Feast of the Annunciation, and the Church of Santissima Annunziata sustained a treasured place in her society's heart.

Fig. 1. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The San Lorenzo Annunciation*, c. 1440, tempera on wood, 175 x 182 cm, Church of San Lorenzo, Florence, Martelli chapel.

Fig. 2. Master of the Barberini Panels, *The Annunciation*, c.1448, tempera on wood, 80 x 62 cm, National Gallery of Art, Washington DC, Kress Collection.

Fig. 3. Alessio Baldovinetti, *The Annunciation*, 1457, tempera on wood, 167 x 137 cm, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 483.

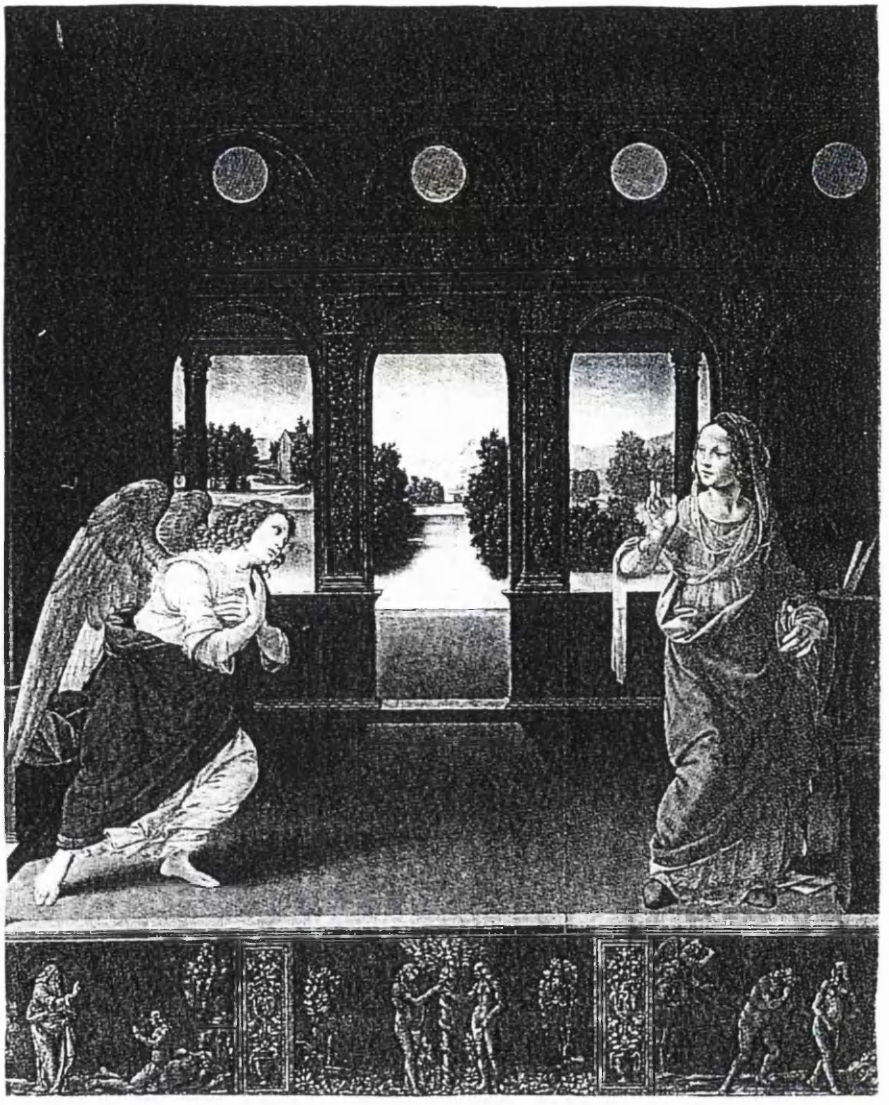


Fig. 4. Lorenzo Di Credi, *The Annunciation*, late 15th C., tempera on wood, 88 x 71 cm, The Uffuzi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 1597.

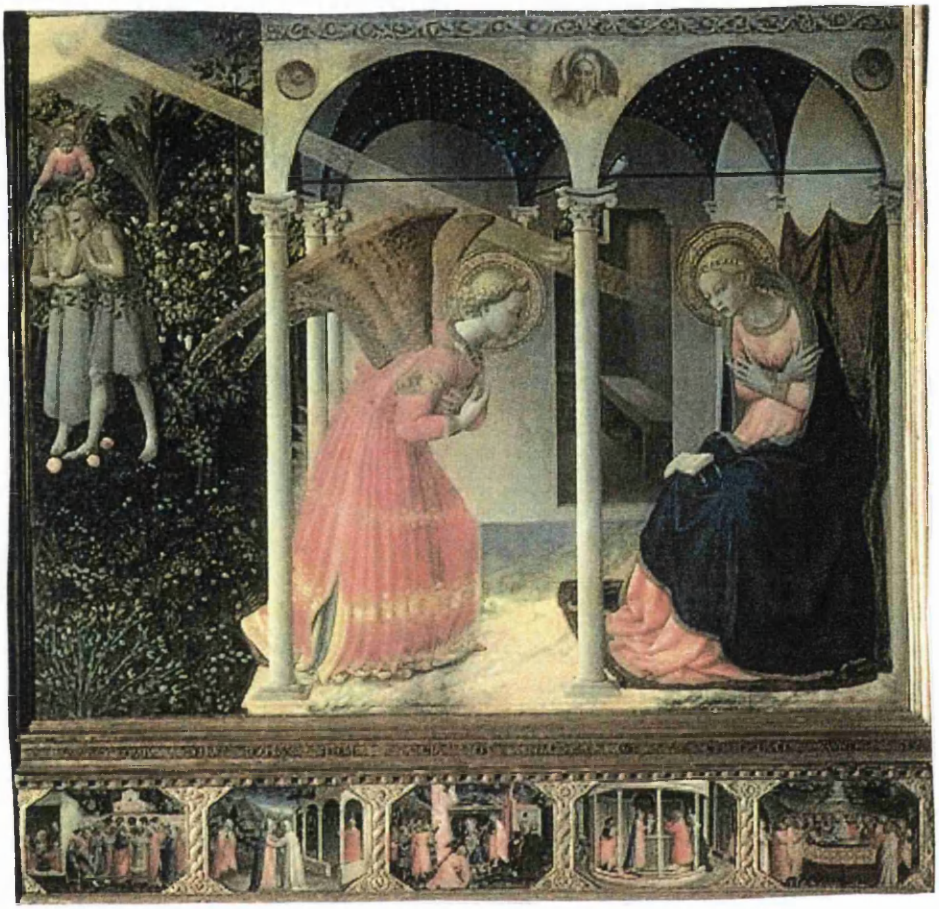


Fig. 5. Fra Angelico, *The Prado Annunciation*, c. 1430s, tempera on wood, 194 x 194 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid, no. 15.

Fig. 6. Zanobi Strozzi, *The Annunciation*, folio no. 14v in Book of Hours, mid fifteenth century, tempera and gold on parchment, page size 13.5 x 9.3 cm, The Walters Art Gallery, Baltimore, MS W. 767.

Fig. 7. Zanobi Strozzi, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445, tempera on wood, 103 x142 cm, The National Gallery, London, no. 1406.

Fig. 8. Florentine School, *The Annunciation*, c.1430, tempera on wood, approx. 70 x 45 cm, The Courtauld Gallery, London, Storage.

Fig. 9. Francesco Rosselli, *The Annunciation*, fifteenth century, tempera and gold on parchment, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence, ms. ashb. 1874, f.13v.

Fig. 10. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation in the Initial R*, folio no. 33V in Missal no. 558, c.1430, tempera on parchment, 47.5 x 33.7 cm, Museo di San Marco, Florence.

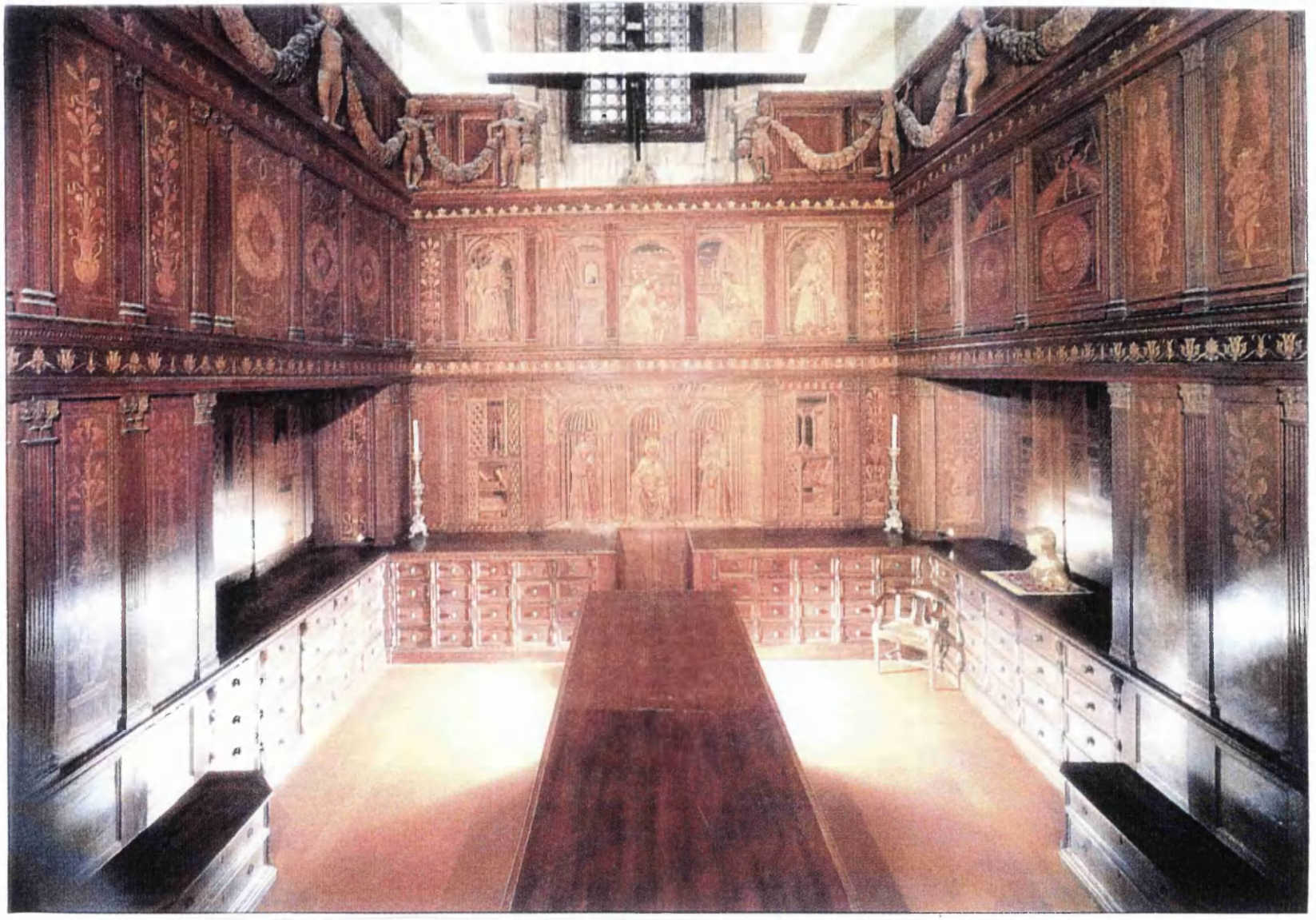


Fig. 11. Woodwork program surrounding room, c.1463-65, perspective wood inlay, approx. 121 x 243 cm, North Sacristy, Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.

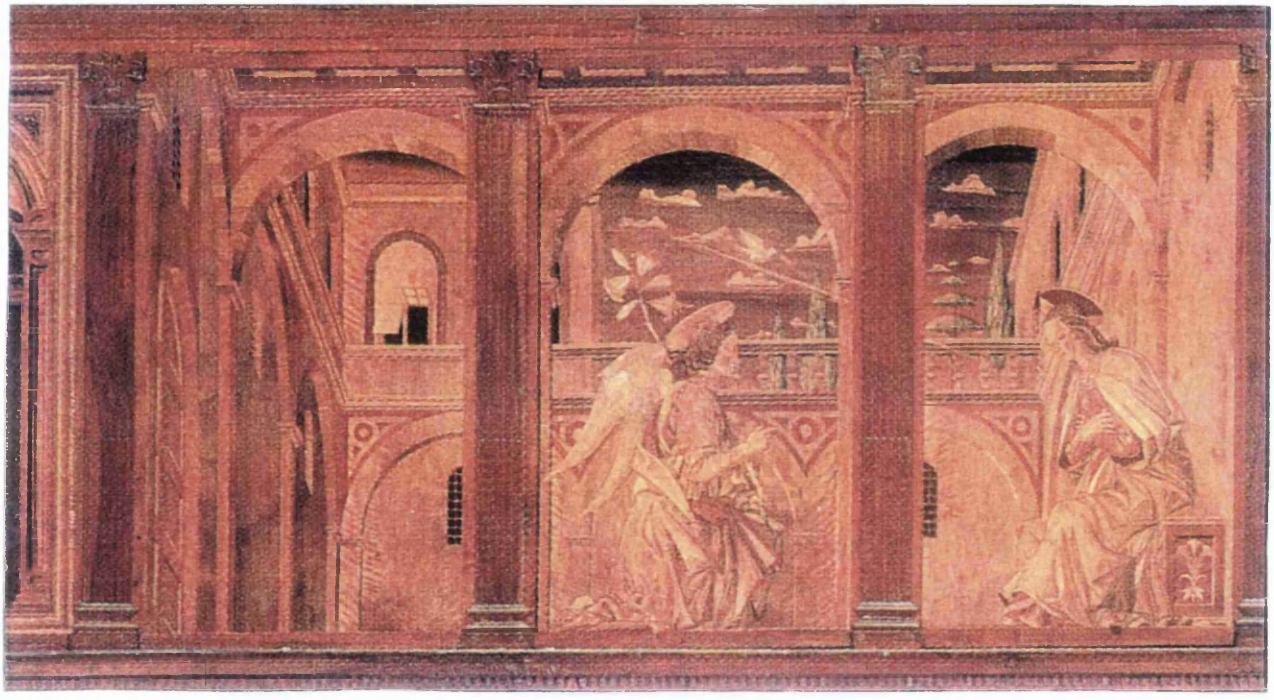


Fig. 12. Giuliano and Benedetto Maiano, *The Annunciation*, panel from woodwork surrounding room, c.1463-65, perspective wood inlay, approx. 121 x 243 cm, North Sacristy, Santa Maria del Fiore, Florence.

Fig. 13a. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *North Door*, c.1403-24, bronze, 15 3/8 cm square, Baptistry, Florence.

Fig. 13b. Lorenzo Ghiberti, *The Annunciation*, panel from left door in set, c.1403-24, bronze, 15 3/8 cm square, North Door, Baptistry, Florence.

Fig. 14. Fra Angelico, *The North Corridor Annunciation*, c.1450, fresco, 216 x 321 cm, Convent of San Marco, Florence.

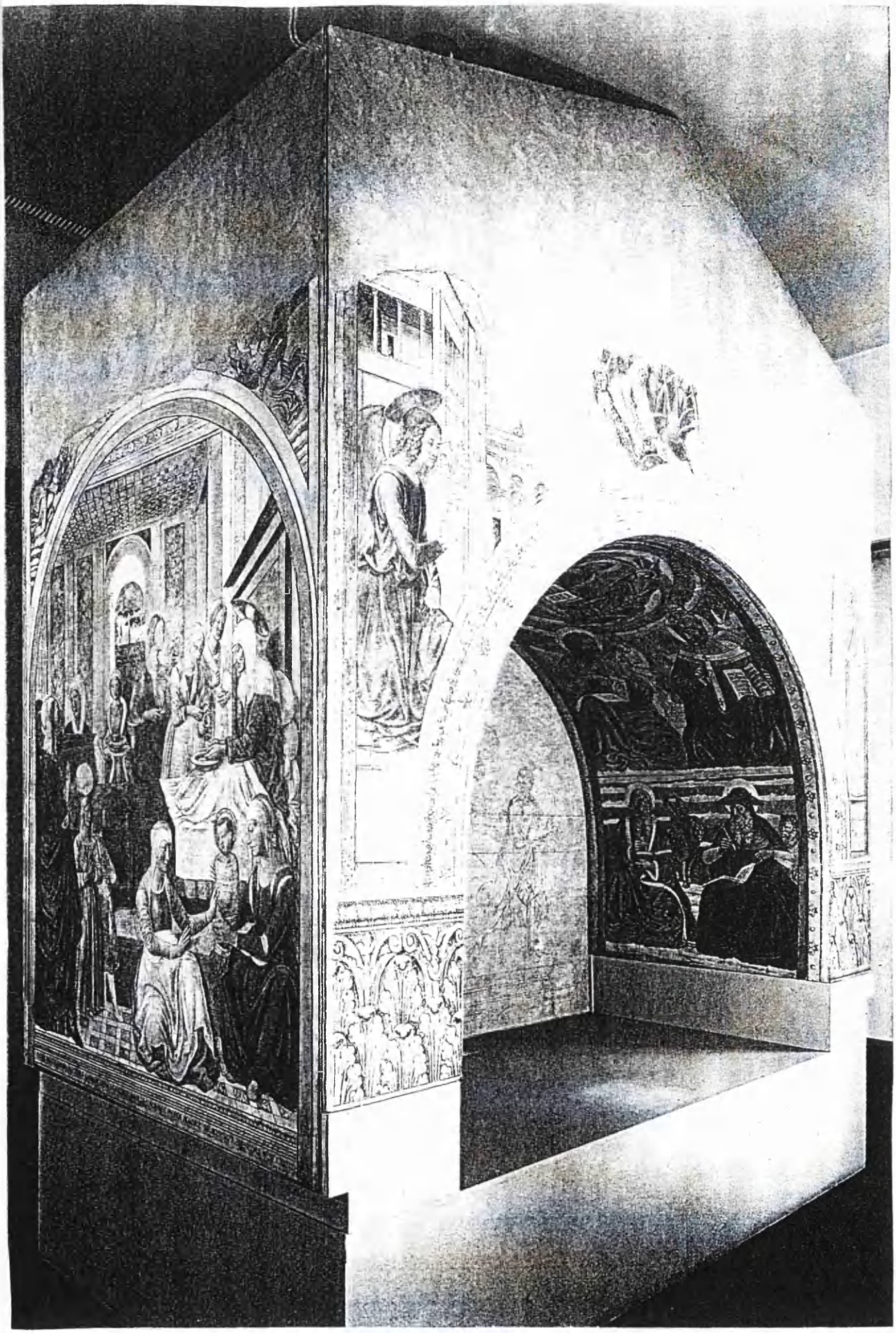


Fig. 15a. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Shrine of the Visitation*, 1491, fresco, no published measurements, Biblioteca Comunale, Castelfiorentino.

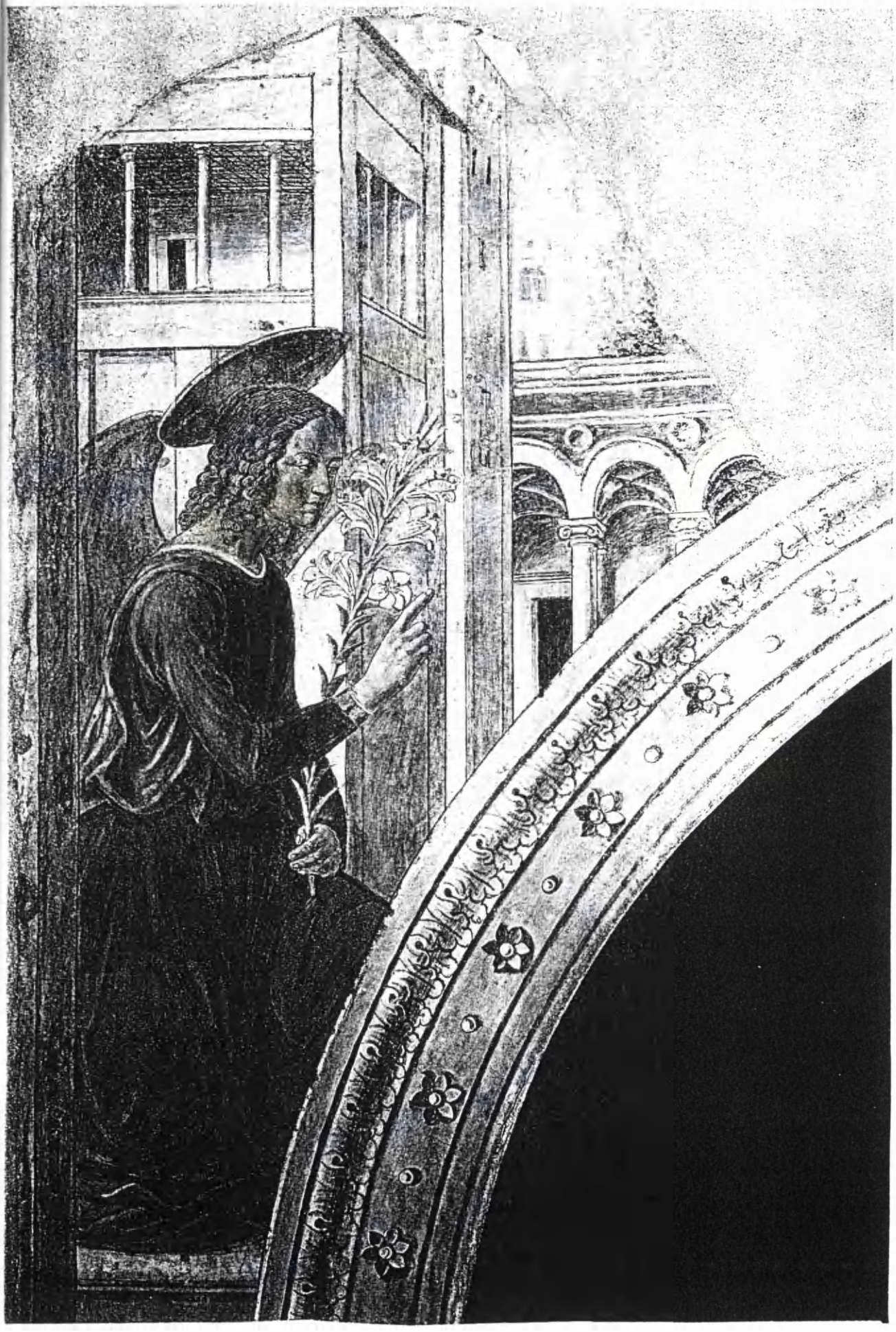


Fig. 15b. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Angel of the Annunciation*, Shrine of the Visitation, 1491, fresco, no published measurements, Biblioteca Comunale, Castelfiorentino.

Fig. 15c. Benozzo Gozzoli, *Virgin of the Annunciation*, Shrine of the Visitation, 1491, fresco, no published measurements, Biblioteca Comunale, Castelfiorentino.

Fig. 16. Andrea Della Robbia, *The Annunciation*, early 1490s, tin-glazed terracotta, 154 x 285 cm, Spedale degli Innocenti, Florence, cloister.

Fig. 17. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, c.1445-50, tempera on wood, 118 x 175 cm, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome.

Endnotes

1. J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, New Haven and London, 1996, p. 81.

2. Florence, Arcidiocesi Di Firenze, Art, Faith, History: A Guide to Christian Florence, translated by Timothy Verdon and Stephanie Johnson, Florence, 2000, p. 74. "In Florence, devotion to Mary is centered essentially on the veneration of Our Lady of the Annunciation. The time-honoured worship of the Virgin Mary here holds a specific connotation with the Order of the Servants of Mary".

3. Ibid, p. 74.
See, also, the chapter in G.A. and S.F. Matthews Grieco, Picturing Women in Renaissance and Baroque Italy, Cambridge, 1997, by Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, 'Imaginative Conceptions in Renaissance Italy,' p. 42, indicating that both men and women believed images had an influence on pregnancy and childbirth partly because childbirth was needed to insure heirs to families for reasons of politics and economics.

4. M. Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, New York, 1988, p. 3.

5. B.A. Bennett and D.G. Wilkins, Donatello, Oxford, 1984, p. 147.

6. P. Tinagli, Women in Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity, Manchester, New York, 1997, p. 159.

7. G. Brucker, Renaissance Florence, Huntington, New York, 1975, p. 256.

8. J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, op. cit., p. 82.

9. See M. Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, New York, 1976, p. 18, which discusses the Four Dogmas of the Virgin: Of the Four Dogmas of the Virgin as recognized today, her Virgin Birth, her Virginity, her Divine Motherhood, and her Assumption into Heaven, three are related to the Annunciation. She was a truly chaste woman because she was born of a virgin, Saint Anne, and she had never known a man, two facts recognized by God before the Annunciation. She became the Divine Mother of Christ at the moment of the Incarnation.

10. Indeed the increasing need of the Christian Church to prove that Mary was chaste, led to the Dogma of *her* Virgin Birth and Immaculate Conception being declared by Pope Pius IX in 1854, discussed in M. Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, p. 236. That Mary was herself born of a virgin, served to exonerate her from the original sin committed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.

11. J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, New Haven and London, 1991, p. 23. Additionally, The Virgin was not to be prayed to directly- nor were the saints- they were only to be recognized as mediators between mortals and God the Father.

12. J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, op. cit., p. 220. In the past and currently in Christianity, all saints serve(d) as role models due to their ideal character attributes.

13. R. Kelso, Doctrine for the Lady of the Renaissance, Urbana, Illinois, 1956, p. 23. She continues, and discusses many different desirable attributes of a woman's personality in particular.

14. M. Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, op. cit., p. 288.

15. P. Tinagli, Women in Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity, op. cit., p. 23. She also says that obedience was the most important attribute of the ideal fifteenth-century woman to her parents first and foremost and then to her husband.

16. J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, op. cit., p. 153.

17. Idem, p. 113.

18. M. Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, op. cit., p. 51.

19. Idem, pp. 50-55: This is the scholar Michael Baxandall's example as well as the four following.

20.This is a pictorial reference to Gabriel's speech "the power of the Holy Spirit shall overshadow thee" (Luke 1: 35).

21. The red lily was the symbol of the city of Florence so the lily, though, white was particularly popular in painting of the Florentine tradition. The Sienese typically preferred to depict the olive branch in place of the lily, probably for this very reason.

22. P. Tinagli, Women in Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity, op. cit., p. 155.

23. M. Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, op. cit., p. 41.

24. P. Humfrey and M. Kemp eds., The Altarpiece in the Renaissance, Cambridge, 1990, p. 57.

25. E. Welch, Art and Society in Italy: 1350-1500, Oxford, New York, 1997, p. 200.

26. Representations of the Virgin and Child and of the Crucifixion did not contain the element of narrative that the Annunciation scene did with the movements and words of its two figures.

27. In some instances the high altarpiece had an image on its backside to give the clergy behind the choir screen an image to look at as discussed in J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, et al., Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, p. 34.

28. The Sienese and Florentine traditions were in a sense rivals and Siena did not take part in Florence's innovations and interest in literature and art.

29. J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, op. cit., p. 36.

30. M. Holmes, Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter, New Haven and London, 1999, p. 121. The reason the background scene was not important for Gothic altarpieces and each figure was set against a flat gold background was mainly because of the medieval theological idea of the power of the *imago*, image of the saint, which had an "affective response to devotional address." In the fifteenth century this painting style was still practiced by the Sienese.

31. D. Robb, 'The Iconography of the Annunciation in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,' Art Bulletin, XVIII, 1936, pp. 480-526, esp. p. 512.

32. M. Baxandall, Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy, op. cit., p. 46.

33. J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, op. cit., p. 36.

34. Ibid, p. 34.

35. M. Warner, Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary, op. cit., p. 26.

36. The Book of Hours, with an inscription on its open page, alluded to the prophecy of Isaiah which was really significant to depictions of the theme of the Annunciation because it foretold that a virgin would conceive.

37. E. Welch, Art and Society in Italy: 1350-1500, Oxford, New York, 1997, p. 72.

38. P. Tinagli, Women in Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity, op. cit., p. 155.

39. Eadem, p. 156.

40. Humility was an especially monastic virtue according to J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, p. 221.

41. L.B. Kanter, B. Drake Boehm, C.B. Strehlke, G. Freuler, C. Mayer Thurman and P. Palladino, Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence: 1300-1450, Exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, p. 15.

42. Ibid, p. 141. The indroit was the part of text most often decorated or illustrated like the beginning of a new chapter of a book, p. 19.

43. Ibid, p. 19. Each monastic order customized the choir book to its preferences in terms of using certain songs for certain days or feasts special to it.

44. J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, op. cit., p. 26.

45. Typological order.

46. G. Di Cagno, Florence: The Cathedral, the Baptistry, the Campanile, Florence, 1999, p. 84. A random fact: Lorenzo de' Medici hid in the North Sacristy of the Basilica of Santa Maria del Fiore, in refuge, at one time during the fifteenth century.

47. Idem, p. 84.

48. F. Hartt, Italian Renaissance Art, London, 1995, p. 219.

49. P. Lee Rubin and A. Wright, Renaissance Florence: The Art of the 1470s, Exh. cat., The National Gallery, London, 1999, p. 314.

50. P. Tinagli, Women in Renaissance Art: Gender Representation Identity, op. cit., p. 22.

51. Due to its long, narrow rectangular shape and size, I think Leonardo's panel could have been a *spalliera* panel from a chest of some sort, though probably not in a *camera* as the panel was acquired from a church sacristy. The dimensions of a *cassone* from the National Gallery, no. 4906, for example, are 103 x 203 x 66cm. The dimensions of its painted portion of the *spalliera* would be almost as large, and hence, similar to those of Leonardo's panel. The painting of *Venus and Mars* by Botticelli in the National Gallery, London, 70.6 x 176.8 cm, is similar in shape and size to Leonardo's *Annunciation*, and it is thought to have been a *spalliera* from a chest.

52. J. Dunkerton, S. Foister, D. Gordon, and N. Penny, Giotto to Dürer: Early Renaissance Painting in the National Gallery, op. cit., p. 110.

53. Ibid, p. 274.

54. R. Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, London, 1989, p. 80.

1. Gentile Da Fabriano

The Annunciation

c. 1420

Tempera on wood. Frame original.

Height: 45.8 cm

Width: 54.4 cm

Private Collection, Mrs. Barbara Piasecka Johnson. **Cat. 1.**

Provenance: Acquired by Comtesse Ducros c. 1860 in Florence and passed through generations until purchased by the Matthiesen Gallery, London, from Hotel Drouot in December 1986. Sold at the Matthiesen Gallery to Mrs. Barbara Piasecka Johnson.

This small panel painting by Gentile Da Fabriano, is a copy after the famous fourteenth-century image of the Annunciation, by Fra Bartolomeo, in the Church of Santissima Annunziata in Florence. It was most likely produced as a private devotional object for sale on the Florentine market, especially as the 'miraculous' Santissima Annunziata fresco was so well-known and admired amongst the Florentines (1). There is another almost identical painting in the Pinacoteca Vaticana, attributed to Gentile as well by some scholars.

As the painting was after the 'miraculous' Santissima Annunziata fresco, Gentile was not able to make many personal changes to the composition. He did, however, attempt to correct the spatial perspective of the carpet and the ceiling in response to the fifteenth century's interest in perspective and space (2). He also made a significant change in the iconography of the scene. In his painting he changed the image of the golden rays and the dove of the Holy Spirit as portrayed extending towards the head of the Virgin, a previous iconographical allusion to the Conception of Christ happening to her through the spoken word that entered her ear. His new iconography consisted of the image of light penetrating her womb as represented by the shadow of the trefoil window's beam on her abdomen (3). This direction of the beam of light, with the dove inside, towards the Virgin's womb, is portrayed

again in Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* lunette in the National Gallery, London (c.1448-50, tempera on wood, 68.5 x 152 cm, **Cat. 7**). Gentile also added the bedchamber of the Virgin to the background, and changed such minor decorative details as the paneling of the bench on which the Virgin sits. The rest of the painting is a fairly true copy after the fresco original. The scene is set within the Gothic chamber. The general scheme of the image is unchanged, as the Virgin sits calmly on the right of the bench with her Book of Hours laying open at her side, and the angel Gabriel approaches her from the left of the scene.

Exhibited: Warsaw, Royal Castle, Opus Sacrum, 1990. London, Matthiesen Gallery, Gold Backs: 1250-1480, no. 13, 1996.

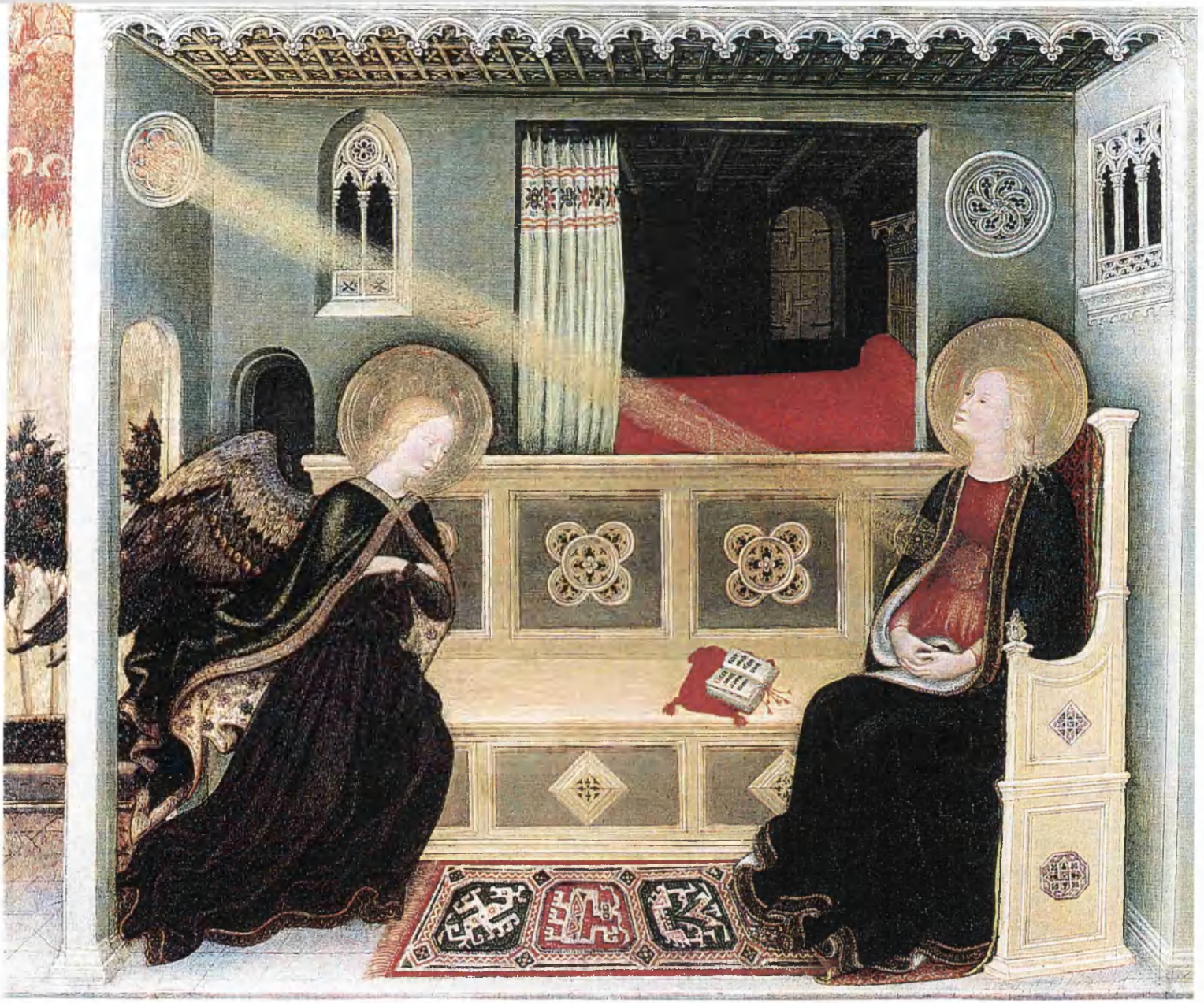
Literature: A. De Marchi, Gentile Da Fabriano, Milan, 1992, pp. 172, 191, fig. 91; Matthiesen Fine Arts Ltd. Gold Backs, London, 1996, pp.95-103; L. Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?'" Part 1, Artibus et Historiae, nr 16 (VIII) Florence, 1987, pp. 32-34, fig. 6.

Footnotes:

1. London, Matthiesen Fine Arts Ltd., Gold Backs: 1250-1480, Exh. cat., The Matthiesen Gallery, Turin and London, 1996, p. 102.

2. Ibid, p. 97.

3. L. Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?" Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation in London, Part 1', Artibus et Historiae, nr 16 (VIII), 1987, pp. 25-45, esp. p. 26.



Cat. 1. Gentile Da Fabriano, *The Annunciation*, c.1420, tempera on wood, 45.8 x 54.4 cm, Private Collection, Mrs. Barbara Piasecka Johnson.

2. Donatello

The Cavalcanti Annunciation

c. 1428-33

Gray Tuscan sandstone, or *pietra serena*, with gilding (restored).

Terracotta groups of cherubs with gilding planned originally by Donatello (not shown in some pictures).

Height: 420 cm

Width: 240 cm

Florence, Basilica of Santa Croce. **Cat. 2, Ill. 1.**

Provenance: Commissioned for the Cavalcanti chapel in Santa Croce but moved to another location in the church when the church was renovated in sixteenth century.

This relief sculpture was moved to its present location in the Basilica of Santa Croce on the south wall to the right of a doorway into the cloister off of the nave, in the sixteenth century. The terracotta cherub group, (**Ill. 1**), was designed by Donatello to be displayed with *The Annunciation* in tribute to Vetruvius, the ancient Roman architect who admired the way the Etruscans added terracotta figures to the tops of their temples (1).

The figures of Gabriel and Mary are not portrayed within the conventional Quattrocento perspectively defined space, but rather against a flat patterned backdrop which along with their idealized figures and faces contributes to the feeling of the work being reminiscent of a Classical Greek funerary stele (2). The garments of both figures are reminiscent of Roman togas, which served not only to allude again to ancient imagery, but also to facilitate the portrayal of bodily movement (3). Indeed the Angel and Virgin are conveyed in motion. Gabriel has just reached the ground and is shifting into a genuflection before the Virgin, while she is rising in response to his appearance before her. He opens his mouth as if to greet her and tell her his message. Any other allusion to the moment of the Incarnation is absent as there is no dove of the Holy Spirit overshadowing the Virgin, there

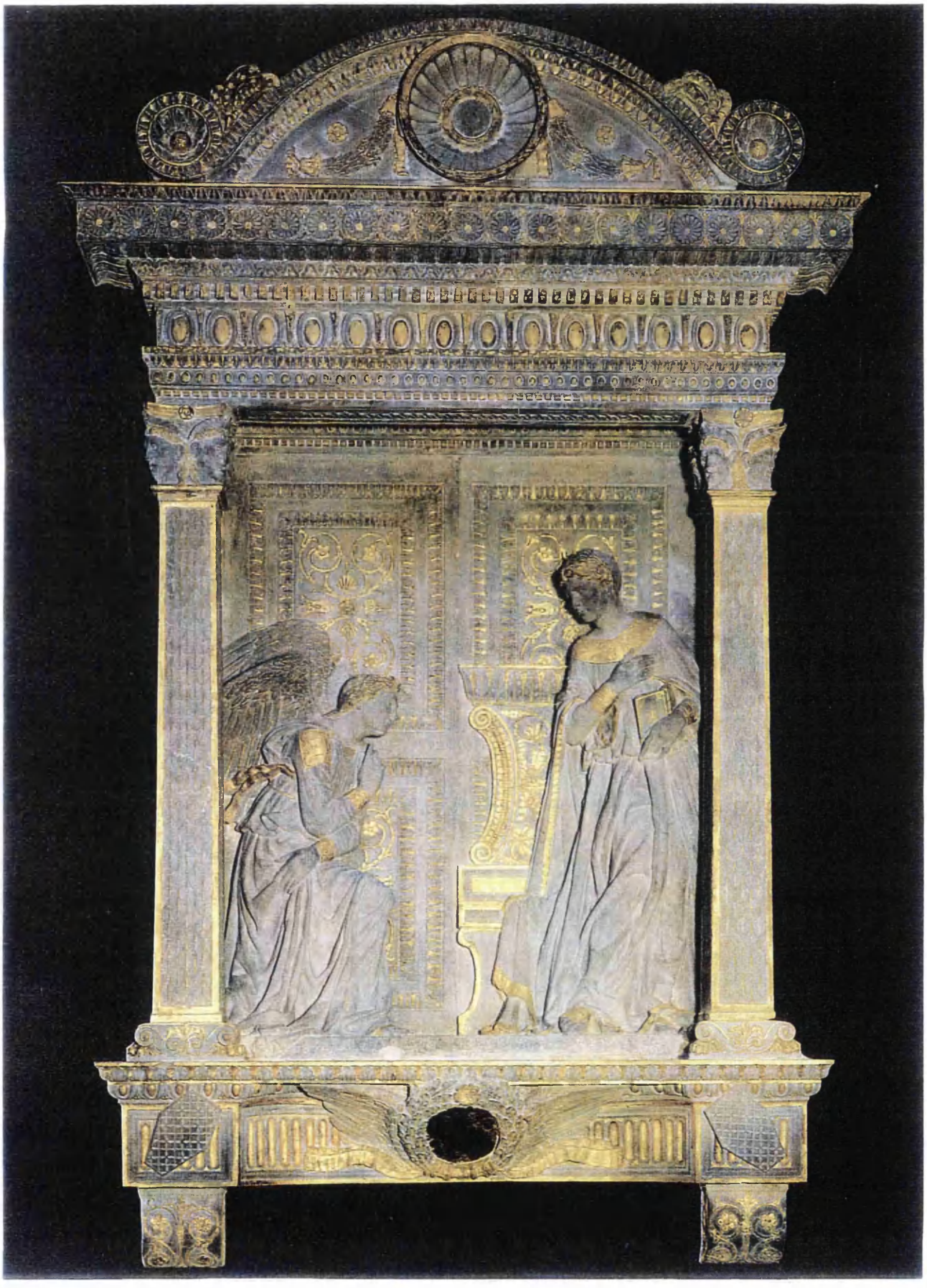
are no golden rays projecting towards her, and there is no depiction of God. In contrast, Lorenzo Ghiberti's sculpted Annunciation panel from the North Doors of the Great Baptistry in Florence, (c.1403-24, bronze, 15 3/8 cm square, **Fig. 13**), has all three (4). The only iconographical detail in the scene is the Virgin's Book of Hours, which alluded to Isaiah's prophecy.

The kinetic scheme of Gabriel and Mary in this Annunciation, was admired and copied in painting by Fra Filippo Lippi in his *San Lorenzo Annunciation*, (c. 1440, tempera on wood, church of San Lorenzo, Florence, **Fig. 1**), and Alessio Baldovinetti in his *Annunciation*, (1457, tempera on wood, 167 x 137 cm, The Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 483, **Fig. 3**), as well as by Botticelli in his *San Martino Annunciation* fresco (1481, 243 x 550 cm, Uffizi Gallery, Florence, no. Deposit 201, **Cat. 13**).

Literature: C. Avery, Donatello, London, 1994, pp. 60-64, 67, plate III; B.A. Bennett and D.G. Wilkins, Donatello, Oxford, 1984, pp. 81-82, 147, 150, 170, 172, 175, 235, figs. 71, 84-86; F. Canali, The Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence, 1954, pp. 28-29; M. Holmes, Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 19-20.

Footnotes:

1. F. Canali, The Basilica of Santa Croce, Florence, 1954, p. 29.
2. B.A. Bennett and D.G. Wilkins, Donatello, Oxford, 1984, p. 172.
3. Idem, p. 170.
4. Idem, p. 147.



Cat. 2. Donatello, *The Cavalcanti Annunciation*, c.1428-33, Tuscan sandstone with gilding, 420 x 240 cm, Florence, Basilica of Santa Croce.

Ill 1. Detail with cherub group, Donatello, *The Cavalcanti Annunciation*, Florence, Basilica of Santa Croce.

3. Fra Angelico

The Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi

late 1420s to early 1430s

Tempera and gold on wood. Predella panel depicts the Madonna and Child in the center framed by saints Catherine of Siena, Apollonia, Margaret, Lucy, Mary Magdalen, Catherine of Alexandria, Agnes, Cecilia, Dorothea and Ursula.

Height of panel: 84 cm

Width of panel: 50 cm

Florence, Fra Angelico Gallery, Museo di San Marco, no. 276. **Cat. 3.**

Provenance: Commissioned by Fra Giovanni Masi for the Church of Santa Maria Novella in the early 1430s. Acquired by Museo San Marco in 1868.

This reliquary tabernacle painted by Fra Angelico is presumably one of four in a set commissioned for the Dominican Mother Church of Santa Maria Novella by Fra Giovanni Masi. The two, depicting The Virgin and Child, and The Coronation of the Virgin, are in the Museo di San Marco, and the fourth depicting The Burial and Assumption of the Virgin is in the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston. Fra Giovanni Masi died in 1434 and this date functions as the terminus ante quem for their dates of commission and production. They were probably produced at varying times during the late 1420s and early 1430s.

In *The Annunciation*, located on the upper half of the tabernacle, the position of the Virgin and Gabriel and the details of their clothing and gestures are similar to both his *Prado* and *Cortona Annunciations,* (**Fig. 5** and **Cat. 5**), that he painted around the same time. A significant stylistic difference however, is that the background for this reliquary tabernacle Annunciation is painted gold in a late-Gothic manner. Additionally, Fra Angelico has created indentations in the gold, which are reminiscent of the work of the earlier, Gentile Da Fabriano (**Cat. 1**)(1).

The scene on the bottom half of the tabernacle depicts the Adoration of the Magi. The precise reason for the choice of these two subjects on one panel is unclear, although they are two significant, chronological themes in Christ's childhood and while the Annunciation represents the Incarnation of Christ the Savior of Humanity, the Adoration alludes to all ages, all races and all nations believing in Christianity as represented by the three magi themselves (2). A similar chronological scheme is on the tabernacle in Boston that depicts the Burial and the Assumption of the Virgin.

If indeed these are the four reliquaries commissioned by Fra Giovanni Masi, Giorgio Vasari's sixteenth-century account stating they were placed on the altar during high feast days, endows these reliquaries with a significant amount of importance. A certain Giuseppe Richa claimed in the eighteenth century, that the frames of the reliquaries contained holy relics although the precise nature of the relics was not known (3). He also alleged that the tabernacles were kept in the sacristy of the church when they were not in use (4).

John Pope-Hennessy personally attributed the four tabernacles to the workshop of Fra Angelico due to their evident poor execution when compared with other known works by Fra Angelico.

Exhibited: Florence, Church of Santa Maria Novella.

Literature: Damiani, San Marco Florence, London, 1997, pp. 33-35; L. Kanter, et al., Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence: 1300-1450, Exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, pp. 342-345, fig. 129; J. Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, London, 1974, pp. 18, 224-25, fig. 70.

Footnotes:

1. G. Damiani, San Marco Florence: The Museum and its Art, London, 1997, p. 35.

2. J.S. Pierce, From Abacus to Zeus: A Handbook of Art History, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, 1991, p. 129.

3. L.B. Kanter, B. Drake Boehm, C.B. Strehlke, G. Freuler, C. Mayer Thurman and P. Palladino, Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence: 1300-1450, Exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, p. 342.

4. J. Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, London, 1952, p. 199.

Cat. 3. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi*, late 1420s to early 1430s, tempera and gold on wood, 84 x 50 cm, Florence, Fra Angelico Gallery, Museo di San Marco, no. 276.

4. Lippo D'Andrea Di Lippo

The Annunciation; Saint Bridget and Bridgettine Nuns

c. 1430s

Tempera and gold leaf on parchment.

Illuminated page formerly the frontispiece of a gradual for the Bridgettine convent of Il Paradiso, Florence.

Length: 55.5 cm

Width: 37 cm

New York, Bernard H. Breslauer. **Cat. 4.**

Provenance: Il Paradiso. Purchased by the Bernard H. Breslauer Collection from Christie's, London, in 1985, no. 294 (cataloged as a Bicci di Lorenzo). This frontispiece is now separated from the gradual which was last documented at a Sotheby's, London sale on June 24, 1986.

This large Florentine illuminated frontispiece, front page, from a Gradual of a convent of Bridgettine nuns, depicts the Annunciation scene in the top half of the page and a choir of Bridgettine nuns on the bottom half. As the Virgin was directly emulated by nuns who gave oaths of chastity, piety and obedience upon entering a convent, the two scenes work well together as the front page of the choir book.

In the scene of the Annunciation, Mary and Gabriel occupy a Gothic structure. Gabriel approaches Mary from a room on the left of the scene and Mary sits on a bench in a separate chamber on the right. Mary's bedroom can be seen behind her and she sits with her Book of Hours in her lap. The interior scheme of the scene is reminiscent of Gentile Da Fabriano's *Annunciation* after the 'miraculous' fresco in the church of Santissima Annunziata (**Cat. 1**). The iconography of the dove within the golden beam released by God the Father and angels, reaching in the general direction of the Virgin's womb, is similar as well.

The scene of the choir of Bridgettine nuns in their gray habits and black veils is set in a church. They stand around a lectern that supports a Gradual such as the one for which this frontispiece was illuminated (1).

The date for the page is arguable as there is no documented evidence of when Il Paradiso commissioned the work. The date thus depends upon stylistic comparisons, and as the page is a similar size to a predella panel from an altarpiece, it has been compared with known predella panels by the same artist as well as with the work of his better-known contemporary, Lorenzo Monaco, whose similar, late works suggest a date of circa 1430s (2).

Exhibited: New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, Bernard H. Breslauer Collection of Manuscript Illuminations, 1992-93. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence, no. 45, 1994-95.

Literature: L.B. Kanter, et al., Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence: 1300-1450, Exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, pp. 318-321; Voelkle, W.M., and Wieck, R.S., The Bernard H. Breslauer Collection of Manuscript Illumination, Exh. cat., Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, 1993, pp. 196-97.

Footnotes:

1. L.B. Kanter, B. Drake Boehm, C.B. Strehlke, G. Freuler, C. Mayer Thurman and P. Palladino, Painting and Illumination in Early Renaissance Florence: 1300-1450, Exh. cat., The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1994, pp. 318-321, esp. p. 319.

2. Ibid, p. 321.

Cat. 4. Lippo D'Andrea Di Lippo, *The Annunciation and St Bridget and Bridgettine Nuns*, c.1430s, tempera and gold leaf on parchment, 55.5 x 37 cm, New York, Bernard H. Breslauer.

5. Fra Angelico

The Cortona Annunciation

c. 1435

Tempera on wood. The five predella scenes illustrate the Marriage of the Virgin, the Visitation, The Adoration of the Magi, The Presentation at the Temple, and the Death of the Virgin. Two small scenes of Saint Dominic, name saint of the Dominican Order for which the altarpiece was painted, to either side (Birth of Saint Dominic and Saint Dominic Receiving the Habit).

Height: 175 cm

Width: 180 cm

Cortona, Museo Diocesano, no. A9. **Cat. 5, Ill. 2.**

Provenance: Commissioned for the church of San Domenico, Cortona, in 1438. Moved to the Museo Diocensano, Cortona in 1810.

In this altarpiece panel the Annunciation is the central scene. There is a smaller scene of the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden, on the upper left-hand side of the panel. Fra Angelico and his followers, among others, often included the Expulsion scene in their altarpieces of the Annunciation as it was related to the theme of the redemption of sin, which is the crux of the scene. Adam and Eve committed humanity's first sins by eating the sacred fruit in the Garden and Mary was chosen by God to conceive Christ who would redeem the sins of humanity and thus permit humanity to rise to Heaven after death. Another example of an Annunciation with a subordinate Expulsion scene is the *Prado Annunciation*, also painted by Fra Angelico (c. 1430s, tempera on wood panel, 194x194 cm, Prado Museum, Madrid, no. 15, **Fig. 5**).

The scene's loggia setting, familiar to the Florentine viewer, illustrates a physical and unified space for the angel and the Virgin. There is a column of the portico, however, which serves to separate the image of Gabriel and Mary and allude to the fact that they were not of

the same world, as he was a messenger of God and she was the once human, now both human and divine Mother of the Son of God. Additionally, in a similar light, the two columns in the foreground of the painting serve to distance the viewer from the scene.

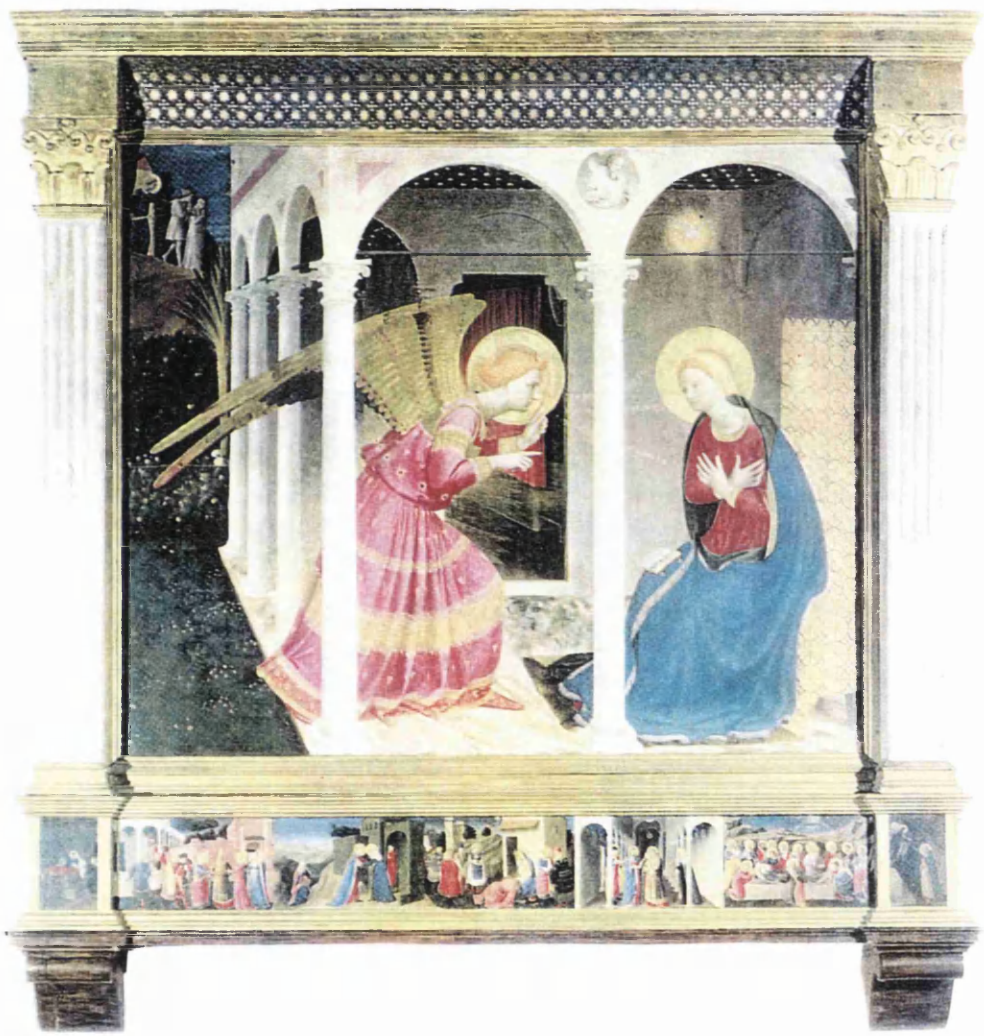
Gabriel stands in a half-genuflection before the seated Virgin. They are level with each other. Gabriel points one hand towards her and one towards God in Heaven to illustrate his message. Mary's answer is written upside down and backward so as to be understood by God in Heaven.

Iconographically, the garden which borders the portico can be related to both the Garden of Eden and the *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden referred to in the Song of Songs in the Bible that symbolizes Mary's virginity. Her bedroom, which is suggested in the background by a red curtained bed, alludes to the bridal chamber of the Virgin. She holds her hands across her chest in humility and wears a veil, which symbolizes chastity and submission. Simultaneously, she wears a diadem, which symbolizes nobility and divinity, as does the golden throne she sits on. A Book of Hours rests open on her knee which while demonstrating her pious Christian behavior, additionally alludes to the Prophet Isaiah's prediction that a virgin would conceive (Isaiah 7:14), a convention in practice from the thirteenth century, onwards.

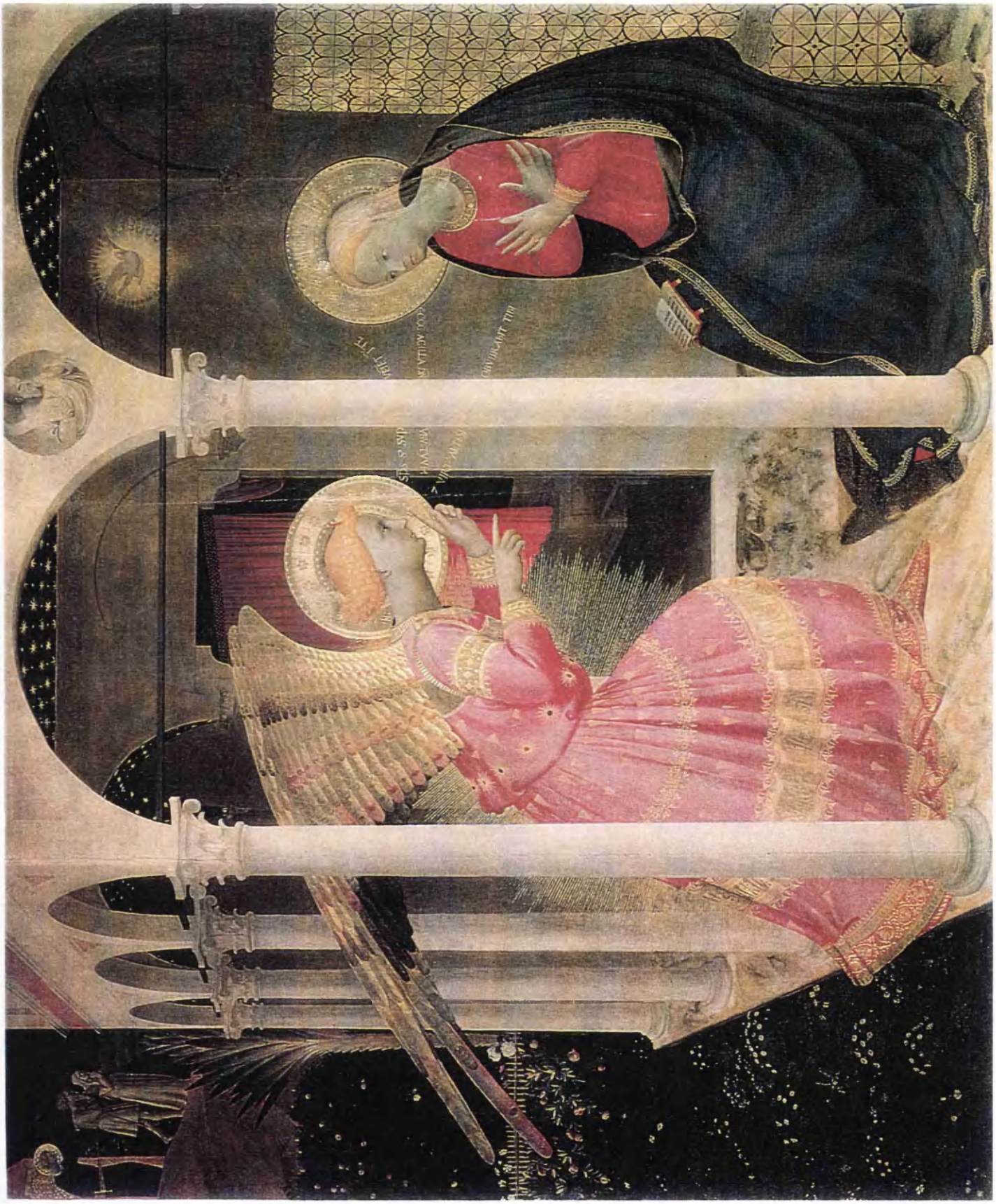
Fra Angelico used gold leaf to highlight details such as the haloes, the edges of Mary's cloak, the ornate patterned fabric of Gabriel's garment, and Gabriel's wings. Additionally there are golden rays emanating from Gabriel's body and the dove of the Holy Spirit that hovers over Mary glows in a golden cloud. The gold additions shimmered in the dim light of the church, and demonstrated the patron's wealth and prestige. An Annunciation scene painted in a similar manner is that by Zanobi Strozzi (c.1445, tempera on wood, 103x142 cm, National Gallery, London, no. 1406, **Fig. 7**).

Exhibited: Cortona, Church of San Domenico.

Literature: U. Baldini, Beato Angelico, Bergamo, 1964, pp. 22, 27-28, pl. 2; C. Lloyd, Fra Angelico, London, 1992, pp. 11, 13, 44, 45, pl. 7; E. and G. Mori, Museum of the Diocese of Cortona, Cortona, 1998, pp. 40-44; J. Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, London, 1974, pp. 14-15, 18, 23, 26, 192-94, 221, 223, 235, pls. 18-23; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, p. 56.



Ill. 2. Detail with predella panel, Fra Angelico, *The Cortona Annunciation*, Cortona, Museo Diocesano, no. A9.



Cat. 5. Fra Angelico, *The Cortona Annunciation*, c.1435, tempera on wood, 175 x 180 cm, Cortona, Museo Diocesano, no. A9.

6. Fra Angelico

The Annunciation, Cell 3, San Marco

c. 1440-43

Fresco

Height: 176 cm

Width: 148 cm

Florence, San Marco, Cell 3. **Cat. 6, Ill. 3.**

Provenance: Florence, San Marco, frescoes commissioned by Cosimo de' Medici.

This fresco is one of many painted by Fra Angelico in the Convent of San Marco. He frescoed the corridor leading to the friars' cells, the cells, and painted the high altar for this Dominican convent where he resided at the time. The subject matter for the images in the cells was the Incarnation of Christ through to his Passion.

The Annunciation scene is very simple in its representation here. The scene is not portrayed in the open loggia setting in which the *North Corridor Annunciation*, (c.1450, fresco, 216 x 321 cm, **Fig. 14**), the other Annunciation fresco in the convent, is portrayed. Instead, it is depicted in a small, cell-like space reminiscent of the actual chamber in which the image is frescoed, off of a convent cloister.

Fra Angelico abandoned his typical preferred iconographical elements in favor of simplicity as the image resided within a convent rather than a public space. Gabriel stands upright before the Virgin who is kneeling humbly on a low wooden bench. She crosses her arms across her chest in submission and clutches her Book of Hours open to an inscribed page alluding to the prophecy of Isaiah. She is without her characteristic red garment and rich dark blue robe, instead wearing a plain, pale pink garment and robe. Aside from her very faint, almost invisible, diadem that symbolizes holiness, she appears very ordinary. Gabriel holds his hands in a position similar to, but not the same as, that which symbolizes humility. In addition, his stance above Mary and no longer genuflecting before her magnifies her extreme

behavioral attribute of humility in his presence and that of God's grave and divine message. The friar's condition before God is similar. The Dominican Saint Peter Martyr stands at the left of the scene watching and praying as a role model for the friar viewing the image in his cell. The scene with its minimal amount of detail, its pastel color palette, its calm and static nature, and its overtones of the virtue of humility, a particularly monastic attribute (1), serves to focus the viewer in meditation, rather than to instruct him as an altarpiece would instruct its viewer with its lavish, detailed representation.

Additionally, the depiction is particularly moving emotionally, in its quiet beauty and simplicity. The light source in the fresco seems to come from within the cell-like space itself. It illuminates the figures and saturates the space, which they occupy. It is in this image of the Annunciation that the modern day viewer is reminded of the painter's documented 'angelic' character and painting that earned him the name 'Beato Angelico', blessed Angelico immediately after his death. A century later Giorgio Vasari claimed he "was a man of the utmost simplicity of intention, and was most holy in every act of his life" (2). Indeed Pope John Paul II beatified him in 1984.

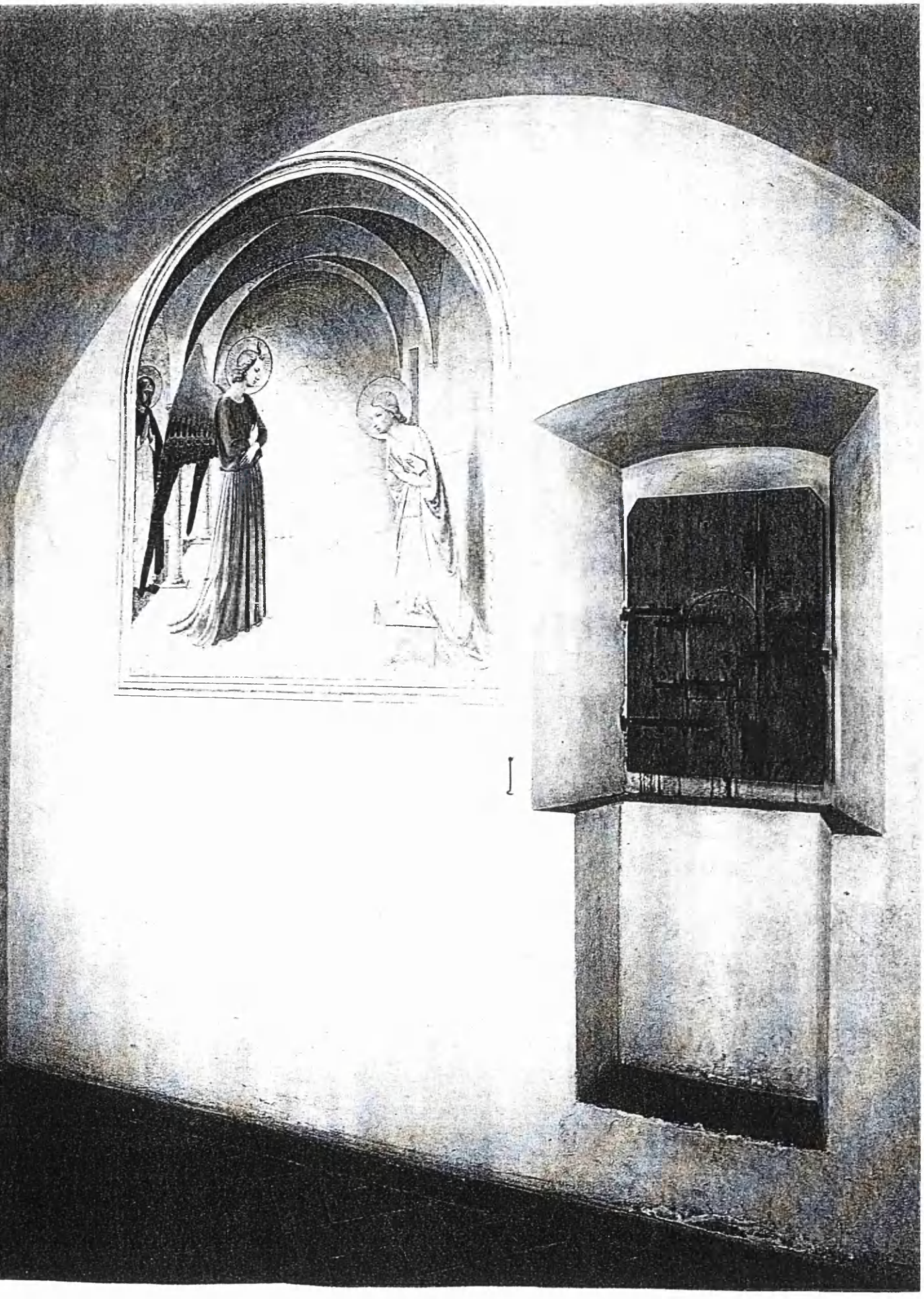
Literature: U. Baldini, Beato Angelico, Bergamo, 1964, pp. 64, 66, 67, pl. 33; G. Damiani, San Marco Florence, London, 1997, p. 67; C. Lloyd, Fra Angelico, London, 1992, pp. 7, 19, 86, 87, pl. 28; W. Hood, Fra Angelico at San Marco, New Haven and London, 1993, p. 236; J. Pope-Hennessy, Fra Angelico, London, 1974, pp. 20-22, 33, 203, 206, pls. 76, 79; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, p. 59-60.

Footnotes:

1. J. Pelikan, Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place in the History of Culture, New Haven and London, 1996, p. 221.

2. C. Lloyd, Fra Angelico, London, 1992, p. 5.

Cat. 6. Fra Angelico, *The Cell 3 Annunciation*, c.1440-43, fresco, 176 x 148 cm, Florence, San Marco, Cell 3.



Ill. 3. Fresco as seen in cell, Fra Angelico, *The Cell 3 Annunciation*, Florence, San Marco, Cell 3.

7. Fra Filippo Lippi

The Annunciation

c. 1448-50

Tempera on Wood. Companion piece with seven saints.

Height: 68.5 cm

Width: 152 cm

London, National Gallery, no. 666. **Cat. 7.**

Provenance: Florence, Palazzo Medici Riccardi. Acquired by the National Gallery from Sir Charles Eastlake in 1861.

This Annunciation lunette and its companion depicting seven saints were acquired from the Medici Palace in Florence. They were probably commissioned by the Medici family as panels to be used in a furniture context in the *camera*, the combination bedroom and receiving room in the Quattrocento Florentine house. Due to their size and shape, it has been suggested that they were bedheads or decoration above two doorways. If they were bedheads, the *Seven Saints* panel was probably for a man's bed, and the *Annunciation* was probably for a woman's bed (1). The Annunciation scene conveyed an especially good example of Mary's admirable character traits, and influential behavioral roles, for woman in general in Quattrocento Florence.

The scene is set in a loggia without columns. In this instance Gabriel and Mary are physically separated by a short ridge that delineates the edge of the enclosed garden, *hortus conclusus*, which iconographically symbolizes Mary's virginity, and the space in which the Virgin sits reading her Book of Hours. The ridge also serves as the support for a vase of lilies, symbols of the Virgin's purity. The hand of God at the top of the image is pictured releasing the dove of the Holy Spirit towards Mary's womb, which actually welcomes the dove into a tiny hole in her garment, to symbolize the Conception of Christ. This somewhat explicit representation was unusual amongst Quattrocento Florentine images of the Annunciation,

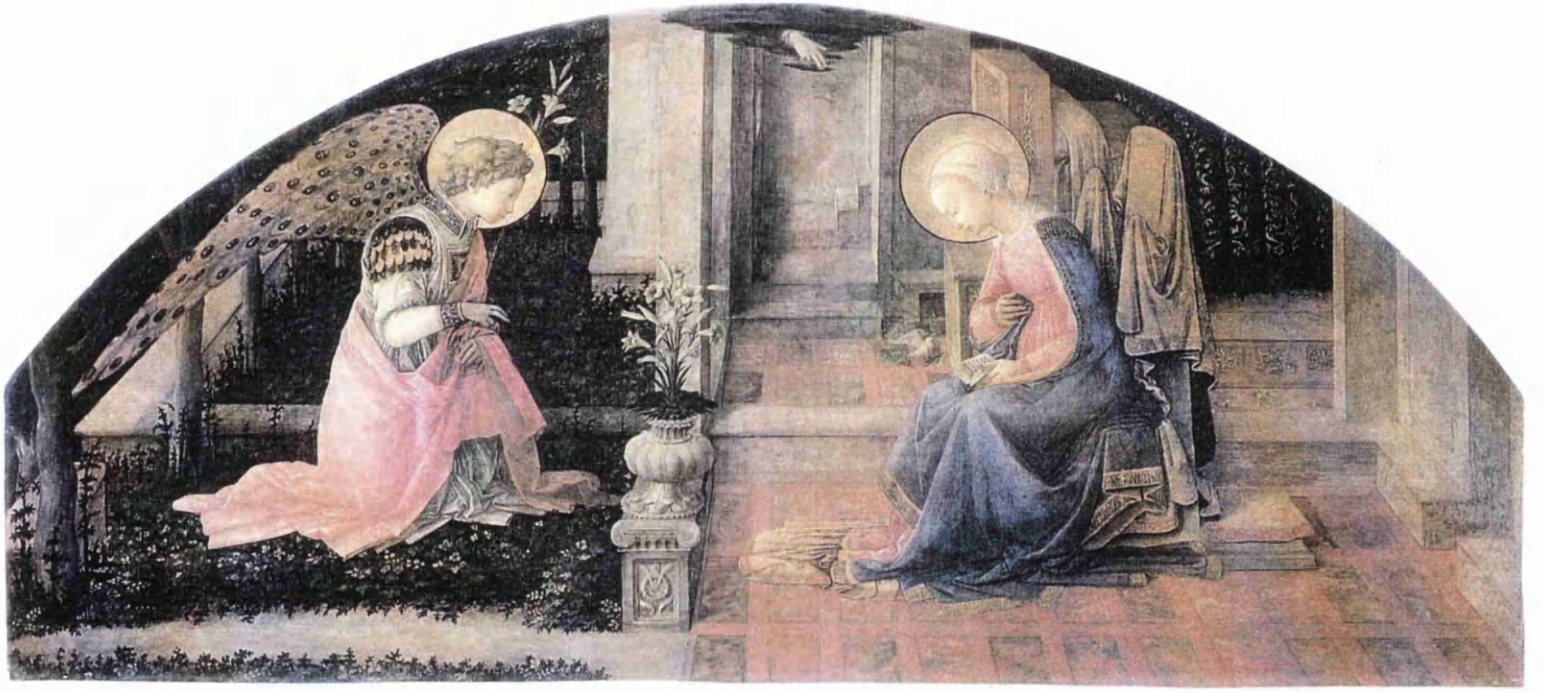
which more commonly depicted the dove flying towards Mary's head. Gentile Da Fabriano's *Annunciation* after the fresco at Santissima Annunziata in Florence is similar to this representation though it does not portray the dove as close to Mary's womb, nor the hole in her garment (**Cat. 1**). Similarly, Lippi's own *Annunciation* in the Gallery Doria Pamhilj in Rome, (c.1445-50, tempera on wood, 118 x 175 cm, **Fig. 17**), depicts the dove and golden rays projecting in the general direction of her womb, although there is no indication of impending physical contact. Perhaps an explanation for Lippi's explicit image of the Immaculate Conception in this depiction of the Annunciation is that the Medici requested it because the panel's proposed function was to be a bedhead, and the bed is the most common location for conception. If the panel was intended for display over a door, this choice of iconographical details is not so obvious.

Exhibited: London, British Institution Exhibition, 1858, painting no. 21.

Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 111-114; S.Y. Edgerton,"'How Shall This Be?" Reflections on Filippo Lippi's Annunciation in London' Part 2, Artibus et Historiae, nr 16 (VIII) Florence, 1987, pp. 45-55; M. Holmes, Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 155, 232, 235-238; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, p. 62; L. Steinberg, "'How Shall This Be?"' Part 1, Artibus et Historiae, nr 16 (VIII) Florence, 1987, pp. 25-45.

Footnotes:

1. London, The National Gallery Micro Gallery, Computer Information Center, Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation.*



Cat. 7. Fra Filippo Lippi, *The Annunciation*, c.1448-50, tempera on wood, 68.5 x 152 cm, London, National Gallery, no. 666.

8. Francesco Pesellino

The Annunciation

c. 1450-55

Tempera on wood. Two panels. On back of one panel, Coat of Arms with cross and four stars, on other, Heraldic design with scroll and inscription. These might have been added in the nineteenth century.

Height of both panels: 20 cm

Width of both panels: 14.3 cm

London, Courtauld Gallery, 1967 no. 136. **Cat. 8.**

Provenance: Purchased in 1859 in Florence by Thomas Gambier-Parry. Bequeathed to Courtauld Institute Gallery by grandson, Mark Gambier-Parry, in 1966.

This small image of two panels, the left portraying Gabriel and the right, Mary, which together compose the Annunciation scene, was painted as a private devotional image. Possibly the two panels were hinged together at the time of their fabrication to form a diptych. The fifteenth century in Florence was a time particularly interested in small devotional images, which were sold on the open market.

The scene is set within the Quattrocento loggia setting, although the ground is completely carpeted possibly to make the image more familiar to the viewer in his or her home. As usual, the Virgin's bedroom is in the background. Gabriel, holding the lily symbolizing Mary's purity, genuflects before her. The Virgin kneels and bows her head in greeting and submission. There is a column portrayed between Gabriel, the divine messenger of God, and the humble, human Virgin (although she was soon to be divine as well), as in Fra Angelico's *Cortona Annunciation*, (**Cat. 5**), among others. Mary's lectern is behind her facing the wall so that her Book of Hours in not in view. This contrasts with most depictions of the Annunciation on public altarpieces which portray the Book of Hours and allude, additionally, to the Old Testament prophet Isaiah's prediction that a Virgin would conceive, through an

inscription on the open pages of the book. Possibly the painter excluded these iconographical details intentionally in order to keep the image simple and hence not distract the viewer from his/her private thoughts and prayers.

The image is very reminiscent of Fra Filippo Lippi's work and one can see that he had a strong influence on Pesellino. The articulated background and figure style is similar to Lippi's style, as are the positions of the figures in relation to each other (see Fra Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* from the National Gallery, **Cat. 7**). It is a beautiful, well-painted image.

Exhibited: R.A. 1930, Cat. no. 135 (cataloged as a Filippo Lippi).

Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 167-168; M. Holmes, Fra Filippo Lippi: The Carmelite Painter, New Haven and London, 1999, pp. 59, 150, 153, 257; J. Ruda, Fra Filippo Lippi: Life and Work With Complete Catalogue, London, 1993, pp. 490, pls. 380, 381.

Cat. 8. Francesco Pesellino, *The Annunciation*, c.1450-55, tempera on wood, each panel 20 x 14.3 cm, London, Courtauld Gallery, 1967 no. 136.

9. Piero Della Francesca

The Annunciation

c. 1452-66

Fresco. One scene in cycle of frescoes at San Francesco Arezzo (bottom right of altar).

Height: 329 cm

Width: 193 cm

Arezzo, Basilica of San Francesco, main chapel. **Cat. 9.**

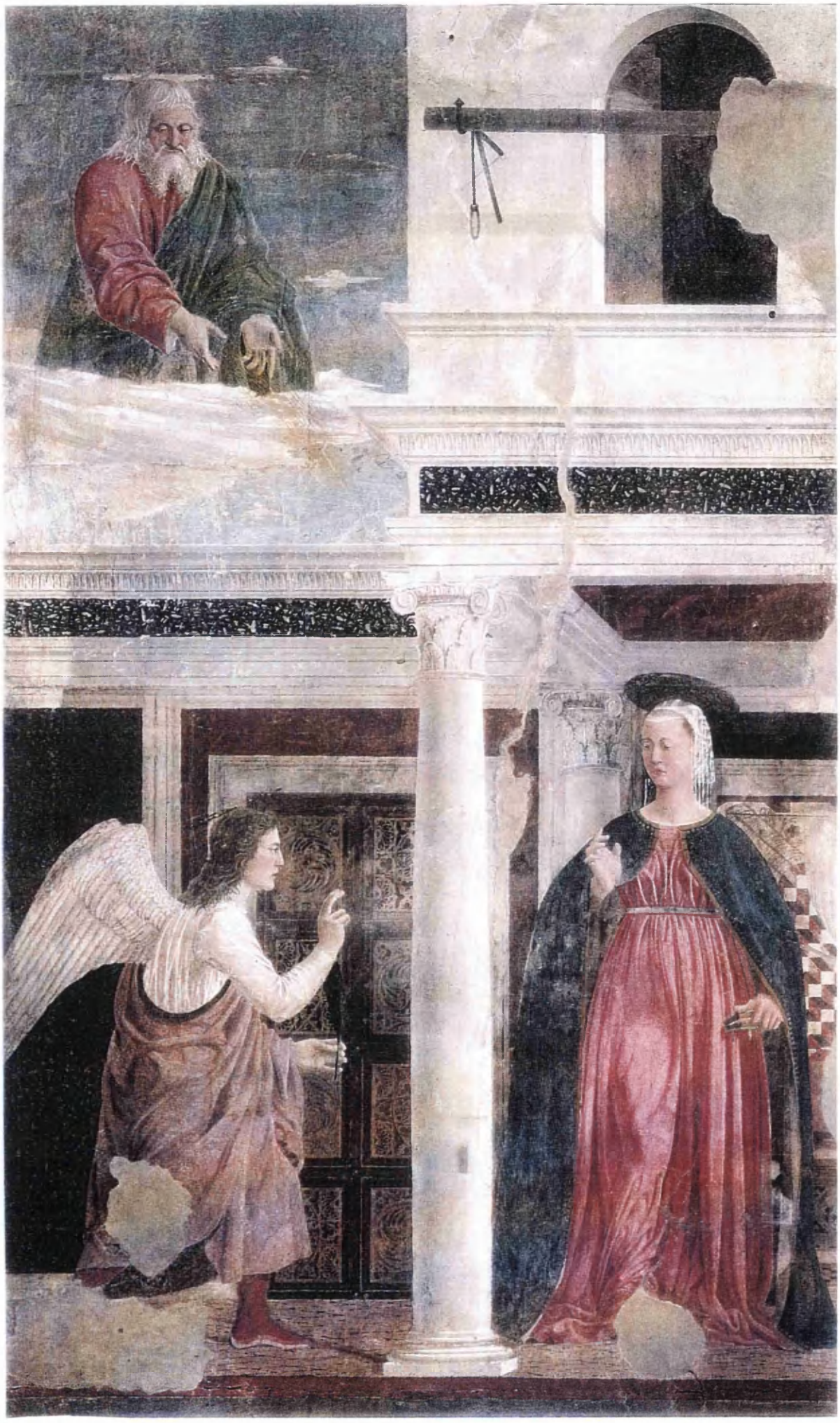
Provenance: Arezzo, Basilica of San Francesco, commissioned by Francesco Bacci (1447, commissioned Bicci Di Lorenzo, commission turned-over to Piero in c. 1452).

This fresco of the Annunciation illustrated one scene in a narrative cycle of the Legend of the True Cross, a complicated mesh of stories based around the central theme of the cross of Christ's crucifixion, spanning the ages of the Old and New Testaments. Piero Della Francesca succeeded in communicating these scenes visually in a lucid manner through his reordering of the stories to make them appear better in relation to each other on the walls of the church. *The Annunciation*, on the wall behind the altar's right side, is in a prominent position in the church and amongst the other scenes in the cycle.

Piero Della Francesca was a pupil of Domenico Veneziano whose light color palette and use of strict perspective are evident in Piero's work. The Annunciation scene portrays Gabriel and Mary in a rendition of the loggia setting so popular in Quattrocento Florentine images of the Annunciation. God the Father is depicted with hands outstretched presumably to send down the ray with the dove of the Holy Spirit that has since disappeared from the painting. A column separates the angel and Mary and the *porta clausa* is depicted between them as well. The Virgin's bedchamber can be glimpsed behind her and she stands holding her Book of Hours. Her other hand raised, communicates her question to Gabriel of how it is possible that she will be the Mother of God, and thus places this representation in Fra Roberto Caracciolo's *Angelic Colloquy* sermon category of 'inquiry.' This stance and gesture of the

Virgin is similar to another Annunciation that illustrates the category of 'inquiry', by Alessio Baldovinetti (1457, tempera on wood, 167 x 137 cm, the Uffizi Gallery, Inv. no. 483, **Fig. 3**).

Literature: Arezzo, Convento Di S. Francesco, Basilica Di S. Francesco Arezzo, Cortona, 1998, pp. 41-43; E. Battisti, Piero Della Francesca, Milan, 1992, pp. 107, 206-213, figs. 152, 153, 156, 157, 158; C. Bertelli, Piero Della Francesca, translated by Edward Farrelly, New Haven and London, 1992, pp. 83, 86, 102, pls. 90-91; B. Laskowski, Piero Della Francesca, Cologne, 1998, pp. 34-37, figs. 29, 30.



Cat. 9. Piero Della Francesca, *The Annunciation*, fresco, 329 x 193 cm, Arezzo, Basilica of San Francesco.

10. Domenico Veneziano

The Annunciation Predella Panel of St Lucy Altarpiece

1461

Tempera on wood. Right-hand predella panel of St Lucy altarpiece, now in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence. Left side cut down by approximately 6.3 cm.

Restored and cleaned in 1965.

Height: 27.3 cm

Width: 54 cm

Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, no. 1106. **Cat. 10.**

Provenance: St Lucy altarpiece, Santa Lucia de' Magnoli, Florence. Purchased by Mr. Fuller in 1815 (as a Domenico Ghirlandaio). Bequeathed to Fitzwilliam Museum in 1909 by Professor Frederick Fuller, received in 1923 and cataloged as a Domenico Veneziano.

This panel is the largest predella panel of the St Lucy altarpiece commissioned for Santa Lucia de' Magnoli in Florence. The altarpiece's main panel portrays The Virgin and Child with Saints, or a *Sacra Conversazione*, and the four additional predella panels depict the Miracle of Saint Zanobius, the Stigmatization of Saint Francis, Saint John the Baptist in the Desert, and the Martyrdom of Saint Lucy. The predella panels of fifteenth-century altarpieces often illustrated the lives of Mary or the saints pictured in the painting above. In this instance they illustrated both.

The Annunciation scene is conveyed in the conventional fifteenth-century loggia setting, although the scheme is slightly different. The angel Gabriel, on the left side of the painting is genuflecting towards the Virgin on the right side as usual, however, there is a large space between them as well as a representation of the *hortus conclusus*, or enclosed garden, symbolizing Mary's virginity. There is also a portrayal of the *porta clausa*, or closed door, through which the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel envisioned the glory of God entering, and which later, as illustrated by a fifteenth-century Florentine prior Antonino, came to allude to

the entrance of Gabriel who would show the Virgin the light of the Holy Spirit (1). Interestingly, this *porta clausa* through which Gabriel, God's messenger, and the light of the Holy Spirit entered from Heaven, is the center of perspective for the painting. The Virgin occupies the space to the extreme right of the image while Gabriel is closer to the center, which serves to illustrate the importance of divine intervention in the theme of the Annunciation and Conception of Christ. Indeed the Virgin's personal symbolic attributes such as her Book of Hours and allusion to the prophecy of Isaiah, or her throne symbolizing her nobility, are absent.

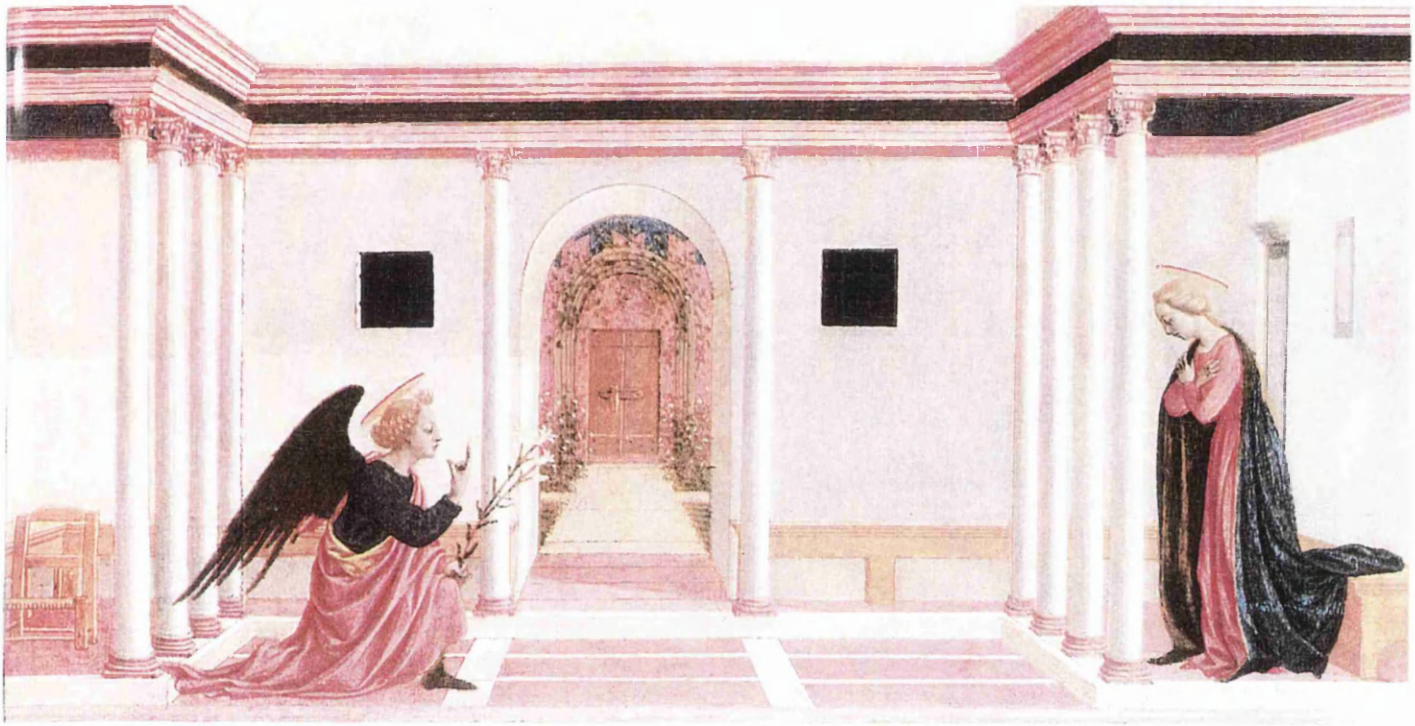
The panel is painted in Veneziano's characteristic light colors and employs accurate perspective.

Exhibited: London, Royal Academy, Italian Art, no. 130, 1930. Cambridge, Treasures of Cambridge, no. 4, 1959. London, Royal Academy, Italian Art in Britain, no. 273, 1959-60. London, Wildenstein & Co. Ltd., Painting in Florence and Siena, no. 51, 1965. Florence, Palazzo Vecchio, reconstruction of St Lucy Altarpiece, 1993/4.

Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 61-62; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, pp. 60-61; H. Wohl, The Paintings of Domenico Veneziano: A Study in Florentine Art of the Early Renaissance, Oxford, 1980, pp. 32, 51-53.

Footnotes:

1. H. Wohl, The Paintings of Domenico Veneziano: A Study in Florentine Art of the Early Renaissance, Oxford, 1980, p. 53.



Cat. 10. Domenico Veneziano, *The Annunciation Predella Panel of the St Lucy Altarpiece*, 1461, tempera on wood, 27.3 x 54 cm, Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum, no. 1106.

11. Leonardo Da Vinci

The Annunciation

c. 1475

Oil and tempera on wood.

Height: 98 cm

Width: 217 cm

Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. 1618. **Cat. 11.**

Provenance: The monastery of San Bartolomeo, Monteoliveto Maggiore, sacristy. Acquired by the Uffizi Gallery in 1867.

This long, narrow rectangular panel of large dimensions has a mysterious history. Its precise original commission and location is unknown. The Uffizi acquired it from a sacristy, but there is no further documentation. Due to its shape it may have been a *spalliera* panel or the long frontal panel of a large *cassone*, or chest (1). The subject matter of *The Annunciation* was appropriate for all locations, religious and secular, in fifteenth-century Florentine art.

This painting is one of Leonardo's first works. His characteristic hazy, atmospheric background style has already been developed (2). Additionally the figures of Gabriel and Mary look Leonardesque in their facial features and form aside from some minor details such as the right hand of the Virgin that recalls the style of Verrocchio, Leonardo's master. Gabriel genuflects in a garden, as in Filippo Lippi's *Annunciation* in the National Gallery, (**Cat. 7**), before the Virgin who sits on a patio bordering the garden at a monumental lectern reminiscent of Roman sarcophagi and probably a tribute to the Medici tomb sculpted by Verrocchio around the same time (3). She holds her place in her Book of Hours with her right hand and gestures her left hand upwards in greeting or surprise at Gabriel's approach and message from God in Heaven.

Drapery studies for the Virgin's mantle have been found, as have studies of the lily that Gabriel holds. Additionally, Leonardo must have done studies of birds and their wings, for the

wings of Gabriel are attached at the shoulder as they should be in order to work properly, in contrast to the more common depiction of his wings attached at the back as in Alessio Baldovinetti's *Annunciation* (1457, tempera on wood, 167 x 137 cm, the Uffizi Gallery, Florence, Inv. no. 483).

Exhibited: Milan, Mostra di Leonardo Da Vinci, 1939.

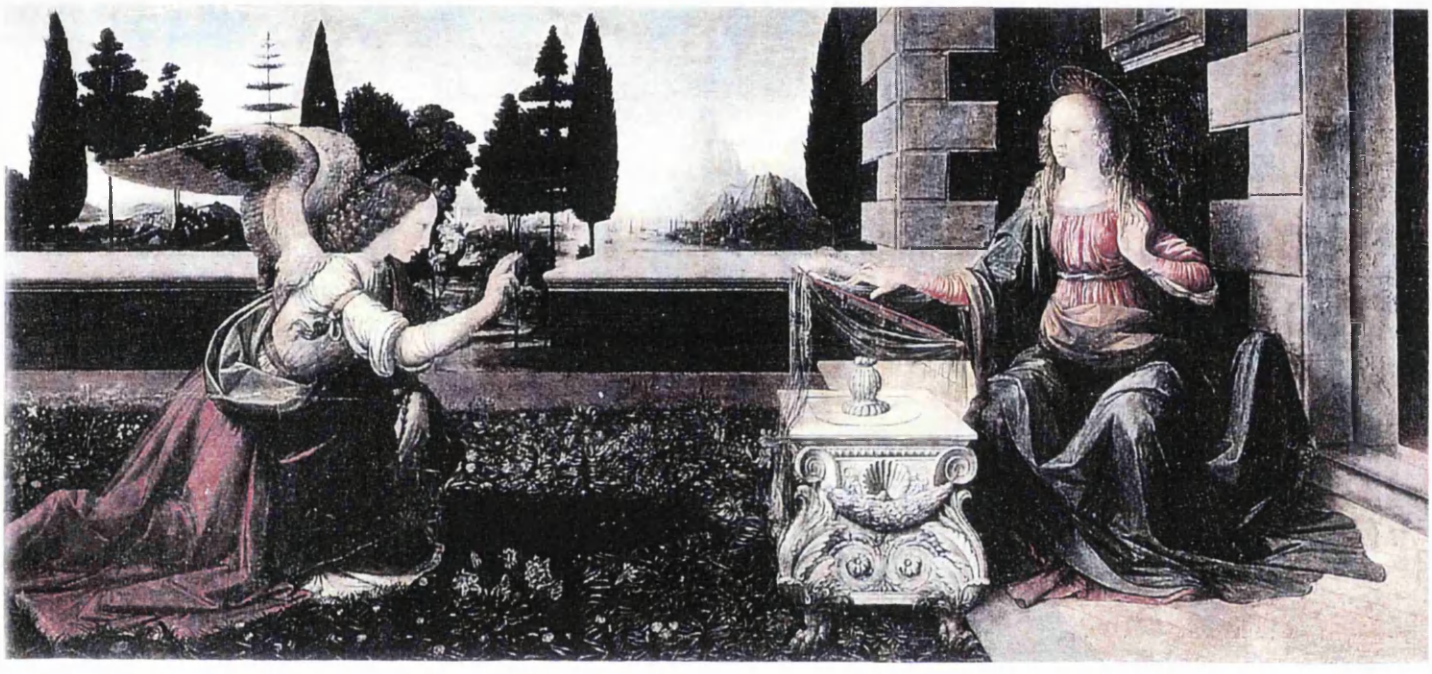
Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 107-108; L. Berti, A.M. Petrioli Tofani, and C. Caneva, The Uffizi, London, 1997, pp.69-71; D.A. Brown, Leonardo Da Vinci: Origins of Genius, New Haven and London, 1998, ch. 4; K. Clark, Leonardo Da Vinci: An Account of his Development as an Artist, Cambridge, 1939, pp. 9, 10, 13-16, 17, 19, 22, 44, 122, pls. 3, 4; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, p. 90.

Footnotes:

1. Due to its long, narrow rectangular shape and size, I think Leonardo's panel could have been a *spalliera* panel from a chest of some sort, though probably not in a *camera* as the panel was acquired from a church sacristy. The dimensions of a *cassone* from the National Gallery, no. 4906, for example, are 103 x 203 x 66cm. The dimensions of its painted portion of the *spalliera* would be almost as large, and hence, similar to those of Leonardo's panel. The painting of *Venus and Mars* by Botticelli in the National Gallery, London, 70.6 x 176.8 cm, is similar in shape and size to Leonardo's *Annunciation*, and it is thought to have been a *spalliera* from a chest.

2. L. Berti, A.M. Petrioli Tofani and C. Caneva, The Uffizi, London, 1997, p. 70.

3. D.A. Brown, Leonardo Da Vinci: Origins of Genius, New Haven and London, 1998, p. 71.



Cat. 11. Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Annunciation*, c.1475, oil and tempera on wood, 98 x 217 cm, Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. 1618.

12. Andrea Della Robbia

The Annunciation

c. 1475

Tin-glazed terracotta. White, blue, green, violet, brown. Inscription on base. Coat of arms (twice) on base.

210 x 210 cm

Sanctuary of La Verna, Chapel of the Annunciation, Basilica of La Verna. **Cat. 12, Ills. 4 and 5.**

Provenance: Commissioned by the Florentine Niccolini family for the Chapel of the Annunciation, Basilica of La Verna in 1476.

The Annunciation was commissioned by the Niccolini family of Florence after a fire damaged the Basilica of La Verna in 1472. The altarpiece resides under a baldacchino, (**Ill. 4**), and is opposite another baldacchino, across the nave, that houses *The Adoration of the Magi* also by Andrea Della Robbia.

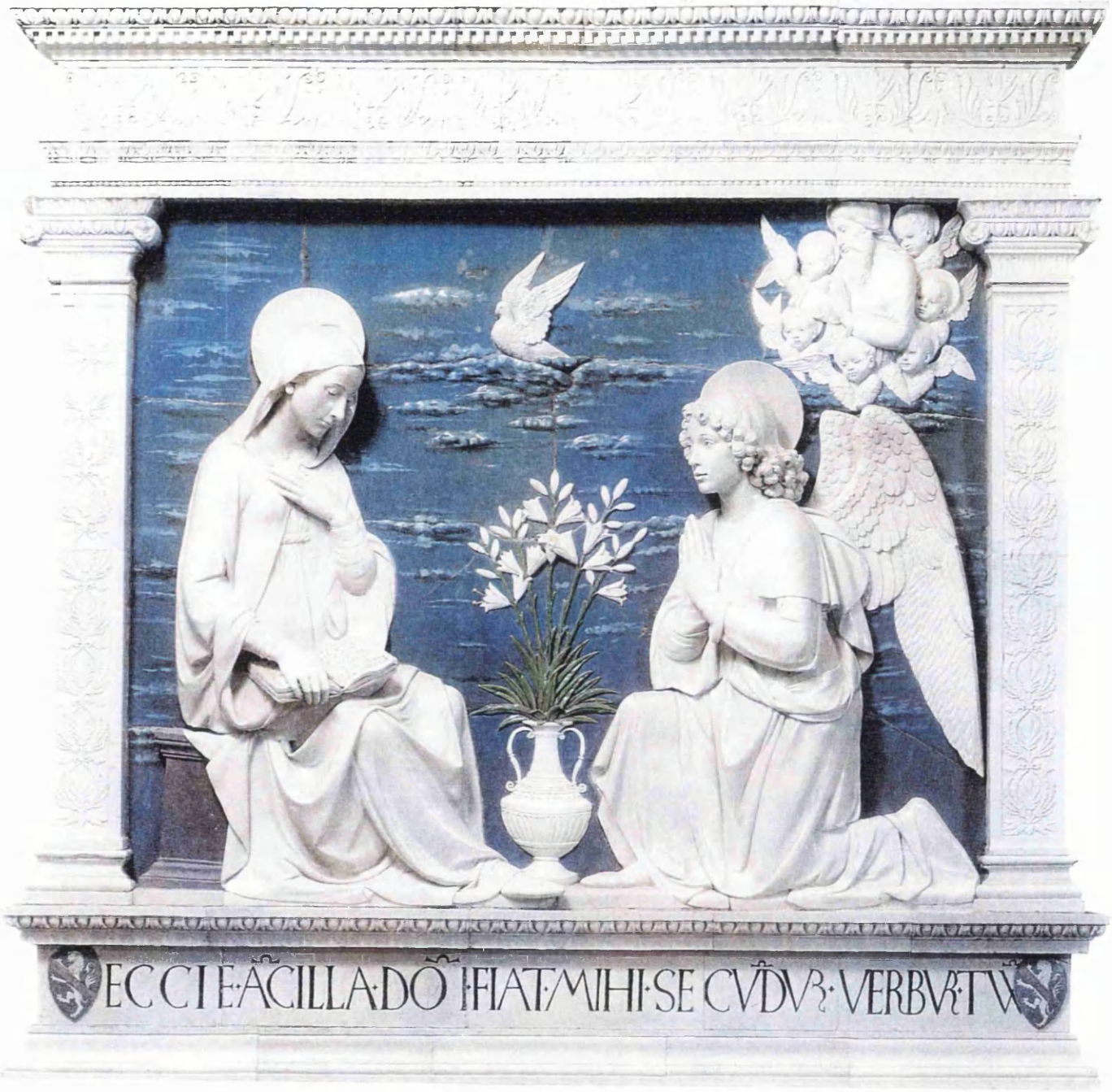
It is made of tin-glazed terracotta, a durable technique that was pioneered by Andrea's uncle, Luca Della Robbia. The altarpiece is in the *tavola quadrata* shape of painted altarpieces in Quattrocento Florence and includes the representation of classical ornament and pilasters framing its sides.

The Virgin and Gabriel, in white, are delicately sculpted in high relief, (**Ill. 5**), and set against a bright blue background. The Virgin is depicted on the left side of the scene and the Angel on the right, which was an unusual positional scheme in portrayals of the Annunciation in Quattrocento Florence. However, Andrea's uncle had positioned the two figures this way in his previous work, and Fra Filippo Lippi did as well in his *Annunciation* (c.1445-50, tempera on wood, 118 x 175 cm, Galleria Doria Pamphilj, Rome, **Fig. 17**). Andrea included a portrayal of God surrounded by cherub heads and the dove of the Holy Spirit hovering in modeled clouds above Mary. She is wearing her mantle up around her head and is holding an

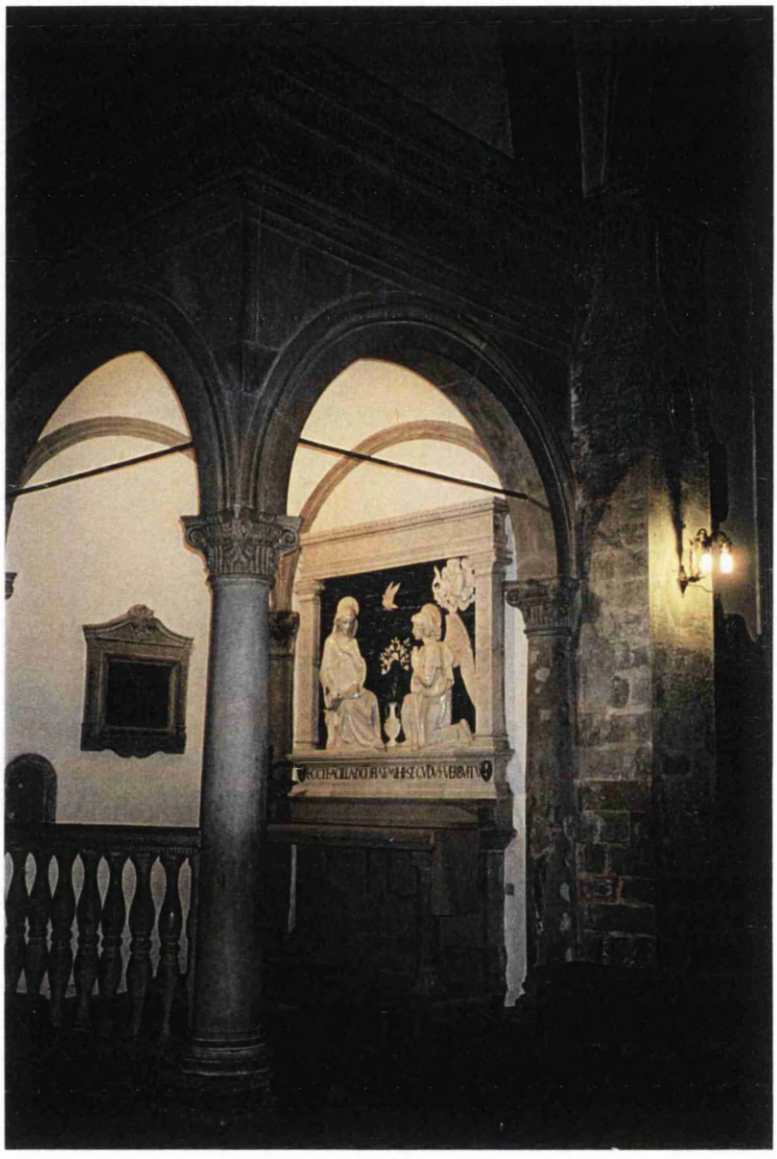
inscribed Book of Hours in her lap alluding to Isaiah's prophecy. Gabriel, genuflecting in front of the seated Virgin, holds his hands together in a gesture of prayer as she holds her left hand to her chest in a gesture similar to that of humility which also serves to communicate her surprise at Gabriel's message. The lilies symbolizing Mary's purity are in a classicizing vase and are very prominent as their stems are green, the second brightest color, next to blue, in the predominantly tri-colored sculpture, (Mary's seat is brown and tiny details such as the irises of her eyes and her eyebrows, are violet). The scene is very simple and elegant in appearance. Andrea's later, lunette-shaped *Annunciation* , (early 1490s, tin-glazed terracotta, 154 x 285 cm), of the same color scheme, in the Spedale degli Innocenti, Florence (**Fig. 16**), is more detailed, and the positions of the Virgin and Gabriel are switched.

The predella of the altarpiece is inscribed in Latin with Mary's reply to Gabriel.

Literature: R. Cetoloni, F. Bernacchi, F. Locatelli, eds., The Sanctuary of La Verna, Verucchio, 1998, pp. 39-41; F. Domestici, Della Robia: A Family of Artists, Florence, 1992, pp. 44-46; A. Marquand, Andrea Della Robbia & His Atelier, vol. 1, Princeton and Oxford, 1922, pp. 48-50, cat. no. 35, fig. 40.



Cat. 12. Andrea Della Robbia, *The Annunciation*, c.1475, tin-glazed terracotta, 210 x 210 cm, Sanctuary of La Verna, Chapel of the Annunciation, Basilica of La Verna.



Ill. 4. Altarpiece as seen under the baldacchino, Andrea Della Robbia, *The Annunciation*, Sanctuary of La Verna, Chapel of the Annunciation, Basilica of La Verna.

Ill. 5. Detail of Gabriel in high relief, Andrea Della Robbia, *The Annunciation*, Sanctuary of La Verna, Chapel of the Annunciation, Basilica of La Verna.

13. Sandro Botticelli

The San Martino Annunciation

1481

Fresco transferred to panel. Damaged in seventeenth century.

Height: 243 cm

Width: 55O cm

Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. Deposit 201. **Cat. 13, a and b.**

Provenance: Spedale di San Martino, Florence, detached in 1920 and acquired by the Uffizi Gallery.

This fresco of the Annunciation was originally painted over a doorway that led into the Spedale di San Martino from a loggia. The hospital was for plague victims, and it has been suggested that the fresco was commissioned for the hospital, in 1481, in commemoration of the recent end of another bout of the plague. The fresco, which was damaged during the seventeenth century, has since been transferred to panel and moved to the Uffizi Gallery in Florence.

Botticelli set this depiction of the scene in an interior structure. On the left side of the scene the angel Gabriel, approaching the Virgin's chamber, has not yet alighted. On the right, Mary sits in front of her bedroom and reads her Book of Hours. There are many decorative elements in the image. The floors of the two connected interior spaces are patterned and painted to simulate tiles, there is a decorative carpet at Mary's feet, and the pilasters represented recalling classical art forms, have ornamental motifs on them.

The scene of the Annunciation was commonly encountered depicted in many different locations, religious and secular, in fifteenth-century Florentine society, and was appropriate as an image in a hospital setting for its religious subject matter and its allusion to the ideas of conception and regeneration.

This fresco, admired by scholars as having been Botticelli's first successful attempt at perspectival clarity, was planned to complement its location over the door into the hospital

(1). The perspective, centered to the right of Gabriel's face on the left side of the painting, served to balance the image with the door below it (2).

Exhibited: Spedale di San Martino, Florence.

Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 33-39; L. Berti , A. Petrioli Tofani, C. Caneva, The Uffizi, London, 1997, p. 56; R. Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, London, 1989, pp. 78, 79,80-81, 143, 311, pl. 30; N. Pons, Botticelli, Milan, 1989, pp. 63, cat. 44.

Footnotes:

1. R. Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, London, 1989, p. 80.

2. R. Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, op. cit., p. 80.

Cat. 13a. Sandro Botticelli, Angel of *The San Martino Annunciation*, 1481, fresco transferred to panel, 243 x 550 cm, Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. Deposit 201.

Cat. 13b. Sandro Botticelli, Virgin of *The San Martino Annunciation*, Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. Deposit 201.

14. Sandro Botticelli

The Cestello Annunciation

c. 1489

Tempera on wood. Frame original. Coat of Arms on frame.

Height: 150 cm

Width: 156 cm

Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. 1608. **Cat. 14.**

Provenance: Commissioned by Benedetto Guardi in 1489 as an altarpiece for the Cistercian church of the Cestello, Florence. Aquired by the Uffizi Gallery in 1872.

This altarpiece of the Annunciation was designed for a side chapel in the Church of the Cestello. It is a unique altarpiece portrayal of the popular scene in the Quattrocento. It is not set in a loggia as was the convention of the time, but instead is set in an enclosed interior space with a doorway onto a small enclosed garden, the *hortus conclusus* of the Virgin, and there is a landscape scene conveyed in the background.

The representation employs rigid geometric perspective, which counterbalances the elegant gestures of the angel and Mary and the elaborate folds of their drapery. Gabriel, on the left, genuflects before the Virgin who has been reading her Book of Hours. She responds to his appearance with a hand gesture that in fifteenth-century Florence illustrated a greeting. Simultaneously, she conveys her character traits of humility and submission, in response to his message, as well as of grace, in her bodily movement. The panel is beautifully painted and in its simplicity it still manages to portray intricate details such as the transparent outer wrap of Gabriel, and the Virgin's transparent, gold-bordered veil. The interior structure is painted a drab gray that serves to accentuate the glowing light of the Virgin and Gabriel, as well as of the outer world as seen through the doorway beyond the garden.

Botticelli included an inscription of both Gabriel's message, "The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee and the power of the Most High shall overshadow thee" and Mary's reply, "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done to me according to thy word", on the frame.

Exhibited: Church of the Cestello, Santa Maria Maddalena dei Pazzi, Florence.

Literature: B. Berenson, Italian Pictures of the Renaissance: Florentine School, London, 1963, pp. 33-39; L. Berti, A. Petrioli Tofani, C. Caneva, The Uffizi, London, 1997, p. 50; R. Lightbown, Sandro Botticelli: Life and Work, London, 1989, pp. 194-198, pl. 68; N. Pons, Botticelli, Milan, 1989, PP. 74-75, cat. 74; G. Prampolini, L'Annunciazione Nei Pittori Primitivi Italiani, Milan, 1939, p. 84.

Cat. 14. Sandro Botticelli, *The Cestello Annunciation*, c.1489, tempera on wood, 150 x 156 cm, Florence, Uffizi Gallery, no. 1608.

Glossary

altarpiece: a complement to an altar in the form of a painted panel(s), sculpture, or tabernacle

baldacchino: a canopy

baptism: Catholic rite, which consists of putting water over the head of a person as a symbol of purification

baptistry: a chamber or independent building reserved for the baptism ceremony

book of hours: a private devotional book that contains prayers for different times of the day

cassoni: chests popular in fifteenth century Florence; *cassoni da nozze* : wedding chests

choir: the area near the high altar in a church reserved for singers and clergymen/women; or the group of singers and clergymen/women

choir screen: the architectural device that serves to separate the choir from the altar and nave

coat of arms: the personal emblem of a family

diptych: two panels hinged together to open and close

entablature: the horizontal portions of the portico structure, which rest on the columns

eucharist: Catholic celebration of Holy Communion, the practice of symbolically turning bread and wine into Christ's body and blood

fresco: pigments painted onto wet lime plaster

frontispiece: the front page of a book or manuscript

funerary stele: a slab of stone with a commemorative relief or inscription carved into it

genuflect: to bend one knee to the floor in Christian worship

gold leaf: very fine, delicate sheets of gold used to add details and gold ground to manuscripts and panels

gradual: a choir song book, 'choir book'

missal: book of the Catholic mass

narrative: an illustrated chronicle or account of a series of events

loggia: a columned outdoor porch

nave: the main space of a church, space that leads to the high altar

oil: a paint mixture of pigments with oils such as linseed, walnut and poppy to assist in the drying process

parchment: animal skin treated, and used to write on

pilaster: a flat decorative element conveyed to recall classical columns

pinnacle: an ornamental tower used in the frame of Gothic altarpieces

portico: the columned structural portion of the porch

predella: the base of an altarpiece, popularly divided into five illustrated panels in fifteenth-century Florence

sarcophagus: a stone coffin

shrine: designated sacred place or object

single-point perspective: a representation of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional surface incorporating one focal point

song of songs: biblical material of the New Testament attributed to King Solomon

spalliera: an elevated panel attached to the back of a chest in fifteenth-century Florence

tabernacle: a niche or container that houses a holy image, the relics of a saint, or the bread and wine of the Eucharist

tavola quadrata: the rectangular single-paneled altarpiece of fifteenth century Florence

tempera: a paint mixture of pigments with a binding agent commonly an egg yolk in Renaissance Italy

tin-glazed terracotta: clay fired once and then coated with a glaze solution containing tin particles, clay, antimony and other minerals and compounds and fired again

trompe l'oeil: an illustrated image created to trick the eye into thinking it is a tangible object or an authentic view

ultramarine: a precious rich blue pigment derived from crushed lapis lazuli

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