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Holy (Mis)conceptions: Late Medieval Depictions of the Visitation Featuring the Occupied Womb and their Female Monastic Audience

2 Volumes
Volume 1 of 2

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Abstract

Images of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Saint Elizabeth in which the *in utero* children are depicted as visible within or outside their mothers' wombs appeared in devotional artworks of Central Europe since the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Research so far has mainly investigated those representations in terms of their iconography and its development from their Byzantine sources to the late medieval period. This thesis seeks to contextualize depictions of the occupied womb within scenes of the Visitation in relationship to one of their most significant contemporary audiences; that is, cloistered women of what is modern-day Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Czechia.

This thesis is the first study to examine these objects predominantly through the lens of their female monastic audience and its use of and response to them. This study combines text-image study and close visual analysis of objects such as panel paintings, sculptures, textiles, and illuminated manuscripts with socio-historical and material approaches to investigate how late medieval nuns in German-speaking areas utilized representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb in their liturgical and para-liturgical practices, private devotion as well as mystical and visionary experiences. Developments in Christian doctrine, artistic tradition, and female monasticism are discussed in order to create a framework in which to explain why images of the occupied womb found such resonance with the religious practices of cloistered women. Both narrative and non-narrative representations of the Visitation are investigated alongside other types of devotional objects, including images of the Holy Kinship, *Maria gravida*, and Christ Child dolls and cribs; in order to place them within the broader context of artwork commissioned by or created within late medieval nunneries. This thesis also newly analyses these objects as direct responses to the social realities of life in the cross-generational kin group of a medieval convent. Actively building on medieval understanding of personal and communal femininity, the female body, and monastic enclosure, this multi-faceted study ultimately demonstrates the significance of depictions of the occupied womb as directly responding to and facilitating gendered piety.

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Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my family. I am immensely grateful to my parents, Anna and Mirosław, for their unwavering support and understanding. To my grandparents, Maria and Józef, in loving memory.

Author's Declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Wiktoria Anna Muryn

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Fig. 79 The Visitation, from an antependium with scenes from the Life of the Virgin. Freiburg im Breisgau, c. 1400. Wool. 89.5/95 x 212cm (shorter on the right-hand side). Augustinermuseum, Freiburg im Breisgau, 11513. Photo: Alex Killian/Städtische Museen Freiburg Online Sammlung.

Fig. 80 Antependium with scenes from the Life of the Virgin. Freiburg im Breisgau, c. 1400. Wool. 89.5/95 x 212cm (shorter on the right-hand side). Augustinermuseum, Freiburg im Breisgau, 11513. Photo: Alex Killian/Städtische Museen Freiburg Online Sammlung.

Fig. 81 Panel from an altarpiece with the Visitation. Middle Rheinish or Westfahlian, 1405-1414. Tempera on panel. 71 x 59cm. Museum Catharijneconvent, Utrecht, ABM s25.2. Photo: Museum Catharijneconvent/ Ruben de Heer.

Fig. 82 Master of the Lichtenthal Altar Wings – Death of Mary and the Visitation (panel from the high altar of the Life of Mary). Baden-Württemberg, 1489. Tempera and oil on pine. 22.5 x 14.2cm. Staatliche Kunsthalle, Karlsruhe, 806b. Photo: Staatliche Kunsthalle.

Fig. 83 Master of the Carrying of the Cross from Vyšší Brod – The Visitation. Český Krumlov (South Bohemia), c. 1440. Tempera on canvas-covered limewood. 100.3 x 71cm. National Gallery, Prague, DO 4101. Photo: National Gallery, Prague.

Fig. 84 Jakob and/or Hans Strüb – The Visitation, from a fourteen-panel Life of Mary altarpiece. Sigmaringen, Swabia, c. 1505. Oil and gold on panel. 80 x 54.7cm. Museo Nacional Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid, 382 (1929.21). Photo: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza.

Fig. 85 Master of Kirchheim – wings of the Holy Kinship altar from St Annaskapelle, Kloster Mariä Himmelfahrt. Nördlingen (?), c. 1500-02. Oil on pine. 107 x 45cm. Germanisches Museum, Nuremberg, GM 249 a&b, GM 250 a&b. On loan from the Alte Pinakothek, Munich. Photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

Fig. 86 The Holy Kinship, central panel from the Ortenberg Altar. Mainz, c. 1430. Tempera and gilding on canvas-covered pine. 100.5 x 162.5cm. Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, GK 4. Photo: Wolfgang Fuhrmannek/Hessisches Landesmuseum.

Fig. 87 Antependium with a scene of the Holy Kinship. Middle Rhenish, c.1475-1500. Linen, wool, metal thread. 76 x 183cm. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, BK-NM-1998. Photo: Rijskmuseum.

Fig. 88 Liège workshop – crib of the infant Christ. Liège, Belgium, early 15th century. Partially gilt silver, embossed and cast. 12.5 x 11.5 x 8cm. Musèee des Arts Anciens, Namur, Belgium, B0054. Photo: Annette LeZotte, “Cradling Power: Female Devotions and the Early Netherlandish Jesueaux,” in *Push Me, Pull You,* vol. 2: *Physical and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), Fig. 3.2.

Fig. 89 A nun and a laywoman as supplicants, from the Wonnental Gradual, fol. 22v. Breisgau, c. 1340-50. Tempera on vellum. 46 x 35.5cm (folio). Badische Landesbibliothek, Karlsruhe, Ms. UH 1. Photo: Badische Landesbibliothek.

Fig. 90 Švamberk Visitation. South Bohemia, after 1450. Tempera on canvas-covered limewood. 57.5 x 57.5cm. National Gallery, Prague, O 673. Photo: National Gallery, Prague.

Fig. 91 Madonna and Child. Krumlov, South Bohemia, after 1450. Tempera on parchment-covered limewood. 103 x 78cm. National Gallery, Prague, O 698. Photo: National Gallery, Prague.

Fig. 92 Visitation panel from an altar of the Life of Mary. Upper Swabia or Augsburg, c. 1410-30. Oil on pine. 54 x 31cm. Museum Benediktinerabtei Ottobeuren, Ottobeuren. Photo: Bildindex der Kunst & Architektur - Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Fig. 93 Spiritual mother and daughter, from *Gespräch einer geistlichen Mutter und Tochter über 17 theologische Fragen*, fol. 8v/9. Swabia, possibly Medingen bei Dillingen/Donau, late 15th century. Colour washes on parchment stitched onto paper. 10.5 x 7.5cm (folio). Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, CGM 862. Photo: Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, *Krone Und Schleier: Kunst Aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (Munich: Hirmes Verlag, 2005), [Kat. 405].

Fig. 94 Nun instructing a girl (detail of the Guidonian hand), from *Expositio hymnorum. Hymnar. Grammaticalia. Musicalia*, fol. 200v. Kloster Ebstorf, c. 1480. Ink and colour washes on parchment. 22 x 16cm (folio). Kloster Ebstorf, Germany, HS V 3. Photo: Kloster Ebstorf/Julie Hotchin, "Emotions and the Ritual of a Nun's Coronation in Late Medieval Germany," in *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe, 1200-1920: Family, State and Church*, ed. Merridee L. Bailey and Katie Barclay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), Fig. 9.2.

Fig. 95 Tapestry with scenes of the Passion, based on a design by Paul Lautensack (?). Dominican nunnery Heilig Grab in Bamberg, c. 1495. Wool. 400 x 320cm. Diözesianmuseum, Bamberg. Photo: Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, *Krone Und Schleier: Kunst Aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (Munich: Hirmes Verlag, 2005), [Kat. 257].

Fig. 96 Two Dominican nuns working at the loom – detail from the lower border of the tapestry with scenes of the Passion, based on a design by Paul Lautensack (?). Dominican nunnery Heilig Grab in Bamberg, c. 1495. Wool. 400 x 320cm. Diözesianmuseum, Bamberg. Photo: Deutsche Inschriften Online, "Die Textilien Inschriften der Stadt Bamberg. 4. Die Inschriftenträger bzw. Inchriftenarten," Abbildung 1.

Fig. 97 Johannes Beyer - *Oblatio* of a novice, from a processional of Kloster St Marienstern, fol. 59v. Sankt Marienstern, 1519. Ink and colour washes on parchment. 7.5 x 5cm (folio). Klosterbibliothek St Marienstern, Panschwitz-Kuckau, Ms. Oct. 1. Photo: Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, *Krone Und Schleier: Kunst Aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (Munich: Hirmes Verlag, 2005), [Kat. 333].

Fig. 98 Dominican nun with a speech scroll reading "*Gloria tibi domine*" – detail from an antependium with four scenes from the Life the Virgin. Switzerland, c. 1480. Wool, silk, linen. 94 x 260cm. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 46.46. Photo: The Burrell Collection.

Fig. 99 Antependium with four scenes from the Life the Virgin. Switzerland, c. 1480. Wool, silk, linen. 94 x 260cm. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 46.46. Photo: The Burrell Collection.

Fig. 100 Nativity of John the Baptist, from an antiphonary (summer part) from the Dominican convent of Paradies bei Soest, fol. 256r. Rhineland, 14th century. Tempera and gilding on parchment. 41.5 x 30cm (folio). Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Düsseldorf, MS-D-9. Photo: Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek, Düsseldorf.

Fig. 101 Fragment from a wing of a retable, possibly from the nunnery of St Clare in Nuremberg. Nuremberg, c. 1350-60. Tempera on panel. 40 x 27cm. Private collection, United Kingdom. Photo: Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, *Krone Und Schleier: Kunst Aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (Munich: Hirmes Verlag, 2005), [Kat. 459].

Fig. 102 Infant Christ. Mechelen, Flanders, c. 1500. Wood, polychromy, silk, velvet, coral, pearl. H. 32cm (with plinth). Staatliches Museum, Schwerin, Pl. 600. Photo: Staatliches Museum Schwerin/H. Maertens.

Fig. 103 Christ Child doll. Belgian, 15th century. Wood with traces of polychromy. Former Benedictine Convent, Preetz. Photo: Bildindex der Kunst & Architektur - Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Fig. 104 Relic shrine containing a figure of the infant Christ. Lost in WWII. Photo: Jeffrey Hamburger, "Am Anfang war das Bild: Kunst und Frauenspiritualität im Spätmittelalter," in *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.-26. Febr. 1999,* ed. Falk Eisermann, Eva Schlotheuber, and Volker Honemann (Leiden: Brill, 2004), Abb. 5.

Fig. 105 Christ Child doll and bedding from a Nativity group. Unknown, 15th century. Wood with traces of polychromy, fabric, metal thread, pearls, and beads. Former Benedictine Convent, Preetz. Photo: Labor RDK (Reallexikon zur Deutschen Kunstgeschichte).

Fig. 106 Nativity scene with removable Christ Child and bedding. Unknown, 15th century. Wood with traces of polychromy. Former Benedictine Convent, Preetz. Photo: Bildindex der Kunst & Architektur - Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Fig. 107 Painted copy of the Bogenberg Madonna, based on an engraving. Germany or Austria, early 18th century. Oil on canvas attached to wooden panel. 22.6 x 15.1cm. Diocesan Museum, St Pölten, Austria. Photo: University of Cambridge, "Making Visible Embryos" online exhibition.

Fig. 108 Bogenberg Madonna on the high altar of the pilgrimage church of the Assumption of the Virgin. Bavarian, 13th-14th century. Sandstone with polychromy. Pilgrimage church Mariä Himmelfahrt, Bogen, Germany. Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

Fig. 109 Mary and Elizabeth from a Visitation group. Swabian, c. 1350-60. Poplar wood. H: 166cm. Formerly Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg, Pl.O.2018 & 2019. Now destroyed. Photo: Bildindex der Kunst & Architektur - Bildarchiv Foto Marburg.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Map of original locations of objects discussed in this thesis associated with women's monastic houses in Germany, Switzerland, and Bohemia.

Appendix 2 - Transcription of the Office of the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Seligenthal Antiphonary (BSB Clm 23046 fol. 1 – 40).

Introduction

The medieval body was a strange creature. Predating the advent of dissection as the foundation of anatomical practice, manuscripts dating from the early and High Middle Ages depict the interiors of human bodies as chasms filled with abstracted lines and shapes, the subjects of the illustrations either unaware, or perhaps unconcerned with, the ongoing rupture of their flesh **(Fig. 1)**. Whether intentionally stylised for emphasis on qualities and functions of the particular organs, or simplified due to the lack of practical knowledge, the images are striking in their decorative richness, calling to mind the intricate detail of stained glass or the soaring arches of Gothic vaulting. Holy bodies, although occupying a separate sphere firmly delineated from the realm of profane flesh, were not straightforward in their significance, either. Seemingly impenetrable and incorruptible, they still did not escape the curious, voyeuristic gaze of the devout crowding in churches and processions to catch a glimpse of sacred anatomies. Relics divided and multiplied into mere specks of dust yet calling to mind the heavenly splendour of the saints; a Shrine Madonna split in half, revealing her inner world to the onlookers; the nude body of Christ, writhing in agony, blood weeping from his wounds again and again on the ubiquitous *crucifixi dolorosi* – these all evoke an uneasy tension between the elusive *sanctum* and the overabundant, fleshy *profanum*. The desire to not just look, but to behold, to touch the sacred body with one’s eyes, to unravel its holy mystery through the power of sight lingers uneasily even today, with the holy bodies removed from churches and shrines; their protective half-darkness replaced by the bright light of museum displays.

Medical discoveries and inventions of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, however, firmly did away with this captivating strangeness, effectively undoing the secrets of the human body. No longer puzzled by the likes of travelling wombs and cephalophore saints, many of us are intimately aware of the flesh-and-blood detail of our insides, having witnessed it depicted in x-rays of broken bones and aching wisdom teeth; MRI scans and CT imaging revealing the endlessly fascinating mess inside us now a routine part of medical examination. For many mothers and mothers-to-be today, it is near impossible to think of childbearing without envisioning the ultrasound images of the developing foetus.

The first clinical use of ultrasound can be attributed to Ian Donald, Professor Regius of Midwifery at the University of Glasgow, who began to explore the practical use of obstetric ultrasound in the 1950s. This pioneering research into diagnostic use of ultrasound in obstetrics and gynaecology culminated in the development of the first ever contact compound sector scanner, made possible through collaboration with John MacVicar, a registrar and obstetrician in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynaecology at the Western Infirmary, and Tom Brown, an industrial engineer who worked for Kelvin & Hughes Scientific Instrument Company. The project led to publication of an article titled “Investigation of Abdominal Masses by Pulsed Ultrasound,” which appeared in *The Lancet* in June 1958.[1] The article contained the first ever published photograph of a living foetus inside its mother’s womb **(Fig. 2).**

Beyond its medical significance, the ultrasound image soon began to stand at the centre of religious and moral debate. Donald’s own opposition to abortion and medical intervention in embryos, as well as his campaigning against the 1967 Abortion Act, elevated the grainy black-and-grey images beyond their medical significance. Feminist scholar Peggy Phelan has observed that ultimately, the twentieth-century efforts to make the foetus visible rendered “reproductive visibility” as something which is independent of the woman’s body, displacing the previously physically enclosed sphere of pregnancy into a publicly displayed spectacle. Foetal imagery which diminishes the significance of the maternal body came to corresponds with the disappearance of women’s rights and autonomy, since the modern-day imaging technologies literally crop the mother – her body, but also her life and reasoning - out of the picture. As a result, the medical imaging process largely presents female bodies as places for the normatively male ‘other’ to occupy and to behold.[2] The foetal image as we know it thus exists outwith the mere boundaries of anatomical knowledge, transgressing into the spheres of moral ideology and political theatre, becoming

[1] Ian Donald, John Macvicar, and Thomas Graham Brown, "Investigation of Abdominal Masses by Pulsed Ultrasound," *The Lancet* 271, no. 7032 (1958): 1188–1195.

[2] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 132–34; Rosalind P. Petchesky, "Fetal Images: The Power of Visual Culture in the Politics of Reproduction," *Feminist Studies* 13, no. 2 (1987): 263–92. For a recent study of modern misogyny in relation to pregnancy and abortion, see Kate Manne, *Down Girl: The Logic of Misogyny* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 91-99.

a sign that is "powerfully implicated in the political economy of capitalism and patriarchy."[3]

Scottish interest in foetal imagery pre-dates Ian Donald's invention by nearly two centuries. The Special Collections of the University of Glasgow Library contain extensive holdings of eighteenth-century medical texts, including multiple editions of William Hunter's *The Anatomy of the Gravid Uterus Exhibited in Figures*, first published in 1774. Despite the atlas being marketed as a luxury collector's item rather than a practical manual for midwifery or dissection (the book, in elephant folio, measures approximately 62 x 45 centimetres); its publication and widespread popularity effectively wrenched a semi-private female ritual of birthing out of its homely confines and brought it into the full light of medical science, pathologising childbirth in an unprecedented way. The text of *The Anatomy* is illustrated with thirty-four leaves of engraved plates, some of them designed by the Dutch artist Jan von Rymsdyk, the most striking of which perhaps is Plate VI **(Fig. 3)**, which depicts a section of a dissected pregnant woman, her body truncated at the thighs and the fully developed deceased child still *in utero*. The plate is one of the three illustrations based on life-sized plaster casts held by The Hunterian Collection at the University of Glasgow.[4]

The series of eleven casts depicts the pregnant uterus, with the three casts corresponding to Plates I, IV, and VI of *The Anatomy* showing the progressive stages of dissection of the same specimen. When displayed, the realistic colouring of ten of the casts makes for a morbid scene. Mounted on black wooden stands, some show only the abdomen, pelvis, perineum, and thighs; others put the full torso on display. Undeniable feat of scientific depiction that they are, it is hard to look at them without thinking of slaughter. Unlike the

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[3] Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, 133.

[4] Five of the eleven plaster casts were the primary focus of the project *Gravid Uteri: Meaning and Making* – a collaboration between the Technical Art History Group at the University of Glasgow and The Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery. Technical examination and conservation of the casts constituted a key element of a wider enquiry into their creation and significance, which contributed to the larger process of the museum's rethinking and expanding its understanding of the Hunter collections in time for the Tercentenary Exhibition on William Hunter (Autumn 2018). University of Glasgow Technical Art History Group, *Gravid Uteri* [Accessed March 2021]. https://technicalarthistory.gla.ac.uk/gravid-uteri/. See also N. A. McCulloch, D. Russell, & S. W. McDonald, "William Hunter's Casts of the Gravid Uterus at the University of Glasgow," *Clinical Anatomy* 14, no. 3 (2001): 210–217.

abstracted images of medieval ruptured bodies, which deny the graphic reality of the flesh through their schematic pictorial language **(Fig. 1)**; or even Renaissance and Baroque anatomical illustrations, which despite their growing interest in naturalism still generally represent human figures as whole and apparently alive; the casts render their female subjects as undeniably and irreversibly dead.

Rejecting the blissful unawareness of the earlier anatomical models, Hunter's book exploited a pictorial language of stylistic naturalism to explore the intricacies of female anatomy as observed in the process of dissection. While the primary concern of the images is clearly a faithful representation of the pregnant female cadaver, they are also heavily aestheticized. The plates based on Rymsdysk's drawings in particular employ a highly foreshortened viewpoint that effectively squeezes the dismembered body into a tightly constricted representational space, creating a visual tension between the strained and stretched body parts expanding toward the viewer and the two-dimensional space of the folio; the harsh light effects and intricate shading magnifying the textures of the flesh and rendering it available in nearly tactile terms **(Fig. 3)**. In their seemingly relentless pursuit of objectivity, the images strip their subjects of any humanity, calling to mind a slab of meat on the butcher's block, rather than the woman that it used to be. Walking the thin line between anatomical detail and stylistic exaggeration, the engravings constitute an immediate, and perhaps unsettling encounter, drawing their viewer into an uneasy play of fascination and revulsion.

Although Hunter's medical texts, scientific instruments, and widely ranging collections are perhaps amongst the most recognized contributions to the history of anatomy and obstetrics to be found in Scotland today, Scottish interest in the visible interior of the pregnant body can be seen throughout collections of works produced centuries earlier. The Glasgow Museums' Burrell Collection includes a series of twelve stained glass panels of unknown provenance produced in Lower Saxony around 1400.[5] One of the twelve panels, which contain representations of

[5] The Burrell Collection was amassed by the shipping magnate Sir William Burrell (1861-1958) and bequeathed to the city of Glasgow in 1944. It consists of almost 9.000 objects, including a world-class collection of medieval art representing most major artistic media, including painting, sculpture, stained glass, and tapestry; produced primarily in England, France, Germany, and

various episodes from the Lives of Christ and the Virgin, depicts a scene of the Visitation **(Fig. 4)**. The Visitation is the visit of Mary to her older cousin Elizabeth as recorded in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:39–56). According to the Gospel, Mary left Nazareth immediately after the Annunciation and went "into the hill country...into a city of Judah" (Luke 1:39) to stay with her relative Elizabeth, who at that time was miraculously pregnant with John the Baptist.[6] The encounter begins with Mary's salutation to Elizabeth. Before the older woman replies, John becomes aware of the presence of Christ, and leaps for joy inside his mother's womb as he is filled with divine grace. Elizabeth returns the greeting, proclaiming Mary as blessed amongst women. In response to Elizabeth, Mary proclaims the *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46–55). Thus, the purpose of the visit is to bring divine grace to both Elizabeth and her *in utero* child, and to confirm the miracle of the Annunciation, framing Elizabeth as a prophetess and Mary as mediator between God and humankind.

At first glance, the Burrell Visitation panel might appear to be a perfectly conventional late Gothic artistic response to the Gospels account. The Virgin Mary and Elizabeth stand in an embrace against a crimson background, safely enclosed underneath an architectural canopy, their faces graced with serene smiles. Elizabeth's hand rests tenderly above Mary's breast as she utters the words depicted on a speech scroll: "Ich bin des nicht gewert, das du komm [st zu mir]," conventionally corresponding to the salutation recorded in the Gospel of Luke: "And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" (Luke 1:43). The gesture, however, alongside the curve of the scroll and the repetition of vibrant green colouring in Mary's halo and her robe guides the viewer's eye to an unusual detail. Positioned in the centre of Mary's chest and framed by an outline of lead is a niche, in which a bust-length figure stands with

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the Low Countries. "The Burrell Collection – Glasgow Life," [Accessed March 2021]. https://www.glasgowlife.org.uk/museums/venues/the-burrell-collection

[6] "[39] And Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. [40] And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. [41] And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: [42] And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. [43] And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord." *Vulgate. The Holy Bible in Latin Language with Douay-Rheims English Translation, The Gospel According to Luke - Chapter 1* [Accessed March 2021]. http://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_1.htm

hands clasped in prayer. Upon a close viewing, a similar homunculus – a miniature, fully-formed human - can be seen apparently floating above Elizabeth's chest, similarly enclosed in a frame of black lead.

The artworks of the later Middle Ages do not present a uniform approach in depicting the Visitation. Objects produced between the eleventh and early sixteenth centuries may portray the scene, which commonly appears as a part of the cycles of the Life of the Virgin and the Life of Christ, or less frequently within the Life of John the Baptist, with both Mary and Elizabeth either visibly pregnant, or not appearing explicitly pregnant at all. In this case, artworks can employ visual signposts such as gesture and costume to direct their audience towards the relevant episode from the Gospels. By the 1430s in particular, loosened front- and side-laces of women's clothing were a common device used as a visual indicator of pregnancy.[7] Many representations of the Visitation do not provide any visual cues as to the specific state both women are in, relying fully on their viewers' knowledge of the biblical narrative to understand the significance of the depiction. The distinct iconographic type represented by the Burrell Visitation panel is what will be referred to throughout this thesis as the Visitation featuring the "occupied womb." This particular iconographic type depicts either one, or more commonly both holy women with their *in utero* children superimposed over their bodies, or in case of sculpture, placed in carved niches, making visible the interior of the womb. Although this type of depiction is relatively uncommon, there is a variety of modes of representation it can employ. The infants Christ and John the Baptist can be pictured either in full- or half-length, bearing a halo or appearing inside of one, positioned directly over their respective mothers' bodies or seemingly floating beside them.

Iconography of the occupied womb appears across a range of media, including manuscript illumination, panel painting, sculpture, stained glass, and tapestry, produced most commonly in the modern-day German-speaking areas, as well as in Czechia, between the thirteenth and sixteenth centuries. Although the exact provenance of many of the objects remains unknown, a number of them were owned by female monastic orders, including houses of Dominicans, Cistercians,

[7] For discussion of "maternity laces" in Northern European 15th century art, see Penny Howell Jolly, "Rogier van der Weyden's "Pregnant" Magdalene: On the Rhetoric of Dress in the "Descent from the Cross"," *Studies in Iconography* 28 (2007): 217-29.

Benedictines, Poor Clares, Premonstratensians, and Augustinian Canonesses **(see Appendix 1)**. The gaps in provenance history of the objects discussed in this thesis are largely caused by dispersion of monastic holdings in the process of secularisation of Church properties during the period of German mediatisation, the major territorial restructuring that took place between 1803 and 1815 in Germany and the surrounding regions by means of mass annexation and secularisation of a large number of Imperial Estates. During that period, most ecclesiastical principalities and other minor self-ruling entities of the Holy Roman Empire lost their independent status and were absorbed into the remaining states. The vast majority of land and property owned by the Church was transferred to civic ownership and use, resulting in closure of monasteries and dispersions of their valuables, and thus the exact provenance of many of the objects discussed in this thesis remains unknown.[8]

The principal objective of this thesis is, however, to develop an understanding of the functioning of representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb in the female monastic context of late medieval Germany. Although the works of art discussed in this thesis have been owned by nunneries of different orders, the principal aim of this study is to develop an interpretative framework relevant to the cloistered female audience in general. As Jo Ann McNamara has noted, nuns did not enjoy the refinement of the monastic vocation available to monks, and the main differences in convent life and devotional, liturgical, and para-liturgical practices are to be found between cloistered men and women, rather than between women of different orders.[9] While the mendicant Franciscans, learned Dominicans, or pastoral Augustinian Canons had distinct conceptions of their vocation, the stricter enforcement of enclosure largely prevented nuns of any order from pursuing those active parts of monastic life. Although the different orders allowed varying degrees of authority to their female members, the daily lives of nuns of all orders were rather similar, to the degree that a number of English houses in particular seem to have been

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[8] For history of the Holy Roman Empire leading up to the Final Recess of the Imperial Deputation of 1803 (the Imperial law which brought about the territorial restructuring of the Empire), see Joachim Whaley, *Germany and the Holy Roman Empire*, Volume II: *The Peace of Westphalia to the Dissolution of the Reich, 1648-1806* (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[9] Jo Ann McNamara, *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns Through Two Millenia* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1996), 317.

uncertain as to which order they belonged.[10] Therefore, as Sarah Salih has argued, the various orders themselves are not the primary lens through which female monasticism should be discussed.[11] Rather, as division into orders is largely overwritten by gender, this thesis will employ gender as its primary mode of inquiry. By investigating the devotional significance occupied womb iconography alongside the socio-cultural circumstances of its production, this project will attempt to connect the late medieval artworks to development of devotional and para-liturgical practices and establish their importance as expressive of relationships between devotional objects and female viewers in monastic contexts.

Chapter 1 will provide a literature review corresponding to the main themes discussed in this thesis, beginning with an overview of scholarship related strictly to the subject of Visitation imagery featuring the occupied womb and expanding the discussion to studies discussing Visitation imagery in general, as well as the key publications concerned with the contextualizing topics of medieval women's motherhood, devotion and mysticism, monasticism and use of devotional objects. The chapter will also interrogate the terms "foetus type" and "occupied womb" as they relate to iconographical descriptions of the Visitation, to assess their accuracy within the context of medieval theology and medicine.

Following a brief investigation into literacy of cloistered women and their knowledge of textual sources, Chapter 2 will investigate the texts which could have informed the iconography and gendered reception of depictions of the occupied womb. By examining sources including patristic exegesis, infancy apocrypha, and medieval biblical paraphrase the chapter will attempt to discover how texts could have informed women's engagement with representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb.

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[10] Penelope D. Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession: Religious Women in Medieval France* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5; Sally Thompson, *Women Religious: The Founding of English Nunneries After the Norman Conquest* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 110.

[11] Sarah Salih, *Versions of Virginity in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2001), 119.

Chapter 3 will aim to connect occupied womb imagery to the pictorial and dogmatic developments which impacted its emergence, appearance, and reception, framed within the larger context of emerging of Christological and Marian imagery. The chapter will provide a brief overview of the development of the iconography of the occupied womb from the Byzantine imagery of the *Theotokos* and the possible cause for its emergence in Germany towards the end of the thirteenth century. Because the majority of Visitation representations featuring the occupied womb owned by medieval cloistered are found in Dominican houses, the chapter will also investigate Dominican preaching and its connections to monastic development and reception of this emerging iconography.

The analysis conducted in Chapter 4 will further contextualise the imagery of the occupied womb within the late medieval landscape of Eucharistic and Marian devotion. The chapter will discuss a range of pictorial genres related to Eucharistic devotion as it was practiced by female monastic communities in order to establish how imagery of the occupied womb would have been utilised in their contemplative and para-liturgical practices. Secondly, the Incarnational significance of the imagery will be discussed, with particular reference to the figure of Saint Elizabeth as a devotional model for cloistered women and the spiritual significance of gaze, vision, and material qualities of devotional objects within the mechanics of an encounter with representations of the occupied womb.

Finally, Chapter 5 will investigate Visitation imagery in relation to the gendered, cross-generational, and communal character of female monastic life, looking to discover how the social relationships within women's communities could have impacted interaction with imagery which has at its core the themes of family, domesticity, and mutual support. The chapter will discuss Visitation imagery in the context of the overlap between private and public devotional practices to explore how images of the occupied womb bridged the two spheres of the cloistered experience.

Chapter 1. State of scholarship

Little research exists on the topic of imagery of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb. Although photographs of various medieval objects depicting Mary and Elizabeth alongside minuscule, floating infants can occasionally be found on the pages of art historical publications, in-depth enquiries into the significance of the motif remain few and far between. The first section of this chapter will provide a survey of literature directly related to the topic of imagery of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, and Visitation imagery and its female audience in general. This section will also include a broad overview of key scholarship on related themes, including medieval motherhood, monasticism, and devotional objects, drawing on interdisciplinary methods in order to fully contextualize the key research questions constituting the body of this thesis. In the second part of the chapter, the applicability of the terms "foetus type" and "occupied womb" will be assessed in relation to the outlined literature and to the wider context of medieval theology and medicine. The resulting analysis will thus aim to summarise the current state of the vast range of scholarship constituting the foundations of this thesis and the terminology it employs, signalling the gaps in recent inquiry which this thesis will aim to respond to and providing an insight into the methodological framework of this response.

1.1 Literature review

1.1.1 The Visitation – iconography and meaning

The article, "An Iconographic Note on Altdorfer's Visitation in the Cleveland Museum of Art" by Egon Verheyen (1964) is one of the earliest publications discussing the iconographic motif of *in utero* children in a depiction of the Visitation.[12] The author observes that the iconographic type of a Visitation panel attributed to Albrecht Altdorfer **(Fig. 5)** can be described, according to the Princeton Index of Medieval Art, as a "type foetus" Visitation, despite the fact that the "foetuses," as he writes, appear to be painted in front of, rather than

[12] Egon Verheyen, "An Iconographic Note on Altdorfer's Visitation in the Cleveland Museum of Art," *The Art Bulletin* 46, no. 4 (1964): 536–39.

directly inside their respective mothers' wombs.[13] Despite his initial qualms with the Princeton Index terminology, Verheyen does not provide any further insight into the contradiction between the term "type foetus" and what is actually depicted in the panel. The ensuing argument does not address the problem of dissonance between the consistently employed term "foetus" and the fully formed children depicted in the Altdorfer painting, casting doubt on the extent to which Verheyen appears to agree or disagree with the Princeton Index. Broadening the enquiry beyond the Altdorfer panel, and towards images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb in general, the author focuses on framing representations of the Visitation including *in utero* children as an *Andachtsbild* - a solitary meditative image, in which the "transparent wombs" reveal "joyful mysteries" to their viewers. The use of such a term in the context of this discussion is largely problematic, considering Verheyen's earlier insistence that the panel depicts the children superimposed over their mothers' wombs, rather than located directly in them, allowing a transparent view inside. Although the author asserts that the depictions of *in utero* children in later medieval art were not influenced by the contemporary medical texts, he describes the "transparent wombs" of the Altdorfer panel as an "anatomical anachronism," establishing a clear connection with anatomical imagery, revealing the complexity of source material, iconographic traditions and cultural circumstances influencing this particular type of Visitation imagery.[14]

Verheyen's use of the term *Andachtsbild* in relation to depictions of the Visitation appears problematic in the light of more recent scholarship, which has largely questioned the validity of the term. Jeffrey Hamburger in particular has noted that the neologism has been misused and overused, becoming largely misleading due to having been applied "to virtually any object that might have been used to stimulate devotional experience," rather than a small group of distinct iconographic types in fourteenth-century German sculpture it was

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13 At the time of Verheyen's study the Princeton Index of Medieval Art included twenty-two references to "fetus type" Visitation. As of March 2021, the Index contains subject entries for both "Visitation, Fetus Type," which includes references to four works of art, and "Visitation, Children Type," which includes references to three. The Index of Medieval Art at Princeton University, "Virgin Mary, Visitation, Fetus Type" [Accessed March 2021]. https://theindex.princeton.edu/s/view/ViewSubject.action?id=6ACC2155-74C3-4EEA-8B75-365092C7A1F9.

14 Verheyen, "An Iconographic Note," 537.

initially conceived to describe.[15] In addition to being imprecise, the term has also acquired pejorative meanings, becoming associated with images perceived to be of little artistic quality or value, pertaining more to the realms of ethnography or visual culture studies, rather than the history of art. The association between the *Andachtsbild* and affective piety has also led to *Andachtsbilder* being understood as frequently having been made for or by women, implicitly inscribing women's piety with such characteristics as lack of sophistication and over-emotionality. In particular, in the context of women's monasticism, the distinction between the *Andachtsbild* as a tool of private piety and the cult image, used in a communal setting such as liturgy, appears unfounded. As this thesis will demonstrate, late medieval nuns would have frequently used publicly displayed images in order to aid their private contemplative devotions, and in turn, their privately owned small-scale objects in communal practices. This thesis will therefore not use the term *Andachtsbild* in its enquiry into artworks made for or owned by nuns, opting to employ the term "devotional objects" instead.

Verheyen's initial observations on depictions of *in utero* infants within Visitation scenes were later developed by Hildegard Urner-Astholz. In an 1981 article, "Die Beiden Ungeborenen Kinder auf Darstellungen der Visitatio" ("Both of the Unborn Children in Depictions of the Visitation"), Urner-Astholz analyses the motif of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb based on the example of a series of wall paintings in the choir of the Burg church in the Swiss town of Stein-am-Rhein.[16] The author notes that in this particular example, the Visitation is included in the narrative cycle of the Life of John the Baptist, rather than the Life of Christ or Life of the Virgin, where it is found most frequently both in the case of wall painting and other media. However, despite this initial observation pointing towards an investigation into an anomaly within an already understudied pictorial tradition, Urner-Astholz follows by broadening her argument to the more typical examples, treating the Stein-am-Rhein cycle as a part of a larger iconographic phenomenon. In agreement with Verheyen, Urner-Astholz asserts that this particular type of Visitation imagery had been described

[15] Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 3.

[16] Hildegard Urner-Astholz, "Die Beiden Ungeborenen Kinder auf Darstellungen der Visitatio," *Zeitschrift für Schweizerische Archäologie und Kunstgeschichte* 38, no. 1 (1981): 29–58.

in the Princeton Index of Medieval Art as “type foetus” despite the depiction having little to do with medical accuracy. Her further discussion is, however, more consistent with this observation, consistently employing the term “children” rather than “foetuses.” The author further develops this argument by suggesting that despite the depictions of *in utero* children being largely “realistic,” the imagery is chiefly concerned with theological issues rather than an accurate representation of anatomy. Urner-Astholz posits that what is in fact represented in images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb are not children or foetuses as such, but rather an iconographic shorthand for the first episode of Christ’s earthly life and his intimate connection with Saint John as his precursor and the last of the prophets, which serves to bridge the gap between the Old and the New Testament.

A particular strength of Urner-Astholz’s discussion lies in its attempt to establish the first fully comprehensive catalogue of depictions of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb. While Verheyen’s earlier article is annotated with a list of images attached to the Princeton Index entry, the author’s contestation of the accuracy of the Index should necessitate an independent approach to the selection of images. Urner-Astholz proposes a selection of forty-four objects dating as far back as the year 900 CE, dividing them into three categories based on the location of the children in respect to their mothers’ bodies. The depictions of children are classified as: “extra-uterine” - located over the breast of the mother; “in-uterine” - located over the womb; and ultimately, as “floating” in front of the body. Upon closer inspection of the listed objects, however, the imposition of those divisions appears artificial, if not unnecessary, as the positioning of the children in the vast majority of the images remains deliberately vague. Nevertheless, the catalogue compiled by Urner-Astholz, descriptive rather than analytical as it is, provides a comprehensive database of key imagery, constituting a valuable tool for further research. Furthermore, the catalogue decisively confirms that this particular type of Visitation imagery is most commonly found in German-speaking regions, with ten of the objects originating in modern-day Bavaria, seven in Switzerland, and six in Austria, which corresponds to the geographical scope of this thesis.

Despite Urner-Astholz's attempt at establishing Visitation imagery featuring representations of *in utero* children as an independent pictorial tradition, the topic has continuously escaped scholarly attention until the publication of a 2007 article by Silke Tammen. The paper, "Das verborgene Sehen und die Anatomie des Heils - Einblicke in die Leiber Mariens und Elisabeths oder: Kindslagenbilder der besonderen Art" ("The Hidden Vision and the Anatomy of Salvation – Insights into the Bodies of Mary and Elizabeth or: Images of Embryos of a Particular Kind") (2007) focuses on a sandstone sculpture of the Visitation held by the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg **(Fig. 6 & 7).**[17] In her detailed investigation of this object, Tammen aims to settle the debate concerning naturalistic tendencies versus theology by building on the earlier research by Verheyen and Urner-Astholz. Both authors briefly mention the Nuremberg sculpture, which was once owned by the Benedictine nunnery Kloster Niedernburg in Passau, interpreting the contrast between the painted opening in Mary's body and the textured, "wormy" one in Elizabeth's as evidence of differentiation between the exceptional body of the pregnant virgin and the ordinary, bodily nature of Elizabeth's pregnancy.

Tammen newly introduces Gregor Martin Lechner's contrasting argument into this discussion. In his 1981 study, *Maria Gravida. Zum Schwangerschaftsmotiv in der Bildenden Kunst,* which remains the most detailed enquiry into iconography of Marian pregnancy published to this day, Lechner deals more broadly with the issues of theological and textual foundations for depictions of the Virgin's childbearing and its representations in artwork beyond the medieval period.[18] In his discussion of the Nuremberg Visitation group, Lechner cautions against the literal interpretation of Elizabeth's womb as filled with internal organs due to the lack of other such naturalistic representations in the given timeframe, even in the realm of medical illustration. Lechner's scepticism thus falls in line with the need for further comparative analysis of devotional and medical imagery signalled by the insufficient evidence provided by both Verheyen and Urner-Astholz.

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[17] Silke Tammen, "Das verborgene Sehen und die Anatomie des Heils - Einblicke in die Leiber Mariens und Elisabeths oder: Kindslagenbilder der besonderen Art," *Gießener Universitätsblätter* 40 (2007): 21–29.

[18] Gregor Martin Lechner, *Maria Gravida. Zum Schwangerschaftsmotiv in der Bildenden Kunst* (Regensburg: Schnell & Steiner, 1981).

Tammen continues the discussion by pointing towards the multitude of possible interpretations of Visitation imagery, which renders her the first scholar to attempt to contextualise the iconography in relation to its contemporary viewers. Although both Verheyen and Urner-Astholz make occasional references to the reception of images, Tammen is the first author to signal a concern with the acts of perceiving, interpreting, and constructing an aesthetic. Tammen questions Verheyen's reductive interpretation of the Visitation as an *Andachtsbild,* which framed the artworks as tools of affective piety, pointing solely in the direction of the sensual aspect of religious veneration. Instead, she introduces the problem of intellectual contemplation, relating the objects to both the experience of motherhood in monastic communities and theological commentaries on Mary's pregnancy. Brief as it is, Tammen's argument invites further research into the problem of reception of Visitation imagery by its predominantly female audiences, signalling a concern with the complex medieval ideas regarding vision, perception, and reception of images which this thesis will aim to investigate.

Simultaneously with the publication of Tammen's article Visitation imagery began to receive attention in the English-speaking realm. In a chapter titled, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts: The Exuberant Bodies of the Katharinenthal Visitation Group" Jacqueline E. Jung (2007) examines one of the earliest depictions of the Visitation (c. 1300) in which the womb is implied to be transparent, and its contents, to a degree, visible **(Fig. 8).**[19] Following Caroline Walker Bynum's earlier investigation, which links the Katharinental Visitation group, once owned by a Dominican nunnery, to a vision experienced by the mystic Gertrude of Helfta, Jung draws parallels between pregnancy motifs, spiritual vision and artistic techniques employing the use of rock crystal.[20] Unlike the German scholarship outlined above, which focuses chiefly on the iconographic significance of the objects, Jung establishes connections between the visual and the material, arguing for the centrality of the medium to the object's expression. Jung's observations on both the popularity and the

[19] Jacqueline E. Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts: The Exuberant Bodies of the Katharinenthal Visitation Group," in *History in the Comic Mode: Medieval Communities and the Matter of Person*, ed. Rachel Fulton and Bruce W. Holsinger (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 223–37.

[20] Caroline Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 198.

significance of the use of crystal embellishments in devotional objects of the time are representative of a larger trend in recent medievalist scholarship, which aims to approach artworks as material "things," focusing on haptic and spatial interaction between objects and their surrounding communities - a method which this thesis will also aim employ in its analysis of devotional artworks.[21]

Jung is one of the first scholars to link Visitation imagery to the concept of the female body as a vessel – an idea related to a variety of medieval objects including reliquary shrines, monstrances, and the so-called Shrine Madonna, later discussed extensively by Elina Gertsman (2015).[22] Jung's concern with the visionary experience in which cloistered women witness the visible contents of transparent holy bodies opens possibilities for further analysis of imagery of the occupied womb both in the context of women's self-perception and devotional practice, as well in terms of visual vocabulary and material qualities of objects which facilitate visionary interaction. Unlike the scholars mentioned above, Jung firmly places the iconography of the Visitation in the realm of the mystical rather than simply the visual, allowing for connections to be drawn between iconographic strategies, the materiality of artworks, and the mystical experience. This thesis intends to draw on this method of investigation, aiming to provide a complex interpretation of Visitation imagery within frameworks of interaction, devotional practice and emotional response signalled by Tammen and Jung, as opposed to the typological approach chiefly employed by Verheyen and Urner-Astholz.

Although its title may suggest an inquiry into the iconographic tradition of the occupied womb, representations of the Visitation featuring *in utero* infants receive only a brief mention in *Approaching Sacred Pregnancy. The Cult of the Visitation and Narrative Altarpieces in the Late Fifteenth-Century Florence* by

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[21] The issues of physical interaction in medieval art have been extensively addressed in Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand, eds., *Push Me, Pull You,* vol. 2: *Physical and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013).

[22] Elina Gertsman, *Worlds Within. Opening the Medieval Shrine Madonna* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015).

Ira Westergård (2007).[23] In spite of signalling the concern with pregnancy at the very inception of the discussion, the study is brief in its analysis of the social history of childbearing and motherhood, with a close investigation of the development of narrative altarpieces during the period of the Italian Renaissance standing at its forefront. Although the focus of Westergård's study lies south of the Alps, and representations of the occupied womb can be found predominantly in Northern Europe, an investigation into this mode of representation alongside the Florentine altarpieces could have yielded a more complex inquiry into the gendered reading of Visitation imagery. Moreover, the study would have benefitted from Visitation imagery being contextualised within the broader visual and textual discourses on pregnancy and motherhood in the era of the Renaissance, which received sustained scholarly attention from authors such as Christiane Klapisch-Zuber (1985), Jacqueline Marie Musacchio (1999), and Patricia Fortini Brown (2004).[24] A particular category of objects which comes to mind are the *deschi da parto* – "birth trays" commissioned to commemorate the birth of a child in late medieval and Early Modern Florence and Siena.[25] Examples of such objects have been linked to the patrons of Visitation altarpieces discussed by Westergård, and her discussion would have benefited from an inquiry into the significance of childbearing and associated rituals both as an iconographic motif, and a socio-cultural factor in artistic production within the wider landscape of fifteenth-century visual culture.

Despite those omissions, however, Westergård's study is of relevance to this thesis as it clearly contextualises images of the Visitation within late medieval and Early Modern Marian devotion, aiming to present a theological development of the cult of the Virgin and to connect it to contemporaneous liturgical practices. The most effective argument of the publication is its firm rejection of the widely disseminated claim that the rise of the cult of the Visitation was

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[23] Ira Westergård, *Approaching Sacred Pregnancy. The Cult of the Visitation and Narrative Altarpieces in the Late Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 2007).

[24] Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual in Renaissance Italy*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Jacqueline Marie Musacchio, *The Art and Ritual of Childbirth in Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1999); Patricia Fortini Brown, *Private Lives in Renaissance Venice: Art, Architecture, and the Family* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2004).

[25] For extensive discussion of birth trays, see Cecilia de Carli, *I Deschi da Parto: E la Pittura del Primo Rinascimento Toscano* (Turin: Allemandi, 1997).

associated with the Italian Franciscans. This attribution was first refuted in 1911 by Hieronymus Golubovich in the *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum*.[26] In his discussion of the General Chapter of the Franciscans in Pisa in 1263, Golubovich argues that the *Annales Minorum seu Trium Ordinum a S. Francisco Institutorum ad anno 1263* Vol. 15 ("The Annals of the Franciscans for the Year 1263") by the Irish Franciscan historian Luke Wadding (1588-1657) include repeated errors claiming that four new feasts began to be celebrated by the Order in 1263: the Visitation, the Conception of the Virgin, the Feast of Saint Anne, and the Feast of Saint Martha of Bethany. More recent scholarship broadly agrees that no references to any feast related to the Visitation are to be found in Franciscan service books before its general promulgation in 1389.[27] In order to provide an explanation for the Franciscan misattribution, Westergård posits a connection between the cult of the Visitation and the Immaculate Conception controversy that pitted the Franciscans against the Dominicans, presenting ample evidence highlighting the role of the feast in the lives of the members of the Order of Preachers. This development thus opens the framework for discussion of Visitation imagery in the context of its significance within Dominican communities, with a particular focus on the Dominican stance on the use of devotional images and the German Dominican mystical tradition.

Most recently, an iconographic study of medieval depictions of the Visitation has been conducted by Anne Marie Velu in *La Visitation dans l'art. Orient et Occident Ve- XVIe siècle* (2012).[28] Although Lechner's *Maria Gravida* (1981) is not cited as a source in the volume's bibliography, Velu appears to be employing a largely similar repertoire of images in her analysis. However, while the earlier study provides extensive, catalogue-style descriptions of the objects mentioned in-text, Velu's selection of images is described and contextualised extremely briefly. At least one of the objects referred to in Velu's study has been misidentified, signalling the need for a more careful engagement with this

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[26] Hieronymus Golubovich, "Statuta Liturgica seu Rubricae Breviarii Auctore divo Bonaventura in GLI. Capitulo Pisano An. 1263 Editae," in *Archivum Franciscanum Historicum* (Florence: Quaracchi Press, 1911), 65-66.

[27] R. W. Pfaff, *New Liturgical Feasts in Later Medieval England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 42; Anna Welch, *Liturgy, Books and Franciscan Identity in Medieval Umbria* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2016), 191.

[28] Anne Marie Velu, *La Visitation Dans l'art: Orient et Occident Ve- XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2012).

pictorial material and a reassessment of the publication's claims: a miniature of a meeting between Mary and Christ and Elizabeth and John (Fig. 50, Pl. VIII in Velu, *La Visitation*) – an episode which does not occur in the Gospels, but can be found in apocryphal writing on the life of John the Baptist from the fourteenth century onwards - from an early fifteenth-century manuscript copy of Rudolf von Ems' *Weltchronik* (The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Ms. 33 (88.MP.70), fol. 257r) is erroneously identified as a Visitation scene. A Visitation miniature appears in the manuscript on fol. 242r and does not include a depiction of the *in utero* infants.

Although the study devotes nearly a third of its chapters to representations of the Visitation featuring *in utero* children, aiming to trace their pictorial origins, the text largely reproduces Lechner's iconographic approach, placing the minute description of detail such as gesture and intra/extra-uterine location of the infants at its forefront. While concerns which lie at the core of this thesis, such as the development of the imagery in the German-speaking areas and its monastic use, are addressed by Velu, her engagement with those issues is extremely superficial, largely appearing as an afterthought to the typological framework employed in this publication. Although Velu's study makes an attempt at placing Visitation imagery within the wider contexts of female physicality and spirituality, it does not engage with those issues extensively enough to introduce new findings which would set it apart from the earlier works by Urner-Astholz and Lechner. However, the publication clearly demonstrates that the iconographic approach to Visitation imagery has been exhausted, with the improved photographic documentation within the volume complementing Lechner's study. Simultaneously, the text clearly reaffirms the need for an in-depth contextualisation of Visitation imagery within the framework of the object-audience encounter, with a primary focus on gendered reception within the wider landscape of monasticism, and both private and communal piety. This thesis will therefore not attempt to provide yet another survey of visual material within its scope; rather, it will aim to reassess and expand on the problems signalled by Velu and earlier authors, approaching representations of the occupied womb as a product of, and a response to the devotional and socio-cultural needs of its predominantly female audience.

Most recently, the parallels between the Gospel account of the Visitation and relationships between women, both on a devotional and spiritual level, have been discussed in a study by Laura Saetveit Miles, titled "Queer Touch Between Holy Women: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Birgitta of Sweden, and the Visitation" (2019).[29] The chapter, included in a collection of essays focusing on the significance of touch within late medieval devotional practice, frames the Gospel account of the Visitation as a parallel to the meeting between the English visionary Margery Kempe and the anchoress Julian of Norwich which, as recorded in Margery's *The Book of Margery Kempe* (1439), took place sometime around the year 1413. Although Miles notes that from a literary standpoint, there is no evidence to suggest that the description of the meeting would have been directly modelled on the scene of the Visitation, she argues that the cultural knowledge of the Visitation narrative, for instance through its depiction in stained glass windows in multiple English churches, would have allowed the readers of the book to interpret it in terms of its similarity to the Biblical episode.

The core of Miles' argument is formed by a reading of the encounter between Margery and Julian, and in turn Mary and Elizabeth, as queer-coded. Miles imposes David Halperin's queer theory, which sees "queer" as "whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant [...] a positionality vis-à-vis the normative" onto the late medieval and early Christian narratives, failing to account for how the notion of queerness would have been interpreted in those historical contexts.[30] In utilising Halperin's theory Miles' discussion of queer touch is therefore not grounded in social realities of the possible homosexual touch between women, and it frames the term "queer" as an abstract concept related primarily to the ideas of transgression of boundaries. In order to fully understand the idea of queerness of medieval women as related to same-gender touch a further enquiry would be necessary, in particular considering questions such as what would have constituted platonic and romantic/erotic touching, what manners of touching between women were socially acceptable, and the

[29] Laura Saetveit Miles, "Queer Touch Between Holy Women: Julian of Norwich, Margery Kempe, Birgitta of Sweden, and the Visitation," in *Touching, Devotional Practices, and Visionary Experience in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. David Carrillo-Rangel, Delfi I. Nieto-Isabel and Pablo Acosta-García (New York; London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 203-35.

[30] David M. Halperin, *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 62.

difference between medieval and modern expressions of affection through touch. In asserting that the Gospel account of the Visitation, which does not describe any instances of touch between Mary and Elizabeth, provides an imaginative space onto which its reader could have projected their ideas regarding touch between holy women, Miles does not account for patristic and medieval commentaries on the episode or its retelling in devotional texts and plays, as well as the numerous visual representations of the scene produced in medieval England. Those accounts and images, which embellish the scene with additional detail such as gesture and touch exchanged between the two women and the setting in which the episode took place, would have informed the medieval audiences' understanding of the Gospel scene, filling in the gaps of the Lucan narrative and shaping the readers' response to the account.

In her much more measured discussion of how the Visitation could have constituted a model of behaviour for a devout woman, Mary C. Erler (2008) sees Nicholas Love's translation and edition of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi* as a possible source for the understanding of Margery Kempe's short-distance travels as a re-enactment of the Virgin's travels on a domestic visit. Erler thus notes the fifteenth-century shift in the reading of the Visitation as oriented towards celebration of the culture of the home, its female community, blood ties and affection, supporting an inquiry into the significance of the Visitation beyond its strictly devotional function and providing a sustained framework for a study of women's reception of the scene in a homosocial, domestic context.[31] Miles' discussion, however, bears significance for this thesis in that it is one of the few studies to analyse the Visitation as a possible model for social interactions between women in a religious setting. The discussion of the encounter between Margery (around forty years old at the time of the meeting) and Julian (around seventy years old) resonates greatly with the analysis of social relationships between women in the cross-generational, homosocial space of the late medieval German nunnery, which this thesis will aim to conduct in order to discover how the nuns' lived experiences, both as individuals and members of the community, could have informed their engagement with Visitation imagery.

[31] Mary C. Erler, "Home Visits: Mary, Elizabeth, Margery Kempe and the Feast of the Visitation," in *Medieval Domesticity. Home, Housing, and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 259-76.

1.1.2 Contexts and settings

While Visitation imagery featuring the occupied womb has consistently remained outside of the mainstream of scholarly investigation, the broader problem of both secular and saintly motherhood in the medieval period began to receive scholarly attention with the rise of feminist medievalist scholarship in the late 1980s. In one of the early publications dedicated to the topic of medieval motherhood, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (1991), Clarissa W. Atkinson approaches motherhood in the medieval period as a socio-historical construct.[32] She proposes an interpretation of motherhood as a specific institution, related to the image and status of women, as well as their political, social, and religious circumstances. Atkinson's argument for motherhood as a cultural construct, rather than something "natural" and inherent, opens a framework for discussion of motherhood in communities commonly associated with the rejection of childbearing. While Atkinson does not explicitly refer to the relationship between motherhood and cloistered women, the interpretation of motherhood as a construct defined by a set of norms rather than biological functions applies particularly well to the discussion of female monastic communities, which constituted a cultural microcosm defined by a strict set of rules influencing every aspect of personal and communal life, including sexuality, reproduction, and familial relations.

Atkinson argues that the later Middle Ages saw a new appreciation of family and motherhood, as well as a shift in the hierarchy of religious values associated with the Franciscans and the Dominicans. The re-evaluation of service to God as superior even to chastity allowed mothers and wives to participate in new forms of veneration as mystics, visionaries, and wandering preachers. This observation supports Bernard McGinn's later account (1996) of the explosion of new monastic culture in the twelfth century, in which he comprehensively analyses the ways in which women, including wives, mothers, and widows, took on a key role in development of new forms of piety, such as female-specific "motherhood mysticism," more recently examined by Brigitte Zierhut-Bösch (2007).[33] Although

[32] Clarissa W. Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation: Christian Motherhood in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1991).

[33] Bernard McGinn, "The Changing Shape of Late Medieval Mysticism," *Church History* 65, no. 2 (1996): 197–219; Brigitte Zierhut-Bösch, "Ikonografie der Mutterschaftsmystik –

Atkinson cites both artistic interpretations of Holy Kinship (iconographic motif depicting extended family of Christ, descended from his grandmother Saint Anne) and literary accounts of “spiritual motherhood” as evidence for an increased appreciation of both social and biological motherhood in the monastic context, Visitation imagery is not presented as evidence in this discussion, signalling the need for further investigation and integration into this analytical framework. Regardless of this gap, however, Atkinson’s argument allows for a drawing of parallels between the increase in monastic participation of women and a newfound compatibility of physical maternity with spiritual expression, prompting the question of the scale of involvement of women with experience of motherhood in monastic communities.

Another key work on the subject of medieval motherhood is a collection of essays edited by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, *Sanctity and Motherhood. Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages* (1995).[34] The essays within this volume examine various aspects of the tension between womanhood, motherhood, and the institutionalized church, and in particular the contradictions inherent to ecclesiastical recognition of maternal sanctity faced with a multitude of socio-cultural preconceptions against reproduction and childbearing. Using an interdisciplinary approach, the authors focus on questions pertaining to women’s experience of devotion and motherhood and their framing in the context of surrounding communities, enhancing the scholarly understanding of the interrelationship between sanctity and virginity on one hand, and marriage, family, and sexuality on the other. The introduction by Mulder-Bakker brings forth a significant problem of marginalization and even omission of female saints in historical and devotional writing, suggesting that exclusion of some saints and the marginalization of *vitae* that present marriage positively can be viewed as part of an attempt to construct a specific ideology of female sanctity apart from marriage and motherhood. This observation signals a gap in research, suggesting that a further inquiry is needed to fully understand the relationship between the representation of female saints in hagiographical texts and their devotional significance, artistic representations, and surrounding ritual in the context of

Interdependenzen zwischen Andachtsbild und Spiritualität im Kontext spätmittelalterlicher Frauenmystik” (Magistra der Philosophie, Universität Wien, 2007).

[34] Anneke Mulder-Bakker, ed., *Sanctity and Motherhood. Essays on the Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages* (London; New York: Garland Publishing, 1995).

female-specific communities. The volume concludes with an epilogue by Atkinson, who places the collection in its historiographical context and remarks on the absence of studies directly focused on the motherhood of the Virgin Mary. Although it can be said that the more recent scholarship, most notably by Sarah Jane Boss (2000, 2009), Donna Spivey Ellington (2001), and Miri Rubin (2009); has made significant contributions to filling this gap, it is worth noting that neither this volume nor any later scholarship give much attention to the figure of Saint Elizabeth.[35] The absence of Elizabeth from a publication discussing holy mothers exemplifies the continuing trend of omission Mulder-Bakker wrote of in the introduction to the volume. However, rather than constitute a weakness of this significant body of scholarship, this noticeable absence presents an opportunity for further research, inviting an investigation into the textual and visual accounts and devotional significance of Saint Elizabeth, with which this thesis will be concerned.

Many of Atkinson's ideas regarding motherhood had been further developed in essays collected by John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler in *Medieval Mothering* (1999).[36] In this publication many of the authors, including notable scholars of medieval womanhood such as Pamela Sheingorn and Rosemary Drage Hale, propose a further distinction between motherhood and biological reproduction, introducing the concept of non-gendered "mothering" into the medieval timeframe. Unlike motherhood, which is essentially female and feminine, rooted in the female body through birth and breastfeeding, mothering is a culturally constructed activity. Participation in cultural practices considered maternal is what designates one as a "motherer," regardless of their gender and therefore biological capacity to bear children. Nurture - the chief quality of a motherer – was seen as a particular cultural positive in the Middle Ages, with the imagery of the motherer-nurturer being appropriated even by prominent male figures. While the emphasis on nurturing behaviour associated with mothering usefully avoids the biological essentialism and determinism which long rendered

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[35] Sarah Jane Boss, *Empress and Handmaid: On Nature and Gender in the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (London: Cassell, 2000); Donna Spivey Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul: Understanding Mary in Late Medieval and Early Modern Europe* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001); Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (London: Allen Lane, 2009); Sarah Jane Boss, ed. *Mary: The Complete Resource* (London: Continuum, 2009).

[36] John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, eds., *Medieval Mothering*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

mothers ahistorical, thus appearing particularly suited to an enquiry into the family lives of cloistered women, it must be applied with critical consideration, as it can also obscure the contentious ways in which biologically maternal bodies - pregnant, postpartum, and nursing - signified within late medieval culture.

The scholarship outlined above has demonstrated a largely uniform progression being made in the field of study concerned with motherhood in the medieval period. While there is a variety of complementary perspectives on the more nuanced aspects of the topic, key scholars appear to be in agreement in relation to the major issues such as the shifting of discourse from strictly biological motherhood to socially constructed mothering. The field of research concerned with devotional practices of women in the medieval period is, however, significantly more divided. The key trend to be observed in the extant scholarship on the subject of the use of gender-specific, maternal images and vocabulary in devotional practices of the medieval female religious, including not only cloistered women, but also beguines, tertiaries, and particularly religious laywomen, is a tension between two contrasting analytical approaches. On the one hand, the earliest research into the topic, conducted mostly by male scholars, aimed to investigate the minute detail of those practices, focusing on their lifelike mimicking of real-life domestic habits and rituals of the medieval period. On the other hand, however, a significant body of feminist scholarship emerging in the 1980s and 1990s distanced itself from this approach, positing a near complete removal of the understanding of women's devotional practices from the realm of physical motherhood, framing them as a spiritually motivated invention based in a complex theological framework.

One of such innovative spiritual practices developed by cloistered women of the medieval period was "mother mysticism" – a type of affective piety in which the nuns sought a direct encounter with the infant Christ through meditation and use of devotional images allowing them to enact the role of his mother or caretaker. The term "mother mysticism" was coined by Rosemary Drage Hale (1999) in her analysis of six textual sources describing visions of the infant Christ received by cloistered men and women.[37] The author acknowledges the earlier assertions of

[37] Rosemary Hale, "*Imitatio Mariae*: Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs," *Mystics Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1999): 193–203.

significance of female physicality, as well as the idea of female as flesh being central to women's *imitatio Christi;* but rather than use this argument to reinforce dated, reductive theories concerned with mysticism as expression of biological desires, she employs it to frame visionary accounts as evidence of an increase in Eucharistic devotion. Hale equates *imitatio Mariae* with *imitatio Christi,* interpreting both as routes to a direct union with the divine and a tool of doctrinal authority, discrediting early twentieth-century Freudian interpretations which brand female mystics as victims of hysteria resulting from suppressed erotic passion.[38] Thus, Hale sets herself in opposition to contemporary scholars such as Klapisch-Zuber, whose largely progressive research into the issues of gendered piety nevertheless remains partially influenced by Freudian approaches, ultimately equating mystical devotion to Christ with desire for sex and marriage.[39] It is worth noting, however, that despite Hale's strong argument against the reductive nature of the psychoanalytical method, it continuously exerts its enduring influence upon German scholarship, with the most recent revised edition of the *Verfasserlexikon* (2010) – the reference encyclopaedia of German medieval literature, compiled in Berlin between 1933 and 1955 – still describing the fourteenth-century Dominican mystic Margaretha Ebner's illness and ensuing visionary experience as "psychologically caused."[40]

In her discussion of Margaretha Ebner's use of a Christ Child doll (c. 1320) for devotional purposes **(Fig. 9)**, Ulinka Rublack (1997) takes an even more concrete stand against interpretations linking women's mysticism to supressed biological urges.[41] Rublack rejects the early investigations into women's mystical experience conducted by Herbert Grundmann (1935), whose discussion of the unusually large number of visions received by the female religious ultimately

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[38] Oskar Pfister, "Hysterie und Mystik bei Margaretha Ebner (1291-1351)," *Zentralblatt für Psychoanalyse* 1 (1911): 468–85; Ludwig Zöpf, "Die Mystikerin Margaretha Ebner (c.1291-1351)," in *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte des Mittelalters und der Renaissance*, vol. 16 (Leipzig; Berlin: B. G. Teubner, 1914).

[39] Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual*.

[40] Burghart Wachinger et al., eds., "Margaretha Ebner," in *Die Deutsche Literatur des Mittelalters. Verfasserlexikon* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010).

[41] Ulinka Rublack, "Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus in Late Medieval Dominican Convents," *Gender & History* 6, no. 1 (1997): 37–57.

reduces them to a method of acting out a neglected maternal instinct.[42] Rublack argues that even the more recent feminist reformulations of this thesis, including research by Klapisch-Zuber which deals with the use of Christ Child dolls during the Italian quattrocento, are insufficient and reductive of a key expression of female spirituality, which they ascribe to the sphere of compensation for worldly experiences unavailable to cloistered women.[43] Rublack's own investigation follows in the direction proposed by Siegfried Ringler (1990), whose research into *vitae* of fourteenth-century South German nuns and the act of their writing and compilation as mystical learning proposed a re-evaluation of the female-specific religious experience, positioning the nuns in a much more active role in their pursuit of a direct encounter with the divine.[44] Rublack posits that maternal imagery present in female religious communities constituted an integral part of a nexus of relationships connecting personal self-definition to an institutional framework. The author cautions against the largely modern interpretation of nunneries as sites of confinement and the nuns' spiritual vision as a tool of self-gratification. Rublack thus reassesses the theological significance of spiritual motherhood, elevating it from the sphere of biological desire while simultaneously acknowledging the sensual and somatic aspect of the experience.

Most recently, Christ Child dolls and cribs have been discussed by Caroline Walker Bynum in *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe* (2020).[45] In her discussion of a Christ Child cradle owned by a nun of the Cistercian convent Marche-les-Dames near Namur, Belgium, and a Burgundian limestone carving of the Nativity, Bynum notes that the distinction imposed on the iconography of the images, which distinguishes between the Latin *praesepe* (German: *Krippe*; English: crib or manger) and *cunabulum* (German: *Wiege*; English: cradle), has been expanded to differentiate more generally between

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[42] Herbert Grundmann, *Religiöse Bewegungen im Mittelalter* (Berlin: Verlag Dr. Emil Ebering, 1935).

[43] Klapisch-Zuber, *Women, Family and Ritual,* 310-31.

[44] Siegfried Ringler, "Gnadenviten aus Süddeutschen Frauenklöstern des 14. Jahrhunderts - Vitenbeschreibung als Mystische Lehre," in *"Minnichlichiu Gores Erkennusse." Studien zur Frühen Abendländischen Mystiktradition. Heidelberger Mystiksymposiiim vom 16. Lanuar 1989*, ed. Dietrich Schmidtke (Stuttgart: Frommann-Holzboog, 1990), 89–194.

[45] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Holy Beds: Gender and Encounter in Devotional Objects from Fifteenth-Century Europe" in *Dissimilar Similitudes: Devotional Objects in Late Medieval Europe* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 59-96.

late medieval women's devotion, which often involved the use of small-scale, movable cradles and corresponding dolls, and veneration of the manger in Christmas scenes practiced in parishes, which can be understood as a Counter-Reformation practice promoted by the Jesuits. Bynum argues, however, that given the linguistic overlap between the two terms, such a distinction appears artificial, and its use can be detrimental to the overall understanding of medieval piety, which often utilized objects employing complex and at times paradoxical meanings. The study reveals that both the cloistered women's cradles and the laypeople's cribs could have been used in both symbolic and literal terms, as conduits of prayers focused on rocking the infant in one's heart or preparing his bedding with one's good deeds; or, on the other hand, as tools of interactive, sensory play involving the ringing of bells, singing of songs, and manipulation of moveable objects. By noting that the objects themselves resist a straightforward interpretation as completely literal or completely spiritual, inviting their viewer to respond to them both literally and by analogy, Bynum thus proposes a framework for interpretation of Christ Child dolls which this thesis will seek to employ.

While the attitudes of early German scholars such as Oscar Pfister and Ludwig Zöpf, who reduced cloistered women's use of devotional objects employing the themes of motherhood to attempts at fulfilling maternal desires, are clearly insufficient for constructing an understanding of those objects, the observations of the feminist scholars of the 1990s require a reassessment as well. As Bynum has argued, objects such as infant Christ cribs facilitate encounters that are literal, or metaphorical, or both, escaping simple classification, thus necessitating an investigation which interprets them not as solely literal, or purely symbolic and detached from the physical realities of their viewers and users, as suggested by Hale. The obvious visual parallels between the Christ Child dolls discussed by Rublack **(Fig. 9)** and the representations of infants in their contemporary Visitation imagery **(Fig. 7),** such as the size of the objects, their pose and gesture thus provide foundations for a more thorough investigation of this genre alongside a discussion of relationships between the artwork and experience of motherhood, devotional practices, and the broader relationship between women's physicality and spirituality within monastic communities absent from many of the studies mentioned above.

The issue of cloistered women's devotion and mysticism cannot be discussed in separation from the idea of the convent as a setting for not only the religious experience, but also the daily activities, artistic culture, and textual expression influencing the spiritual sphere of the nuns' lives. The realm of religious women in the medieval period was made genderless, or even masculine, by its rejection of roles traditionally associated with womanhood. At the same time, however, it remained uniquely feminine in its creation of practices, texts and objects informed by an explicitly gendered environment, directly connecting the problem of gender and motherhood to the monastic setting. Thus, the convent setting can be approached from two different perspectives – as a series of individual examples of institutional histories, firmly embedded in written record providing insights into the socio-economic situation of the monastic houses in the broader medieval landscape; and as a communal feminine space, in which culturally constructed gender roles intersect with rich and complex idiosyncratic religious and artistic expression.

In his earliest publication dealing chiefly with the topic of cloistered women, *Nuns as Artists: The Visual Culture of a Medieval Convent* (1997), Jeffrey Hamburger examines a series of drawings produced by a Benedictine nun of the convent of St Walburg in Eichstätt, arguing for the existence of idiosyncratic visual cultures which governed artistic production in medieval nunneries.[46] Rejecting earlier interpretations of artwork produced by cloistered women as unrefined or even primitive, Hamburger points towards not only the unique visual styles developed by female monastic painters, but also to the particularities of the uncommon, distinctive visual programmes they employed, framing them as significant representations of the key theological concerns of cloistered women. Hamburger's discussion constitutes a foundation for the discussion of works made by and for female monasteries as deliberate in their iconographic expression and stylistic detail, rather than simply reactionary to broader trends in the artistic production of their time. In agreement with Hamburger's interpretation, the visual language of the Visitation imagery featuring occupied wombs discussed in this thesis can thus be investigated not only as referring to the broader religious and artistic concerns of its time, but

[46] Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists.*

also as governed by the particular ideals, needs and aspirations held by the women who made, commissioned, owned and used those objects.

While Hamburger focuses his study chiefly on the visual culture of medieval nunneries, the textual practices of the female monastic communities, once again framed in the context of works created by and for women, are examined by Rebecca L. R. Garber in *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers 1100-1375* (2003).[47] While the title of the volume itself is slightly misleading, suggesting an overall concern with the broad understanding of the concept of gender rather than the multiplicity of exemplary possibilities of gender performance which form the primary concern of the publication, Garber's examination of the theme of female exemplarity across literary genres provides a complex insight into the didactic models of womanhood available to the monastic community. In particular, the third chapter of the book, "Invented Communities, Idealizing the Past: Redefining Monastic Ideals in the Dominican Sister-Books," offers an investigation into the tensions between the ideal and the mundane, the individual and the community, the exceptionality and the uniformity characterising female monastic communities in the medieval period. Garber's discussion highlights an intriguing paradox of the late medieval Sister-Books (chronicle-style texts written by Dominican nuns in fourteenth-century Germany, compiling *vitae* and accounts of mystical experiences of members of monastic communities; also referred to as *Nonnenbücher* or *Schwesternbücher*): that although the idealized communities they portray did not exist at any one point in time, they nonetheless present an image of convent life that would have been both familiar and imitable to later medieval women.

Garber lists and examines a variety of models of piety contained in the accounts, acknowledging their inclusion of less-than-exemplary women in the convents, thus establishing Sister-Books as more than entirely idealized representations of monastic life. Throughout her study, Garber remains focused on literary analysis and monastic history, providing foundations for a further study focused on the material properties of the manuscripts of the Sister-Books. Although none of the

[47] Rebecca L.R. Garber, *Feminine Figurae: Representations of Gender in Religious Texts by Medieval German Women Writers 1100-1375* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003).

original Sister-Book manuscripts survive, an extended discussion of their later copies produced within female monastic communities from the early fifteenth century onwards as material objects, concerning issues such as how many copies existed, when they were copied and by whom, as well as an inquiry into their decoration and artistic quality could further enrich the scholarly understanding of the Sister-Book genre, rendering the discussion increasingly relevant to art historical interpretations. Regardless of this omission, however, the wide scope of Garber's study, and its acknowledgement of the Sister-Books' realistic reflections of cloistered women's responsibilities, attitudes and goals clearly lends itself to application of the Sister-Books as evidence in wider interdisciplinary discourse, including art historical argument pursued in this thesis.

Jeffrey Hamburger's concern with female monastic culture continues in a 2008 volume co-edited with Susan Marti.[48] The source material for this study is derived from an exhibition, *Krone und Schleier: Kunst aus mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (*Crown and Veil – Artworks from Medieval Women's Convents)* which opened in Spring 2005 across two venues in Bonn and Essen. The overall theme of the exhibitions was German female monasticism and the objects of art and daily life which once belonged to women's monastic institutions. The exhibitions were accompanied by an illustrated catalogue including a wide range of interdisciplinary introductory articles, which, alongside a foreword by Caroline Walker Bynum and an introductory essay on the historiography of female monasticism by Hamburger, constitute the volume discussed below. Hamburger envisions this particular publication in the tradition of Eileen Power's *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535* (1922) and the methodological approaches to women's history which predate current feminist historiography.[49] Power's book addressed English monasticism not from the perspective of women's devotional, mystical or visionary practices, as is often done in the present day; but rather in terms of the situation of female monastic institutions in the day-to-day reality of the medieval world, including the issues of income and expenses, property holdings, and education. The volume offers a detailed

[48] Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti, eds., *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

[49] Eileen Power, *Medieval English Nunneries, c.1275 to 1535* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922).

investigation into administrative and economic aspects of cloistered life, consistently framing the monastic realm as a microcosm of larger socio-political structures, rather than a gendered space shaped by and responding to the needs, ideals and aspirations held by women in the given period.

As observed by Bynum in the foreword to *Crown and Veil*, approaches focused on gender are similarly partially lacking in the essays collected in the volume, reflecting the German preference for a focus on socio-economic and political history which largely mirrors Power's interpretive framework, and a general scepticism of German scholars towards feminist approaches. From the very emergence of German medievalism towards the late nineteenth century, *Landesgeschichte* ("regional history") has been the preferred method for the study of monastic communities. This approach to medieval history is characterised by extremely detailed analysis of archival materials focused on a small, precisely defined region, such as, for instance, a single monastic house. While such research can create an incredibly detailed picture of a particular community, recent scholarship has recognised the limitations of this method. *Landesgeschichte* has received criticism as being overly focused on the "petty minutiae of a narrowly defined place or region" and issues of narrow national interest, rendering it out-of-touch with contemporary research on an international level, which may seek to employ larger theoretical frameworks, such as gender theory. While recent initiatives such as the Working Group on Regional History within the Association of Historians of Germany (*Verband der Historiker und Historikerinnen Deutschlands*, founded 2012) were established with the goal of assessing the state of field and networking nationally and internationally in order to reframe *Landesgeschichte* as a discipline dedicated to source-intensive interdisciplinary research that crosses traditional chronological boundaries; the limitations of the more dated approaches to regional history, characterised by over-reliance on the most minute archival detail, continue to exert an influence on German historiography.[50]

The notable lack of interest in German sources demonstrated by early feminist scholarship emerging predominantly in the United States and France in the

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[50] Sigrid Hirbodian, "Research on Monasticism in the German Tradition," trans. Alison I. Beach, in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West,* ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1140-43.

1980s, as well as the low value and legitimacy attributed to women's history in German scholarship itself appear particularly jarring considering the extraordinary wealth of textual and visual material surviving in German-speaking areas. Hamburger acknowledges, therefore, that *Crown and Veil* was designed to a certain extent in order to "confront American and Continental approaches to a subject that in its importance and interest transcends any one set of approaches or a single historiographic tradition."[51] With its broad chronological, geographical, and thematic approach, *Crown and Veil* provides a cohesive introduction to a complex landscape of women's monastic history. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the key significance of this volume lies in its power to suggest the existence of a gap between methodologies employed by German scholarship and the wealth of modern interpretive approaches which can be applied to objects owned and used by gendered communities.

Even within the curatorial realm, objects once interpreted almost solely through the prism of their devotional meanings have now begun to receive attention in relation to their significance as expressions of women's daily experiences. A recent exhibition, titled "Portraying Pregnancy: From Holbein to Social Media" which ran at the Foundling Museum in London from January 24th to August 23rd 2020 opened with a seventeenth-century embroidered image of the Visitation **(Fig. 10)**. Although the depiction was not produced in the monastic context, it shares many features with artworks discussed in this thesis, such as the use of a textile medium and its possible function as an object of gendered piety. While the exhibition focused chiefly on British artworks, its broader themes correspond to a wider European interest in portrayals of pregnancy. According to the Foundling Museum, the exhibition brought together, for the first time, examples of representations of pregnancy from the medieval period to the digital era, situating contemporary issues of women's emotion, empowerment and autonomy in a 500-year context.[52] The exhibition's focus on forging links between representations across a range of media, including painting, prints and textiles, as well as its seminal objective of presenting pregnancy portraits – not just the

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[51] Hamburger and Marti, eds., *Crown and Veil,* 9.

[52] The Foundling Museum, "Portraying Pregnancy: From Holbein to Social Media" [Accessed March 2021]. https://foundlingmuseum.org.uk/events/portraying-pregnancy/; Karen Hearn, *Portraying Pregnancy: From Holbein to Social Media* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2020).

modern ones – within the broader enquiry into historical women's identities and social attitudes towards them closely correspond to the key goals of this thesis, which aims to discuss images of the occupied womb as representative of both their female audiences' personal and communal lived experience and their spiritual beliefs.

The body of scholarship concerned with the experience of women's physicality and spirituality in the Middle Ages is rich in a variety of attitudes pertaining chiefly to the fundamental problem of tension between the two spheres. On the one hand, second-wave feminist scholars have rejected the earlier reductive approaches to women's religious expression and its manifestation in artwork and writing, stressing the importance of freeing the discourse from the limits imposed on it by outdated interpretations of gender and its presumed impact on women's intellect and spirituality. Indeed, as Barbara Newman has observed recently, even medieval discourses themselves – folkloric, theological, and mystical ones – appear to have interest in womanhood chiefly in instances when it can be ascribed to the intellectual and spiritual realms, rather than to a realistic understanding of the lived experience of medieval women. The vast majority of pregnancy metaphors found in theological writing, for instance, employ concepts which contradict the natural realities of childbearing, such as pregnant souls and minds, male pregnancy, or bodies that are permanently pregnant.[53] Therefore, an understanding of pregnancy and motherhood solely as a biological phenomenon firmly grounded in medical and social realities appears largely insufficient in explaining their significance within devotional practices of the medieval period. On the other hand, however, the more recent scholarship has attempted to reinstate the balance between the physical and spiritual spheres into this discussion, with approaches focused on materiality reminding us of the importance of examination of women's histories in the context of the lived female experience and the complex and inescapable network of social relations, rules, and ideologies shaping it at every turn, necessitating the reassessment of devotional practices of cloistered women in terms of the medieval female experiential reality.

[53] Barbara Newman, "Mother and Child. Giving Birth," in *The Permeable Self: Five Medieval Relationships* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021), 156-57, 191.

1.2 Terminology – the "occupied womb"

In line with its focus on art historical analysis favouring iconographic approaches based in archival record and typological cataloguing of observable detail, German scholarship in particular has approached the imagery of the occupied womb in terms of "realistic" depiction of pregnancy, despite the research of Verheyen and Urner-Astholz signalling the inability of such classification to accurately describe a complex iconographic tradition. Despite significant developments in the understanding of the largely ambiguous nature of realistic representation in the late medieval period, even relatively recent scholarship, including Tammen's 2007 study, has framed representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb as an example of a growing interest in naturalism. In her discussion of the Nuremberg Visitation group **(Fig. 6 & 7)**, Tammen argues that the "wormy" texture of the opening representing Elizabeth's womb within this particular sculpture is an attempt at a naturalistic depiction of the umbilical cord or perhaps the blood vessels within the uterus of a pregnant woman; while the smooth, formerly gilded surface of the Virgin Mary's womb denotes the supernatural status of her pregnancy.[54] However, the lack of any comparable representations of the womb, as well as the emphasis on the miraculous nature of Elizabeth's pregnancy found in exegetical literature, which will be discussed in Chapter 2, imply that this argument cannot be extended toward other images within this pictorial genre. While Tammen's argument appears appropriate in the context of this particular sculpture, it must be noted that, based on Lechner's extensive iconographic survey of representations of Marian pregnancy, there are no other examples of such apparently "naturalistic" treatment of the occupied womb, or the womb in general, even within manuscripts of medical or encyclopaedical subject matter.[55]

Moreover, even as recently as in 2021, English-language scholars have also argued that Visitation imagery in general followed a linear progression towards realism, albeit taking on a different understanding of the term. Newman in particular has argued that towards the fifteenth century "a greater realism" emerges in representations of the scene, with artworks such as Rogier van der

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[54] Tammen, "Das verborgene Sehen," 26.

[55] Lechner, *Maria Gravida.*

Weyden's Visitation panel (Museum der Bildenden Künste, Leipzig, 1550) opting to depict the gesture of expectant mothers palpating each other's wombs, much as medieval women must have done in their lifetime, instead of employing the non-realistic symbolism of occupied womb.[56] Moreover, the term "type foetus" is still used in museum catalogues and the Princeton Index to this day, despite the lack of obvious comparatives between Visitation iconography and its contemporary anatomical illustration. This contested understanding of pictorial realism in relation to Visitation imagery, as well as scholarly uncertainty regarding its medical significance necessitate further research in this area in order to fully assess the applicability of the term "type foetus" to imagery analysed in this thesis.

The key problem with anatomical comparison arises in the very deployment of the word "foetus" to describe representations of fully formed children. The word "foetus" was used in medieval writing both in strictly medical texts, such as Guy de Chauliac's *Chirurgia magna* (1363) - one of the key reference manuals of practical medicine throughout the late medieval period; as well as in encyclopaedic texts addressed to a wider audience, including the widely-copied, cited, and later printed *De proprietatibus rerum* (c. 1240) by Bartholomaeus Anglicus.[57] Although vague and often employing complex symbolism, medieval medical texts do express a degree of understanding of foetal development in the womb. According to *De secretis mulierum* – a late thirteenth-century text frequently attributed to Albertus Magnus, which draws on Hippocratic, Galenic, and Aristotelian theories of sex and reproduction to produce a scientific understanding of female nature - it takes only eighteen days for the child to become fully formed in the womb, with the rest of the pregnancy dedicated to "strengthening" the infant. This observation is corrected in an anonymous commentary to the text, which extends the time of development to forty days, after which "the human nature is complete and the infant grows and opens his mouth." Further on in the text, the observation concerning the eighteen days of foetal development is contradicted by detailed description of planetary influence in each month of pregnancy. Nevertheless, the general idea appears to

[56] Newman, "Mother and Child. Giving Birth," 178, 191.

[57] Bartholomaeus Anglicus and John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation [from the Latin] of Bartholomaeus Anglicus "De Proprietatibus Rerum:" A Critical Text*, ed. M. C. Seymour (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

be that the basic shape of the human body is completed by the third month of pregnancy, when the head and limbs are formed, with additional body parts, including facial features and genitals, developing until the seventh month of quickening.[58]

One of the most comprehensive descriptions of foetal development is given in the *Trotula* – a twelfth-century ensemble of texts on women's medicine attributed to the Italian physician Trota of Salerno. The *Trotula* texts are considered the most widely circulated assembly of materials on women's medicine from the late twelfth through the fifteenth centuries, surviving in 126 manuscripts both in Latin and in vernaculars, including fourteenth- and fifteenth-century translations into Dutch, Middle English, French, German, Irish, and Italian.[59] A survey of known owners of the Latin *Trotula* has demonstrated that it was used not only by physicians and surgeons throughout Western and Central Europe, but it was also owned by monastic houses in England, Germany, and Switzerland, suggesting that some of its key ideas were known in the monastic context.[60] The *Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum* ("Book on the Conditions of Women"), which draws heavily on the gynaecological and obstetrical chapters of the *Viaticum*, Constantine the African's Latin translation of Ibn al-Jazzar's *Zad al-musafir*, and similarly employs Galenic ideas in its discussion of conception and pregnancy, states:

> "In the first month, there is purgation of the blood. In the second month, there is expression of the blood and the body. In the third month, [the fetus] produces nails and hair. In the fourth month, it begins to move and for that reason women are nauseated. In the fifth month, the fetus takes on the likeness of its father or its mother. In the sixth month, the nerves are constituted. In the seventh month, [the fetus] solidifies its bones and nerves. In the eighth month, Nature moves and the infant is made complete in the blessing of [all] its

[58] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets. A Translation of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' De Secretis Mulierum with Commentaries,* ed. Helen Rodnite Lemay (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 78–86.

[59] Trota of Salerno, *The Trotula: A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine,* ed. and trans. Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 51; Monica H. Green, "A Handlist of the Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-Called Trotula Texts. Part II: The Vernacular Texts and Latin Re-Writings," *Scriptorium* 51 (1997): 80–104.

[60] Monica H. Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 325–39.

> parts. In the ninth month, it proceeds from the darkness into the light."[61]

This passage clearly demonstrates that the *Trotula* text does display a degree of understanding of the process of foetal development. Once again, however, the body of the infant is thought to be formed in its basic shape in the second month of pregnancy, and to become "fleshed out" with facial features and nerves throughout the remaining seven months. Therefore, even though it cannot be established which concept of the timeline of foetal development would have been understood to be the most accurate, it is apparent that none of them corresponds to the modern understanding of development *in utero,* which is implied by the use of the term "foetus type." Thus, only by placing the term "foetus" in its historical context can we evaluate the applicability of the word to imagery of the occupied womb.

None of the theories of foetal development outlined above seem to have found reflection in visual representations, medical or otherwise, as images concerned with development of the foetus appear to be virtually non-existent, rendering the term "foetus type" problematic. Rather than depict the changes in the physical form of the embryo over the course of pregnancy, images of the womb found in medical texts tend to be solely utilised to represent the possible positioning of the child, or multiple children, inside the womb. Depictions of foetal positions found in two fifteenth-century English manuscripts **(Fig. 11, 12)** represent the contents of the womb as a fully formed infant, complete with hair and musculature, located within a flat, red circle. While the variation of the imagery of the occupied womb featuring the infants enclosed in circular discs does resemble such medical representations of the *in utero* child, the term "foetus" does not appear to be correct in describing either. Depictions of the infants John and Christ within the Visitation scene, which is said to have occurred respectively in the sixth and first month of their mothers' pregnancies, do not correspond to the medieval understanding of medical reality of foetus development; and in the medical texts, the infant is always depicted as fully formed, rather than foetal, its development beyond the concern of the text.

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[61] Trota of Salerno, *The Trotula,* 107.

The lack of differentiation between stages of foetal development is further extended towards depictions of infancy, where new-borns can be depicted virtually identically to older children. Depictions of birth which appear in historical works, such as compilations on ancient history which often feature an image of the caesarean section to illustrate the biography of Julius Caesar **(Fig. 13)**, almost always represent the new-born infant as disproportionately large, with elongated limbs and its head held upright, appearing indistinguishable from images of older children. The employment of a single visual language to represent an *in utero* infant, a new-born, and an older child suggest that little distinction was made between the three, bringing into question the accuracy of the term “type foetus” and its insistence on differentiating between Christ and John *in utero,* and Christ and John as infants.

In the few manuscripts employing religious imagery in connection with a medical text, such as an early fourteenth-century French copy of Roger Frugardi’s *Chirurgia* (Sloane MS 1977), the Visitation is not linked to writing on childbearing, childbirth, gynaecology, and obstetrics, or even more broadly, women’s health, in any manner. The manuscript features a series of miniatures divided into nine quadrants, with the top row of three depicting scenes from the Life of Christ, and the middle and bottom rows showing a surgeon performing various procedures on a patient. Whittington has argued that although the typological, iconographic or structural connection between the religious narrative and the medical one is not readily apparent, or perhaps even non-existent, there are nevertheless sections of the images where the artist may have attempted to highlight the possible visual, moral, and typological connections between the biblical and surgical narratives.[62] It becomes apparent, however, that folio 2 **(Fig. 14)** is not one of those instances, as the scenes of Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity are pictured alongside a depiction of the surgeon repairing a head laceration. As imagery of the occupied womb began to emerge towards the end of the thirteenth century, it would have been possible for such an image to be included in a medical manuscript if there had been a typological connection between the scenes of the Annunciation or the Visitation and gynaecological or obstetrical procedures. Nevertheless, MS Sloane 1977 once

[62] Karl Whittington, “Picturing Christ as Surgeon and Patient in British Library MS Sloane 1977,” *Mediaevalia. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Medieval Studies Worldwide* 35 (2014): 86.

again denies such connection, opting not to employ imagery which could possibly constitute a reference to the medical realities of Mary's pregnancy, such as for instance a *homunculus* Christ within the scene of the Annunciation, the occupied womb in the miniature of the Visitation, or midwives being present in the depiction of the birth of Christ.

Yet another question which must be posed in relation to the applicability of the term "type foetus" is if the infant Christ had ever been a foetus at all. Representations of the Annunciation which depict a *homunculus* Christ descending towards the Virgin's ear or womb appear to suggest that the infant might have entered Mary's womb as a fully formed child. This interpretation, however, contradicts a fundamental medieval belief – that Christ was made, at least partially, of his mother's flesh and blood; since he had no human father, his body had to be formed not *by*, but *from* his mother's own flesh. This link between the Incarnation and the Virgin's womb appears to suggest that there must have been at least some degree of foetal development following the Annunciation. However, in her extensive discussion of this problem, Jacqueline Tasioulas has noted the fundamental problem of this theory: in the medieval worldview, the foetus is seen as something less than human.[63] According to theological writing which followed the Aristotelian tradition, prior to the moment of ensoulment, the foetus was either, according to Aquinas, fully animalistic, or in the writing of Giles of Rome, in a constant state of flux and unidentifiable as any substantial form.[64] The *in utero* child could not receive its soul until the body was fully formed, which as discussed above, could occur as late as in the third month of pregnancy. If Christ were to follow the human process of quickening, it would imply that he had existed in an imperfect, underdeveloped state, firstly vegetative and then animalistic – a concept which many later theologians viewed not only as inappropriate, but even impossible.[65]

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[63] Jacqueline Tasioulas, "'Heaven and Earth in Little Space': The Foetal Existence of Christ in Medieval Literature and Thought," *Medium Ævum* 76, no. 1 (2007): 35.

[64] Aquinas extensively discussed the problem of ensoulment in the *Summa contra gentiles II*. The main points of this debate have been outlined in Norman Kretzmann, *The Metaphysics of Creation: Aquinas's Natural Theology in Summa Contra Gentiles II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 307–13; Pamela M. Huby, "Soul, Life, Sense, Intellect: Some Thirteenth-Century Problems," in *The Human Embryo: Aristotle and the Arabic and European Traditions*, ed. Gordon R. Dunstan (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1990), 118; M. Anthony Hewson, *Giles of Rome and the Medieval Theory of Conception: A Study of "De Formatione Corporis Humani in Utero* (London: Athlone Press, 1975), 99.

[65] Tasioulas, "Heaven and Earth in a Little Space," 41.

The issue was resolved most clearly in the writing of Thomas Aquinas, who declared that Christ must have possessed a rational, human soul from the very moment of his conception; and since a rational soul cannot dwell in an imperfect, undeveloped body, Christ's body must have been fully formed from the very first moment of his existence as well.[66]

This notion was repeated in medical and encyclopaedic texts such as the above mentioned *De proprietatibus rerum*, which following the description of normal foetal development, assures that Christ was an exception from the rule: "Crist alone was all at ones ischape and distinguid in his modir wombe when he was conseyued þerinne."[67] The idea of Christ appearing fully formed following his conception was circulated widely in popular devotional and hagiographic literature, for instance in the *Golden Legend,* which reasserts that "in an instant the Son of God was conceived in [Mary's] womb, perfect God and perfect man, and from the very first day of conception he has as much wisdom and as much power as he had in his thirtieth year," as well as in the *Meditationes vitae Christi,* which explain that Christ was placed inside his mother's womb as a smaller version of a fully formed human child, and went on to grow in size like other children do: "at þe firste instance he was ful schapen in alle membres & alle hole man in body & soule bot neuerles ful litel in quantite. For aftere he waxed more & more kyndly as oþere children done."[68] The widespread acceptance of the idea that Christ never experienced foetal development, but

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[66] "But the body's very formation, in which conception principally consists, was instantaneous, for two reasons. First, because of the infinite power of the agent, viz. the Holy Ghost, by whom Christ's body was formed, as stated above. For the greater the power of an agent, the more quickly can it dispose matter; and, consequently, an agent of infinite power can dispose matter instantaneously to its due form. Secondly, on the part of the Person of the Son, whose body was being formed. For it was unbecoming that He should take to Himself a body as yet unformed. […] Therefore in the first instant in which the various parts of the matter were united together in the place of generation, Christ's body was both perfectly formed and assumed;" "What the Philosopher says is true in the generation of other men, because the body is successively formed and disposed for the soul: whence, first, as being imperfectly disposed, it receives an imperfect soul; and afterwards, when it is perfectly disposed, it receives a perfect soul. But Christ's body, on account of the infinite power of the agent, was perfectly disposed instantaneously. Wherefore, at once and in the first instant it received a perfect form, that is, the rational soul." Thomas Aquinas, *The "Summa Theologica" of St Thomas Aquinas*, Third Part, Question 34, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province (London: Washbourne, 1914), [Accessed March 2021]. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Summa_Theologiae/Third_Part/Question_34.

[67] Bartholomaeus Anglicus and John Trevisa, *On the Properties of Things,* vol. 1, 298.

[68] Jacobus da Voragine, *The Golden Legend. Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 200; Nicholas Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ. A Reading Text*, ed. Michael G. Sargent (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2004), 27.

rather was created through instantaneous formation of the body and immediate ensoulment, suggests that the term “type foetus” cannot be employed in order to describe the *in utero* holy infant.

The obvious medical connotations of the term “type foetus” link the miraculous pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth to observable anatomical reality, ignoring the unnatural character of Mary’s childbearing, which had been heavily emphasised in medieval artworks and literature. While Elizabeth’s pregnancy is fundamentally natural, her ability to conceive at an old age being the essence of the miracle, Marian pregnancy has been continuously framed as exceptional – not only due to the divine paternity of her child, but also because Mary did not experience pregnancy like any other woman did. Although theological writing did show concern with the flesh-and-blood woman Mary, for instance, in debates regarding the question of whether Mary menstruated, ultimately, as the new Eve, the Virgin was understood to be exempt from the curse which condemned women to the pain of childbirth.[69] Already in the twelfth century a belief developed that due to not being conceived like other humans, Mary was not affected by original sin, situating her natural humanity as distinct from that of the rest of humankind.[70] This is particularly apparent in Nativity narratives, which emphasise the exceptional nature of Mary’s labour, as medieval theologians seem to have universally agreed that Mary did not suffer any pain during the birth of her son.[71] This idea was further developed in writings of female mystics such as Birgitta of Sweden (c. 1303-73), who declared that the virgin birth was not just painless, but also devoid of any blood associated with natural childbirth, the new-born infant emerging spotlessly clean from his mother’s womb, Mary snipping the umbilical cord with her fingers without any fluid emerging, and Mary’s placenta appearing to shine.[72] In the visionary writing

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[69] This problem was directly addressed by Thomas Aquinas, who concluded that Mary must have menstruated, since menstrual blood was understood as necessary for production of breast milk. Her menstruation would however have been internal, without the external bleeding. Charles T. Wood, “The Doctors’ Dilemma: Sin, Salvation, and the Menstrual Cycle in Medieval Thought,” *Speculum* 56, no. 4 (1981): 710–27; Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 174.

[70] Rubin, *Mother of God,* 303.

[71] Amy Neff, “The Pain of Compassio: Mary’s Labor at the Foot of the Cross,” *The Art Bulletin* 80, no. 2 (1998): 258–59.

[72] Birgitta of Sweden, "Chapter 21. A Vision of Nativity" in *The Revelations of St. Birgitta of Sweden,* vol. 3: *Liber Caelestis*, Book VII, ed. Bridget Morris, trans. Denis Searby (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 250-52.

of the Cistercian mystic Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302), who saw the immaculate womb "transparent like a most pure crystal," Marian anatomy was further dissociated from the bodily reality of gore and pollution to the point where the Virgin's internal organs appeared to be made of glass, light, and gold, rather than human flesh.[73]

Visionary accounts which directly reflect the materiality of representations of the occupied womb discussed in this thesis stand in stark contrast to medieval depictions of natural pregnancy, such as the pregnant "disease woman" of the Wellcome Apocalypse **(Fig. 15)**, produced in early fifteenth-century Germany. The anatomical image places childbearing on the periphery of hybrid monstrosity, affording the subject of the depiction very little dignity. Although pregnancy is not directly depicted in this folio, the word *embrio* is inscribed on the woman's uterus, indicating that she is either pregnant or capable of bearing a child. The contents of the womb are elaborated upon in an upper portion of the image and in the preceding folio (f. 38r), alongside a depiction of a "muscle man" and an abstracted, geometric diagram of the matrix. By physically removing the infant, enclosed in a flask-shaped womb, from the disease woman's body, the image renders the fully-formed, healthy, implicitly male child as separate from the mess of the woman's reproductive organs and their afflictions, which in much of later medieval writing were directly connected to the notions of secrecy, concealment and shame.[74] Similar treatment of representation of the *in utero* infant can be found in numerous *foetus-in-utero* series produced throughout the fifteenth century, often as illustrations to Muscio's sixth-century *Gynaecia,* which constituted a key source for many medieval medical texts, including the largely influential *Chirurgia* – an eleventh-century medical treatise by the Arab Andalusian physician Al-Zahrawi, notable for its description of ectopic pregnancy. The series of images associated with Muscio's text, which deals with the issues surrounding management of normal and abnormal childbirth was reproduced as late as the start of sixteenth

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[73] Gertrude of Helfta, "Chapter 3: On the Honey-Sweet Nativity of the Lord" in *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness*, Book IV, ed. and trans. Alexandra Barratt (Collegeville, MN: Cistercian Publications, 2018), 23.

[74] For discussion of the notion of "secrets" in medieval anatomical, medical, and gynecological literature see Monica H. Green, "From "Diseases of Women" to "Secrets of Women:" The Transformation of Gynecological Literature in the Later Middle Ages," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 1 (2000): 5-39.

century, when Eucharius Rösslin's *Der Swangern Frauwen und Hebammen Rosegarten* ("Rosegarden for Pregnant Women and Midwives"), the first ever printed text on midwifery was published in Strasbourg (1513), receiving sixteen subsequent editions and numerous translations.[75]

Depictions of the occupied womb stand in a complex relationship with those images. On the one hand, similarly to medical illustrations, many representations of the occupied womb deny the anatomical reality of childbearing through employment of materials such as gilding or glass **(Fig. 8)**, frequently enclosing the infants in circular "flasks" of their own or depicting them as "floating" outside their mothers' bodies **(Fig. 5)**, effectively sanitising the medical reality of pregnancy. On the other hand, however, the enduring insistence on the importance of the mothers within representations of the Visitation, and the celebration of pregnancy rather than its pathologisation firmly separate images of the occupied womb from the realm of anatomical illustration, which frequently treats the mother as a possible source of "contamination" of the *in utero* child.[76] Moreover, the visual separation of the infants from their mothers' bodies described above accomplishes yet another goal – the use of gilding, defined outline or glass **(Fig. 4)** clearly draws the viewer's eye precisely to the pregnant wombs, framing them as something to be beheld and celebrated, rather than relegated to the shameful realm of women's "secrets." The ambiguous relationship between images of the occupied womb and medical imagery thus demonstrates that terminology linking Visitation iconography to medical depictions is not suited to describing this particular mode of representation, as the largely negative medical view of the pregnant female body is incompatible with the positive, celebratory representations of pregnant women found in Visitation imagery.

[75] The oldest illuminated manuscript associated with the Muscian tradition appears to be a Carolingian (9th to 11th century) copy of *Gynaecia* and other medical treatises (Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique, MS. 3701-15). For examples of late medieval *foetus-in-utero* series images see Al-Zahrawi – *Chirurgia* (England, c. 1400), Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS. Laud Misc. 724, fol. 97 and a miscellany of astronomy, astrology, and medicine (South Germany, c. 1485), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 597, fol. 260r-261v.

[76] For discussion of medieval understanding of the maternal body as source of pollution, pathology, and danger to both foetus and nursing child, see William F. MacLehose, "Nurturing Danger: High Medieval Medicine and the Problem(s) of the Child," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 3-24.

While medieval texts present a decisive stance on the exceptional nature of Christ's conception and growth *in utero,* there is significantly less evidence concerning the infant John the Baptist. However, the Biblical account itself signals the unnatural properties of Elizabeth's child. From the purely iconographic standpoint, in the vast majority of representations of the occupied womb, the infant John is represented nearly identically to the *in utero* Christ **(Fig. 5, 8)**, similarly contradicting the theories of foetal development outlined above. Although the difference in status between Christ and John would have been immediately understandable to the medieval viewer, in representations of the occupied womb, it remains visually implicit. Since Elizabeth is said to have been six months pregnant when Mary came to stay with her, according to the medieval worldview her child would have not been fully formed at this point, since a commentary on *De secretis mulierum* places the development of facial features throughout the six month of pregnancy, and the completion of skin in the seventh.[77] Although the above cited passage from the *Trotula* places the formation of facial features in the fifth month, it is the bones and nerves that are "solidified" only in the seventh month, making it technically impossible for John to assume a kneeling pose **(Fig. 4)** prior to that, if he were a natural foetus. Despite being a naturally conceived child, the infant John the Baptist is consistently represented as fully formed, oftentimes kneeling before Christ, thus suggesting that the term "foetus type" cannot be applied to his figure either.

Although Elizabeth's child was conceived through sexual intercourse, the significance of the divine intervention being the reversal of Elizabeth's barrenness rather than a miraculous conception; his ability to recognise the infant Christ upon Mary's arrival and to communicate this knowledge to his mother suggests John was embedded with supernatural, prophetic qualities already *in utero.* The not-fully-natural character of the infant is emphasised particularly in relation to his act of leaping inside the womb, which medical accounts such as the *Trotula* describe as occurring only in the eighth month of pregnancy. In a commentary cited in Thomas Aquinas' *Catena Aurea* on the Gospel of Saint Luke, Augustine argues that the act of leaping in the womb is not caused by any natural, rational circumstances:

[77] Pseudo-Albertus Magnus, *Women's Secrets,* 86.

> "AUG. […] for she said not, "The babe leaped in faith in my womb," but leaped for joy. Now we see not only children leaping for joy, but even the cattle; not surely from any faith or religious feeling, or any rational knowledge. But this joy was strange and unwonted, for it was in the womb; and at the coming of her who was to bring forth the Savior of the world. This joy, therefore, and as it were reciprocal salutation to the mother of the Lord, was caused (as miracles are) by Divine influences in the child, not in any human way by him."[78]

While Augustine does not discuss whether the infant John *is* a natural, human child or not, he asserts that he certainly does not *act* like one, his movement being triggered by a miracle occurring *in utero* rather than by his own agency or the natural course of foetal development. An anonymous Greek exegete cited by Aquinas takes this argument even further, suggesting that the act of leaping would be unnatural even for an ordinary, human child *in utero*. While the commentary is rather brief and its authorship anonymous, its inclusion in a work by Thomas Aquinas would have placed it alongside the key authors of the patristic period, embedding it with the additional authority of the patristic tradition. The commentator believes that the infant John moving inside his mother's womb is a novel introduction to the natural world, meant to communicate his recognition of Christ – ascribed to the heightened senses of sight and hearing, constituting an unnatural feature in their own right – to his mother:

> "GREEK EXPOSITOR. (Geometer.) For the Prophet sees and hears more acutely than his mother, and salutes the chief of Prophets; but as he could not do this in words, he leaps in the womb, which was the greatest token of his joy. Who ever heard of leaping at a time previous to birth? Grace introduced things to which nature was a stranger. Shut up in the womb, the soldier acknowledged his Lord and King soon to be born, the womb's covering being no obstacle to the mystical sight."[79]

The account is noteworthy due to its explicit introduction of the concept of mystical vision into the discussion of the Visitation. According to the commentator, John can see through "the womb's covering," evoking sculptural representations such as the Nuremberg group, owned by the Benedictine nuns of

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[78] Augustine in Thomas Aquinas, *The Catena Aurea. Gospel of Saint Luke*, trans. John Henry Newman and Joseph Kenny (London: John Henry Parker, v. II, J.G.F. and J. Rivington, 1842), [Accessed March 2021]. http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/c3z.htm.

[79] Thomas Aquinas, *The Catena Aurea. Gospel of Saint Luke.* http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/c3z.htm.

Kloster Niedernburg **(Fig. 6)** and the Visitation from the Dominican community at Katharinental **(Fig. 8)**, which utilise glass and crystal in order to render partially visible the contents of the holy wombs. This particular language of sight and transparency later appears in the accounts of a number of mystical visions experienced by German nuns in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, most notably by the Cistercian mystic Gertrude of Helfta. A passage from her spiritual biography reads:

> "The spotless womb of the glorious Virgin also appeared, transparent like a most pure crystal; through it all her inner organs shone forth, shot through and filled with his divine nature, just as gold wrapped in parti-colored silk is accustomed to shine through crystal. She also saw the dewy-fresh little boy, the only child of the Highest Father, sucking at the heart of the Virginal Mother with hungry pleasure."[80]

Yet another issue necessitating a critical reassessment of the term "type foetus" is the placement of the infants in relation to their mothers' bodies. As observed in the survey conducted by Urner-Astholz, there is a significant number of representations of the Visitation in which the *in utero* children can be observed "floating" above or beside their mothers' bodies **(Fig. 5)**, resulting in a depiction which does not attempt to imply the physical presence of the infants within their mothers' wombs. A large number of depictions of the occupied womb denies any attempt at naturalism by placing the infants exceedingly high on their respective mothers' chests **(Fig. 4)**, suggesting a conflation between the womb and the heart. This conflation appears not only in devotional practices centred on the veneration of the Sacred Heart, but also more broadly in medieval languages themselves. Both Latin and Middle High German made little distinction between the womb and other organs, using the word "womb" to refer to the stomach as the seat of satiety or gluttony, as well as in biblical context to the stomach as the seat of feelings and affections, equivalent to the heart and

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[80] *"[…] immaculatus uterus Virginis gloriosae ad instar purissimae crystalli perspicuus, per quam omnia viscera ejus divinitate medullitus pertransita et replete refulgebant, velut aurum diversi coloris serico convolutum elucere solet per crystallum. Videbatur etiam puerulus ille floridus, summi Patris unicus, cor Matris virgineae avida delectatione sugere."* Gertrude of Helfta, "Chapter 3: On the Honey-Sweet Nativity of the Lord," 23. While it is unlikely that the Thuringian mystic Gertrude would have been aware of the existence of the Katharinental sculpture, Hamburger argues that her visionary experience must draw on the imagery of the *Maria gravida* type. This would in turn suggest the existence of similar objects in geographic proximity of Eisleben, where the convent of Helfta was located. Jeffrey Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary: Art and Female Spirituality in Late Medieval Germany* (New York: Zone Books, 1998), 18.

the soul. While in the medical context, pregnancy was clearly understood to occur in the womb, the conflation of organs in Visitation imagery serves to elevate the significance of the pregnancy, implying that the children are being nourished by the blood of the heart, rather than the supposedly 'polluted' menstrual blood understood to nourish infants *in utero*.[81]

The word "womb" would have even been used to refer not only to a particular organ, but to bodily cavities in general, including hollow spaces within organs such as the heart, as it was used in the Middle English translation of the *Chirurgia magna*.[82] In fact, the Middle High German word *wampe* or *wambe* can be translated not only as "womb," but also as "belly," "paunch," or "uterus," indicating that although in medical thought the uterus was certainly considered a discrete organ and the sole site of pregnancy, conceptually and linguistically this distinction was not made entirely clear.[83] The ambiguity of placement of the holy infants in relation to the anatomy of their mothers can thus be understood as largely conceptual, rather than resulting from a pursuit of anatomical accuracy. Ultimately, the conflation between the womb, heart, stomach, and cavities within the body in general justifies the use of the term "occupied womb" to describe a wide range of representations which do not make explicit the location of the infants within their mothers' bodies.

The chronological survey conducted by Urner-Astholz clearly demonstrates that there is no linear progress from abstraction to realism within the iconography of the occupied womb. The Nuremberg Visitation group **(Fig. 6 & 7)**, discussed by Tammen as an example of the growing medieval interest in pictorial naturalism, is both preceded and succeeded by images less "naturalistic" than itself. If we take Urner-Astholz's category of the infant being depicted as physically located inside his mother's body as the requirement for "realistic depiction," then an early fourteenth-century sculpture of *Maria gravida* which includes a removable miniature figure of the infant Christ – one of the first known sculptural representations of the occupied womb - can be understood as a "realistic"

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[81] Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts," 227.

[82] "The substaunce of þe herte is harde […] hauynge in it two ventricles, i. smale womes." Guy de Chauliac, *The Cyrurgie of Guy de Chauliac,* ed. and trans. Margaret S. Ogden (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 54.

[83] *Oxford English Dictionary Online,* "Womb, n." [Accessed March 2021]. https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/229912?isAdvanced=false&result=1&rskey=6qxUOo&.

representation, succeeded by an array of images significantly more decorative or abstract in their depiction. Such images **(Fig. 5)**, which utilise halos or *mandorlas* to represent pregnancy, fully negate the idea of a progression towards naturalistic representation. The apparent lack of naturalism within categories of images often described as naturalistic – representations of the Man of Sorrows for instance - had been noted by Suzannah Biernoff, who argues that these artworks are expressive rather than naturalistic, acting on no false pretence of providing an illusory window into a parallel word.[84] The problem of naturalism of depictions of the occupied womb can thus be resolved if a different understanding of naturalism is applied. Noa Turel has argued that between the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries the term *au vif* – "from life," or "lifelike," was not used to refer to the process of depicting an observed reality in a manner understood as modern-day "life drawing." Rather, it was employed to describe a category of images which constitute "living pictures," which in the context of representation of miracle necessitated "an interactive miracle at the moment of viewing."[85] Seen through this interpretive lens, the naturalism of representation of the Visitation featuring *in utero* infants becomes less concerned with the medical accuracy of the images, but rather allows them to be understood as living and present, relying on active devotion and in turn, forming an active part of their viewers' realities.

While relatively explicit images of female anatomy became increasingly popular towards the mid-fifteenth century, representations of full-length, standing pregnant female figures, which could have potentially informed representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, did not gain popularity until nearly a century later.[86] Moreover, the term "foetus" is simply not an accurate

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[84] Suzannah Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 145.

[85] Noa Turel, "Living Pictures: Rereading 'Au Vif,'" *Gesta* 50, no. 2 (2011): 170–72.

[86] There are two notable exceptions of pre-sixteenth century German anatomical images which depict the foetus inside a woman's body. These include a late 15th century copy of *De secretis mulierum* (Universitätsbibliothek, Erlangen, MS B 33), where the sixteen possible foetal positions (fol. 93v-95r) are depicted using a full-length female figure in the half-crouched "disease woman" pose, the womb and embryos shown as an integral part of the woman's body rather than a rather than a separate entity. A late 15th century Bavarian miscellany (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 597) includes an image of the "disease woman" notable not only for its realistic colouring, but also the inclusion of a depiction of a minuscule infant within her womb (fol. 259v). This image is however followed by a traditional depiction of the foetal positions (fol. 260r-261v), which depict the infant(s) within a separate, abstracted womb. An inscription in a later, possibly seventeenth/eighteenth century hand (fol. 1v) reads "*Conventus*

description for an infant Christ, who, according to theological understanding, never experienced the natural process of foetal development, and its application to Marian pregnancy equates the miraculous motherhood with natural childbearing, denying the exemplary status which the virgin mother was afforded by medieval Christians. Similarly, the term appears misleading in the case of the infant John the Baptist, who in spite of being conceived naturally, appears to have possessed miraculous qualities already *in utero*. While very few examples of representations of the occupied womb – namely, the Nuremberg Visitation group discussed above **(Fig. 6 & 7)**, and a stained glass window from Erfurt Cathedral, which uncharacteristically presents the *in utero* Christ frontally and posed in a "foetal" position **(Fig. 16)** might be understood to make allusions to observable medical reality, they constitute an exception to the pictorial tradition of the occupied womb, which largely utilises non-literal, symbolic, or even decorative visual vocabulary.[87] This thesis will therefore not employ the term "foetus type," due to its medical connotation imposing a modern understanding of observable anatomical reality onto imagery concerned largely with the spiritual significance of childbearing.

Ratisbonensis ordinis praedictorum," linking the manuscript to the Dominican nunnery in Regensburg. However, it is not known whether the manuscript was owned by the nuns immediately following its production, or if it constitutes a later addition to the monastic library.

[87] Although the stained glass panel from the Erfurt Cathedral appears to be a solitary *Maria gravida* figure, Goern has referred to the panel as a "Mary of the Visitation," suggesting that there would have been a matching, now-lost representation of Saint Elizabeth. The *Maria gravida* panel is currently placed in the window of the Life of Joseph, but Goern notes that it would have originally belonged to the window of the Life of Mary, which survives in very few original fragments, further implying the possibility of additional figural representations having been present in the pictorial programme. The caption on the *Maria gravida* panel reads "They [three rows of panels of the Life of Joseph window, including the *Maria gravida*] were found here during restoration works of 1901," suggesting that the panels could have been moved to replace missing donor portraits from the Life of Joseph window during the baroque period, when an altar was built which obscured the majority of the Life of Mary window, allowing for panels to be taken out of it and moved elsewhere in the church without creating visible gaps. Hermann Goern and Fritz Hege, *Die gotischen Bildfenster im Dom zu Erfurt* (Dresden: Verlag der Kunst, 1961), 50, 64-65.

Chapter 2. Textual sources

Although the Visitation is one of the central scenes of the narrative of the Life of Christ presented in the Gospel of Luke – the only of the four Gospels to provide an account of the scene – its textual significance has largely escaped analysis in terms of its medieval interpretations through text and image. As observed in the preceding chapter, what little art historical interest there is in the narrative of the Visitation in the medieval period has largely remained confined to the iconography of the artworks, rather than the wider interpretive framework they would have functioned within. While Michael Camille has largely argued against interpretation of medieval imagery solely through the lens of textual accounts, it cannot be denied that the very inclusion of text in representations of the occupied womb – be it through the means of speech scrolls **(Fig. 4, 8)**, captions, or the placement of the images themselves within illuminated manuscripts – necessitates an investigation into the textual sphere. In his 1990 essay, "Mouths and Meanings," Camille seeks an understanding of how meaning in medieval images could be discerned independently of a specific textual referent, proposing a "somatic rather than semantic" reading of objects, grounded in widely understood cultural metaphors and a range of ideas beyond a dominant theological interpretation. Although ultimately the essay does provide the reader with an account of possible textual sources which could be employed to negotiate the reception of objects it discusses, Camille's primary argument is for a supra-textual, rather than non-textual, reading of medieval images.[88]

On the other hand, scholarship has largely acknowledged the textuality of medieval culture at large. Brian Stock has argued that oral and performative traditions of Western Europe did not simply decline from the eleventh century onwards. Rather, they remained largely verbal and individualistic, while simultaneously becoming increasingly bound to textual forms which implied "shared values, assumptions, and modes of thought."[89] The gesture, ritual, and physical symbol did not become lost or replaced, but rather became embedded

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[88] Michael Camille, "Mouths and Meaning: Towards an Anti-Iconography of Medieval Art," in *Iconography at the Crossroads: Papers from the Colloquium Sponsored by the Index of Christian Art, Princeton University, 23-24 March 1990*, ed. Brendan Cassidy (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University, 1993), 43–58.

[89] Brian Stock, "History, Literature, and Medieval Textuality," *Yale French Studies* 70 (1986): 10.

in a set of complex interpretive frameworks involving various scripts and notations, with the spoken and the sensed being drawn into an increasingly closer relationship with the written word.

Following this dual interpretation, this chapter will not seek to pinpoint the exact textual sources which could have informed the production, iconography, or material characteristics of representations of the occupied womb. Moreover, it will not aim to establish the primacy of written accounts as the chief interpretive framework for the visual material discussed in the following chapters of this thesis. Rather, its objective is to explore the possible interpretive filters through which the narrative of the Visitation could have been negotiated within a rich textual culture of the medieval period. By examining a range of sources from the patristic to the late medieval, this chapter will attempt to discover the possible textual cues which would have informed the reception of Visitation imagery indirectly, through the texts' continuous exerted influence on private and public devotional practices and their shaping of their readers' somatic sphere discussed by Camille. Firstly, the Gospel of Luke will be discussed in terms of its narrative structure and significance. This inquiry will then be supported by an analysis of a range of exegetical and apocryphal material that would have been familiar to the monastic audience in the timeframe relevant to this thesis, in order to establish the available medieval interpretation of the Lucan account of the Visitation.

2.1 Literacy of cloistered women

One of the key challenges in examining the textual frameworks surrounding depictions of the Visitation discussed in this thesis is the fact that due to large-scale secularisation and dissolution of monastic orders and the dispersion of their library collections in the early nineteenth century, no library inventories survive from the convents discussed in this thesis. However, an inquiry into the literacy of cloistered women demonstrates that the female audience would have been familiar with the key theological, hagiographic, and historical accounts which wielded significant textual authority in the medieval period. While cloistered women rarely had access to works of theology written in Latin, the more widespread works in vernacular were derived from 'high' theology and

mediated it in its scholastic, as well as monastic form.[90] Although cloistered women may have never read certain works in their original version, the adaptation of patristic and ecclesiastical traditions into compilations, translations and short versions strongly suggests that the female audience would have been familiar with authors such as Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bernard of Clairvaux, and Hugh of St Victor. While vernacular versions of texts ascribed to those authors did not always exactly reproduce the original Latin writing, the degree of similarity is high enough to establish that their key ideas would have been familiar to the readers of the translated material.

There is ample evidence that female monastic houses possessed copies of texts belonging to the tradition of *Deutsche Scholastik* – writings which supplied scholastic material in translation, composed specifically for an audience whose knowledge of Latin was insufficient to negotiate those texts in their original language. A book list from the Dominican convent of St Catherine in Nuremberg prescribes the explanation of the Mass of the day according to Durandus' *Rationale divinorum officiorum* as a part of the daily table readings, alongside vernacular sermons and translations of the Epistles and the Gospels.[91] References or direct quotations from patristic and ecclesiastical writers would have been found not only in strictly theological or scholastic writings. Devotional narratives such as the *Meditationes vitae Christi,* likely composed by a female author and intended for a monastic female use, draw on texts including the Gospel of Luke, the *Legenda aurea*, Comestor's *Historia scholastica*, as well as patristic writing including Augustine's *Lucan Homilies*, constituting a possible channel of transmission of those texts to a cloistered female audience.[92] The nuns' knowledge of patristic ideas was also gained from sermons delivered by learned preachers, with whom Dominican women in particular stayed in close contact.

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[90] Christoph Burger, "Theologie und Laienfrömmigkeit. Transformationsversuche im Spätmittelalter," in *Lebenslehren und Weltentwürfe im Übergang vom Mittelalter zur Neuzeit. Bericht über Kolloquien der Kommission zur Erforschung der Kultur des Spätmittelalters 1983 – 1987*, ed. Hartmut Bockmann, Brend Moeller, and Karl Stackmann (Göttingen: Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1989), 303.

[91] Marie-Luise Ehrenschwendtner, "*Puellae Litteratae*: The Use of the Vernacular in the Dominican Convents of Southern Germany," in *Medieval Women in Their Communities*, ed. Diane Watt (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1997), 56–59.

[92] Sarah McNamer, "The Author of the Italian Meditations on the Life of Christ," in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices. Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsal*, ed. Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John J. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), 121–26.

Therefore, although the evidence concerning monastic library holdings in women's houses in the late medieval period is fragmentary, the wide proliferation of compilations and translations allows us to assume that exposure of monastic audiences to the texts discussed below was larger than suggested by the surviving evidence.

Although Latin literacy amongst nuns is treated as uncommon, there is a degree of evidence that some cloistered women would have been familiar with theological writings in their original forms. The Dominican Sister-Book of Unterlinden, written entirely in Latin by Katharina von Gebersweiler, mentions sisters such as Hedwig of Steinbach, who taught her fellow nuns theology and instructed them how to perform Latin liturgy properly; and Gertrude of Rheinfelden, who was not only trained in Latin, but was also an experienced copyist of liturgical manuscripts and other kinds of books. Gertrude's understanding of Latin appears to have extended beyond excellent copying, as the Sister-Book records that "in the explication of books she was also outstanding," implying that the nun produced commentary, either written or oral, on the texts she was copying. There is even evidence for the preference of certain texts above others: Elisabeth Kempf of Unterlinden would have preferred the writings of Augustine over those of other theologians.[93] Although the convent of Unterlinden is largely exceptional in its insistence on educating its members in knowledge of Latin, there is further evidence for the presence of Latin-literate nuns in other houses as well. According to her biography, Claranna of Hochenburg, the first prioress of the Dominican convent of Schönensteinbach in Alsace, read many works of theology, including the "*liber beati Dionysii*."[94] Latin was still being taught at the Cistercian house of Marienstern at the beginning of the sixteenth century, as evidenced by the survival of a heavily glossed and annotated printed copy of a German-Latin dictionary (1467-77), a Latin grammar book (1513), and a Latin copy of Bartholomeus Anglicanus' *De proprietatibus rerum* (after 1491).[95] An account produced by a nun of the Benedictine convent

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[93] Catherine of Unterlinden, "Les "Vitae Sororum" d'Unterlinden. Édition Critique du Manuscrit 508 de La Bibliothèque de Colmar," ed. Jeanne Ancelet-Hustache, *Archives d'histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire Du Moyen Age* 5 (1930): 365, 430–31, 506.

[94] Johannes Meyer, *Chronica Brevis Ordinis Praedicatorum*, ed. Heribert Christian Scheeben (Leipzig: Harrasowitz, 1933), 74.

[95] Klosterbibliothek St Marienstern, Panschwitz-Kuckau, Sign. W 45, Sign. G 11, and Sign. P 330. Marius Winzeler, "Die Bibliothek der Zisterzienserinnenabtei St. Marienstern. Zu Geschichte

Ebstorf provides detail of the schooling she was receiving, which included ample instruction in Latin grammar, which would allow the sisters literacy beyond the basic understanding of liturgy.[96]

Despite evidence for Latin literacy and ownership of Latin texts amongst cloistered women being fragmentary, the strong monastic traditions of translation, transcription, and communal reading practices constituted an avenue of transmission of this knowledge from the exceptional, Latin-literate individuals to their wider community. While very few manuscripts that can be unquestionably linked to female monastic communities are listed in German-language library holdings, the body of writing attributed to monastic female authors provides substantial evidence for the knowledge of patristic writing, apocrypha, and the popular bible amongst cloistered women.[97] By the first quarter of the twelfth century, the knowledge of exegesis, apocrypha, and the popular Bible is evident in the writing of Ava (d. 1127), the first female writer in any genre of vernacular German known by name, who lived as an anchorite in the Benedictine double monastery at Göttweig. In the five poems she authored, Ava employs material which includes the biblical commentaries of Bede, Rabanus Maurus, and Alcuin, as well as Adso's *Libellus de Antichristo* (or its Latin source).[98] In her study of vernacular literacy within Dominican convents, Marie-Louise Ehrenschwendtner has noted that the principal sources for the writings of Gertrude the Great, who belonged to the Cistercian community at Helfta, which had Dominican spiritual advisors, included not only Scripture, but also liturgical books, the writings of Augustine, and Bernard of Clairvaux’s sermons on the *Song of Songs*. The knowledge of this source material was, however, not reserved solely for the named, universally recognized female authors such as Gertrude. Gertrude’s anonymous biographer, herself a nun at Helfta, quotes Bede,

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und Bestand einer frauenklösterlichen Büchersammlung des Mittelalters,” in *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.-26. Febr. 1999*, ed. Falk Eisermann, Eva Schlotheuber, and Volker Honemann (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 354.

[96] Conrad Borchling, ed. “Litterarisches und geistiges Leben in Kloster Ebstorf am Ausgange des Mittelalter,” *Zeischrift des historischen Vereins für Niedersachsen* 4 (1905): 394-95.

[97] Johnette Putnam, "Mechthild of Magdebrug: Poet and Mystic," in *Medieval Women Monastics. Wisdom’s Wellsprings*, ed. Miriam Schmitt and Linda Luzer (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 217.

[98] Hellmut Rosenfeld, "Frau Ava," in *Neue Deutsche Biographie* 1 (1953), 464 [Accessed March 2021]. https:/www.deutsche-biographie.de/sfz1636.html.

Augustine, Jerome, Bernard of Clairvaux, Gregory the Great, and Hugh of St Victor in her writing.[99]

Later medieval nuns were also familiar with both the Latin and vernacular works of their predecessors. Surveys of surviving manuscript copies reveal an interconnected network of readership of visionary accounts and *vitae*, with works such as Mechthild of Magdeburg's *Fließendes Licht der Gottheit* (c. 1250-90), Mechthild von Hackeborn's *Liber specialis gratiae* (c. 1290) and multiple texts by Elisabeth of Schönau (1129-64) and both Christine Ebner (1277-1365) and Margaretha Ebner (1291-1351) circulating amongst numerous monastic houses. In the library of the Cistercian convent Marienstern – one of the few monastic libraries to operate to this day – there are two copies of the thirteenth-century *Liber specialis gratiae*: a fifteenth-century manuscript in German vernacular translation, and the earliest known printed edition of the text commissioned in 1503 by the Saxon duchess Zedena and printed in the workshop of Melchior Lotter in Leipzig. Both copies survive in excellent condition, with the printed one preserved as a part of the convent's chained library, demonstrating the continued relevance and value of the text to the monastic community.[100] Texts written and compiled by German nuns were also translated into languages including Latin and Middle English and circulated throughout Europe alongside works such as Birgitta of Sweden's *Liber celestis* (c. 1340-70) and Catherine of Siena's *Dialogo* (1377-78).[101]

In particular, in the case of the Dominicans, both Sister-Books and personal revelatory texts continued to be copied throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.[102] The Dominican *Schwesternbuch* of St Katharinental survives in eight copies, five of which were copied in other female monastic houses: the Dominican convents of Katharinenkloster, Nuremberg (copied in 1454), St Katharina in St Gallen (1493 - fragmentary), and St Katharina in Zofingen, Constance (early sixteenth century); as well as the Clarissian convent of

[99] Ehrenschwendtner, "*Puellae litteratae,"* 58.

[100] Klosterbibliothek St Marienstern, Panschwitz-Kuckau, Octav 75 and Sign. B 53f. Winzeler, "Die Bibliothek der Zisterzienserinnenabtei St. Marienstern," 338.

[101] Naoe Kukita Yoshikawa, "Mechtild of Hackeborn as Spiritual Authority: The Middle English Translation of the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*," in *Translation and Authority – Authorities in Translation*, ed. Pieter De Leemans and Michele Goyens (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), 241.

[102] Garber, *Feminine Figurae,* 3.

Gnadenthal, Basel (1493 - fragmentary) and the Benedictine nunnery Münsterlingen, Thurgau (sixteenth century - fragmentary).[103] The nuns whose *vitae* were recorded in the manuscript lived between approximately 1245 and 1345, demonstrating that the earlier visionary traditions of the convent continued to be valued and disseminated throughout the fifteenth century.[104] The continued relevance of the *vitae* and Sister-Books thus renders them a key element of the interpretive framework of representations of the occupied womb, as the enduring traditions of copying and compilation would have made the manuscripts available outwith the immediate location and timeframe they were composed in, allowing later visual representations to be read in the context of earlier texts and demonstrating a rich literacy amongst the late medieval nuns discussed in this thesis.

2.2 The Visitation in textual sources

2.2.1 The Gospel of Luke and patristic sources

The Gospel according to Luke is the third of the four Canonical Gospels. Consisting of twenty-four chapters, which describe the origins, birth, ministry, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, the Gospel of Luke is the longest of the four Gospels and the longest book of the New Testament.[105] The probable date for the composition of the Gospel is around 80–90 CE, as much of its material draws on earlier sources including the Gospel of Mark, the earliest of the three Gospels, composed around 70 CE. The Gospel also draws largely on a common synoptic source for Matthew and Luke known as the "Q source," a hypothetical "sayings gospel" consisting primarily of Jesus' *logia*. Besides the sheer length of the Gospel, which together with the Acts of the Apostles (written by the same author) accounts for 27.5% of the New Testament, a unique feature of the Gospel of Luke is the volume of original material it contains. Around 35%

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[103] Stadtbibliothek, Nuremberg, Cent. V. 10[a]; Benediktinische Stiftsbibliothek, St Gallen, cod. 603; Leopold-Sophien-Bibliothek, Überlingen, Constance, cod. 22; Öffentliche Bibliothek der Universität Basel, Basel, Cod. Y 105; Benediktische Stiftsbibliothek, Einsiedeln, cod. 695. For a comprehensive overview of the surviving manuscripts of *vitae* of female mystics and Dominican Sister-Books see Garber, *Feminine Figurae,* 241-45.

[104] Amiri Ayanna, "Bodies of Crystal, Houses of Glass: Observing Reform and Improving Piety in the St. Katharinental Sister Book," *Journal of Medieval Religious Cultures* 43, no. 1 (2017): 26-27.

[105] The Gospel of Mark dates from c. 66–70 CE, Gospels of Matthew and Luke from c. 85–90 CE, and Gospel of John from c. 90–110 CE. Although Matthew and Luke are likely to have been written concurrently, Luke is traditionally placed third in the sequence of Gospels.

of the textual account of the Gospel is dedicated to episodes that do not appear either in the Gospel of Mark or the Gospel of Matthew **(Fig. 17).**[106] The material unique to the Gospel of Luke includes an extensive narrative of the Nativity and Infancy of Christ, as well as many of the well-known parables, including the stories of the Good Samaritan (Lk 10:25-37) and the Prodigal Son (Lk 15:11-32).

Yet another distinctive feature of the Gospel of Luke is the volume of written account afforded to the stories of women. Female figures are central to the Gospel, with Luke devoting significantly more attention to stories of women than the other Evangelists do. From a narrative standpoint, the parallel structure of Nativity and Infancy episodes described in Chapters 1 and 2 raises theological themes that are then developed in latter passages, framing the figures of Mary and Elizabeth as central to the understanding of the Gospel. The actions of the key figures of Chapter 1: Mary, Elizabeth, Joseph, and Zechariah; and additional persons appearing in Chapter 2: Anna and Simeon, prefigure the path of Jesus and John, and that of other female and male disciples and prophets. In turns, the Visitation itself – an episode unique to the Gospel of Luke – provides a starting point for the parallelism between Jesus and John, and the extensive exegetical interpretation of John as the forerunner of Christ. The mirroring of the two annunciations and two births, centred on the meeting of the two mothers, stands at the narrative core of the first two chapters of the Gospel of Luke, providing foundations for visual representations focused on the themes of mirroring and mutuality. The Lucan account is further embellished with a comparatively large number of female-centric episodes. These include the story of the widow of Nain (Lk 7:11-17), the forgiveness of a sinful woman (Lk 7:36-50), the healing of a crippled woman (Lk 13:10-17), the curing of Mary Magdalene of “evil spirits and infirmities” (Lk 8:1-3), and Mary and Martha serving Christ (Lk 10:38-42). The account also emphasises the presence of women who helped Jesus in his travels (Lk 8:1-3), as well as the women who wept for him on his way to Calvary (Lk 23:27-31).[107]

The Visitation is one of the gynocentric episodes unique to the Gospel of Luke. Chapter 1 recounts the episode as follows:

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[106] A. M. Honoré, "A Statistical Study of the Synoptic Problem," *Novum Testamentum* 10, no. 2/3 (1986): 95–147.

[107] Howard I. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1970), 140.

> "[39] And Mary rising up in those days, went into the hill country with haste into a city of Juda. [40] And she entered into the house of Zachary, and saluted Elizabeth. [41] And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost: [42] And she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. [43] And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? [44] For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. [45] And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord."[108]

Although Elizabeth remains one of the understudied figures in the tradition of interpretation of the Gospel of Luke, both in patristic and medieval exegesis, and, as observed in the previous chapter, in modern theological and art historical scholarship concerned with medieval devotion, she is undoubtedly one of the central figures of Chapter 1. Elizabeth's pregnancy structures the chronology of the narrative, foreshadowing and mirroring parallel events in the story of Mary and Jesus. As a narrative figure, Elizabeth acts autonomously from the moment she raises her song of praise (Lk 1:25) and utters her blessing to Mary (Lk 1:42-45), which grants her the authority of a prophetess as she is the first person to witness the Incarnation of Christ and confirm the miracle of the Annunciation. Although Mary knew that Elizabeth was with child, it does not appear that Elizabeth had any prior knowledge of Mary receiving the Annunciation from the angel; and therefore, what knowledge she appears to have had of it must have come by a revelation, which would thus render her a prophetess. Elizabeth's significance as a prophetess is most openly acknowledged in the commentary of Gregory the Great, who ascribes to her the power of witnessing a similar vision to the one foretold by Mary in the *Magnificat*. The exegesis clearly states that Elizabeth "was touched with the spirit of prophecy at once, both as to the past, present, and future [...] and when she foretold that all things would be accomplished, she saw also what was to follow in the future."[109]

[108] *Vulgate. The Gospel According to Luke - Chapter 1.* http://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_1.htm.

[109] "GREGORY. (super Ezech. lib. i. Hom. i. 8.) She was touched with the spirit of prophecy at once, both as to the past, present, and future. She knew that Mary had believed the promises of the Angel; she perceived when she gave her the name of mother, that Mary was carrying in her womb the Redeemer of mankind; and when she foretold that all things would be accomplished,

Elizabeth's story of suffering as a barren, elderly woman signals the overarching message of the chapter, articulated most clearly in Mary's hymn of *Magnificat* – that God will liberate humankind from oppression and humiliation. In the earthly realm Elizabeth suffers "reproach" within her community due to her failure to bear a child: "Thus hath the Lord dealt with me in the days wherein he hath had regard to take away my reproach among men" (Lk 1:25). However, her righteousness and obedience to the commandments renders her blameless before God: "And they were both [Elizabeth and Zechariah] just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame" (Lk 1:6). Elizabeth's experience as a childless, 'barren' woman bears significance beyond the chapter itself. In the context of both the narrative of the Gospel and patristic exegesis, it signifies the connection between life and death mediated through God's intervention, with Ambrose interpreting John's divine conception and Elizabeth's miraculous pregnancy as a manifestation of divine grace beyond the boundaries of life and death.[110] Mirroring the episodes of the disciples experiencing the death of Christ (Lk 23) and his resurrection (Lk 24), Elizabeth connects the beginning of the Gospel to its ending, Old Testament matriarchs to the female followers of Jesus, and Abraham to the doubting disciples through the figure of Zechariah.[111]

The emphasis placed on the pregnancies of Mary and Elizabeth directs the reader's focus towards the bodies of the mothers-to-be. Although both women initially seem to be defined by their status as mothers and nurturers, a latter chapter of the Gospel denies such an interpretation. In Chapter 11, which provides the account of the Lord's prayer, a female member of a group listening

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she saw also what was to follow in the future." Gregory the Great in Thomas Aquinas, *The Catena Aurea. Gospel of Saint Luke*. http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/c3z.htm.

[110] Elizabeth is described as "barren" and "well advanced in years" in the Gospel account (Luke 1:7, 17). Her elderly age and barrenness are also stressed by patristic exegetes including Chrysostom ("old", "barren", "the unfruitful rock", "he [the angel] noticed the age, saying, She also has conceived a son in her old age; and the natural infirmity also"), Ambrose ("old age", "period of life [is] more fitted for governing children, than begetting them", "laden with the burden of another age", "shame […] on account of her age", "coming together in their old age"), and Bede ("in their old age a son was to be born", "both were well stricken in years ", "she received the example of one both old and barren"). Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary of Saint Ambrose on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, trans. Íde Ní Riain (Dublin: Halcyon, 2001), 20.

[111] Claudia Jannsen and Regne Lamb, "Gospel of Luke: The Humbled Will Be Lifted Up," in *Feminist Biblical Interpretation. A Compendium of Critical Commentary on the Books of the Bible and Related Literature*, ed. Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2012), 651.

to Jesus preach identifies Mary solely through her maternal function. The passage reads: “And it came to pass, as he spoke these things, a certain woman from the crowd, lifting up her voice, said to him: Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the paps that gave thee suck” (Lk 11:27). However, Christ himself denies such an understanding, pointing towards the significance of Mary as a recipient of the word of God: “But he said: Yea rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God, and keep it” (Lk 11:28). This interpretation is supported by the exegesis of Augustine, who in one of his sermons argues that Mary having been a disciple of Christ bears more significance than her having been his mother. Augustine cites those particular verses from Luke to state that Mary “believed by faith, she conceived by faith, she was chosen to be the one from whom salvation in the very midst of the human race would be born for us, she was created by Christ before Christ was created in her.” Augustine reaffirms that Mary heard the word of God and kept it, confirming the primacy of the spiritual conception of Christ in the mind over physical conception in the womb: “She kept truth safe in her mind even better than she kept flesh safe in her womb. Christ is truth, Christ is flesh; Christ as truth was in Mary’s mind, Christ as flesh in Mary’s womb; that which is in the mind is greater than that what is carried in the womb.”[112]

The Marian song of the *Magnificat* provides further evidence against the reductive understanding of the Gospel solely through the physical, maternal role of women:

> “[46] And Mary said: My soul doth magnify the Lord. [47] And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour. [48] Because he hath regarded the humility of his handmaid; for behold from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed. [49] Because he that is mighty, hath done great things to me; and holy is his name. [50] And his mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear him. [51] He hath shewed might in his arm: he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart. [52] He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble. [53] He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away. [54] He hath received

[112] Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 72A on the Words of the Gospel of Matthew 12:41: And Behold, Something More than Jonah Here," in *The Works of Saint Augustine. A Translation for the 21st Century*, vol. 3: Sermons 51-94, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New York City Press, 1991), 288–89.

> Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy: [55] As he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever."[113]

Throughout the hymn it becomes apparent that Mary is chiefly concerned not with her individual role as a mother, but rather with the future vision of salvation history. The *Magnificat* employs a poetic language which unites the past, present, and future - as God "spoke to [the] fathers, to Abraham and to his seed for ever" - to communicate the fact that although Mary's bearing of the son of God is a unique event, God's mercy will similarly be received "from generation to generation." Thus, the reading of the Visitation in the context of the *Magnificat* does not detract from the singularity of what is occurring to Mary and Elizabeth; rather, it frames their pregnancies as an integral part of the narrative of salvation history, incorporating the women's individual fates into the complete whole of God's work. Similarly, during the Visitation Elizabeth praises Mary not for her miraculous childbearing, but for her faith: "And blessed art thou that hast believed, because those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to thee by the Lord" (Lk 1:45). Mary's pregnancy is rendered a locus of God's redemptive action, which elevates the biological capacity of women to bear children to a starting point for their activity as prophetesses and disciples. While Mary is blessed because her child will be the son of God, as evidenced by Elizabeth's *in utero* infant recognizing the messianic Lord, thus fulfilling Gabriel's prophecy to Mary; her blessing also stems from her response to God's word. Unlike Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, who doubts the divine messenger, Mary hears and believes the word of God, immediately embarking on her journey to deliver divine grace to Elizabeth. Mary is thus represented as a model servant, for whom God's word is enough to surrender herself to divine purpose.

The significance of blessing thanks to belief is underlined by Ambrose, who extends this notion to encompass every single contemporary believer, rendering Mary the prototype of a devout Christian. While the patristic period favoured Matthew and John as the accounts most frequently afforded sustained commentary, Ambrose's *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* wielded significant

[113] *Vulgate. The Gospel According to Luke - Chapter 1.* http://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_1.htm.

authority during the Middle Ages.[114] The only other exegetical work from the patristic period concerned with the Gospel of Luke – the Lucan homilies of Origen of Alexandria (surviving primarily in Latin translation by Jerome and secondarily in Greek fragments) began to be viewed as problematic around the end of the fourth century, and thus Ambrose's exposition stood firmly as the textual authority on the Gospel.[115] Ambrose frames the Visitation as a joyful mystery, establishing the basis for the practice of praying the Rosary as a devotion to Mary – which Anne Winston-Allen has argued originates in twelfth century German Marian legends, and largely predates the development of the rosary in Carthusian monasteries in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[116]

Although divine conception and the ensuing virginal pregnancy were not available to the medieval faithful in a literal sense, according to Ambrose the spiritual conception of Christ in the believer's soul was a possible outcome of steadfast devotion. The idea of Christ's conception in the soul emerges in the writings of Origen, who built on the tradition of the Pauline epistles (Galatians 4:19 and Ephesians 3:17) and early Christian writings on baptism, fully developing the concept in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs, Commentary on the Song of Songs,* and the treatise *On Prayer*. In those texts, Origen emphasised the idea of a fertile soul which through perpetual prayer and exercise of good works gives birth to the Logos. This idea was taken up by other prominent early Christian theologians, who further allegorized Mary's motherhood as a model for spiritual imitation. According to Ambrose, whose commentary on the Gospels unites the concepts of conceiving and receiving divine grace, all souls who remain chaste and pure are capable of conceiving Christ as their fruit:

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[114] Susan B. Griffith, "Ambrose the Appropriator: Borrowed Texts in a New Context in the Commentary on Luke," in *Commentaries, Catenae and Biblical Tradition: Papers from the Ninth Birmingham Colloquium on the Textual Criticism of the New Testament: In Association with the COMPAUL Project*, ed. H. A. G. Houghthon (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 203.

[115] Scholars attribute this shift largely to the Cypriot bishop Epiphanius of Salamis' call to recognise Origen's writings as speculative and non-dogmatic. The so-called First Origenist Crisis culminated in Pope Theophilus of Alexandria declaring Origen a heretic and expelling Origenist monks from Egyptian monasteries in the year 402, rendering Ambrose's *Expositio* unchallenged as the main point of reference for further commentary and preaching on the Gospel of Luke. E. M. Harding, "Origenist Crises," in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 163–64.

[116] Anne Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose: The Making of the Rosary in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997), 26.

> "But you too are blessed, because you have heard and have believed. For every soul that believes conceives and brings forth the Word of God and recognises His works. […] According to the flesh, there is only one Mother of Christ, but by faith, Christ becomes the fruit of each one. For every soul receives the Word of God – on condition that it keeps its chastity and that free from vice it preserves its purity immaculate."[117]

The idea of conceiving Christ in the mind is articulated in even more explicit language by Augustine, who argues that preservation of virginity of the mind can allow for the Christian faithful to become "mothers of Christ" themselves. Augustine sees the Christian community as a familial unit in which the roles of siblings and parents are interchangeable, with the Church being the bride and mother of Christ at once, and the faithful assuming the roles of the "members" of Christ, the children of the Church, and Christ's mother:

> "And so, just as Mary gave birth in her womb as a virgin to Christ, so let the members of Christ give birth in their minds, and in this way you will be the mother of Christ. It is not something out of your reach, not something beyond your powers, not something incompatible with what you are. You became children, become mothers too."[118]

In addition to alternating between the earthly and heavenly aspects of Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancies, thus providing a devotional model for cloistered women focused on the conception of Christ, the Gospel provides an insight into the relationship between two largely different female figures. The majority of scholarship dealing with representation of the Visitation in medieval artworks emphasises the contrast between the two women, framing this opposition as a shorthand for the contrast between the Old Covenant, represented by elderly, barren, flesh-and-blood woman Elizabeth, and the New Testament, represented by the miraculous, fertile Virgin Mary.[119] The text of the Gospel itself does not warrant the discussion of the difference between the virginal Mary and barren Elizabeth insomuch as both of the pregnancies occur miraculously. In the case of Elizabeth and Zechariah, the miracle lies in the reversal of the natural process of aging and of Elizabeth's lifelong infertility (Lk 1:7,18) - a restoration of nature to its viable state, and a reversal of the process of decay. The supernatural

[117] Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke,* 36.

[118] Augustine of Hippo, "Sermon 72A on the Words of the Gospel of Matthew 12:41," 289.

[119] Tammen, "Das verborgene Sehen," 24.

character of Christ's birth is profoundly different in that it introduces upon the Earth something nature has not known before – a union between an earthly woman and God resulting in human-divine offspring. Despite its seemingly inferior nature, however, the supernatural element of Elizabeth's pregnancy is emphasised by a number of commentaries, including the aforementioned *Expositio euangelii secundum Lucam* by Ambrose, who observes:

> "The presence of the Lord had made [John] already strong and robust in his mother's womb, and he never knew the helplessness of infancy. [...] You see, he never knew the age of infancy and childhood. Still in his mother's womb he was raised above nature, above age, and began life at the age of perfection."[120]

This commentary not only frames the circumstances of John's development in the womb as miraculous, casting doubt on the modern art historical scholarship ascribing the emphasis on difference between the two women to medieval artworks, but also provides justification for representation of both Jesus and John as fully developed in the womb. The act of leaping in the womb is further discussed in detail by Augustine, who sees it as an expression of reciprocal salutation to the Virgin Mary, caused entirely by divine grace. Augustine argues that, even assuming that John "should be able in the bowels of his mother to know, believe, and assent," it is not possible for him to be responsible for any of his movement in Elizabeth's womb. Rather than the physical ability of a human child to move *in utero*, the leaping is understood as an expression of a "strange and unwonted" joy caused by the encounter with the divine, further underscoring the miraculous nature of Elizabeth's pregnancy and her mirroring of Marian childbearing:

> "AUG. [...] Such then might be the meaning of so great an event; to be known indeed by grown up persons, but not understood by a little child; for she said not, "The babe leaped in faith in my womb," but leaped for joy. Now we see not only children leaping for joy, but even the cattle; not surely from any faith or religious feeling, or any rational knowledge. But this joy was strange and unwonted, for it was in the womb; and at the coming of her who was to bring forth the Savior of the world. This joy, therefore, and as it were reciprocal salutation to the mother of the Lord, was caused (as miracles are) by Divine influences in the child, not in any human way by him. For even supposing the exercise of reason and the will had been so far

[120] Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke,* 37-38.

> advanced in that child, as that he should be able in the bowels of his mother to know, believe, and assent; yet surely that must be placed among the miracles of Divine power, not referred to human examples."[121]

The intimate connection between Elizabeth and Mary ultimately reveals itself in their speech. Arie Troost makes note of three Old Latin Gospel books – *Codex Vercellensis*, *Codex Veronensis*, and *Codex Rehdigeranus*– which attribute the *Magnificat* to Elizabeth.[122] This substitution could be caused by the fact that in the Visitation scene, Mary and Elizabeth address each other in terms reflective of their own individual situations. Mary's greeting to Elizabeth is reminiscent of the salutation she received from the angel. In turn, Elizabeth's greeting to Mary: "blessed is the fruit of thy womb" reflects on Elizabeth, who is also pregnant with a divinely promised child. Elizabeth addresses Mary as the recipient of divine promises made in the Law, of which she herself partakes; and Mary extends the angelic promise of protection and assistance she received to Elizabeth. The discussion of which of the women sang the *Magnificat*, which captured authors' interests since the earliest days of biblical exegesis, can be seen as a reflection of the search for the assumed precedence of Mary before Elizabeth, based in the superiority of Christ over John. However, while Mary remains obviously superior in the context of the entirety of salvation history, the textual merging occurring during the Visitation scene suggests a close parallel rather than opposition between the two women.

The intimate relationship between Mary and Elizabeth is further emphasised by exegetes beyond the context of their respective pregnancies. Recalling the earlier discussion of the roles of Lucan women beyond their capacity as mothers, Ambrose interprets the Visitation as a role model for pious women. The *Expositio* stresses the importance of respect and humility in the context of inter-generational relations, as well as the significance of love and duty that Mary felt

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[121] Augustine in Thomas Aquinas, *The Catena Aurea. Gospel of Saint Luke*. http://www.clerus.org/bibliaclerusonline/en/c3z.htm.

[122] *Codex Vercellensis* is the earliest surviving manuscript of the Old Latin Gospels. It was produced in the Piedmont region of Italy c. 350 and is held in the Vercelli Cathedral Capitulary Library (*Vetus Latina* 3). *Codex Veronensis* was produced c. 450 in Verona (Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare I 1, *Vetus Latina* 4), and *Codex Rehdigeranus* (first hand), produced c. 750, originates from Breslau (Wrocław in modern-day Poland) (Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Depot Breslau 3, *Vetus Latina* 11). Arie Troost, "Elizabeth and Mary-Naomi and Ruth: Gender Response Criticism in Luke 1-21," in *Feminist Companion to the Hebrew Bible in the New Testament*, ed. Athalya Brenner-Idan (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 79.

towards her elderly cousin. This particular exegesis is key to the reading of the Visitation as a model for relationships between women of different seniority and bears particular significance for interpretation of the Visitation in the monastic context. In his commentary on the Gospel, Ambrose acknowledges Elizabeth as an example to Mary, provided to her in order to strengthen her faith, once again signalling the significance of the exemplarity of female role models in the context of the Visitation.[123] Ambrose writes:

> "My sisters, learn from this to serve with the greatest eagerness those belonging to you who are with child. Mary had, up to this moment, lived in the strictest retirement. Neither that, nor her virginal dread of appearing in public, nor the ruggedness of the mountain paths, nor the length of the journey could deter her from fulfilling her duty. Towards the heights the Virgin hastens – the virgin who thinks only of rendering service and is forgetful of the trouble to herself. Her strength lies not in her sex but in her love. She leaves her house and sets forth. […] My sisters, you have learnt Mary's purity and refinement. Learn, too, her humility. She comes as a cousin to her cousin, as a younger woman to an elder. Not only does she come, but she is the first to address a greeting. It is highly becoming that the more chaste a virgin is, the more humble she should be. She should show respect for her elders. If she professes chastity, then she should be a model of humility."[124]

Although far from a major Biblical character, Elizabeth appears in yet another key text focused on the narratives of the Nativity and Infancy - the apocryphal Gospel of James, composed around 145 CE. Even though the narrative of the Visitation itself is not elaborated upon in the apocryphal Gospel, Elizabeth appears as a character in a narrative that introduces significant figures of women whose sanctity is chiefly connected to their involvement with motherhood: Saint Anne and the midwife Salome. While the other prominent apocryphal gospel, the Gospel of Thomas, also composed in the mid-second century (no scholarly consensus on a more precise date), does not part from the biblical canon in its retelling of the Infancy narrative; the Infancy Gospel of James provides the earliest surviving elaboration of the canonical Infancy narratives, which had a significant impact on the development of doctrines of

[123] "The angel, when announcing the mystery, gave Mary a proof or precedent that would enable her to believe him. He therefore announced to Mary, a virgin, that an old and hitherto barren woman was now expecting a child." Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke*, 34.

[124] Ibid.

Mariology.[125] The Gospel of James influenced latter childhood gospels such as Pseudo-Matthew, and the Arabic, Armenian and Latin Infancy traditions, demonstrating its enduring influence despite its formal absence in the medieval period.[126] In spite of the lack of surviving early Latin translations, likely due to the Gospel being condemned in the West because of its teaching regarding Joseph's first marriage, the survival of printed editions from the mid-sixteenth century suggests the existence of earlier manuscript versions.

Although the Infancy of Christ accounts for the key narrative of the Gospel of James, the main motif of the text appears to be the glorification of Mary through the retelling of the story of her birth, childhood, and marriage, responding to the demands of popular piety wishing for the filling of gaps in canonical material. Furthermore, there is a strong dogmatic motivation behind the text. The author stresses not only the fact that the conception of Jesus was virginal, but that his birth did not violate Mary's virginity. The belief in Mary's virginity *in et post partu* is coupled with the assertion of her perpetual virginity: the siblings of Christ known from the canonical gospels are explained to be

[125] Over a hundred Greek manuscripts of the Gospel of James survive, the oldest being the 3rd-4th century Papyrus Bodmer 5 (Bodmer Library, Geneva). Translations were made into Syriac, Ethiopian, Coptic, Georgian, Old Church Slavonic, Armenian, and Arabic, and the Gospel found immense popularity in the Christian East, where it enjoyed a quasi-canonical status. However, in the West it was condemned by the *Decretum Gelasianum*, an anonymous 5th or 6th century work traditionally thought to be a Decretal of Pope Gelasius I. The *Decretum* contains a list of writings thought to have been composed or compiled by heretics and schismatics and therefore not to be accepted by the Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church. Included in this list are "the Book on the Infancy of the Saviour (*Liber de infantia salvatoris*)" and "the Book of the Nativity of the Saviour and of Mary or the Midwife (*Liber de nativitate salvatoris et de Maria vel obstetrice*)," that is, the Infancy Gospel of Pseudo-Thomas and the Protoevangelium of James, respectively. This exclusion from the Western canon means that presumably very few manuscripts of the Gospel of James were produced in the medieval period, with the text being transmitted chiefly through compilation, oral tradition and visual culture. J.K. Elliott, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament. A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 49; Cornelia Horn, "The *Protoevangelium of James* and Its Reception in the Caucasus: *Status Quaestionis,*" *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 223-38.

[126] Translation, edition, and copying of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew was widespread throughout the medieval period. The manuscript evidence ranges from the turn of the 9th to the 16th century, with copies produced in nearly all European countries. Jan Gijsel identified 190 manuscript witnesses, divided into four major family recensions: A, P, Q, and R. The A-text and the P-text were developed around 800 CE. The Q-text emerged in the middle of the 12th century, and around the turn of the 13th century the R-text was created. The composer of the R-text worked with a variety of other sources, including the early 11th century *Nativity of Mary,* to create a newly compiled narrative, demonstrating the growing prominence and interest in Marian literature and devotion derived from apocrypha as evidenced by the ongoing effort to rewrite and elaborate on established Infancy narratives. Brandon W. Hawk, ed. and trans., *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 4-6; for manuscript descriptions and a list of manuscript copies of the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, see Jan Gijsel, ed. *Libri de Nativitate Mariae 1. Pseudo-Matthaei Evangelium: Textus et* Commentaries (Turnhout: Brepols, 1997), 108–217, 483–515.

Joseph's children from a previous marriage.[127] A noteworthy detail of the account is the introduction of two female characters, the midwife and her associate Salome, who are the first to bear witness to Jesus' birth and recognise him as Christ. By the High Middle Ages this Salome was often identified with Mary Salome, often appearing in representations of the Holy Kinship. In addition, the later medieval period saw the conflation of this account with the story of the birth of Mary, with representations of the nativity of the Virgin often embellished with additional figures of midwifes and nursemaids **(Fig. 18),** situating Mary in a community of women from the day of her birth and further connecting the Infancy narratives to the themes of kinship, mutuality, and servitude.

2.2.2 Medieval commentary and hagiography

Although there are few textual sources evidencing the popularity of the Infancy Gospels during the medieval period, the prolific visual evidence for the widespread cult of the apocryphal Saint Anne confirms that the medieval public would have been intimately familiar with the figure. The likely cause for this is the fragmentary proliferation of the Infancy Gospels through compilation works such as the *Golden Legend* and Vincent de Beauvais's *Speculum historiale*.[128] By the twelfth century, the cult of Saint Anne was firmly established in Northern Europe, and her feast was celebrated on July 26th. Despite her absence from the text of Scripture, Anne features prominently in widely proliferated genealogical

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[127] The controversy surrounding Joseph's first marriage stems from numerous references to "brethren" of Christ found throughout the Scripture (Mt 13:55-56, Mt 12:46, Mk 6:3, Lk 8:19, Jn 2:12, Jn 7:3-5, Acts 1:14). The New Testament describes James, Joseph (Joses), Judas (Jude), and Simon as brothers of Jesus. The Greek term *adelphos* (brother) is distinct from *anepsio* (cousin, nephew, niece). However, Aramaic, the native language of Jesus and his disciples, could not distinguish between a blood brother and a cousin, since, like Biblical Hebrew, it does not contain a word for "cousin," rendering the familial relationship ambiguous. The Gospel of James explicitly claims that Joseph was a widower with children at the time when Mary was entrusted to his care, and that one of his sons led the donkey on which Mary was seated during the journey to Bethlehem. The apocryphal account found support in the 3rd century when the theory of Joseph's children was used to support the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity. Since the early church did not accept that Mary had any children apart from Jesus, theologians such as Eusebius of Caesarea (c. 260/265–339/340 CE) and Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310/320–403 CE) held that these children were Joseph's children from a previous marriage. However, this idea began to find rejection after Jerome attested in *Against Helvidius* (c. 383 CE) that both Mary and Joseph perpetually remained in the virginal state, and thus the 'brethren' of Jesus were in fact his cousins (the children of Mary's sisters). Frank Leslie Cross, "Brethren of the Lord," in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church,* ed. Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[128] Virginia Nixon, *Mary's Mother. Saint Anne in Late Medieval Europe* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 12.

representations including depictions of *Anna Selbdritt* **(Fig. 19)** and the Holy Kinship **(Fig. 20)** across various media, suggesting that the apocryphal account would have been not only known, but also carried significant authority during the medieval period.[129] Towards the very end of the medieval period, there are further instances of elaboration on the theme of Holy Kinship where rather than constitute a single scene depicting the extended family of Christ, the representation is composed of a series of images showing episodes and figures related to the themes of family, matrimony, and motherhood, including the Visitation, both with and without the occupied womb.

One such example is the Kinship Altar from the Dreikönigskapelle in Baden, Kanton Aargau, Switzerland **(Fig. 21)**. The altarpiece, painted by the anonymous Master of the Carnation (c. 1500) depicts *Anne Selbdritt* accompanied by her husband Joachim (usually absent from representations of the *Selbdritt*), flanked by the scenes of the marriage of the Virgin to the left, and the Visitation featuring the occupied womb to the right, directly linking the motif of the occupied womb to the wider context of the genealogy of Christ. In addition, towards the late fifteenth century the motif of the occupied womb began to fuse with imagery of the *Selbdritt*, resulting in portrayals of the pregnant Saint Anne with the infant Mary visible within her womb, for instance in the Saint Anne altar from the Carmelite brotherhood in Frankfurt am Main **(Fig. 22).** Despite the lack of survival of pre-sixteenth-century Latin versions of the text, the visual presence of the Infancy Gospel of James and its widespread proliferation betrays an interest in maternal figures in the medieval period, with the parallelism between Anne, Mary and Elizabeth further strengthening the idea of biblical women as a multigenerational community, a concept crucial to our understanding of images of the occupied womb, to be explored in Chapter 5.

[129] *Anna Selbdritt* (literally: "Anna of the Three") is an iconographic type depicting Saint Anne with her daughter the Virgin Mary and her grandson, Jesus. This motif, which is based on the earlier *sedes sapientiae,* gained particular popularity in Germany and Flanders in the late 15th century as a part of the growing cult of Saint Anne. By showing the extended lineage and emphasising the humanity of the infant Christ the motif links the apocryphal Anne to salvation history and frames her as the source of the flesh of Mary, and thus Christ, linking both women to redemptive sacrifice. Ton Brandenbarg, "Saint Anne: A Holy Grandmother and Her Children," in *Sanctity and Motherhood. Essays on the Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages,* ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker (London; New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 31–65.

The significance of the Visitation as a model for female performance of the virtues of charity and humility was further underscored by medieval theologians. In his thirteenth-century commentary on the Gospel of Luke, Bonaventure interpreted the episode as "the demonstration of charity both in desire and effect." Towards the end of the thirteenth century, the Franciscan Conrad of Saxony followed Bonaventure's exegesis in his *Speculum beatae Mariae virginis,* stating in his retelling of the narrative of the Visitation that Mary is "four times named, and her charity towards God and towards her neighbour most fully declared."[130] This interpretation would have made the Visitation particularly significant to monastic audiences, considering that charity was universally recognized as one of the key monastic virtues, as well as the greatest of the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, and Charity), as articulated by Saint Paul (1 Corinthians 13).

The relationship of mutuality between Mary and Elizabeth is further noted in a number of medieval biblical paraphrases, including the *Historia scholastica* composed by Peter Comestor around 1170. *Historia scholastica* went on to become one of the most successful schoolbooks of its time, and its influence extended beyond medieval universities, with the text receiving translation into every major Western European vernacular of the period, including Czech, English, French, and German.[131] The survival of over eight hundred manuscript copies is a testament to the popularity of the text, which became a foundation for a number of seminal literary works of the medieval period.[132] Those include Guyart des Moulin's *Bible historiale* (1291-95) - the predominant medieval translation of the Bible into French - and Rudolf von Ems' *Weltchronik* (before

[130] "See how Mary was most loving by her charity. For she is that Mary of whom St. Luke saith: "Mary rising up with haste, went into the hill country." She went that she might visit, and salute, and minister to Elizabeth. See how this visitation of Mary was full of charity. In the description of that visit Mary is four times named and her charity towards God and towards her neighbor is most fully declared. Charity to our neighbor should be kept and cherished in the heart, in word and in deed. Mary had charity to her neighbor in her heart, and therefore, arising, Mary went with haste into the hill country. What was it that urged her on to haste in this office of charity but the love that burned in her heart?" Conrad of Saxony, *Mirror of the Blessed Virgin Mary*, Chapter IV: The Name of the Blessed Mary is Free From All Vice And Resplendent With Every Virtue (Il IntraText Edition CT) [Accessed March 2021]. http://www.intratext.com/IXT/ENG0025/_P5.HTM.

[131] James H. Morey, "Peter Comestor, Biblical Paraphrase, and the Medieval Popular Bible," *Speculum* 68, no. 1 (1993): 6–35.

[132] Mark J. Clark, *The Making of the Historia Scholastica, 1150-1200* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2015), 261.

1254) - a history of the world composed for Conrad IV Hohenstaufen, king of Germany and successor to the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II. More than simply a schoolbook, *Historia scholastica* became the foundation of the medieval popular Bible, shaping the common knowledge of the biblical narrative and reflecting the universal understanding of salvation history. The text was afforded sustained interest for over three centuries past its creation, becoming one of the earliest works ever printed, with editions appearing around 1470 in Strasbourg and Reutlingen.[133] In a section commenting on the works of the evangelists, Comestor combines the four gospel texts into a continuous narrative of salvation history, the *Historia evangelica.* The first three sections of the chapter cover the material presented in Luke 1:39-80, from Mary's travel to the hill country of Judah to the Canticle of Zechariah, unifying the paraphrased text of the Scripture and Comestor's gloss into a single account. Comestor's narrative is the first known text to introduce the scene of Mary assisting Elizabeth during her pregnancy, stating that the Virgin was the first one to pick up the infant John in her arms after he was born, and that she "served" her kinswoman before returning home following John's birth:

> "Rising up, Mary went into a city of Juda [...] where they say Zacharias lived, four miles from Jerusalem, and there was born John. And as is to be read in the book of the Just, the blessed Virgin was the first to lift him from the ground. "And as she greeted Elizabeth, the infant leapt in her womb." And when the mother of her Lord blessed her, Elizabeth prophesised, and Mary proclaimed the hymn of the Lord, saying: "My soul magnifies the Lord," etc. Mary stayed there for three months, attending to her kinswoman, and then returned home."[134]

Historia scholastica is widely cited in Jacobus da Voragine's *Legenda aurea,* which repeats the assertion that Mary assisted Elizabeth during the three remaining months of her pregnancy. The entry titled "The Birth of Saint John

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[133] Morey, "Peter Comestor," 6-35.

[134] *"Exsurgens autem Maria abiit in civitatem Juda […] in quo dicunt tunc Zachariam habitasse, quarto milliario a Jerusalem, et ibi natum Joannem. Et legitur in libro Justorum, quod beata Virgo eum primo levavit a terra. «Et cum salutasset Elisabeth exsultavit infans in utero ejus,» et cum matrem Domini sui et beatam eam prophetaret Elisabeth, edidit Maria canticum Domino, dicens: «Magnificat anima mea Dominum,» etc. Mansit autem Maria ibi mensibus tribus, ministrans cognatae donec pareret, et tunc rediit in domum suam."* J. P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 198: col.1537D - col.1538C (1848-55), Patrologia Latina Database (ProQuest Information and Learning Company, 1996) [Accessed March 2021]. Own translation. http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=3&id=Z300091821&FILE=../session/1560090395_13758&CURDB=pld.

the Baptist" compares Mary's behaviour to that of a "nursemaid" who "lifted [the child] from the earth with her holy hands"- a description which found reflection in late medieval representations of the nativity of John the Baptist, some of which depict Mary at Elizabeth's bedside, holding the swaddled infant John in her arms **(Fig. 23).**[135] Moreover, the text is likely to have influenced a number of German-language devotional plays, including the Bohemian Eger *Corpus Christi* Play (c. 1499) and the Swiss Lucerne Passion Play (1616), both of which include scenes of Mary remaining in Elizabeth's home until the birth of the Baptist.[136] Although Elizabeth is largely absent from the *Golden Legend* account, the chapter dedicated to John does provide additional commentary on her character and significance. While the text of the Gospel of Luke does not provide any reason as to why Elizabeth remained in seclusion for the first five months of her pregnancy, Jacobus cites Ambrose in emphasising the shame Elizabeth must have felt due to bearing a child at her age. However, he also recalls her happiness at conceiving. This is allegedly since a lack of children is shameful for a married woman of Elizabeth's age, since according to Ambrose carnal union is seen as justified and childbearing as a reward, with the marriage itself being a joyful event. The *Golden Legend* account of the Visitation thus positions Elizabeth between the shame of possible allegations of indulging in "lustful pleasure despite her years" and the "reproach of sterility," inadvertently rendering her a complex, multidimensional figure likely to resonate with an audience of women who experienced both motherhood (or lack thereof) and monastic chastity.

The text of the *Golden Legend* emphasises John's movement in Elizabeth's womb, echoing Augustine's discussion of the divine origin of the unborn child discussed above. While the Gospel itself only states that the child "leapt in [Elizabeth's] womb for joy (Luke 1:40)," the text of the *Golden Legend* adds additional dynamism to the scene, stating that John "leapt for joy in his mother's womb, and danced, saluting by his movements the one he could not greet with his voice. He leapt as one wishing to greet his Lord and to stand up to

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[135] "*et quasi morem gerule officiosissime peregit.*" Jacobus da Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 330.

[136] Cobie Kuné, "Maria in der Hoffnung. Zu den Graviditätsszenen in den deutschen religiösen Dramen des späten Mittelalters," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur Älteren Germanistik* 41 (1995): 223.

his presence."[137] The miraculous nature of the conception itself is also underlined, with Jacobus citing Ambrose's five causes for John's praiseworthiness, one which is the gift of threefold grace the infant received while still in his mother's womb.[138] The first of the graces is John being sanctified before he was born, in a manner that greatly resembles the calling of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:4). Second is the gift of prophecy, with John being anointed as a prophet by Christ while still *in utero*. Jacobus cites Chrysostom in saying that the words of Mary's salutation to Elizabeth proceeded from the womb, "where Christ dwelt," and entered through Elizabeth's ears, passing down to John in order to anoint him. Chrysostom's account cited in the *Golden Legend* thus diminishes the narrative significance of the women conversing with each other, instead reducing them to speaking vessels through which divine grace is channelled from Christ to John. The third of the gifts is John's ability to pass on the spirit of prophecy onto his mother. According to Chrysostom, John was able to bestow the knowledge of the coming of the Lord onto his mother, and he "opened her mouth to the word of confession of faith." This passage further emphasises the role of Elizabeth as a vessel for John's voice, with the *Golden Legend* referring to Chrysostom as an authoritative source, thus rejecting the ambiguity of Elizabeth's prophetic abilities expressed in both the Gospels and the multivalent patristic commentary.

While the fifteenth-century Nuremberg Chronicle's treatment of salvation history does not elaborate on the canonical account of the Visitation, an entry on John the Baptist appears before the description of the Nativity. It states: "John the Baptist, forerunner of Jesus Christ, born of holy parents, Zechariah and Elizabeth, was the most holy one who emerged from his mother's womb, and among the sons of women (as the Lord himself witnesses) the most outstanding."[139] The choice of language in this particular section of the Chronicle emphasises that John is the son of a woman during a time concerned largely with

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[137] Jacobus da Voragine, *The Golden Legend,* 330.

[138] Ibid., 331-32.

[139] "*Iohannes baptista Christi Iesu precursor ex sanctissimis parentibus Zacharia et Elizabeth natus. uir ab ipso matris sue utero sanctificatus. et inter mulierum natos (domino testante) non surrexit maior isto*." Hartmann Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum. Registrum Huius Operis Libri Cronicarum Cu[m] Figuris et Ymagi[Ni]Bus Ab Inicio Mu[n]Di:* (Nuremberg: Anton Koberger, for Sebald Schreyer and Sebastian Kammermeister, 1493). University of Glasgow Library Special Collections Sp Coll BD9-a.2, fol. XCIIIIv. In this and subsequent Latin transcriptions, I have expanded abbreviations but have not normalized spellings.

paternal, rather than maternal ancestry. The text of the Nuremberg Chronicle draws parallels between Elizabeth and the apocryphal Saint Anne, the mother of Mary, introduced in the Infancy Gospel of James, who conceived Mary in a manner largely similar to the conception of John the Baptist, as she, too, received an annunciation from an angel and was divinely cured of her infertility in her advanced age.[140] In the visual realm, analogy between Anne, Mary, and Elizabeth became apparent in the early sixteenth century, when representations of Saint Anne pregnant with *in utero* Virgin Mary began to appear following the papal approval of the Doctrine of Immaculate Conception in 1496 **(Fig. 22)**. In the German-speaking areas in particular, the publication of the treatise *De Laudibus sanctissimae matris Annae* in 1494, written by the Benedictine abbot Johannes Trithemius appears to have contributed to emergence of imagery of the pregnant Saint Anne alongside the already established and popular iconographic type of *Anna Selbdritt*. In many of the representations of the previously barren Anne, the infant Mary is depicted in a manner clearly resembling the infant John in representations of the occupied womb, nude and with hands clasped in prayer, frequently positioned within a halo. In describing Elizabeth and Anne, the Nuremberg Chronicle reads: "Zechariah […] married Elizabeth, the cousin of the Virgin Mary. Both women were very pious in their innocence, goodness, and grace. They had been barren for a long time, and Elizabeth had reached old age, and her womanly potency had ended."[141] While the woodcuts accompanying the text depict both Anne and Elizabeth as equals alongside their respective husbands, Joachim and Zechariah, the superior status of the women is emphasised by depicting them as halo-bearing saints, while their husbands remain mere earthly men **(Fig. 24, 25).**

In the Nuremberg Chronicle's abundant genealogical woodcuts, it is the mothers, rather than the fathers, who appear connected to their offspring through plant-like stems which they hold at the height of their wombs, suggesting a matrilineal

[140] See also: Jean Bourdichon - Hours for the use of Tours/Life of Saint Marguerite, Paris, c. 1490 (Bibliothèque Mazarine, Paris, MS 0507, fol. 186); stained glass window from the choir of the church of Notre-Dame de Brennilis, France, c. 1500-10; Jean Bellegambe - *Saint Anne Conceiving the Virgin,* c. 1515-20 (Chartreuse Museum, Douai).

[141] *"Zaharias […] Elizabeth virginis marie consobrinam duxit uxorem. Ambo quidem innocentia pietate et gratia sanctissimi. Qui cum diu steriles fuissent: et iam Elizabeth processisset i dies suos: et muliebria ei fieri desiissent.*" Schedel, *Liber Chronicarum.* University of Glasgow Sp Coll BD9-a.2, fol. XCIIIIr.

genealogy atypical for a period defined by paternal ancestry **(Fig. 26).**[142] Although the genealogical schemata of the Nuremberg chronicle follow the older, “top-down” model of representation inherited from the Carolingian period, in which the great ancestor of the dynasty (*Spitzenahn*), was pictured at the top of the genealogical structure; they also utilise the non-linear, loose structure and botanical elements typical for family trees of the later Middle Ages and the Renaissance. Christiane Klapisch-Zuber has noted that the earlier, descending model and its rigid structure generally excluded those individuals (above all, maternal relatives) who had formerly been integrated into the less linearly structured kinship groups and did not reinforce the lineage's claim to a fiefdom. The later mode of representation, however, constituting a winding, ascending tree and its many branches, gives greater emphasis to “a joyful proliferation” and the vital energy of a lineage.[143] Despite being detrimental to any clear depiction of the legitimate rights of each of the family members, the horticultural symbolism manages to express not only the chronological cohesiveness of the male line, but also the organic growth of a lineage, and its many interlacings and exfoliations. By merging the two modes of representation, the genealogical imagery of the Nuremberg chronicle thus combines the assertion of the dominance of the spiritual ancestors of both holy and secular families, who preside from their position at the top of the genealogical structure, with the newfound interest in a wider range of familial relations and their significance as an interlinked, collective whole, connected by winding stems originating, at times almost literally, in the wombs of women.

The mutual relationship between Mary and Elizabeth provides foundations for a possible reading of the women as a typological pairing. Illustrated accounts of the Visitation, including ones featuring the occupied womb, appear in a

[142] That is unless a woman is depicted with multiple husbands, as in the case of Saint Anne. This mode of representation is employed not only for the genealogy of Christ, but also for secular genealogies of both pagan pre-Christian dynasties and contemporaneous Christian rulers, e.g. Holy Roman Emperor Henry II and Empress Kunigunde. While in the imperial genealogies the fathers are equipped with heraldic devices and labelled with their royal titles, and the mothers remain mostly unidentified, it is still the mothers who connect the dynasty, holding the stems of the family tree. In addition, the modern costume of the imperial genealogies, rather than the loose robes of the biblical figures, allows the connections to be depicted more explicitly, and in a number of woodcuts the stems of the genealogical branches appear to emerge from within the women, resembling an umbilical cord.

[143] Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, "The Genesis of the Family Tree," *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 4 (1991): 107–8.

significant number of manuscript copies of the fourteenth-century typological encyclopaedia *Speculum humanae salvationis*, where they are included in the cycle of the Seven Joys of the Virgin Mary **(Fig. 27, 28).**[144] The chapters containing the illustrations and text of the Seven Joys and Seven Sorrows are structured differently from the rest of the text – rather than depict New Testament episodes alongside their Old Testament parallels, they present a semi-structured narrative encouraging meditation on individual episodes. Although the women are not presented as a typological mirror to each other, they appear within a larger typological scheme, which is likely to have suggested a possible interpretation of the episode in terms of analogies between the characters and their narratives. The paragraph of text accompanying the representation of the Visitation focuses chiefly on the Virgin Mary, only mentioning Elizabeth once, and concluding with a Marian prayer. The text introduces into the discourse of the Visitation a key number of Mariological concepts – the notion of Mary as a vessel of "heavenly balm" ("Deyn kewlcher leyb war geleych eynem blasam vaß"), the typology of the burning bush, which in the main body of *Speculum* is paired with the Annunciation ("Du bist der busch vol fewrs des grо̊ne nit verbrann"), and the emblematic attribute of Mary as *hortus conclusus* ("Du bist eyn beschloßener gart aller wircze unnd wollusten").[145] It is therefore likely that the inclusion of Visitation in a typological context would have allowed for the extension of the parallelism between Jesus and John to their respective mothers, further suggesting a relationship of mirroring and mutuality between the two women.

[144] See the Warburg Institute Iconographic Database for an extensive collection of Visitation imagery from manuscript and early printed copies of *Speculum humanae salvationis* [Accessed March 2021]. https://iconographic.warburg.sas.ac.uk/vpc/VPC_search/subcats.php?cat_1=14&cat_2=812&cat_3=2903&cat_4=5439&cat_5=13111&cat_6=9888&cat_7=3241.

[145] "Die andere frewd unnser frawen. Frew dich milte mů̊tter christi. […] Dann bettest du sů̊sse mů̊tter deyn ander frewd Da du dein mů̊men Elizabeth mit sů̊ssen umbfengen umbfiengest. du das kindt Iohannes in seyner mů̊tter leyb vor frewden sich frewete. […] Deyn kewlcher leyb war geleych eynem blasam vaß in dem got seynem hymlischen balsam hett beschloßen Du bist der busch vol fewrs des grо̊ne nit verbrann wann du wardest beschwärt on mägtliches verliessen. Du bist eyn beschloßener gart aller wircze unnd wollusten;" "The other joy of Our Lady. Rejoice, pious Mother of Christ. […] You possess your second joy. Because you embraced your relative Elizabeth with a sweet embrace. When the child John leaped with joy inside his mother's womb. […] Your chaste womb was like a vase of balm in which God enclosed his heavenly balm. You are the burning bush without its greenness burning when you were impregnated without losing virginity. You are an enclosed garden of all virtues and joys […]." Johannes, Benedictine Of St. Ulrich Und Afra, *Speculum humanae salvationis cum Speculo S. Mariae Virginis* (Augsburg: Benedictine Abbey of St Ulrich and Afra, 1473). Library of Congress, Washington DC, Incun. 1473.S7 BT750, fol. 253r [Accessed March 2021]. Own transcription and translation. https://www.loc.gov/item/48043284/.

The focus on Elizabeth's age and her role in creating a community of women with Mary, seen in patristic exegesis and medieval literature, makes her an ideal model for cloistered women. The *Meditationes vitae Christi* – one of the most widely copied texts concerning the Life of Christ, composed at the very start of the fourteenth century – encourages its readers to imagine themselves as present in the key moments of Christ's life, re-enacting the scenes as vivid imaginary scenarios in order to both invite the readers' empathy and facilitate memorisation of the structure of events.[146] The text appears particularly relevant to female audiences, since, as Sarah NcNamer has noted, it contains allusions to or material borrowed from female authors such as Mechthild of Hackeborn and Elizabeth of Hungary. Although its authorship remains anonymous, it is also possible that the text of the *Meditationes* was composed by an Italian Poor Clare due to its focus on Franciscan ideals without an insistence on promoting the Franciscan Order as an institution.[147]

NcNamer has observed that the original text of the *Meditationes* contains frequent descriptions of women's domestic spaces and rituals, the pragmatic detail of pregnancy and childcare, and numerous references to women socializing, sharing beds, and engaging in intimate conversation.[148] The text also places women at the centre of the Infancy and Passion narratives, even when there is no scriptural basis for doing so. The account of the journey to Bethlehem stresses the difficulty of travel for a heavily pregnant woman; at the Visitation Elizabeth and Mary sit together in an intimate domestic space and ask each other how their pregnancies are progressing, with the text emphasising Mary's role in serving her cousin and her assistance during the birth of John the Baptist. While in the Biblical text it is only said that Mary greeted Elizabeth, the *Meditationes* put this greeting into words: "Alheyle my dere sistere Elizabeth," stressing the familial relationship between the women and elevating Elizabeth's

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[146] The text survives in over two hundred manuscript copies, including translations into German vernacular. Renana Bartal, "Repetition, Opposition, and Invention in an Illuminated *Meditationes Vitae Christi*: Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 410," *Gesta* 53, no. 2 (2014): 156; Sarah McNamer, "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," *Speculum* 84, no. 4 (2009): 905; The most comprehensive list and description of surviving manuscript copies remains Columban Fischer, "Die *'Meditationes vitae Christi'*: Ihre handschrifliche Überlieferung und die Verfasserfrage," *Archivum Franciscanum historicum* 25 (1932): 3-35, 175-209, 305-48, 449-83.

[147] McNamer, "The Author of the Italian *Meditations on the Life of* Christ," 121-22, 125-26.

[148] Ibid., 127-28, 130-31.

status.[149] The text emphasises the importance of the familial nature of the scene in its description of Mary and Elizabeth, Jesus and John, and Joseph and Zechariah all dwelling together, framing it as a model for relationships across genders and generations – a notion particularly relevant in the context of close relationships between women and their advisors or confessors, and across younger and older women in the monastic context:

> "And what tyme she came & entered in to þe house of Zakarye.' she gret his wife Elizabeth in þis manere, *Alheyle my dere sistere Elizabeth*. And anone herewiþ Elizabeth glad & ioyful & liȝtenet þorh þe holy gost.' rose vp & clepped hire dereworþly & tendurly criyng for ioy & seying thus.' *Blessed be þou amonge women & blessed be þe fruyt of þi wombe*.
>
> And when she had done.' þei wenten to sitte togeddire. And oure lady of hire souereyn mekenes, sette hire doune in þe lowere place at Elizabeth feet. Bot she anone risyng vp.' suffred not bot toke hire vp & so þei setten downe to gedire. And þan asked oure lady of Elizabeth þe manere of hire conceyuyng, & she aȝeyn of ȝe maner of hire conceyuyng, & so þei tolden eiþere to oþere gladly þe grete gudenesse of oure lord, & lowedon & wirchipedon god of eiþer conception, & so in þonkyng god & gostly myrþ they contynueden dayes & nyȝtes. For oure laidy duelled þere þe [terme] of þre moneþes seruyng Elizabeth in al þat she myȝt, mekely, reuerently & deuoutly as a seruant, forȝetyng þat she was goddis modere & qwene of alle þe world.
>
> A lord god what house was þat, what Chaumbur & what bedde in þe whech duelleden to gedire & resteden so worþi Moderes with so noble sones, þat is to sey Marie & Elizabeth Jesus, & Jon. And also with hem duellyng þo wirchipful olde men, Zakarie & Joseph. Þis was a blessed companye of men & women & of children.
>
> In þis forseid processe of þe visitacione of our lady we hauen ensaumple þat it is leueful & oft spedful, deuout men & women to viset oþer for edificacion & gostly recreacion, & namelich the ȝongere

[149] Mary and Elizabeth's conversation in the episode of the Visitation is further elaborated upon on in the late 15th century Towneley Plays – one of the four surviving English mystery play cycles. In the Towneley *Salutation of Elizabeth*, when Elizabeth sees Mary she first asks her not about her pregnancy but about "how thi freyndys fare" and "how thou farys" (1:11.16, 19). The Gospel greeting is said by Elizabeth only when Mary confirms that all of their shared companions and kin still live, emphasising the significance of familial relations within the episode, offering the possibility of women's friendships and religious devotion existing in immediate correlation with each other. "The Salutation of Elizabeth" in *The Towneley Plays, The Corpus of Middle English Prose and Verse*, University of Michigan, 97-98 [Accessed March 2021]. https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/Towneley/1:11?rgn=div1;view=fulltext.

> to þe eldire, so þat it be done in dewe tyme, & with oþere leueful menes."[150]

Although this passage in particular does not provide explicit instructions for interacting or identifying oneself with the Virgin such as the ones found for instance in the commentary on the journey to Bethlehem, McNamer argues that nevertheless through its construction of gendered spaces and implicit invitation into them, the text positions its reader as a woman in women's space, encouraging behaviour similar to Elizabeth's.[151]

Despite later medieval versions of the text aiming to place the narrative in a larger exegetical framework and elevate it to a more dignified status, the later iterations of the *Meditationes* retained their feminine perspective, remaining highly affective and containing a substantial amount of descriptions related to childbearing, childcare, and the domestic sphere.[152] In its insistence on a very particular *imitatio Mariae* steeped in a feminine viewpoint and domestic realism, the text reaffirms the widely established function of medieval text and images as tools which structure and guide the viewing experience by providing visual anchors in the form of figures which elicit the spectator's emotion, engaging them in the depicted event. Similar descriptions of the relationship of mutuality can be found in accounts of female mystics towards the mid-fourteenth century, suggesting that their record of visionary experience could have been influenced by the *Meditationes.* In the account of a vision of the Virgin Mary experienced by Birgitta of Sweden, Mary says:

> "Full of wonder, I went up to my kinswoman Elizabeth to aid her in her pregnancy and to talk with her about the angel's message to me. She met me at the spring, and when we embraced and exchanged kisses, the infant in her womb leapt for joy with a wonderful and noticeable movement. I, too, was so much moved in my heart with a new and strange elation that my tongue declared words of God I had

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[150] The text quoted is from a Middle English translation of the *Meditations* by Nicholas Love. This translation, which forms the basis of many English mystery pays, including the N-town cycle, omits many of the quotations from Bernard of Clairvaux and compresses the section on public ministry, bringing to the forefront the passages which formed the core affective meditations and are considered the most influential sections of the Meditations. Love, *The Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ*, 32 l. 30-42 – 33, l.1-10; McNamer, "The Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," 914.

[151] Sarah McNamer, *Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 132.

[152] McNamer, "Origins of the *Meditationes Vitae Christi*," 908-09.

> not thought out before, and my soul could scarcely contain itself for joy. When Elizabeth felt wonder at the fervor of the spirit that spoke in me, and I, too, wondered at God's grace at work in her, then both of us praised God and remained together for some days."[153]

Birgitta's account clearly echoes Ambrose's exegesis of the Lucan episode discussed above, foregrounding the relationship of mutuality between the two women, incorporating patristic exegesis into the medieval framework of interpretation of the Visitation within a female devotional context.

2.2.3 Feast and liturgy

The authority of the Gospel of Luke and Ambrose's Lucan homilies was sealed by their incorporation into the Roman Mass liturgy by the mid-seventh century.[154] The three canticles sung daily in the Western Office – *Benedictus,* the hymn of Zachariah recognizing John as the forerunner of Christ; *Magnificat*, Mary's exaltation of joy; and *Nunc dimittis*, Simeon's recognition of Christ as Messiah - all have their origins in the text of the Gospel. The hymns of *Benedictus* and *Magnificat* in particular are irreversibly tied to the Luke-specific account of the Visitation. The three hymns, all primarily concerned with the acts of giving and receiving, were deeply ingrained in medieval Christian imaginations as they were re-enacted daily, marking particular hours through their proclamation and occupying key spaces in the timeframe of daily liturgy. *Benedictus* and *Magnificat* constitute an integral part of the two Major Hours – Lauds and Vespers respectively, when both were sung with a variable antiphon, and *Nunc dimittis* closes the daily cycle of prayer as a part of the Roman office of the Compline with the antiphon *Salva nos domine*.[155]

In addition to the celebration of Mass, the liturgy of the Hours also played a key role in nuns' piety. Since the Hours were first a lay celebration in their late antique origins, no presence of male clerics was required, and by the High

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[153] Birgitta of Sweden, "Chapter 59. Mary's Visit to Elizabeth, her Pregnancy, and her Life with Joseph" in *The Revelations,* vol. 3: *Liber Caelestis*, Book VI, 122.

[154] Margot E. Fassler, *The Virgin of Chartres. Making History Through the Liturgy and the Arts* (New Haven, CN; London: Yale University Press, 2010), 64.

[155] John Harper, *The Forms and Orders of Western Liturgy from the Tenth to the Eighteenth Century. A Historical Introduction and Guide for Students and Musicians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 83; Jonathan Black, "The Divine Office and Private Devotion in the Latin West," in *The Liturgy of the Medieval Church*, ed. Thomas J. Heffernan and E. Ann Matter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, Western Michigan University, 2001), 60.

Middle Ages women would often fill the role of the liturgical presider within monastic communities.[156] Sources such as the *Notel der Küsterin* ("Handbook of the Female Sacristan," 1436, Stadtbibliothek, Nuremberg, Cent.VII 16) from the Dominican nunnery St Katharina in Nuremberg, demonstrate the extent to which cloistered women assumed the typically male liturgical duties, including instruction on everything from the readings for and precedence of certain feast days and how the altars were to be decorated for individual feast days; to strictly practical matters such as how ecclesiastical hangings were to be cleaned and maintained.[157] The use of illuminated manuscripts in liturgical practice was also widespread in monastic communities. The Office of the Hours of the Virgin was often illustrated with Visitation imagery, with the scene corresponding to the hour of Lauds. While the majority of the surviving books of hours which include the Little Office are linked to lay patronage, Rachel Fulton Brown has observed that the monastic practice of reciting the Hours of the Virgin predates its lay popularity by almost a century. [158]

While the psalms (except those for Matins) corresponding to the Hours were not necessarily specific to Marian feasts (for example, the Psalms for Lauds do not correspond to the liturgy of the Feast of the Visitation), they nevertheless bear significance in the context of Visitation imagery used to illustrate the office in prayer books. Although the antiphons for the office are variable, the readings included in the office display an overwhelming focus on joyful worship. In its calling of all nature to worship God, the Canticle of the Three Children demonstrates the scale of Creation, conceptually linking the Second Joyful Mystery and birth of Christ to creation of all Christendom as it began in Genesis. The *Benedictus* - the hymn of Zachariah recognizing John the Baptist as the forerunner of Christ - is directly derived from the Lucan account of the

[156] Gisela Muschiol, *Famula Dei. Zur Liturgie in merowingischen Frauenklöstern* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1994), 101-06.

[157] Gerhard Weilandt, "Alltag einer Küsterin: die Ausstattung und liturgische Nutzung von Chor und Nonnenempore der Nürnberger Dominikanerinnenkirche nach dem 'Notel der Küsterin' (1436)," in *Kunst und Liturgie. Choranlagen des Spätmittelalters. Ihre Architektur, Ausstattung und Nutzung*, ed. Anna Moraht-Fromm (Ostfildern: J. Thorbecke, 2003), 159–87.

[158] The office of Lauds – the only one consistent from Use to Use – comprises Psalms 92 (with antiphon), 99 (with antiphon), 62 and 66 (under one antiphon), followed by the Canticle of the Three Children (Daniel 3:57-88), and Psalms 148, 149 and 150 (under one antiphon). These are followed by a capitulum (with or without responsory), the hymn *O gloriosa domina* with versicle and response, concluding with *Benedictus* (Lk 1:68-79). Rachel Fulton Brown, *Mary and the Art of Prayer: The Hours of the Virgin in Medieval Christian Life and Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017), 26.

Visitation. Although in the biblical text the hymn is proclaimed only following the birth of John, it directly mirrors the moment of recognition occurring during the Visitation itself, paralleling the Marian hymn of *Magnificat* which would have been sung at Vespers, the two hymns opening and closing the day of prayer.[159]

By the fourteenth century, textual material unique to the Gospel of Luke, repeated daily in the cycle of prayer of the vast majority of medieval faithful, was considered significant enough to eventually be afforded feast days in the liturgical calendar. Pope Boniface IX instituted the Feast of the Visitation in the year 1390 at the urging of Jan of Jenštejn, archbishop of Prague, for celebration on July 2nd - the day after the end of the octave following the feast of Nativity of John the Baptist. Although the timing of the Feast of the Visitation does not coincide with the chronology of the biblical narrative of John the Baptist's conception and infancy, its placement in the liturgical calendar allows it to suggest a symbolic connection between John's birth and the day of his cleansing from the original sin. Like many liturgical feasts and newly established cults, the Feast of the Visitation had been celebrated locally long before gaining official recognition and papal approval. The feast had been celebrated in cities including Ratisbon, Paris, Prague, Reims, and Geneva prior to its official introduction by the church, and it was included amongst the major Marian feasts recorded in the devotional handbook *Flores de gestis beatae Mariae*, composed by Nicholas of Strasbourg - the Vicar of the Dominican province in Germany appointed in 1325.[160]

As noted in Chapter 1, the Dominicans were significant not only in the spread and popularisation of the feast prior to its official institution by the papacy. Indeed, the official establishment of the feast can be tentatively linked to the order as well. The Order of Preachers was actively involved in the peace negotiations between the Papacy and Florence and in the efforts to end the Great Schism, which erupted in 1378. The General Master of the order, Raymond of Capua, had been responsible for the spiritual care of the Dominican nuns at

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[159] Although Lauds is preceded by Matins and thus it is the second of the hours, Matins and Lauds were often sung together at the start of the day, effectively making the two sets of prayers the beginning of the daily liturgy.

[160] Eugen Hillenbrand, *Nikolaus von Strassburg: Religiöse Bewegung und dominikanische Theologie im 14. Jahrhundert* (Freiburg im Breisgau: E. Albert, 1968), 81.

Montepulciano, and he later became the confessor and biographer of Catherine of Siena, alongside whom he became involved in the political events outlined above – in part thanks to his close relationship to Jan of Jenštejn, whom he visited in 1383, shortly before Jan introduced the Feast of the Visitation in Bohemia in 1386.[161] It is therefore possible that Raymond and Catherine's influence on the papacy provided exposure for the increasingly prominently gendered spirituality, contributing to the institution of a feast employing an episode centred on womanhood as a means of accomplishing peace within a divided church.

Jan of Jenštejn himself would have been familiar with the South German Dominican mystical movement, as he practiced ascesis in a manner similar to monastic practices of the time, and reported experiencing visions of the Virgin Mary following the papal schism.[162] The first vision allegedly confirmed to him the need for institution of the Feast of the Visitation in order to ensure Mary's mediation and assistance towards the divided Church, and a subsequent vision is said to have inspired him to compose the office for the new feast, which was disseminated through letters sent to bishops and priors in regions which remained loyal to the Roman papacy. Accounts of visions experienced by Jan of Jenštejn are recorded in two fifteenth-century manuscripts.[163] From the fifteen "miracles" described in the manuscripts, the eleventh miracle can be connected to the emergence of the iconographic type of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb towards the end of the fourteenth century. In this account, Jan recalls lamenting the fact that due to not yet having received permission from

[161] Further evidence for the connection between the Italian, German, and Bohemian Dominicans and the Feast of the Visitation is suggested by the fact that the University of Siena was attended by a significant number of German students, who had their own chapel in the church of San Domenico – a convent which itself had a significant number of German friars. Raymond of Capua would have been at least aware of this community through his role as spiritual director and confessor of Catherine of Siena. After Catherine's death, Raymond frequently travelled between Germany and Italy, and in addition, Raymond and Jan of Jenštejn exchanged letters after the institution of the Feast of the Visitation in Prague, in which Raymond expressed his support for the initiative and constructed elaborate theological arguments in favour of the feast. Vladimir Koudelka, "Raimund von Capua und Böhmen," *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum* 30 (1960): 206-26.

[162] Milada Studničková, "Archbishop Jan of Jenstein and a New Iconography of the Visitation of St Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary. Mystic Vision and its Visualization as an Instrument of Church Policy," in *Image, Memory and Devotion. Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley*, ed. Zoë Opačić and Achim Timmermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 114.

[163] Those are: *Quod visitationis festum pluribus est revelatum,* Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Wrocław, I F 777, fol. 105r-111v; and *Miracula beatae Mariae visitationis* in the *Jenstein Codex,* The Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. lat. 1122, fol. 157r-161v.

the papacy, he was not allowed to don the pallium for celebration of the Feast of the Visitation.[164] Subsequently, he describes a dream in which he saw himself preparing to officiate Mass while wearing a pallium decorated with a depiction of Saint Elizabeth visiting the Virgin Mary after the birth of Christ, embroidered on the bands of the garment. According to Jan's account, three days after experiencing the vision, he received confirmation from Rome that the Feast of the Visitation had been approved by the Roman Curia, the image of Elizabeth's reciprocal visit thus miraculously confirming the institution of the feast. Although very few pallia survive from the medieval period, images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb can be found on other ecclesiastical garments, including a Bohemian orphrey panel from a cope produced at the beginning of the fifteenth century **(Fig. 29).**[165]

This second visitation, which prior to Jan of Jenštejn's visionary account had been briefly described in apocryphal texts including *Life of the Virgin* (1330-50) by the Carthusian monk Philipp of Seiz and *Vite de' Santi Padri* (1320-42) by the Pisan Dominican Domenico Cavalca, is depicted within a historiated initial opening the account of Jan of Jenštejn's Marian visions in the *Jenstein Codex* **(Fig. 30),** which also contains the full text of his Visitation office.[166] The

[164] The pallium is a type of ecclesiastical vestment worn by the Pope and bestowed upon metropolitans and primates as a symbol of their conferred jurisdictional authorities. For history and significance of the pallium in the medieval period see Steven A. Schoenig, *Bonds of Wool: The Pallium and Papal Power in the Middle Ages* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2016).

[165] Embroidered depictions of the Visitation, albeit without the occupied womb, can also be found on a 16th century chasuble cross from the cathedral of Fulda (Dom-Museum, Fulda), where the scene is accompanied by representations of the Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple; an early 16h century Hessian chasuble (Domschatz und Museum des Sankt-Petri-Domes, Fritzlar) where the Visitation and panels of female saints accompany a central depiction of the Virgin and Child; and an Alsatian textile fragment dating to c. 1520 which had been cut to be used as a cope, presumably originating from a larger tapestry of the Life of the Virgin (The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 46.45).

[166] Towards the later medieval period, representation of the second meeting between Mary and Elizabeth can be found prominently in manuscript copies of Rudolf von Ems' *Weltchronik,* and the *Historienbibeln* – vernacular works of biblical paraphrase drawing on chronicles and apocrypha (including the *Weltchronik* and Phillipp's *Life of the Virgin*) surviving in over a hundred manuscript copies produced in the 14th and 15th centuries. In manuscripts of the *Historienbibeln* representations of the second meeting can appear both when the Lucan Visitation is depicted, as well as when it is absence from the visual programme of the manuscript, which can vary greatly between copies as there was no single standardised version of the text. When the second meeting is illustrated in the *Historienbibeln* it can be shown with just the two women and no children (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 1101, fol. 280r); the two women embracing, their fully clothed children standing together to the side of their mothers, mirroring their poses in an embrace or prayer (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 1101, fol. 258v; Zentralbibliothek, Zurich, Ms. C 5, fol. 359v); or with nude infants positioned in front of their mothers, at a distance from each other, visually resembling their

manuscript includes five historiated initials illuminated with images of the Visitation (fols. 4r, 13v, 138v, 157r, 187v), three of which depict Mary with female companions (fols. 4r, 138v, 87v). The initial on fol. 157r, however, shows Mary and Elizabeth holding their nude infants while facing each other, John the Baptist praying and Christ performing the gesture of blessing, demonstrating direct resemblance to images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb which depict the *in utero* children as "floating" in front of their mothers **(Fig. 27)**. The manuscript, which was produced in the late fourteenth century, correlates temporarily to the emergence of imagery of the occupied womb in the south of Germany, suggesting that perhaps representations of the two Visitations – the canonical one of Mary to Elizabeth, and the apocryphal reciprocal visit of Elizabeth to Mary – might have become visually conflated, the infants of the second visit being translated into the visible *in utero* children in representations of the Gospel episode. A marginal note by Jan of Jenštejn himself suggests that the historiated initial is based on a no longer surviving mural in the tower of the Archbishop's Palace in Prague, which had allegedly been decorated with multiple frescos of Jan's visions and a subject of public attraction until its destruction by a fire in 1420.[167] The final sentence of the account of the eleventh miracle within the Wrocław manuscript notes that Jan had many depictions of his visions painted, implying that those Bohemian representations could have influenced the later German artworks depicting the Visitation featuring the occupied womb.[168]

While Jan of Jenštejn did compose an office for the Feast of the Visitation, eventually an office by the English Benedictine cardinal Adam Easton was officially approved by the papacy. Jan first submitted his proposal for a new

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contemporary depictions of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb (Staats- und Stadtbibliothek, Augsburg, 2 Cod 50 (Cim 74), fol. 300v).

[167] "*Item visitacio quomodo elizabet visitavit cum pueris sicut depictum est in turri mea in praga ubi leo est depictus in angulo."* "The Visitation, in the manner of Elizabeth visiting with the boys, is depicted in my tower in Prague, where a lion is painted in the corner." The Vatican Apostolic Library, Vat. lat. 1122, fol. 157v. Cited and translated in Studničková, "Archbishop Jan of Jenstein," 116; Ruben Ernest Weltsch, *Archbishop John of Jenstein (1348-1400): Papalism, Humanism and Reform in Pre-Hussite Prague* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 88.

[168] "*Quare in ipsum miraculum tanquam secundam Scripturam inauditum, possibilem tamen in pluribus loci idem archiepiscopus per imagines depingi mandavit.*" "Therefore while this miracle is unheard of according to the Scripture, it was possible for the archbishop to command to depict it in many places." Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Wrocław, I F 777, fol. 111v - *Miraculum undecimum,* ed. Augustin Neumann, reproduced in Studničková, "Archbishop Jan of Jenstein," 120.

feast and an initial three-lesson office to the Papal Curia in 1386. The text was examined by a panel of thirty-seven theologians, which, according to Augustine Neumann, raised eight objections to the feast, including one related specifically to office: that its writing style was not sophisticated enough. When Pope Urban VI, whom Jan first approached regarding the institution of the feast, died before he could officially institute the feast with a papal bull, Jan approached his successor, Boniface IX, to petition for the completion of the process. In the year 1390, Boniface IX appointed a new panel of four cardinals, including Adam Easton, to investigate Jan's office alongside seven other newly submitted offices. Jan of Jenštejn's office, *Exurgens autem Maria,* had been previously criticised for its unsophisticated Latin, use of strange or dubious phrasing, and lack of consistent rhyme and versification schemes.[169] In contrast, Easton's own office, *Accedunt laudes virginis*, addressed those criticisms by using rhymed and versified texts, and eventually was selected by the Papal Curia. However, the twenty-nine manuscripts and early printed books indexed in the Cantus database containing the text of the Office demonstrate that although Easton's office was promulgated by the Curia, Jan of Jenštejn's was still being copied and used to celebrate the feast across Europe, both in lay and monastic settings, as late as in the mid-sixteenth century. Both offices have been largely adapted and modified to suit the needs of local congregations, including monastic ones, with manuscripts containing either full readings or excerpts from both, oftentimes seamlessly combined with each other or supplemented by readings from other feast days.[170]

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[169] Augustine Neumann, "Účast Arcibiskupa Jenštejna Na Zavedení Svátku Navštívení P. Marie," *Pax: Časopis pro Přátele Liturgie a Řádu Sv. Benedikta* 10 (1935): 472.

[170] Amongst the manuscripts and early printed books indexed in the *Cantus* database, the text of the office for the Feast of the Visitation appears in antiphoners (26), as well as a breviary, vesperal, and gradual. The books were produced primarily in Germany (13), as well as the Low Countries (3), Poland (4), France (2), Austria (3); and Hungary, Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom (1 each). The majority dates from the 14th (6), 15th (9), and 16th centuries (9), although there are also instances of the text of the office being added to manuscripts produced in the 12th (2) and 13th (3) centuries. Thirteen of the twenty-nine manuscripts included in the index were produced for or by monastic houses. All of these are antiphoners, and they originate from: the convent of Carmelites of Mainz, 1430 (D-MZb C); Benedictine abbey of Saint-Vaast d'Arras, France, 14th century (F-AS 893); Premonstratensian community at Tongerloo, Belgium, 16th century (B-Gu HS Bkt.006); Benedictine abbey of Saints Ulrich and Afra in Augsburg, three manuscripts dating to 1519 (D-Mbs Clm 4304), 1459 (D-Mbs Clm 4305), and 1501 (D-Mbs Clm 4306); Benedictine abbey of Zwiefalten, 12th century with significant 13th/14th century rewriting (D-KA Aug. LX); Carmelite Convent of Kraków, Poland, two manuscripts dating to 1397 (PL-Kkar 3 Rkp 12) and 1468 (PL-Kkar 3 Rkp 15); Cistercian abbey of Rein, Austria, 13th century with later additions (A-Wn 1799); and an unknown community of Franciscans in Spain, late 16th century (AUS-Sfl Add. MS 413). Two of the manuscripts originate in female monastic

This chapter has demonstrated that in medieval exegetical commentary on the Gospel of Luke there is no single, unified interpretation of the account of the Visitation. A wide variety of texts, both patristic and original to the Middle Ages, exerted its influence on visual representations of the Visitation and associated motherhood narratives, shaping the visual appearance of artworks, their semiotic significance, and their reception by their contemporary audiences. As the single most significant textual authority on the Gospel of Luke, the *expositio* of Ambrose points strongly towards the relationship of mutual aid and support between the two women. Moreover, neither the fragmentary patristic commentary nor the medieval works of biblical paraphrase provide decisive interpretation of the nature of the relationship between Mary and Elizabeth, and their perceived equality, or lack thereof. While several commentaries, in particular Chrysostom's exegesis, which forms the core of the *Golden Legend,* tend to devalue the significance of Elizabeth as a prophetess, the accounts are nuanced enough to justify a suggestion that the text of the Gospel would have been largely open to individual interpretation by the reader.

By introducing additional female characters and intimate detail of familial relations, key medieval support Ambrose's interpretation of the biblical episode in the context of joy, mutuality, and familial relations. Despite the body of commentary text noting differences between Mary and Elizabeth in various terms including their age and status, there is no single account that would emphasise this difference strongly enough to allow it to support the central position it has been afforded in modern scholarly discourse on medieval representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb. The analysis conducted in this chapter thus suggests a necessity of reassessment of interpretation of this type of imagery in line with the ambiguity and multivalence of meaning expressed in the contemporary literary material, which would have largely affected the relationship between the artworks and their audience, contributing to the interpretive strategies employed by the cloistered women interacting with representations of the occupied womb.

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communities: the house of Augustinian Canonesses of St Vitus in Hilwartshausen, 16th century (D-W 28 Helmst.); and a community of Sisters of the Common Life at the Augustinian convent of Amersfoort, Low Countries, late 15th century (NZ-Wt MSR-03). For shelf marks, as well as detailed information on the contents of the manuscripts see University of Waterloo, *Cantus: A passiDatabase for Latin Ecclesiastical Chant* [Accessed March 2021]. http://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/feast/2428.

Chapter 3. Visual development

As observed in the initial chapter of this thesis, German scholarship on iconography of the Visitation accomplished the task of providing a survey of existing representations of the occupied womb as early as in the 1980s. These approaches have largely followed an archaeological method, focusing on providing minute detail of changes in depiction of pose, gesture, and costume of both the mothers and the infants within representations of the Visitation, both with and without the inclusion of the occupied womb. While those analyses answer many questions regarding iconographic and stylistic developments of the pictorial genre, they fail to account for the cumulative sum of meanings - both religious and socio-cultural - amassed as a result of centuries-long transmission and transformation of a devotional image. While this chapter bases its structure in a historiographic overview of visual material, its primary aim is to connect the changes in the appearance of the objects to the multivalent meanings they carried, and to establish how the interpretive frameworks accumulated through the centuries of transformation impacted the significance which the image of the occupied womb carried for female religious communities in late medieval Germany.

Although earlier scholarship has argued that the imagery of the occupied womb and the devotional practices related to it are at their core “mystic and undogmatic,” the more recent medievalist research recognizes the plurality of religious experience in the late Middle Ages, and its functioning as an extension of, rather than an alternative to, the basic requirements for membership in Christian society.[171] Richard Kieckhefer has argued that the pious late medieval individual was presented not with a single public culture, but with a multiplicity of related but potentially conflicting and competing cultures – devotional and otherwise – in which they could participate. However, even the most “unconventional” of those cultures originated not as a result of rejection of conventions, but rather, through a distortion and amplification of a shared heritage of convention.[172] The aim of this chapter is therefore to connect the imagery of the occupied womb to devotional developments which would have

[171] Verheyen, "An Iconographic Note," 537n6.

[172] Richard Kieckhefer, “Today’s Shocks, Yesterday’s Conventions,” *Religion & Literature* 42, no. 1–2 (2010): 257–59.

had an impact on Christian societies at different points in time, beyond the cloistered or mystical realm, thus demonstrating its significance as an elaboration on a widely understood tradition, rather than the visual and dogmatic aberration some scholars claim it to be.

This chapter will provide a brief overview of the development of the iconography of the occupied womb, the possible cause for its emergence in Germany towards the end of the thirteenth century, and its subsequent development within the context of visual culture of female monastic environments. Firstly, the chapter will discuss representations of the Visitation in early Christian and Byzantine art and the characteristics and contexts which point towards their possible significance as models for the later modes of depicting the Visitation. In particular, this section will focus on the connection between the Visitation in the medieval German context and Byzantine iconography of the *Theotokos* – the Virgin Mary as Mother of God. Secondly, the chapter will investigate Dominican spirituality and the teachings of the key mystics and preachers of the period – Meister Eckhart and Heinrich Suso - and their possible connection to the emergence of the imagery of the occupied womb in the female monastic context in late medieval German-speaking areas. Ultimately, the chapter will discuss a range of objects employed in cloistered women's devotional practices in order to establish the significance of the imagery of the occupied womb within the wider context of the intersection between the visual and devotional culture of cloistered women.

3.1 Pictorial sources

The earliest representations of the Visitation can be found in the repertoire of Early Christian art, predominantly as decoration of small-scale, luxury personal objects. The *Dictionnaire d'archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* provides a list of such objects in the entry for the Visitation, and included are book covers, metalwork and manuscript illumination.[173] Iconography of the Visitation also appeared on objects associated with the pilgrimage to the presumed site of the meeting between Mary and Elizabeth – the village of Ein Karem (Arabic: Ayn Kārim, also Ain Karem, Ein Kerem), situated about eight kilometres west of

[173] Henri Leclercq, "Visitation," in *Dictionnaire d'archéologie Chrétienne et de Liturgie*, ed. Henri Marrou (Paris: Libraire Letouzey et Ane, 1953), 3130–33.

Jerusalem and identified with the Lucan “city of Judah” (Luke 1:39). A church dedicated to Saint Elizabeth existed there since at least the seventh century, allegedly marking the exact location where the meeting took place, and a liturgical calendar from Jerusalem records a feast of Saint Elizabeth being celebrated in a church in Ein Karem already in the eighth century.[174] The presence of Visitation imagery on pilgrimage artefacts may predate even the founding of this church. A tin-lead ampulla belonging to the set of sixteen Monza ampullae **(Fig. 31)** decorated with representations of scenes from the life of Christ has been dated between the sixth and seventh centuries, constituting one of the earliest objects to set the Visitation in a Christological context.[175] André Grabar has identified a series of iconographies repeated within the set: the Annunciation, Visitation, Nativity, Adoration of the Magi, Crucifixion, Resurrection, Ascension, Christ’s Baptism, Christ Walking on Water, and Doubting Thomas, with the scenes depicted either individually or representing a complete cycle of *locus sanctus* images, as in the case of Monza 2.[176] The presence of representations of the Visitation on pilgrimage artefacts – objects often understood as having apotropaic powers, often worn close to the body in order to provide protection to their bearer during their travels - suggests the prophylactic significance of the imagery.[177]

Although the number of surviving objects is relatively small, Henry Maguire has observed that in the pre-iconoclast period the cult of the Virgin Mary would have been particularly attractive to women in the domestic context. He cites wearable objects of everyday use – textiles, rings, and armbands – featuring gender-specific inscriptions invoking protection of the Virgin as evidence of apotropaic use of Marian imagery. In the early Byzantine period, the Virgin was invoked more frequently through Gospel episodes than through her portraits, with four subjects being particularly popular: the Annunciation, Visitation,

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[174] Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4.

[175] G. A. Wellen, *Eine Ikonographische Abhandlung über das Gottesmutterbild in Frühchristlicher Zeit* (Utrecht; Antwerp: Uitgeverij Het Spectrum, 1960), 44–45.

[176] André Grabar, *Ampoules de Terre Sainte (Monza-Bobbio)* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1958), 52–65.

[177] Heather Hunter-Crawley, “Pilgrimage Made Portable: A Sensory Archaeology of the Monza-Bobbio Ampullae,” *Journal on Hellenistic and Roman Material Culture (HEROM)* 1 (2012): 148.

Nativity, and the Adoration of the Magi.[178] The Visitation in particular was a popular motif in early Byzantine art, gaining extensive prominence in the sixth and seventh centuries as a subject of both monumental public artworks and small scale domestic objects, finding its counterpart in the homiletic literature which expanded upon the theme of Marian pregnancy.[179] The attractiveness of the domestic cult of the Virgin and the apotropaic use of Marian imagery was enhanced by the "analogical potential" of scenes such as the Visitation and Nativity, which functioned as exemplars of successful pregnancy and childbirth.[180] This is the function suggested by a sixth- or seventh-century golden pendant depicting Christ blessing a married couple, with the scene of the Annunciation supplemented by smaller scenes of the Visitation and Nativity on the reverse **(Fig. 32)**.

The apotropaic use of Marian imagery appears to have remained frequent throughout the Middle Ages. In his extensive study of textual amulets in the Middle Ages, Don Skemer dedicates substantial research to birthing amulets, arguing that in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, textual birthing amulets were easily obtained from local clerics, midwives, and physicians.[181] Strips of parchment with the names of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin Mary, or the text of the *Magnificat* were recommended as talismans, with the names of Saint Anne and Elizabeth sometimes added to the list. The parchment was either cut up and ingested, as recommended by *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing,* a gynaecological treatise derived from the *Trotula* texts, or bound to the woman's thigh.[182] The wearing of a belt with prayers, charms, excerpts from the Life of Saint Margaret (patron saint of childbirth), or indeed the *Magnificat* inscribed onto it, was also recommended to aid labour.[183] The narrative charm *Ut mulier*

[178] Henry Maguire, "The Cult of the Mother of God in Private," in *Representations of the Virgin in Byzantine Art*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Milan: Skira, 2000), 284–85.

[179] Henry Maguire, "Body, Clothing, Metaphor: The Virgin in Early Byzantine Art," in *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium. Texts and Images*, ed. Leslie Brubaker and Mary B. Cunningham (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2001), 39.

[180] Henry Maguire, "Byzantine Domestic Art as Evidence for the Early Cult of the Virgin," in *Images of the Mother of God. Perceptions of the Theotokos in Byzantium*, ed. Maria Vassilaki (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), 189.

[181] Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words. Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), 237–38.

[182] Alexandra Barratt, ed. *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), 369-74.

[183] Newman, "Mother and Child. Giving Birth," 166.

pariat, found in a late medieval Carmelite manuscript from Milan describes the three holy births – Elizabeth's of John the Baptist, Anne's of Mary, and Mary's of Christ – as a sacred number of precedents, suggesting that the charm be said three times in the woman's right ear along with a *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria* in order to ensure safe birth.[184]

This particular practice appears to echo the idea of conception *per aurem* – in literal translation a conception "through the ear," or more precisely, conception following the hearing and acceptance of the divine proposal transmitted to Mary by the archangel Gabriel, which implies becoming a mother without ceasing to be a virgin. This concept appeared prominently in Mariological writing between the fifth and fifteenth centuries, notably in patristic texts including Pseudo-Augustine, the Armenian Infancy Gospel, and in the sermons of Peter Damian and Bernard of Clairvaux, and was frequently visualised through the iconography of a dove flying towards the Virgin's ear.[185] Iconography of the dove of the Holy Spirit was frequently represented in works produced for the monastic context in the medieval period, for instance in an Annunciation scene from the wings of the Altenberg Altar, made for the female Premonstratensian convent Altenberg/Lahn, c. 1330 (Städel Museum, Frankfurt am Main, SG 358-361); in the Annunciation panel from the Vyšší Brod altar, made for the Cistercian abbey in Vyšší Brod, Bohemia, c. 1345-50 (National Gallery, Prague); and in the Annunciation panel from a stained glass window from the church of St Severinus at the Benedictine convent Marienberg in Boppard on the Rhine, south-west Germany, c. 1440 (The Burrell Collection, Prague, 45.485.2.c).

Like their small-scale counterparts, the earliest monumental representations of the Visitation are predominantly Christological in context. Rather than negate the growing significance of the Virgin, however, they emphasise the prominence

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[184] Karl Helm, "Mittelalterliche Geburtsbenediktionen," *Hessische Blätter für Volkskunde* 9 (1910): 210.

[185] The idea of conception *per aurem* would have been known outside the immediate context of strictly theological texts through the bestiary account of the weasel, which is frequently described as conceiving at the mouth and giving birth to her young through the ear, or vice versa. From a theological standpoint the story of the weasel provides an analogy for the virgin birth since - regardless of the fact if the conception occurs through the mouth or through the ear - the weasel's generative process does not endanger her virginity. José María Salvador-González, "*Per Aurem Intrat Christus in Mariam*. An Iconographic Approach to the *Conceptio per Aurem* in Italian Trecento Painting from Patristic and Theological Sources," *De Medio Aevo* 9 (2016): 105–10; Debra Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries: Text, Image, Ideology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30–31.

of Mary as a mother in the Christological narrative, effectively unifying devotion to the Virgin with devotion to Christ. The introduction of the doctrine of Incarnation, adapted by the Church following the First Council of Nicaea in 325, the Council of Ephesus in 431, and the Council of Chalcedon in 451, was sufficient to assure the maternal body a central place in Christian spirituality, providing a dogmatic foundation for the development of devotional practices and artworks focused on the physicality of Christ, Mary, and the saints in the High and late Middle Ages. In the monumental apse mosaic of the Euphrasian Basilica in Poreč, Croatia (c. 540) **(Fig. 33)** the scene of the Visitation (located on the south wall of the apse) is compositionally paired with the Annunciation (in corresponding location on the north side). The pictorial programme of the church does not include additional iconography which would form a full Infancy cycle. The Annunciation and the Visitation are the only narrative scenes shown in the mosaic of the basilica, implying the special significance of the imagery outwith the narrative cycle of the Life of Christ.

In the context of the visual schema of the mosaic, the inclusion of a scene of the Visitation emphasises the Incarnation as a key Christian concept. While the scene of the Annunciation depicts the Word becoming flesh in the womb of the Virgin, the Visitation captures a moment where Incarnation is first externally witnessed and confirmed – by Elisabeth and the infant John, who prophesies the birth of Christ. In the Visitation scene, both women are shown as visibly pregnant, with enlarged breasts and swollen bellies. The contrast between the scenes of the Annunciation and the Visitation would have thus been utilised to underline the contrast between the two conceptions of Christ – the spiritual, or miraculous conception evidenced by the reception of the angel’s message in the Annunciation scene, and the earthly, physical conception and gestation of the infant, evidenced by the bodies of women in the Visitation mosaic. The two scenes, aligned on a horizontal axis, would thus express the paradox of the two natures of Christ Incarnate, which is further reinforced by the vertical axis of the mosaic, which contrasts a depiction of Christ in eternal glory, flanked by the apostles, with a representation of the Christ Child sitting in his mother’s lap **(Fig. 34)**.

The narrative scenes of the Poreč Visitation mosaic are supplemented by an extensive decorative programme featuring conventional symbolic meanings associated with the Virgin's pregnancy. The lower register of the mosaic is separated from the inscription beneath the apse vault by a row of nine golden shells executed in mosaic, accompanied by fourteen large discs of mother of pearl. As Maguire has observed, such imagery is rather uncommon in the given time period, and thus it invites interpretation beyond its decorative function.[186] Aside from the shells' obvious connection with water, which rendered them a common feature in decoration of baptisteries, early Byzantine sermons connected the imagery of a shell with the birth of Christ from the Virgin, with notable exegetes such as Hesychios of Jerusalem (d. 450s) and Proklos of Constantinople (d. 446) describing Mary as a vessel for a pearl of light and wisdom. From the early medieval period onwards, Mary bore the title of *Stella Maris* – the Star of the Sea. Originally arising from a scribal error, the title came to be seen as representative of Mary's role as a "guiding star" on the way to Christ.[187] According to the Cantus Index, the responsory *O praeclara stella maris* is one of the two chants unique to the Office of the Feast of the Visitation which are most frequently used in the feast's liturgy, appearing in thirteen instances within manuscripts catalogued by the Index, on par with the hymn *In Mariam vitae viam matrem*.[188] The text of the responsory reads: "O praeclara stella maris virgo mater singularis quae cognatam visitasti Joannem illuminasti prole praeclarissima te praecamur in hoc festo sis solamen omni maesto fuga mortem confer sortem nobis in caeli patria alleluia." While *praeclarus* can be

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[186] Maguire, "Body, Clothing, Metaphor," 48.

[187] The title *stella maris* was first used to describe the Virgin Mary in the manuscript tradition of Saint Jerome's Latin translation of the *onomastica* of Philo and Origen - although this is a misnomer based on a transcription error. The Hebrew name Miryam (מרים) was translated into Aramaic as Maryām and into Greek as Mariam (Μαριάμ). It was this form that it was etymologized by early Christian scholars who interpreted it as mar-yam (מר-ים) "drop of the sea." Jerome adopted this interpretation and translated the name into Latin as *stilla maris*, "drop of the sea", but at some later stage a copyist transcribed this into *stella maris*, "star of the sea", and this transcription error became widespread. Anthony Maas, "The Name of Mary," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1912) [Accessed March 2021] http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15464a.htm.

[188] "O splendid star of the sea, unique virgin mother, who visited your relative and illuminated her offspring, John; the most splendid, we pray to you for solace in this feast, may all grief of death flee; bring together our fate in the home of heaven, halleluiah" (own translation). "Ave praeclara maris stella" in Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, *Online-Repertorium der mittelalterlichen deutschen Übertragungen lateinischer Hymnen und Sequenzen (Berliner Repertorium)* [Accessed March 2021]. https://repertorium.sprachen.hu-berlin.de/repertorium/browse/hymn/6261?_bc=6261; "Visitatio Mariae" in University of Waterloo, *Cantus Database* [Accessed March 2021]. http://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/feast/2428.

conventionally translated as “very clear,” “splendid,” “famous,” “bright,” or “noble,” a large number of vernacular medieval German manuscripts translate the word in the context of various *stella maris* hymns and prayers as “chlarr” (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 87), “klar” (Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, mgo 212), “durchklar” (BSB, Munich, Cgm 136 and Yale Univ. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Libr., New Haven, MS 652), and “durchlüchte” or ”durchleuchtig” (Universitätsbibliothek, Basel, A X 122 and A XI 65; Stiftsbibliothek St Peter, Salzburg, Cod. b IX 10; BSB, Munich, Cgm 1135), emphasising the material qualities of glowing, clarity and transparency associated with the Virgin Mary, which often form the focal point of late medieval depictions of the occupied womb **(Fig. 6, 8)**.

The Virgin was also commonly associated with the parable of the Pearl of Great Price (Matthew 13:45-46). This association is closely connected to the conception *per aurem* discussed above, since according to bestiary texts, pearls were created by rays of sunshine penetrating the sea, similar to rays of divine light which caused the conception of Christ.[189] The motif of the shell remained in use in the context of Marian symbolism well into the High Middle Ages, appearing in both literature and works of art, including the twelfth-century mosaics at the cathedral of Monreale, where shells appear beneath the depictions of the Angel Gabriel and the Virgin in the Annunciation scene flanking the arch of the main apse. The use of shell and pearl symbolism in the context of the Annunciation and the Visitation constitutes a precedent for the evocative language of precious materials, light and transparency appearing both in later representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, as well as in the accounts of mystical visions connected to representations of holy pregnancy in the later medieval period.

While earlier scholarship in particular has understood the iconography of Mary’s pregnancy and childbirth to be a strictly Western iconographic type, isolated from the cycles of the Life of Mary or the Life of Christ, the more recent research has traced the sources of this imagery to an earlier period, aiming to establish a narrative of continuous visual development of this category of

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[189] Hassig, *Medieval Bestiaries,* 30.

representation.[190] This connection is most clearly acknowledged by Urner-Astholz, whose 1981 article proposes the most comprehensive yet catalogue of Visitation imagery featuring the occupied womb. Although the earliest artwork in Urner-Astholz's catalogue, which contains forty-four objects, is dated to the tenth century, she discusses the significance of the Marian icon *Platytera*, which was also commonly represented on the half-dome above the altar of Eastern churches, visible high above the iconostasis, facing down the length of the nave **(Fig. 35)**. The *Platytera* is the key representation of the virgin birth of Jesus and the divine Incarnation to be found amongst Byzantine artworks, emerging as a distinct iconographic type in the fifth century, following the Council of Ephesus officially naming Mary as *Theotokos* in 431 CE – as a possible direct source for the imagery of the occupied womb.[191] The *Panagia Platytera* is a distinct type of the icon of the *Theotokos*, which can also be referred to as the "Virgin of the Sign" in reference to the Book of Isaiah: "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel" (Isaiah 7:14).[192] The icon portrays Mary facing the viewer directly, depicted in full- or bust-length with her hands in the *orans* position, and with the image of the Christ Child positioned in front of her chest, also facing the viewer directly and often contained within a medallion. Although the Christ Child is meant to be represented at the moment of his conception in the womb of the Virgin, he is not depicted as a nude infant, as in the later representations of the occupied womb, but rather vested in robes, and often holding a scroll, symbolic of his role as a teacher. Even though the icon is not explicit in its portrayal of Mary's pregnancy, it can be understood as a possible pictorial source for the Visitation featuring the occupied womb since in the art of the Eastern Church the virginal pregnancy was indicated not by a literal

[190] Hans Aurenhammer, *Maria. Die Darstellung der Madonna in der Bildenden Kunst* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1954), 140.

[191] Urner-Astholz, "Die beiden ungeborenen Kinder," 45-48.

[192] Greek: *Παναγία*, fem. of panágios, pan- + hágios, the All-Holy, or the Most Holy; *Πλατυτέρα*; literally "wider" or "more spacious", also *Πλατυτέρα των Ουρανών*: "More spacious than the heavens;" Rhetoric of the sign is present in the fourth-century commentary on the Gospel of Luke by Saint Ambrose, discussed extensively in the preceding chapter. Ambrose cites the passage from Isaiah to frame the virgin birth as "a sign of not something human but of divine mystery." Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Luke*, 32.

depiction of the swelling of Mary's womb, but rather through the use of a circular medallion – the *clypeus* - enclosing the child.[193]

The transmission of Byzantine iconography into the artistic production of the German-speaking realms can be explained by the close ties between the East and West fostered in the era of the Holy Roman Empire. By the early tenth century, the Dukes of Saxony had mustered the power to claim royal standing, and in the year 936, Otto I (Otto the Great), was crowned king at Aachen. In 962, following the ratification of the *Diploma Ottonianum*, which confirmed Pope John XII as the spiritual head of the Church and Otto I as its secular protector, the pope invested Otto I with the imperial title. Under the reign of Otto I (936–73), the Holy Roman Empire was revived, encompassing the lands that now are Germany, Switzerland, and northern and central Italy. A strategic alliance was sealed when the Byzantine princess, Theophanu, married Otto the Great's son, Otto II, in the year 972. In addition to political advantage, the alliance allowed for considerable exposure to Byzantine art in the West.[194] The tenth-century Ottonian revival under the rule of Otto I, Otto II and Otto III was characterised by geographic expansion and political alliances with the East, resulting in increased production of artworks including illuminated manuscripts, churches and monastic buildings, as well as small-scale objects including seals, coins, and reliefs, fashioned in a decidedly Eastern manner. Alongside late antique sources and the artistic models inherited from their Carolingian forbearers, Ottonian artists employed Eastern models imported with objects brought by Otto II's Byzantine wife from Constantinople.[195]

While there are no extant examples of the iconography of the *Platytera* being directly imported into Western artworks, its influence is apparent in the period following the Ottonian expansion.[196] The most notable examples of near-direct

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[193] Lechner, *Maria Gravida,* 191.

[194] Timothy Reuter, *Germany in the Early Middle Ages c. 800-1056* (London; New York: Longman, 1991), 148–74.

[195] Otto Demus, *Byzantine Art and the West* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), 79–86.

[196] An early Western elaboration on *Platytera* iconography can be found in a mid-12th century gospel book from the Augustinian abbey of Notre-Dame d'Hénin-Liétard in Pas-de-Calais, France (Boulogne-Sur-Mer, Municipal Library, 0014 t. I, fol. 22v). This depiction in particular anticipates the imagery of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, as the Virgin *Platytera* is depicted alongside Zechariah, who is holding a clypeus containing a bust-length figure of John the Baptist, closely mirroring the medallion of the infant Christ. John is depicted inclining his

import are a miniature in a Gospel book produced by the monk Hermann of the Benedictine cloister Helmarshausen for Henry the Lion, the Duke of Saxony and Bavaria, around 1188 **(Fig. 36)**, and a monumental wall painting located in the northern chapel of the west wing of the church of St Pantaleon in Cologne **(Fig. 37)**, which received substantial renovations in 1216 under abbot Heinrich II.[197] Although it cannot be confirmed that the author of the Gospel manuscript was directly exposed to Byzantine art, Henry the Lion travelled East on at least two occasions – as a participant in the 1147 Wendish Crusade and on a pilgrimage in 1172, where he visited Jerusalem and spent Easter in Constantinople, and was accompanied by a number of Saxon prelates with possible connections to Helmarshausen.[198] The city of Cologne in particular can be considered as the site of transmission of Byzantine imagery due to its significance during the period of the Crusades. The Fifth Crusade (1217-21) originated in Cologne following the preaching of the Cologne cathedral scholastic Oliver of Paderborn, and the city was the starting point for the German faction of the Children's Crusade of 1212.[199]

In this particular period, the imagery of the frontally facing Virgin *orans*, often supplemented with a medallion of the Christ Child over her breast, was frequently used to decorate small-scale objects including cameos, seals, and coins, allowing for easy transmission of objects and their imagery across geographical boundaries. Although Robert Ousterhout points to the 1042 gold

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head towards Christ, hinting at his recognition of the Messiah in utero described in the Gospel of Luke. The full-page miniature, which depicts the evangelist Matthew writing positioned below the Virgin and Zechariah, is followed by an incipit page with the initial 'L' decorated with three medallions depicting ancestors of Christ, connecting the infants Christ and John to the wider context of genealogical history. The Gospel of Matthew begins with the words "The book of the generation of Jesus Christ […]," outlining the genealogy of Christ's descent from Abraham and King David (Mt 1:1-17) and the miraculous events surrounding the virgin birth (Mt 1:17-25), as well as a selection of episodes from the Infancy narrative (Mt 2:1-23). The second narrative section of the Gospel, which begins in Chapter 3, starts with an account of John the Baptist's preaching and his life in the wilderness, followed by the baptism of Christ (Mt 3:1-17); the progress of the text from chapter to chapter and the miniature of Mary and Zechariah emphasising the parallelism between Christ and John in the absence of description of the Visitation, which does not appear in the Gospel of Matthew.

[197] Albert Boeckler, *Deutsche Buchmalerei Vorgotischer Zeit* (Königstein im Taunus: Koster, 1959), 55; Paul Clemen, *Die Romanische Monumentalmalerei in den Rheinlanden* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1916), 459–65.

[198] Paul Lock, *The Routledge Companion to the Crusades* (London; New York: Routledge, 2013), 151; Sigfrid H. Steinberg, "Abendländische Darstellungen der Maria Platytera," *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte* 51 (1932): 515.

[199] Lock, *The Routledge Companion to the Crusades,* 513.

coin of Empresses Zoe and Theodora as the first known example of representation of the Virgin *orans* with a bust of the infant Christ in a *clypeus* in Byzantine coinage, Urner-Astholz makes note of representations of the Virgin *Platytera* appearing in Byzantine coinage as early as the rule of Nikephoros I (802-11).[200] The most notable example of such objects is perhaps a lot of almost a thousand gold coins with the representation of the *Platytera* minted by Basil II (976 –1025) c. 989. Coinage employing a similar manner of representing the Virgin Mary was utilised by Byzantine emperors including Romanos III Argyros (1028-1034) **(Fig. 38)**, Romanos IV Diogenes (1068-71), Michael VII Doukas (1071-78) and Alexios I Komnenos (1081-1118), constituting a continuous source of possible transmission of said imagery into the West towards the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Further evidence of contact with small-scale Byzantine objects such as coins and seals can be traced through direct copying thereof into a range of media, including monastic seals. For instance, the 1127 seal of the Benedictine nunnery of Schwarzrheindorf, which depicts the Tender Virgin with Child, also includes extensive Greek lettering which reveals direct contact with an Eastern object, perhaps observed in Cologne.[201]

While the iconographic type of the Virgin *Platytera* imported into the West remained virtually unchanged from its emergence in the fifth century, examples of artistic elaboration can be found with the inception of the production of icons in Kievan Rus' following its conversion to Orthodox Christianity in the year 988.[202] The majority of Russian icons of the medieval period follow the traditional model of the *Platytera*. An icon of our Lady of the Sign, produced by an artist of the Kiev School c. 1114 in Yaroslavl **(Fig. 39)** depicts the standing Virgin Mary with her arms raised in the *orans* gesture. Following Byzantine tradition, the

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[200] Robert Ousterhout, "The Virgin of the Chora: An Image and Its Contexts," in *The Sacred Image East and West*, ed. Robert Ousterhout and Leslie Brubaker (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 94; Urner-Astholz, "Die beiden ungeborenen Kinder," 46.

[201] Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 330.

[202] Venice is perhaps the only location in Western Europe where the iconographic type of the Virgin *Platytera* remained largely unchanged throughout the medieval period, likely due to the ongoing, rather than incidental, contact with Byzantine artworks. The key features of the *Platytera* – the *clypeus*, the *orans* or teaching gestures, and full clothing of the Child – were often incorporated by Venetian artists into representations of the *Madonna della Misericordia*, for instance in a relief by Bartolomeo Buon (produced in 1448, originally at the Scuola Vecchia della Misericordia, now in Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 25-1882), a triptych panel by Jacobello del Fiore (1415, Gallerie dell'Accademia, Venice, 13), and a retable of the Life of St Bartholomew by Simone da Cushige (1394, Ca' d'Oro, Venice, 18).

Christ Child appears in a round medallion positioned over the breast of his mother, with additional medallions containing bust-length angels located in the top right and left corners of the panel. However, icons contemporaneous to the one described above break from the established pictorial model, combining the type of the *Platytera* with the scene of the Annunciation, and rendering Mary's pregnancy in a notably more explicit manner. The *Annunciation of Ustyug* **(Fig. 40)** was produced in Novgorod around 1120-30, and its design was most likely informed by the liturgy of the feast of Annunciation.[203] In this icon, the Christ Child is depicted not positioned in a medallion, but rather placed directly in front of his mother's chest, clearly resembling the mode of representation employed in the imagery of the occupied womb in the West in the later period. In a notable departure from the *Platytera* tradition, he is represented in a seated position, rather than appearing only as a bust. The child is rendered in the same shade of ochre as his mother's garment, making his figure difficult to visually distinguish in spite of the monumental scale of the panel, which measures 238 x 168 centimeters. Such depiction emphasises the tension between what is revealed and what is concealed, necessitating an attentive, up-close viewing in order to discover the mystery of the Incarnation, clearly anticipating the concern with dynamics of revelation characteristic of later medieval depictions of the occupied womb. Additionally, the infant Christ is dressed only in a loincloth, which serves as a prefiguration of the Passion, the garment connecting the physical body of the *in utero* infant to the dead body of the adult Christ on the cross. His right hand is raised in the gesture of blessing and his left extended downward, abandoning the traditional *orans* gesture. Yet another novel detail introduced in the Ustyug icon is the spindle of red thread held by Mary, which Urner-Astholz suggests similarly foreshadows the Passion.[204]

As mentioned in the preceding chapter, textile metaphors had been utilized in the Byzantine context to describe Mary spinning and weaving the fabric of Christ's humanity with her very flesh, suggesting her active participation in the

[203] For detailed analysis of the *Annunciation of Ustyug*, including its pictorial sources, original location, and similar iconography in Byzantine art, see Maria Lidova, "Incarnation Revealed: The Ustyug Icon and Annunciation Imagery in Middle Byzantine Art," in *The Announcement: Annunciations and Beyond*, ed. Hana Gründler, Alessandro Nova, and Itay Sapir (Boston: De Gruyter, 2020), 3-28.

[204] Urner-Astholz, "Die beiden ungeborenen Kinder," 46.

Incarnation of Christ.[205] The iconography of the Virgin spinning or weaving, either as a solitary meditative image or within depictions of the Annunciation, is derived from the apocryphal gospels, which describe the Virgin weaving the veil of the Temple.[206] In the medieval period, the association between Mary and textile labour became extended through various elaborations on the theme of the seamless tunic, for which the Roman soldiers at the Calvary cast lots ("Erat autem tunica inconsutilis, desuper contexta per totum," Jn 19:23). Late medieval narratives composed following the rediscovery of the tunic at Argenteuil, France, such as the thirteenth-century *Vita beatae Mariae rhythmica* and the *Vita Christi* by Ludolf of Saxony (before 1378) ascribe the production of the garment to Christ's mother, noting that the clothing miraculously increased in size as Christ grew from child to adult. One of the most prominent depictions of the motif is a panel from an altar by Meister Bertram of Minden **(Fig. 41)**, which was produced for the female Benedictine convent at Buxtehude and includes a panel depicting the Virgin Mary knitting a tunic with the infant Christ resting at her feet while angels arrive with instruments of the Passion.[207] Mary's spinning of the initial fabric of Christ's human form, symbolised by her creation of the Temple veil, is extended to imply her ongoing involvement in salvation history as her creation accompanies her son throughout his life, culminating at

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[205] Annemarie Weyl Carr, "Threads of Authority: The Virgin Mary's Veil in the Middle Ages," in *Robes and Honor: The Medieval World of Investiture*, ed. Stewart Gordon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 64.

[206] Both the 4th-century Protoevangelium of James and the 7th-century Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew describe Mary being chosen to weave the veil after she has to depart the Temple at the age of twelve (James) or fourteen (Pseudo-Matthew). In both accounts, Mary is accompanied by the Temple virgins, and the women cast lots between themselves to decide who will be weaving each fabric (gold, amianthus, linen, silk, hyacinth, scarlet, and purple) given to them by the priest, with Mary receiving the task of weaving the most valuable of the fabrics – the scarlet and purple. Pseudo-Matthew adds considerable detail to its retelling of the life of Mary, including an observation that already when she was a child, Mary "persisted in working with wool, and anything the old women were not able to do, she was able to untangle." The verb used here, *explicabat,* carries multiple meaning, and can be also understood as 'explaining' or 'offering exegesis,' implying that even as a child Mary was able to understand and 'untangle' deeper spiritual meanings. Hawk sees this use of *explicabat* as a specific reference to monastic labour, which is both physical and intellectual. Elliott, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament,* chap. 10, 61; Hawk, ed. and trans., *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Nativity of Mary*, chap. 6, 54; chap. 8, 61-62.

[207] Gail McMurray Gibson, "The Thread of Life in the Hand of the Virgin" in *Equally in God's Image: Women in the Middle Ages,* ed. Julia Bolton Holloway, Joan Bechtold and Constance S. Wright (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), 50.

the Passion, the Virgin's continued presence, her mercy and love of her son being signalled by the garment.[208]

The association of thread as flesh, and thus textile production as creation of life, can be traced back to the veneration of the Marian relic of the *maphòrion* – the Virgin's veil, which was preserved in the church of the Virgin at Blachernae in Constantinople and was often associated with protection in times of conflict, having allegedly protected the city from enemy attacks in the seventh and eighth centuries.[209] In the Eastern church, a feast honouring the miracle-working relic, which allegedly contained droplets of the Virgin's breast milk and was used to swaddle the infant Christ, was celebrated on July 2nd with readings of the Visitation episode.[210] Although the veneration of the relic was not intended to be a celebration of the Visitation, the Gospel narrative was nevertheless read during the feast day, and it is therefore possible that the introduction of the Feast of the Visitation in the Western church on the same day as the Eastern celebration of the relic would have been conceived as an appeal to the protective power of the Virgin in the midst of the schismatic crisis.[211] The association of the garment with the motherhood of Mary renders it conceptually fitting with the overarching theme of the Visitation, with the textile covering the Virgin being analogous to her own flesh protecting *in utero* Christ; or as explained by the Byzantine Patriarch Proclus, Jesus himself being a "luxurious toga woven on the textile-loom of Mary's womb."[212]

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[208] Other panels of the altar depict scenes from the Life of Mary (Joachim's sacrifice, Annunciation to Joachim, the Meeting at the Golden Gate, the Birth of Mary, Annunciation, and Visitation), and the Infancy of Christ (the Nativity, Annunciation to the Shepherds, Adoration of the Magi, Weaving of the seamless tunic, Circumcision, Presentation in the Temple, Slaughter of the Innocents, Flight into Egypt, Christ amongst the Doctors), as well as the Marriage at Cana.

[209] The *maphòrion* was a type of Byzantine garment covering the head and shoulders, typically worn in public by married women and widows. A relic of Marian clothing is said to have arrived in Constantinople from Nazareth in 460 CE, and it was eventually identified by Byzantine patriarchs as a *maphòrion.* Alongside the Virgin's girdle (*zônê*), which was housed at the church of Chalcoprateia, the *maphòrion* was considered one of the holiest Marian relics, as the Virgin was understood to have been assumed bodily into Heaven and thus left behind no body-part relics, resulting in the increased importance of Marian contact relics such as items of clothing. John Wortley, "The Marian Relics at Constantinople," *Greek, Roman & Byzantine Studies* 45 (2005): 171-87.

[210] Kristin Vincke, *Die Heimsuchung. Marienikonographie in der italienischen Kunst bis 1600* (Cologne; Weimar; Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 1997), 24.

[211] Carr, "Threads of Authority," 67.

[212] Proclus of Constantinople, *Orationes, Homiliae, Sermones* (*Patrologia Graeca* vol. 65: Col.712D-Col.713A), transated in Nicholas P. Constans, "Weaving the Body of God: Proclus of

Proclus emphasised the significance of the weaving metaphor to Empress Aealia Pulcheria, to whom he acted as a confessor. He suggested that by virtue of pious chastity, Pulcheria could make her own flesh a loom of Christ, echoing Augustine and Ambrose's earlier writings on the conception of Christ in the soul of a devout Christian. The Empress is said to have inscribed her vow of chastity on an altar in the church of Hagia Sophia, for which she wove a robe of cloth that served as both a covering for the body of the altar, and a shroud for the symbolic body of Christ, following the exemplar of the Virgin Mary who, according to Proclus' exegesis, wove a robe of flesh that was draped around the divinity. This symbolism reappears in the medieval period both in the East, in the *Annunciation of Ustyug* discussed above, and in the West, where it is brought together with the imagery of the occupied womb in a panel painting produced c. 1400 in Erfurt **(Fig. 42)**, in which Joseph, a witness to his wife's generative process, peeks at Mary spinning, the red thread passing from the distaff to the spindle through a figure of the infant Christ appearing in a halo positioned over Mary's womb. This continuity and evolution from the Byzantine period onwards demonstrate that imagery of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb was not merely a novel invention of a period suddenly focused on the physicality of devotion, but rather a result of a centuries-long translation and transformation of dogma, language, and pictorial traditions.

The mode of representation employed in the *Annunciation of Ustyug* is strikingly similar to a historiated *Vidi*-initial from the Regensburg Lectionary **(Fig. 43),** produced c. 1267-76 for the female Dominican convent zum Heiligen Kreuz in Regensburg, Bavaria. The initial opens the reading for the Feast of the Annunciation, depicting the scene with the angel extending his hand towards Mary, and God the Father appearing above. Similarly to the *Annunciation of Ustyug*, the Christ Child also appears in full length, placed directly over his mother's body rather than inside a halo, with his right hand raised in a gesture of blessing. In further resemblance to the Russian icon, the infant is rendered as almost transparent; his shape signalled only by a black outline and the colouring of his hair, the rest of the body showing the colours of his mother's clothes underneath. Once again, such rendering, this time further accentuated by the

Constantinople, the Theotokos, and the Loom of the Flesh," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3, no. 2 (1995): 182–83, 89.

small scale of the historiated initial, invites its reader-viewer into physical proximity of the depicted scene, emphasising the need for a close viewing in order for the miracle of the Incarnation to be fully revealed. The lectionary was not made for private use; rather, its purpose was to be read at the Matins service celebrated by the whole convent.[213] On many occasions, the only person physically proximate enough to view the manuscript's illumination would be the reader, the access to miniatures and initials and divine revelations physically confined within the book reserved for the spiritual leaders of the monastic community. The *Vidi*-initial itself is accompanied by a diminutive figure of a supplicant Dominican nun identified by her name, Tuta.[214] Through her physical inclusion on the pages of the manuscript, the nun is granted direct and permanent access to the Annunciation scene; the depiction functioning not only as a sign of her individual piousness, but also as a marker of spiritual privilege.

Although it is unlikely that the Russian icon would have been known in the German-speaking region in the late thirteenth century, when the Visitation featuring the occupied womb began to emerge as a distinct iconographic type, the apparent similarities between the Eastern and Western depictions of the *in utero* Christ in representation of the Annunciation confirm that the Western images would have drawn on the same visual sources that informed the Eastern icons – namely, Byzantine artworks imported through the Holy Roman Empire. Representations of the Annunciation featuring the occupied womb appearing as a predecessor to depictions of the Visitation featuring *in utero* infants can also be understood to be derived from the side-by-side presence of those images in the earlier Christological iconography outlined above. The imagery of the occupied womb would have thus been transmitted from Annunciation imagery to Visitation scenes due to a conceptual theological overlap and narrative continuity between the two episodes, combining the Christological focus of the Annunciation narrative with the visual vocabulary used by Byzantine artists to

[213] Ralph Hanna, *The Regensburg Lectionary at Keble College, Oxford,* ed. Yvonne Murphy and Gillian Beattie (Oxford: Keble College, 2018), 14.

[214] Other Regensburg nuns are depicted within the manuscript, including Otilia and Juta (f. 8v), Hailwigis (f. 61v), and Dimut (f. 71r). The women are identifiable in surviving convent muniments as corresponding to real persons of the 1270s, and they are frequently shown accompanied by both monastic and lay male figures, likely corresponding to the convent's confessors and donors.

depict the childbearing of the Virgin *Platytera*, resulting in emergence of representations of the Visitation increasingly isolated from Infancy cycles.

3.2 The Dominican context

The earliest known examples of Western imagery of the occupied womb appear not in the context of the Visitation, but rather in depictions of the Annunciation, as well as in sculptural representations of the *Maria gravida* – a non-narrative, solitary image of the pregnant Virgin Mary. Those early examples, including the historiated initial from the Regensburg Lectionary discussed above **(Fig. 43)**, as well as a small scale limewood sculpture of the Virgin which includes a glass-covered niche containing a removable figure of the Christ Child **(Fig. 44)** were both produced for the Dominican nunnery zum Heiligen Kreuz in Regensburg. The first known inclusion of the iconography of the occupied womb in a scene of the Visitation represented in a small-scale sculptural group is related to a Dominican convent as well. Indeed, one of the only representations of the occupied womb to receive sustained scholarly attention is the Katharinental Visitation group **(Fig. 8)**, produced for the Dominican convent Sankt Katharinental in the Constance region in modern-day Switzerland. The connection between the Dominicans and the emergence of the imagery of the occupied womb in the late medieval context can be explained by the significance of the female Dominicans within the German mystical movement, and their commissioning and promotion of such imagery. The Dominican order was one of the most prolific monastic orders in medieval Europe, counting seventy-four women's foundations in Germany by the end of the thirteenth century, with the number of houses in the province of Saxony (nine) and the highly urbanised Teutonia (sixty-five) equalling more than the total in all seventeen other Dominican provinces combined. By 1358, there were 157 nunneries throughout Europe under the care of the Dominican order.[215]

The three most prominent German mystics of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries - Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), Heinrich Suso (1295-1366), and Johannes Tauler (1300-1361) – all belonged to the Dominican Order, and are

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[215] Paul Lee, *Nunneries, Learning and Spirituality in Late Medieval English Society: The Dominican Priory of Dartford* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: York Medieval Press, 2001), 13; Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 198.

known to have had extensive contact with cloistered women as preachers, spiritual advisors, and frequent visitors to women's monastic houses.[216] While recent scholarship has argued that the influence of male spirituality, expressed predominantly through preaching, on women's devotional practices tends to be largely misrepresented, it cannot be doubted that the preaching of the key male mystics of the period would have exuded a degree of influence in women's monastic foundations, leading to an exchange of ideas which would have aided in creation of visual culture strongly focused on representations linked to Marian devotion.[217] While it would be extremely reductive to claim that female devotional practices centred on imagery of childbearing and motherhood developed solely as a reaction to encounters with male preachers, it can be suggested that the widely disseminated teachings of male preachers, writers and visionaries supplemented the development of women's religious and visual cultures in the given period, in particular considering the fact that despite their apparent independence, women's monastic foundations remained subject to patriarchal authority of religious men.[218]

Sermons of Meister Eckhart appear to have particular relevance to the development of imagery of the occupied womb in the Dominican context. Although Meister Eckhart's speculative mysticism is frequently contrasted - most notably by Otto Langer - with the supposedly anti-intellectual affectivity, eroticism, and emotionalism of women's mysticism; recent scholarship has demonstrated the artificiality of this differentiation and the failure to acknowledge the fruitful relationship between Meister Eckhart's mysticism and the Dominican nuns' spirituality.[219] In her discussion of the writing of Beguine

[216] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 199-200.

[217] Amy Hollywood, "Feminist Studies," in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*, ed. Arthur G. Holder (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 363–86.

[218] For recent studies of male-female relationships in the monastic context see Fiona J. Griffiths and Julie Hotchin, eds., *Partners in Spirit: Women, Men, and Religious Life in Germany, 1100-1500* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014); Janet Burton and Karen Stöber, eds., *Women in the Medieval Monastic World* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015).

[219] Otto Langer bases his discussion of Meister Eckhart's "mystical experience" in the titular confrontation ("Auseinandersetzung") with the spirituality of the women he counselled. According to Langer, female spirituality is characterized by emphasis on emotions, sensuality, subjectivity, extraordinary experiences, ecstasy, bridal *topoi*, and suffering. Eckhart's intellectual, speculative mysticism is in turn seen as a direct reaction against women's mysticism. This view persisted through a majority of publications dealing with the topic of Dominican spirituality and devotional practice, including the seminal *The Dominicans* by Benedict Ashely (1990) in which he writes about medieval female Dominican mysticism: "Today this style of spirituality seems to us somewhat too fanciful, too colored by unresolved neuroses,

mystic Mechthild of Magdeburg, Sara Poor has argued that "the opposition […] between the *heilsam* (healing) effect of speculative mysticism and the *ekstatische Visionsmystik* or *Gefühlsmystik* (ecstatic visionary mysticism or emotional mysticism) has lasting consequences" which have led to an unjustified differentiation between women's and men's mysticisms.[220] More recent research, however, has managed to demonstrate concrete influence of the "gendered" mysticisms on each other, in particular with the noticeable Beguine impact on the writing of Meister Eckhart, which according to Amy Hollywood, breaks down the stark contrasts between women's affective spirituality and men's speculative mysticism.[221] This fluidity and mutuality is discussed most extensively by Charlotte Radler, who argues that while in Meister Eckhart's speculative mysticism the experience of love is undoubtedly associated with the categories of intellect and being, it is not limited to them, containing an expansive range of meanings that includes the notion of God as love and the loving relationship between God and humanity, extending the discourse into the territory of what is conventionally considered women's affective mysticism.[222]

In expressing the polyvalent dimensions of love, Meister Eckhart employs a variety of terms, principally *amor*, *dilectio*, and *caritas* in his Latin writings, and *minne* and *liebe* in the Middle High German texts. He does not differentiate between these terms by assigning specific meanings and degrees to various types of love, but rather, he uses them interchangeably to describe the full scope of God's creation. Yet another distinctive feature of Meister Eckhart's writing is the language of fecundity and a fertile God overabundant in love, giving birth to the Son and the World in all the faithful. In particular in his sermons Meister Eckhart utilizes the language of fertility and birthing alongside multivalent metaphors of love to speak of an eternally pregnant (*swanger)* God who births the world and overflows into creation in a semblance of Neoplatonic ebullience,

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and lacking proper physical and mental hygiene." Otto Langer, *Mystische Erfahrung und Spirituelle Theologie: Zu Meister Eckharts Auseinandersetzung mit der Frauenfrömmigkeit seiner Zeit* (Munich: Artemis, 1987), 156–287; Benedict M. Ashley, *The Dominicans* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 78.

[220] Sara Poor, *Mechthild of Magdeburg and Her Book: Gender and the Making of Textual Authority* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 192.

[221] Hollywood, "Feminist Studies," 377-78.

[222] Charlotte Radler, ""In Love I Am More God:" The Centrality of Love in Meister Eckhart's Mysticism," *The Journal of Religion* 90, no. 2 (2010): 171–98.

eternally lying in childbed like a pregnant woman and birthing the soul as the Son.[223] Such explicit metaphors utilized in Meister Eckhart's preaching could have thus influenced the establishment of the three main strands of women's mysticism originating in the Rhenish Dominican context, all of which centre on the theme of love: Passion mysticism, centred on affective love towards the suffering Christ; bridal mysticism, founded on the principles of *minne* (courtly or erotic love); and in particular, motherhood mysticism, based in the idea of motherly love towards the infant Christ and meditation on Mary's pregnancy and motherhood, which would have created an increased need for imagery dealing with the issues of the conception, birth, and childhood of Christ, such as depictions of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb.

The significance of Heinrich Suso in relation to the "explosion" of devotional imagery in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has been discussed extensively by Jeffrey Hamburger, who argues that Suso's writings provide an indicator of a rapidly shifting devotional landscape in which art served as an aid and a stimulant to a range of devotional practices, including both affective and intellectual mysticisms. *The Exemplar* (c. 1361-63) - a four-part compilation consisting of *The Life of the Servant* (Suso's autobiography written in hagiographic convention), *The Little Book of Eternal Wisdom, The Little Book of Truth,* and *The Little Book of Letters* (epistles written to the nuns of the Dominican order) - provides its chief audience, identified by Hamburger as cloistered women, with evidence of Suso's own extensive use of devotional images.[224] *The Exemplar* encourages its readers to follow the author's example by providing a set of imagery in the form of illustrations to the text. While earlier scholarship was reluctant to acknowledge the clear reference to images in Suso's account of his life, interpreting his devotions *nach bildricher weise* in terms of linguistics, including metaphor, simile and apophatic imagery, Hamburger openly recognizes the obvious references to images which Suso employed in his daily devotions, such as the fresco decoration he commissioned for his chapel in the Dominican church in Constance. Hamburger convincingly discusses the evidence for the physical existence of those images outside of the

[223] Meister Eckhart, "Predigt 75" in *Meister Eckhart: Die Deutschen und Lateinischen Werke*, Die Deutschen Werke, vol. 3, ed. Josef Quint (Stuttgart; Berlin: Kohlhammer, 1976), 297; Radler, ""In Love I Am More God"," 190-91.

[224] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 197.

narrative of *The Exemplar* and their functioning within the conventions of Dominican devotional practice as a fundamental element of Suso's spirituality.[225]

In his use of images, Suso establishes himself as a living exemplar for his audience, breaching the boundary between the spiritual advisor and advisee in a marked shift from earlier male writing addressed to female audiences, such as *De institutione inclusarum* by Aelred of Rievaulx (c. 1160), which established the rules for the behaviour of cloistered women without providing any example of the author of the text observing those rules himself.[226] Similarly to the Dominican sisters whom he addressed in his writings, Heinrich Suso himself experienced affective visions of the infant Christ. In his sermon titled "How he celebrated Candlemas," Suso described what happened in a such a vision, when Mary gave him the infant at Christmas:

> "And when she kindly passed the child to him, he stretched out his arms into the infinity of the wide world, received, and embraced the loved one, a thousand times in an hour. He gazed into his pretty little eyes, he beheld his tiny little hands, he greeted his tender little mouth, and he touched all the infant limbs of the heavenly treasure. And then he lifted up his eyes and exclaimed in his heart over the great miracle, for the one who carries heaven is so great and yet so small, so magnificent in the kingdom of heaven, and yet so childlike and so poor on earth. And then he played with him, just as he suggested, singing and crying and doing spiritual exercises."[227]

Although Suso's vision lacks the vivid, physical detail of interacting with an actual infant child, which can be found in records of visionary experience originating in Dominican nunneries, the similarities between the two are apparent. The key difference lies in the fact that the primary concern of the

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[225] In *the Exemplar* Suso refers to one of the chapels of the Dominican church as "his" – rather than suggest a private space, this is likely to imply that the redecoration of the chapel during the period of renovation of the church was funded by Suso's wealthy family, in return for him being taken into the convent at the age of thirteen, where novices would usually be admitted at fifteen. The fresco does not survive, as the church was remodelled on numerous occasions, secularized in the 18th century and repurposed as a factory, and later a hotel. Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 218.

[226] Aelred of Rievaulx, *De Institutione Inclusarum: Two English Versions*, ed. John Ayto and Alexandra Barratt (London: Oxford University Press for the Early English Text Society, 1984).

[227] Heinrich Suso, "Leben Seuses. Kap. XI: Wie er begie die liehtmiss," lines 30.5-30.14 in *Heinrich Seuse. Deutsche Schriften im Auftrag der Württembergischen Kommission für Landesgeschichte*, ed. Karl Bihlmeyer (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 1907). Elektronischer Text und Konzeptausdruck hergestellt für das Digitale Mittelhochdeutsche Textarchiv und das Mittelhochdeutsche Wörterbuch [Accessed March 2021]. http://www.mhdwb-online.de/Etexte/PDF/SEUSE.pdf.

sermon appears to be the above discussed paradox of Christ's dual nature, and the simultaneous closeness to Christ's humanity and distance from his divinity; while in women's mysticism related to the infant Christ, as Lechner has argued, this duality is simply not a factor with which the visionary experience is concerned.[228] However, lacking as it may be in the immediate intimacy noticeable in women's visionary accounts, the very existence of such a record suggests a possible influence of Suso on the development of motherhood mysticism and related imagery.

In the case of *The Life of the Servant,* the majority of references to the use of devotional images appear in sections devoted to the period of Suso's training as a novice, which he completed at the Dominican convent in Constance. Suso's writing combines an interest in the use of images in the education of novices with attitudes inherited from his teacher Meister Eckhart, whom he met during his studies at the *Studium Generale* of the Dominicans in Cologne. Meister Eckhart himself takes a paradoxical approach to the use of images in religious practice. While in his writings he remains diametrically opposed to the use of imagery for the purpose of the mystical experience, arguing that the path to God must be *bildlos* (imageless) and one must *entbilden* ("de-image," or reject images), his texts themselves employ a visual language rife with complex metaphors and analogies, which in the context of their meditative reading could have functioned as a substitute for visual images.[229] Suso's stance combines Meister Eckhart's rejection of images with the knowledge of their practical application in education and pastoral care, resulting in an argument for the use of images at the initial stages of the mystical experience – prayer and meditation – and their rejection at the highest levels of contemplation, resulting in a state of *Bildlosigkeit* ("imagelessness"). Thus, for Suso images remain indispensable in describing and categorising the devotional experience, as simply there are no other tools for expressing that which is beyond image. He writes: "But still, so that one may drive out one image with another, I shall now explain it to you through images and by making comparisons, as far as this is possible, for these

[228] Lechner, *Maria Gravida,* 57.

[229] Frank Tobin, "Mysticism and Meister Eckhart," *Mystics Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (1984): 21.

same meanings beyond images – how it is to be understood in truth."[230] Rooted in the negative theology of Pseudo-Dionysus, Suso's writing implies that the image is the tool of accomplishing the imageless, explaining the proliferation of devotional images – and in particular innovative, uncommon and deeply complex ones such as the Visitation featuring the occupied womb – within the context of the monastic houses known for the visionary experiences of their members.[231]

Studies on Dominican patronage of the arts suggest that the order devised their own tradition in assigning images a central didactical role, both in terms of moral and religious instruction.[232] The key function of the Dominicans as an order of learned preachers relates directly to their use of images as an aid in teaching through preaching, both within the order and to the laity. By the third quarter of the thirteenth century additions to the Constitution of the Orders allowed greater expenditure on works of art, with an admonition from that period suggesting that each monastery cell contain images of the crucified Christ and the Blessed Virgin.[233] It is therefore possible that the emergence of imagery of the occupied womb within the context of female Dominican nunneries is a result of a combination of the increasingly positive attitude towards artistic patronage and production within the Dominican order and the intellectual and spiritual exchange between the key male preachers and authors of the period and cloistered Dominican women at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The transfer of images from the advisors to the advisees in the

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[230] Heinrich Suso, "Leben Seuses. Kap. LIII: Diss bůches meinunge ein beschliessen mit kurzen einvaltigen worten," lines 191.9-12 in *Heinrich Seuse. Deutsche Schriften.* http://www.mhdwb-online.de/Etexte/PDF/SEUSE.pdf.

[231] Works of Pseudo-Dionysius were translated into Latin in the 9th century and gained prominence from the 12th century onwards, primarily via Hugh of St Victor. The Pseudo-Dionysian influence on image theory resulted in some of the West's first explicitly anagogical descriptions of imagery. Hugh of St Victor's commentary on Dionysius' *Celestial Hierarchy*, "provides a detailed account of the perceptual process by which a person should be led from visible things to invisible things." This is echoed in later monastic writing, e.g. Gertrude of Helfta, who argued that as invisible and spiritual things cannot be understood by the human intellect except in visible and corporeal images, it is necessary "to clothe them in human and bodily forms." Hugh of St Victor and Gertrude of Helfta cited and translated in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, "Mysticism and Visuality," in *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Mysticism*, ed. Amy Hollywood and Patricia Z. Beckman (New York; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 288–89.

[232] See Joanna Cannon, *Religious Poverty, Visual Riches: Art in the Dominican Churches of Central Italy in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2013).

[233] "*Dist. 1, cap. ix, no. 175: Fratres in cellis habeant imaginem Crucifixi et Beate Virginis. Ita enim odrinatum fuit in primo Capitulo Ordinis sub Beato Dominico patre nostro celebrato, anno Domini 1220*." The Dominican Order, *Constitutiones Fratrum S. Ordinis Praedicatorum* (Paris: Poussielgue, 1886), 102.

process of *cura monialium* imbued them with a sense of legitimacy and a wide range of applications which they would have not enjoyed previously. The symbiotic relationships between nuns and their male advisors must be therefore understood as far more than one-sided, with the nuns not only receiving instruction on how to shape their own devotional practice and spiritual lives, but rather actively contributing to the development of the spiritual *milieu* of their time, resulting in Dominican foundations as a place of origin for novel devotional practices and innovative imagery.

3.3 Sensual environment of late medieval nunneries

Depictions of the occupied womb did not exist in a visual vacuum, isolated from the remainder of artistic production in female monasteries in medieval Germany. Seemingly unaffected by the widespread influence of the Hirsau Reforms – monastic reform originating in the Benedictine abbey of Hirsau in the Upper Rhine region, based in the Cluniac Reform but seeking a return to a more austere monastic life - throughout the eleventh and twelfth centuries, artistic production assumed increasing importance in the majority of women's religious institutions. From its very emergence in the Dominican convents of the thirteenth century, imagery of the occupied womb displayed chief characteristics which will remain its distinct feature until the decline of this iconographic genre during the later years of the Protestant Reformation; namely, its connection to the female monastic environment, and its correlation to a wide range of artistic production, devotional practices, and visionary experience therein. While the individual representations of the occupied womb often constituted an independent object unrelated to any larger cycle or group, they functioned as an integral part of the "sensual environment" of medieval nunneries, interacting with other objects employed by cloistered women in their religious practices. Erika Lindgren defines the sensual environment as a complex sum of "the entire surrounding in which [the cloistered women] were immersed, incorporating the architecture in which they dwelt, the objects that decorated those spaces, the books they read, and the sounds and silences which they created, heard, and observed," and the sensory experience of perceiving and

interacting with it.[234] Such definition warrants the study of Visitation imagery featuring the occupied womb produced for monastic institutions not only in its own right, but also in the context of a vast array of surrounding objects and devotional practices, liturgy and daily life within the convent, and writing by and about the monastic women themselves.

A case in point is the Katharinental Visitation group **(Fig. 8)**, which is not the only artwork produced by Heinrich of Constance for the Dominican nunnery of Katharinental. The convent owned multiple objects, including a Christ and Saint John group **(Fig. 45)**, a Madonna and Child, and sculptures of John the Baptist and Saint Catherine produced by the same workshop, which indicate a close working relationship of commission between Heinrich and the nuns.[235] A number of objects arrived in the nunnery in the period directly preceding or even coinciding with the production of the convent's gradual, in which the iconography of many of the over fifty historiated initials relates directly to the convent's sculptures. Depictions that recall the Christ and John group appear in initials on folios 87v and 158v **(Fig. 46)**, and one closely resembling the Visitation group - not featuring the occupied womb, however – can be found within border decoration on folio 190r **(Fig. 47)**. Two initials on folios 158v and 258v depicting the Apocalyptic "woman clothed with the sun," described in Revelation 12:1-2 and conventionally associated with Mary, present her with the sun positioned over her womb in a manner evoking the crystal openings of the Visitation group. The similarities between the body of the Apocalyptic Woman and those of Mary and Elizabeth of the Visitation have been noted in particular by Jung, who in her detailed analysis of the sculpture characterises them both as "exuberant" – able to demonstrate their internal richness through the material qualities of the objects which utilise the physical and symbolic properties of gemstones, gold and crystal to communicate meanings regarding divinity, spirituality and virtue.[236] Numerous illuminations depicting subjects from the Life of John the Baptist are scattered throughout the manuscript, confirming the

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[234] Erika Lauren Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters: Monastic Women and Spirituality in Medieval Germany* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 2.

[235] For these and other works associated with Katharinental, see Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, eds., *Krone Und Schleier: Kunst Aus Mittelalterlichen Frauenklöstern* (Munich: Hirmes Verlag, 2005), 404–17.

[236] Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts," 234.

significance of the Visitation narrative to the Katharinental nuns. Those include the scene of the Nativity of John the Baptist (fol. 178v) in which, following the apocryphal traditions discussed in the preceding chapter, Mary can be seen holding the infant in her arms and assisting Elizabeth with his bath **(Fig. 48)**, as well as an image of Mary and Elizabeth sat on a bench, holding their infant children on folio 264v **(Fig. 49)** - a relatively uncommon iconographic type perhaps based on the apocryphal account of the second Visitation discussed in the preceding chapter of this thesis, once again reaffirming the significance of Elizabeth and John in the monastic context.

Examples of relationships between artworks extending across media appear not only in the relatively well-documented Katharinental. As discussed above, the earliest examples of German representations of the occupied womb both appear in the convent zum Heiligen Kreuz in Regensburg, in the form of a historiated initial from a lectionary **(Fig. 43),** and around twenty years later in the form of a small-scale sculpture of *Maria gravida* **(Fig. 44)**. A reverse order of appearance of the motif across media can be found in the Cistercian convent of Marienstern, which owned at least three sculptural depictions of *Maria gravida,* all equipped with a niche containing a representation of the infant Christ.[237] Resemblance can be noted in particular between the so-called *Marienchen,* produced c. 1450 **(Fig. 50)** and a historiated initial from a missal **(Fig. 51)**, which depicts a figure of the Virgin Mary with the occupied womb. Although the missal was produced around one hundred years prior to the sculpture, the particularly close resemblance in the Virgin's hairstyle, patterned gown, and pose with hands clasped in prayer demonstrates a direct connection between the two objects.

Although there is little evidence to suggest haptic engagement with imagery of the occupied womb, it must be noted that those images existed in an environment which strongly encouraged tactile relationships with devotional objects. While painting or manuscript illumination do not prioritise haptic engagement beyond the process of their production, the multisensory environment in which they were located fostered practices of viewing images that do not differ significantly from the act of touching and manipulating three-

[237] Judith F. Oexle, ed., *Zeit und Ewigkeit: 128 Tage in St. Marienstern; Ausstellungskatalog; Erste Sächsische Landesausstellung, 13. Juni 1998 - 18. Oktober 1998* (Halle: Stekovics, 1998), 90–91.

dimensional objects. The medieval theories of vision suggest that the gaze itself could constitute one means of haptic engagement. Summarising the complex medieval ideas regarding seeing, vision, and the senses in general, Biernoff argues that the eye of the medieval viewer was "simultaneously receptive, passive, vulnerable to sensations; and active: roaming, grasping, or piercing its objects."[238] Objects could be touched, or even animated, by the beholder's eye, suggesting that the image-turned-flesh *topos* permeating the late medieval Sister-Books could perhaps be extended to objects that do not necessarily assert the primacy of haptic engagement. Although in the medieval period haptic engagement with devotional objects and animation thereof were not always interdependent, and could be practiced and accomplished separately, in the context of the Dominican Sister-Books they appear intrinsically connected with one another, objects becoming animated as frequently through touch as they are through memory or prayer. While physically they remain static, the gilded wombs of Mary and Elizabeth would have been animated by the turning of book pages and covering of the altars with cloths, by the light shining through stained glass windows, even by drafts of air wafting incense smoke and causing candles to flicker and reflect in liturgical vessels made of gold and silver, the play of light turning the gilded surfaces into what Rico Franses has referred to as "mystical meditations on theology and divinity."[239]

A particularly evocative use of gilding can be observed in the historiated initial 'A' (*Accedunt laudes virginis admirande*) with the Visitation, which opens the reading for the Feast of the Visitation in the antiphonary of the Cistercian convent Seligenthal **(Fig. 52).** The manuscripts was produced in the nunnery scriptorium and its scribe, a nun named Adelhaidis, is depicted accompanied by Bernard of Clairvaux in a (self?)portrait on folio 144r.[240] In the Visitation initial,

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[238] Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* 3.

[239] Rico Franses, "When All That Is Gold Does Not Glitter: On the Strange History of Looking at Byzantine Art," in *Icon and Word: The Power of Images in Byzantium. Studies Presented to Robin Cormack*, ed. Antony Eastmond and Liz James (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2003), 19; Bissera Pentcheva, *The Sensual Icon: Space, Ritual and the Senses* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

[240] The nun is identified with the caption: "*Finis adest operis mercedem posco laboris. Et qui me scribebat Adelhaidis nomen habebat*" ("The finishing of this work demands payment. And the one who wrote me has the name Adelhaidis"), to which Bernard replies: "*Dominus noster Jhesus Christus ipse erit merces tua, fiat, fiat*" ("Our Lord Jesus Christ is your reward, evermore"). It is not known whether the illumination and decoration of the manuscript, which consists of historiated initials depicting the birth of the Virgin Mary (fol. 25r), St Michael fighting the dragon (fol. 37v), St Ursula and the martyrdom of the 11.000 virgins (fol. 48v), and a

which is a later addition to the manuscript, both women are depicted with circular, richly gilt occupied wombs, which recall earlier representations such as the illustrations of the Katherinental Gradual, which conflate the Virgin Mary with the Apocalyptic Woman and Ecclesia triumphant **(Fig. 53)**. In her discussion of the Katharinental Gradual, Jung has observed that, accompanied by model viewers – John the Evangelist and a nun, who make the realm occupied by the Apocalyptic Woman accessible to the reader – the Woman emanates light from her chest, making permanent the fleeting visions experienced by cloistered women.[241] The gilding would have made the wombs of both the Katharinental Apocalyptic Woman and Seligenthal Mary and Elizabeth appear almost transparent in certain light, transforming the female bodies into windows opening up into a view of the divine. This animation of imagery of the occupied womb can thus be linked to popular tales of animation of Marian statuary, some of which are said to have occurred within the convent themselves.

In the absence of possibilities for direct haptic engagement, such as manipulation of three-dimensional objects, the sensual environment of the convent could have consolidated this absence through a combination of communal and individual memory and sensory play between objects and their audience. The two-dimensional occupied womb would thus become animated both through the individual sensory experience of handling reliquaries, tabernacles, and indeed sculptures of *Maria gravida* which feature movable elements **(Fig. 6, 44, 50)**, and the shared cultural memory of liturgy, vision, and communal reading. The intertwining of the sensory elements and communal memory would in turn negate the need for the occupied womb to be overtly explicit in its opening – the perceptual gap between what is depicted and what is

Schutzmantel Christ (fol. 57r), as well as numerous penwork initials and the *bas-de-page* image of the scribe Adelhaidis and Bernard would have been produced by the monastic scriptorium as well. However, recent archeological evidence suggests that nuns would have played a greater role in production of manuscripts that had been assumed previously. An examination of calcified tooth tartar of the skeleton of a 12th century nun from the Augustinian convent at Dalheim found particles of lapis lazuli embedded between the woman's teeth. The study concluded that the woman was a most likely a painter who could have ingested the paint while licking her brush to a point, or that she breathed in the powder while preparing pigment, suggesting the possibility of greater involvement of medieval women in the process of book production. Anita Radini et. al., "Medieval Women's Early Involvement in Manuscript Production Suggested by Lapis Lazuli Identification in Dental Calculus," *Science Advances* 5, no. 1 (2019) [Accessed June 2021]. https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/5/1/eaau7126.

[241] Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts," 234-35.

signified would have been filled by the visionary experience and multi-sensory interaction with other objects within the monastic environment.

The visual and conceptual relationships between objects described above demonstrate the level of self-awareness and critical understanding that cloistered medieval women had of their own visual culture, in which artworks across media remain in conversation with one another. By actively designing their visual environment, both through commission and as artists, medieval women actively shaped the devotional experience of their monastic communities in ways that were personally and communally meaningful to them, the visual cultures of the convents being governed by their inhabitants' own requirements and protocols.[242] The visual environment of the monastery was thus intimately connected to mystical devotion and the visionary experiences of its inhabitants. While theological writing foundational for the medieval period, in particular that of Gregory the Great and Bernard of Clairvaux, as well as numerous texts contemporary to the religious women discussed in this thesis, advocated for imageless devotion; Ringbom argues that the powerful tradition of visionary experience inspired by works of art resulted in a more practicable outlook on devotional images, in which the formative role of the image in visionary experience became tolerated, and even encouraged.[243]

Inspired and determined by figural representations as they were, the visions of nuns in German convents of the late Middle Ages emerge as yet another element of the multi-sensory environment of the convents, which combined the visual, textual, and visionary into a unique category of experience. Visionary accounts of nuns such as Gertrude of Helfta, which employ a vocabulary of materiality clearly pointing towards interaction with devotional images, or Margaretha Ebner, who readily admits the correlation of her vision with pictorial imagery, stating that the loving soul of Christ appears to her "as [it] is painted," demonstrate the extent to which artworks were deliberately used within the devotional setting to foster the visionary experience. The novel form of

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[242] June L. Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions: Gender, Material Culture, and Monasticism in Late Medieval Germany*, ed. Alison I. Beach, Constance H. Berman, and Lisa M. Bitel (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), 58; Hamburger, *Nuns as Artists,* 10.

[243] Sixten Ringbom, "Devotional Images and Imaginative Devotions: Notes on the Place of Art in Late Medieval Private Piety," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 73 (1969): 159–66.

devotional images produced for and used in women's monastic houses provides evidence for a new role of artworks in the devotional context, in which certain objects appear to have been explicitly designed with the purpose of aiding in meditative devotion. A shift in representation in the late thirteenth century results in proliferation of objects such as the statues of *Maria gravida* from the convent zum Heiligen Kreuz **(Fig. 44)** or the Katharinental Christ and Saint John group **(Fig. 45)**, and indeed, representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, which, depicted independently of the context of their biblical narrative or larger pictorial cycles take on the function of instruments of inducing, channelling, and focusing visionary experience.[244]

According to the Sister-Book of Katharinental, the prioress Adelheit Hüterin and two other nuns experienced visions in which they saw themselves embraced not by an immaterial, visionary Christ, but by the wooden crucifix placed in their own choir. Another one of the Katharinental nuns, Mechthilt die Rittrin prayed in front of a Holy Sepulchre consisting of a near life-sized effigy of the dead Christ placed inside a container representing his tomb. When she took the wooden hands and feet of the statue in her hands, they felt like flesh, "as if a person's body were lying there," and in her vision she became a witness to the death of Christ. When Anne of Ramschwag "prayed once before the large image of Saint John resting on Our Lord's heart," sister Mie of Retherhoven "saw that Anne was as clear as crystal and that she shone with a light that came from within her." Praying in front of the very same image, which her *vita* locates with certainty in the nuns' choir, Adelheid Pfefferhartin, too was observed by another nun at her devotions, but instead of becoming translucent, Adelheid is said to have levitated. A life-sized sculpture of the Virgin and Child placed in the Katharinental nuns' choir appears to be particularly relevant to visions experienced by a community rather than an individual. With her left arm thrust forward, the image of the Virgin almost invites its viewers to hold her child – an invitation accepted by nuns such as Adelheit of St Gall, who once beheld "Our Lady walking through the choir carrying the Christ Child on her arm and bowing to each [lay] sister. When she reached the nuns who were singing [the antiphon

[244] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 131.

Ave stella to Our Lady], she gave each sister the baby to hold on her own arm."[245]

In recounting the nuns' visionary experience, written accounts such as Sister-Books and *vitae* tie individual devotions to communal history, lending the artworks they are connected to, whether private or public, additional authority and tying the visionary and visual cultures of the monastic house to its history and identity. Although the female mystical experience has been historically interpreted as highly private and personal, as well as potentially subversive of the devotional frameworks of the given period, it must be reiterated that in the context of German female monasticism of the late Middle Ages, it was far from either. Women's mysticism was effectively a public discourse, neither private nor passive, but rather "communal, dialogic and active," as well as highly structured.[246] Accounts of visionary experience which take images as the point of departure not only assert the interwoven nature of private and communal devotion, but also reflect the prominence of images in female piety. However, rather than reassert the outdated notion of religious women being unable to ascend to the level of experience beyond image, they demonstrate the manner in which the visually rich environment of the convent enabled devotion which was both uniquely sensual and exhibited a level of intellectual sophistication nurtured through interaction between individuals within the community and beyond, as in the case of the Dominican preachers outlined above.

Through the repertoire of visions, ascetic behaviour, and devotional activities described in the Sister Books and convent chronicles, cloistered women created significant spiritual meanings in the semi-sacred spaces of their cloister, extending sanctity beyond the main altar of the choir. The presence of images throughout the entirety of the space of the monastery allowed for creation of a boundless spirituality, not confined to specific spaces or events, but rather permeating the daily life within the convent, with the objects mediating the relationship between the nuns' sense of self in relation to God and their sense of

[245] Ruth Meyer, ed. *Das "St Katharinenthaler Schwesternbuch": Untersuchungen, Edition, Kommentar* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995), 35, 106, 130-133, 152.

[246] Laurie A. Finke, "Mystical Bodies and the Dialogics of Vision," in *Maps of Flesh and Light: The Religious Experience of Medieval Women Mystics*, ed. Ulrike Wiethaus (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1993), 35.

community. Lechner has noted that devotional images produced for women's nunneries were rarely related directly to certain observances and events from the liturgical year. Rather, they received continuous veneration according to communal practices and individual spiritual needs, abolishing the temporal structure of devotions established by the liturgical calendar.[247] That is not to say that the connection between the liturgical year and devotional images was not present – but rather, that certain liturgical observances served as means of collecting and centering a spirituality which functioned in a manner continuously responding to the imagery permeating the visual environment of the convent. As the women's visions were prompted by contemplation of images, the boundaries and requirements of time and space containing them were transgressed, and the functions assigned to particular places and objects were rewritten, thus pointing towards the significance of devotional imagery of the cloistered women beyond its canonically established understanding.

Alongside the shaping of their own para-liturgical experience through an idiosyncratic use of objects and images, the nuns developed practices of prayer not officially sanctioned by the Church. One such example is the Psalter of the Virgin, written in the thirteenth century by Bonaventure. While the Psalter was never used liturgically by the Church, it rapidly gained popularity in monastic circles, providing women with meditations organised around a cycle of mysteries in which the nuns saw themselves recreating the cycle of the Life of Christ by identifying themselves with the Virgin.[248] Already in the fourteenth century, the initial form of the Mary-Psalter, which consisted largely of a litany of praise to the Virgin, began to be infused with scenes from the Life of Christ, with the Christocentric narrative providing additional structure to the repetitive *Ave* prayer.[249] The repetition of the phrase *Ave Maria* recalled the process of Incarnation, since, as Anne Winston-Allen has demonstrated, the Hail Mary stems from the two greetings offered to Mary by the angel Gabriel and by Elizabeth, effectively containing the main elements of the Incarnation narrative in one phrase and echoing the relationship between the Annunciation and the Visitation discussed above. The inclusion of Elizabeth's greeting to Mary on a speech scroll

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[247] Lechner, *Maria Gravida,* 51.

[248] McNamara, *Sisters in Arms,* 322.

[249] Winston-Allen, *Stories of the Rose,* 14, 20-24.

in representations of the Visitation **(Fig. 4, 8)** would have thus not only recalled the Gospel account of the episode from the Life of the Virgin – it would have also connected the representation to the daily order of communal prayer, since recitation of the *Ave* formed part of daily devotions of both the religious and laity, incorporating the nuns' prayer into the sum of their sensual environment.[250]

Egon Verheyen has argued that "the Byzantine pseudo-foetus [Visitation] type had a theological and dogmatic origin whereas its counterpart, the Northern realistic foetus type, had a mystic and undogmatic basis," due to the fact that "the transparency of the womb appears much earlier in Visitations than in representations of the pregnant Virgin [and] thus the later Northern type cannot be derived from the older Byzantine scheme."[251] By contrast, this chapter has demonstrated that both Byzantine iconography and religious doctrine impacted Northern representations of the occupied womb through their transmission and translation during the Ottonian era of the Holy Roman Empire. Throughout the medieval period, Eastern and Western traditions both built on common sources and remained in conversation with each other **(Fig. 40, 43)**, resulting in the emergence of Visitation iconography which openly builds on meanings derived from the Byzantine period. In addition to the use of Byzantine symbolism, such as textile metaphors and precious material analogies, the two traditions existed in close physical proximity, openly complementing each other across the boundaries of time and proving that while imagery of the Visitation did gain pictorial independence, it was still frequently considered within the larger Christological landscape. For instance, in St Leonhardskapelle in Nauders, South Tirol, a scene of Annunciation and a Visitation depicting the *in utero* children of Mary and Elizabeth appears on the arch of the transept **(Fig. 54)**.[252] The two

[250] Ann Van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation in Early Byzantine and Medieval Annunciation Imagery," *The Art Bulletin* 81, no. 3 (1999): 420.

[251] Verheyen, "An Iconographic Note," 537n6.

[252] The majority of depictions of the occupied womb within wall painting appear in locations with strong monastic ties, and it is likely that male monastic communities would have been influential in the design of those pictorial cycles. The motif appears within a cycle of the Life of John the Baptist (c. 1420) in the Burg parish church in Stein-am-Rhein, Switzerland. The church stands directly across the river Rhine from the Benedictine monastery of St Georg, which was the key religious and economic power in the region. It is thus likely that the monastic community would have extended some degree of authority over surrounding parishes and could have been influential in the creation of the fresco decoration in the Burg church following the Council of Constance (1414-18). A scene of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb can also be found in the fresco decoration of the townhouse of the merchants' guild of Toruń, Poland (c. 1390-

scenes were a late fifteenth century addition to the Romanesque fresco decoration of the chapel, supplementing the scene of Christ in Majesty combined with *traditio legis* painted in the apse, clearly employing a narrative strategy similar to the earlier Byzantine Christological pictorial programs, such as the mosaics of the Euphrasian Basilica **(Fig. 33)**. Moreover, Verheyen is incorrect in his observation that in the Northern context the iconography of the occupied womb emerges much later within depictions of the Visitation than in the *Maria gravida*: Byzantine-influenced depictions of the pregnant Virgin *Platytera* can indeed be found in Northern Germany as early as the twelfth century **(Fig. 36, 37)**, and the motif of *Maria gravida* appears towards the late thirteenth century both as an independent, non-narrative object **(Fig. 44)** and within the scene of the Annunciation **(Fig. 43)**, pre-dating the earliest known uses of the imagery of the occupied womb within Visitation scenes, such as the Katharinental Visitation group **(Fig. 8)**. The thirteenth century thus marks the transformation of the predominantly Christological context of Visitation, in tandem with the Annunciation, into one increasingly affording additional significance to the Marian dogma, with isolated representations of motherhood appearing with much higher frequency outside of narrative cycles and frequently being found within the interconnected, sensual environment of female monastic houses.

While towards the late medieval period imagery of the occupied womb appeared with increased prominence in the West, it did not vanish completely from the Byzantine realm either, where it remained frequent within narrative cycles such as the late fourteenth-century fresco of the Life of the Virgin in the Timios

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1400). At the time of the wall paintings being created, the city boasted a strong Franciscan presence, and the townhouse stands in the vicinity of the Franciscan church of the Assumption of the Virgin. Studies have found the merchants' frescoes, including the cycle of the Life of the Virgin, which includes the Visitation, to be either modelled directly on the earlier decoration of the Franciscan church, or designed under Franciscan theological influence. Franciscan influence has also been found by multiple scholars in the wall paintings in the parish churches of Ochtiná and Koceľovce in modern-day Slovakia (both c. 1377-1400). References to Franciscan spirituality can be found in the extensive Easter and Passion cycles in both churches, and it is likely that the Franciscan monastery in nearby Kameňany played an intermediary role in the design of iconographic programmes of both churches, with monks of the order living in the villages and holding clerical roles within said churches. Hildegard Urner-Astholz, "Ikonographische Besonderheiten in den Wandmalereien der Kirche auf Burg in Stein am Rhein," *Unsere Kunstdenkmäler: Mitteilungsblatt für die Mitglieder der Gesellschaft für Schweizerische Kunstgeschichte* 39 (1988): 64-71; Marcin Dawidowicz, "Program ideowy gotyckich malowideł ściennych dawnej sali zebrań bractwa kupieckiego pw. NMP przy ul. Żeglarskiej 5 w Toruniu," *Acta Universitatis Nicolai Copernici Zabytkoznawstwo i Konserwatorstwo* 40 (2011): 9-37; Peter Megyeši, "*Et benedictus fructus ventris tui*. K ikonografii Navštívení na středověkých nástěnných malbách v Ochtiné a Koceľovcích," *Umění/Art* 65, no. 3 (2017): 261-68.

Stavros Church in Pelendri, Cyprus **(Fig. 55)**, further implying an ongoing exchange between the East and West. However, it is decidedly in continental Western Europe where the pictorial motif of the occupied womb ultimately gained independence from narrative cycles. Although, as outlined above, the non-narrative depictions of the occupied womb were not solely an invention of the late medieval period, nor were they merely mystic and undogmatic, the existence of this iconography within a new context of Marian devotion allowed it to gain independence as a significant element of monastic visual vocabulary, working interdependently with surrounding visual culture in order to encourage and guide female-specific devotional practices and visionary experiences, which will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4. Devotional significance of the occupied womb

The developments outlined in the preceding chapter facilitated a transformation of the non-explicit imagery of Marian childbearing produced in the Byzantine era into a genre clearly focused on the body of the Virgin Mary as the locus of the inception of Christological history. Throughout the course of the Middle Ages, Mary herself acquired new titles related to this concept, including the Sacred Shrine and the Tabernacle of the Lord. In turn, those titles received visual manifestation in increased artistic production imaging the body of the Virgin as a sanctified location. The emergence of the imagery of the occupied womb as an independent pictorial tradition in line with the developments described above is further connected to the doctrinal changes in beliefs surrounding the Virgin Mary which occurred during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This period witnessed firm, widespread acceptance of the idea of Christ being made literally of his mother's flesh and blood. It was understood that since the infant Jesus had no human father, his body had to be formed not *by*, but *from* his mother's flesh; the idea of hybridity of mother and son elevating Mary's status within devotional practices focused on the body.[253]

This chapter will discuss the significance of imagery of the occupied womb within the landscape of Eucharistic and Marian devotion. Firstly, it will explore a range of pictorial genres related to Eucharistic devotion as it was practiced in female monastic communities in order to establish how imagery of the occupied womb would have been utilised in this complex nexus of devotional practices. Secondly, the Incarnational significance of the imagery will be discussed, with particular reference to the figure of Saint Elizabeth as a devotional model for

[253] The medieval period inherited two key medical theories concerning the role of the female within the reproductive process. Aristotelian physiology employed the "one seed" model, which reduced the mother's role to a passive one – while the woman's menstrual blood did provide nourishment for the foetus, it was only the male seed which created the flesh and form of the child. Meanwhile, Galenic and Hippocratic interpretations stated that the foetus is formed by the combination of male and female seeds. Galen theorized that the female seed is expelled from the ovaries at the time of coition in such manner that it mixes with male seed in the womb and forms a membrane, allowing for development of the three major organs: liver, heart, and brain. Both theories were widely circulated in the Middle Ages, with Galen being favoured in medical writing, including Bartholomaeus Anglicus, pseudo-Albertus Magnus, and the *Trotula* texts; and Aristotle finding more popularity with natural philosophers and theologians such as Thomas Aquinas. Anthony Preus, "Galen's Criticism of Aristotle's Conception Theory," *Journal of the History of Biology* 10, no. 1 (1977): 65-85; Newman, "Mother and Child. Giving Birth," 157-58.

cloistered women. Finally, the chapter will address the significance of gaze and vision, as well as material qualities of devotional objects in the mechanics of an encounter with representations of the occupied womb in the devotional context.

4.1 The Visitation and Eucharistic devotion

The accelerating devotional and artistic focus on Mary's body, its miraculous properties and hidden contents emerging towards the end of the High Middle Ages found further recognition and popularisation following the adaptation of the doctrine of transubstantiation at the Fourth Lateran Council (1215). The doctrine firmly reasserted that the whole substance of the body and blood of Christ is contained under the form of sacramental bread and wine, having been transubstantiated by the actions of God and the Holy Spirit. This notion placed emphasis on the real presence of Christ's physical body in the Eucharist, conceptually linking it to its analogous conception in the womb of Mary, Christ being "the living bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:51).[254] Although the Fourth Lateran Council provided official, papally-legislated foundations for the development of Eucharistic teachings focused on the role of the Virgin Mary in the process of the Incarnation, the language of liturgical containment had been introduced into Marian discourse as early as in the sixth century. The Byzantine *Akathistos* Hymn, composed for the Feast of the Annunciation of the *Theotokos*, employs a liturgical and literary language which characterises Mary as an "ark gilded by the Spirit," a "container for the uncontainable" and a "tabernacle of God and the Word."[255]

An even more direct emphasis on the connection between the Eucharist and the Incarnation through the flesh of the Virgin can be found in theological texts and

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[254] One of the most widely-accepted formulations of the doctrine can be found in the *Summa Theologiae* (1265–1274) of Thomas Aquinas, which states that, as McCord Adams has summarised, "divine omnipotence includes not only power to create and to annihilate, but power to convert the whole of one thing into the whole of another. Relevant in the Eucharist is power to transubstantiate: to convert the whole substance of the bread into the whole substance of the Body of Christ." The conversion which happens in the Eucharist is thus absolute: "the whole substance of bread is converted into the whole Body of Christ, in such a way that the metaphysical constituents of the bread substance are converted into the metaphysical constituents of Christ's Body: the matter of the bread into the matter of Christ's Body; the substantial form of the bread into the substantial form Christ's Body." Marilyn McCord Adams, *Some Later Medieval Theories of the Eucharist: Thomas Aquinas, Giles of Rome, Duns Scotus and William Ockham* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 89–90.

[255] Leena Mari Peltomaa, *The Image of the Virgin Mary in the Akathistos Hymn* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2001), 13–19.

sermons composed during the period of Eucharistic controversy, which lasted from the eighth to the eleventh century. The widespread popularity of this topic resulted in theological references to the conception and birth of Christ becoming widely utilised formulas for expressing the official doctrine, including phrases such as “this certainly is no other flesh than that which was born of Mary” (Paschasius Radbertus, 785–865); “there is one body of Christ, identical with that which he received from the Virgin's womb” (Remigius of Auxerre, 841-908); and “we receive that very body which was taken from the Virgin” (Lanfranc of Bec, 1005-89). The action of the Holy Ghost at the conception of Christ by the Virgin Mary was thus understood as analogous to the action of the Holy Ghost in the transformation of the eucharistic elements into the body and blood of Christ: “that the bread consecrated on earth is called the real body of Christ, since both that which was taken from the Virgin and that which is consecrated [...] is transformed into the real substance of flesh by the unseen action of one and the same Spirit” (Fulbert of Chartres, 952-1028).[256] Explicit comparisons between Christ’s Incarnation within his mother’s womb and the presence of his body in the sacramental bread can be found prominently in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090-1153), who wrote, “Offer your son, sacred Virgin, and present to God the blessed fruit of your womb. Offer for our reconciliation the blessed host, pleasing to God,” thus underscoring the Virgin’s sacerdotal role in the transubstantiation by framing her flesh as a liturgical vessel.[257]

The rise of the mendicant movement concurrent to the Fourth Lateran Council – the Franciscan Order having been established in 1209 and the Dominican Order in 1216 – further contributed to the proliferation of sermons utilising an increasingly evocative language of conception in the womb, with such prominent figures as Saint Francis drawing direct parallels between the Virgin’s childbearing and the real presence of Christ on the altar in his preaching on the Eucharist.[258] The idea of Christ’s flesh being derived from the Virgin soon led to

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[256] All cited and translated in Donald L. Ehresmann, “Medieval Theology of the Mass and the Iconography of the Oberwesel Altarpiece,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 60, no. 2 (1997): 217.

[257] “*Offer filium tuum, Virgo sacrata, et benedictum fructum ventris tui Domino repraesenta. Offer ad nostram omnium reconciliationem hostiam sanctam, Deo placentem*.” Bernard of Clairvaux, *In purificatione beatae Mariae,* “Sermo III” in Patrologia Latina 183, col. 370, translated in Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 51.

[258] Although Francis’ *Admonitions* were directed at his fellow friars, rather than the general public, they are likely to have influenced the later preaching of the mendicants, surviving in a significant number of manuscripts produced as late as the 15th century. In *Admonition 1: Of the Lord’s*

the two being understood as one and the same, with Richard of St Laurent writing in *De laudibus sanctae Mariae* (c. 1250): "In the sacrament of [Mary's] Son we also eat and drink her flesh and blood […] Mary feeds her guests […] on her virginal flesh […] also in the Sacrament where the flesh of Christ and the flesh of Mary are consumed, since the flesh of the Mother and of the Son are one flesh."[259] The feast of *Corpus Christi* was formally instituted by the papacy in the year 1264, with its readings taken from the feasts of the Annunciation and the Nativity, and the consecrated sacramental bread saluted with the hymn *Ave, verum corpus natum de Maria Virgine* ("Hail, true body, born of the Virgin Mary").[260] In the later medieval period, bodily metaphors featured prominently in popular sermons, with the phrase *ex purissimus sanguibus beate Marie* ("from the very pure blood of blessed Mary") occurring frequently enough to become a part of what Donna Ellington refers to as the "permanent mental stock" of the sermons' audience inventory of phrases and images regarding Mary's connection to Jesus.[261] By the end of the thirteenth century, the Eucharist began to replace baptism as the central sacrament of the Catholic church.

Ultimately, towards the end of the thirteenth century, Guillaume Durand (1230-1296), author of the *Rationale divinorum officiorum* – one of the first liturgical treatises on the origin and symbolic sense of Christian ritual - stated that the

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Body, Francis equates the Incarnation of Christ in Mary's womb with his daily appearance in the Eucharist, saying: "Behold, daily he humbles himself as when from his "royal throne" he came into the womb of the Virgin; daily he himself comes to us with humility; daily he descends from the bosom of his Father upon the altar in the hands of the priest." Francis of Assisi, "Admonition 1: Of the Lord's Body," in *The Writings of Saint Francis of Assisi, Newly Translated into English with an Introduction and Notes*, trans. Pascal Robinson (Philadelphia: The Dolphin Press, 1906) [Accessed March 2021]. https://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/1172.

[259] Richard of St Laurent, *De laudibus sanctae Mariae*, 2.2.3, 83 and 12.1.7, 632, cited and translated in Hilda Graef, *Mary: A History of Doctrine and Devotion* (Notre Dame, IN: Christian Classics, 2009), 211.

[260] Prior to its formal institution by pope Urban IV, the feast had been celebrated in the diocese of Liège since 1246. From its very inception the feast had intimate connection to religious women, its main proponent being Juliana of Liège, a Norbertine canoness who reported experiencing visions of Christ in which she was instructed to plead for introduction of the feast in 1208. Juliana and her confessor John of Lausanne petitioned bishop Robert of Turotte for institution of the feast, and in 1246 a celebration of *Corpus Christi* was ordered to be held in the diocese. The local Dominicans were supportive of the Eucharistic movement in Liège, and Hugh of St Cher promoted the feast following his 1251 appointment as Cardinal Legate to Germany, leading to the feast's spread to Germany, Dacia, Bohemia, and Moravia, and eventually his whole jurisdiction as provincial of the French Dominican province. Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi. The Eucharist in Late Medieval Culture* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 164-77.

[261] Ellington, *From Sacred Body to Angelic Soul*, 50.

Eucharistic ciborium was symbolic of the womb of the Virgin Mary.[262] In the daily order of liturgy, the consecration of the Host would thus come to signify the real presence of Christ, mirroring his conception in the womb of the Virgin, with visions of the Christ Child physically appearing at the altar or emerging from the consecrated wafer reported particularly often in the writing of German-speaking female mystics such as Gertrude of Helfta (1256-1302) and Elsbeth Stagel of Töss (c. 1300-1360). The most evocative is perhaps a vision recorded in the *Offenbarungen* of Adelheid Langmann, a nun of the Dominican convent Engelthal, who wrote:

> "[…] during the gospel our Lord came down from the altar in the form of a small child. Then he sprang up and walked back to all who were his friends and embraced them and when the priest began the Preface then he jumped up on the altar again and when the priest elevated the host the child changed himself into the host […]"[263]

Towards the later medieval period, the increasingly evocative language of preaching on the Eucharist began to find reflection in the form and decoration liturgical vessels, clearly demonstrating a shift towards thinking about the Eucharist in terms of the Incarnation, and thus the conception, birth, and childhood of Christ. The few Eucharistic ciboria with figurative decoration to survive from this period commonly display episodes from the Infancy narratives, and from the middle of the thirteenth century, ciboria and tabernacles in the form of the Virgin and Child were produced in France **(Fig. 56)**, making literal the notion of Mary's body as a liturgical container. The idea of the Virgin Mary as a tabernacle of the Lord informed the composition of the liturgy for the Feast of the Visitation. One of the few surviving monastic manuscripts to include the text of the office for the feast is the Seligenthal Antiphonary, produced for the female Cistercian convent in Seligenthal, Bavaria **(Appendix 2)**. The inclusion of the text of the office for the Feast of the Visitation dates the manuscript after the year 1392, when the feast was introduced in the diocese of Regensburg. The folios containing the readings for the new feast are inserted at the very beginning of the manuscript, and may constitute a later addition to the antiphonary, pointing towards the unique significance of the feast to the

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262 Guillame Durand, *Rationale divinorum officiorum*, I, I, c. 3, n. 25, ed. Jean Beleth (Naples: Apud Josephum Bibliopolam, 1859); Ehresmann, "Medieval Theology of the Mass," 218.

263 Adelheid Langmann, *Die Offenbarungen der Adelheide Langmann, Klosterfrau zu Engelthal,* ed. Philipp Strauch (Strasbourg, 1878), 18.

monastic community. One of the longest hymns included in the liturgy for the Feast of the Visitation in the Seligenthal Antiphonary is *De sacro tabernaculo*. The hymn, usually sung at Lauds, reads: "De sacro tabernaculo virtutum flos egreditur, in montis diverticulo odor Mariæ spargitur" ("From a sacred tabernacle of virtues a flower emerged, in a mountain crossroads a scent of Mary has been scattered,") connecting the liturgy to key Mariological concepts including Mary as the tabernacle of virtues, the *hortus conclusus,* and the sensory association between Marian and Eucharistic miracles and sweet scents. The devotional focus on the connection between the body of the Virgin and the Christ Child as mediated through the Eucharist and the prevalence of language of containment within Eucharistic lore therefore make Eucharistic belief crucial for understanding the significance of imagery of the occupied womb.

According to the *Cantus* Index, the hymn is found in two manuscripts which include Adam Easton's office for the Feast of the Visitation (Mss SK-Sk 2, 15th century, Slovakia and DK-Kk 3449 8o [09] IX, 1580, Germany, used for Lauds and Vespers), as well as two manuscripts containing Jan of Jenštejn's office (Mss PL-KiK 1, 1372, Poland and PL-PłS 36, 15th century, Poland, used for Matins and Lauds). However, the hymn cannot be attributed to Jan of Jenštejn, as it is not included in the *Jenstein Codex* (Ms Vat.lat.1122) which lists all hymns written by him for the office of the Visitation. It is also unlikely that the hymn was composed by Easton, as it is only found in two manuscripts which contain his office, and only given in full in one. However, the geographic spread of these manuscripts raises the possibility that it was a regional Visitation hymn in central Europe, and its inclusion as a non-standard element of liturgy for the feast day points towards its particular significance within the monastic community of Seligenthal. Moreover, the liturgy is composed of both new antiphons derived from the office composed by Easton and referring directly to the Lucan account of the episode, e.g. *Surgens Maria gravida* **(see Appendix 2)**; as well as numerous readings imported from other feast days, including the chant *Christi virgo dilectissima* which was usually sung at the feast of Annunciation and the responsory *Felix namque es sacra virgo* derived from the Feast of the Birth of the Virgin Mary. Those inclusions reaffirm the significance of the Visitation not just in its own right, but also in the context of other events from the Infancy

cycle, placing the episodes of pregnancy and virgin birth within a sustained narrative of salvation history.[264]

4.1.1 Between the Incarnation and Passion

Although in the fourteenth century nuns received communion on average no more than fifteen times a year, devotion to the Eucharist was nevertheless central to the female monastic experience.[265] While throughout the late medieval period devotion to the Virgin, predominantly in terms of her role as a nurturing mother rather than the authoritative mediatrix of the earlier centuries, stood at the forefront of laywomen's devotional practices; Caroline Walker Bynum has noted that in female monastic circles, devotion to the Virgin was not emphasised as much as devotion to Christ and the Eucharist.[266] That is not to say, however, that devotion to the Virgin was unimportant in the monastic setting; on the contrary, Marian imagery was ubiquitous both in publicly displayed and privately owned objects, and Marian antiphons including *Salve regina* and *Ave regina celorum* were amongst the most frequently employed in monastic liturgy.[267] Nuns read, copied, and translated Marian texts such as the treatise *Wie Maria geistlich geleicht ist in zechen dingen einem puch* ("How Mary is spiritually similar to a book in ten ways") which states, "Mary can assert: 'I am the door, whoever wants to come to my son, Jesus Christ, must go through me.'[268] The visual and literary representations of the Virgin Mary found

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[264] The use of certain hymns outwith the feast days for which they were primarily composed can be observed through the records of the *Cantus* Database. The archive holds inventories of antiphoners, breviaries, and graduals, indexing the incipits of all chants found within the texts. An incipit search for *Christi virgo dilectissima* reveals that while the chant was used primarily in the office of the Feast of the Annunciation, there are also four instances of it being used in the liturgy of the Feast of the Conception of the Virgin, and one use in the office of the Feast of the Visitation. University of Waterloo, *Cantus Database* [Accessed March 2021]. http://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/search?op=allwords&t=christi+virgo+dilectissima&genre=All&cid=&mode=&feast=&volpiano=All.

[265] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 89.

[266] Caroline Walker Bynum, "Religious Women in the Later Middle Ages," in *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt, Bernard McGinn, and John Meyendorff (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), 131.

[267] Richard Kieckhefer, "Ihesus Ist Unser!: The Christ Child in the German Sister Books," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es et O!*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 180.

[268] The text survives in two manuscript copies: one copied by Anna Winter for the Nuremberg convent of Poor Clares in 1400 (Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, MS Germ. 2 1276, fols. 145v-147v) and one copied in 1461 by Ursula Geiselherin for the Dominican convent of St Catherine, also in Nuremberg (Stadtbibliothek, Nurembeg, Cod. Cent. IV 30, fols. 218rb-222ra). Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 44.

in medieval nunneries firmly reaffirm the previously discussed symbolic function of Mary as both a container and a gateway to her son through her powers of intercession, suggesting a conceptual overlap between Marian and Eucharistic devotion which invites an inquiry into the two devotional strands as complementary to each other.

In the later medieval period, Mary's significance in the context of Eucharistic devotion was further explored, the Virgin becoming not only the source of the Incarnation, but also "a mediator, celebrant, the person who had intimately constituted the sacred."[269] The asserted correspondence between the original body of Christ born from the virgin womb and the Eucharistic body reborn at mass, which became developed in vernacular literature from the eleventh century onwards, led to an understanding of the Nativity and Crucifixion as linked not just through Christ, but also through his mother. Representations of the Christ Child and the Virgin Mary thus became ubiquitous in the Eucharistic context, for instance, on altarpieces and in liturgical manuscripts, providing a conceptual link between the mother and her son, the Infancy and the Passion, birth and death, and reflecting the growing awareness of historic and moral dependence between those events within the narrative of salvation history. The visual and textual conflation of the Incarnation with the sacrifice of Christ in the act of receiving the Host spread beyond the immediate liturgical setting, leading to a growing artistic and literary interest in the pregnancy and motherhood of the Virgin. Kristen van Ausdall has noted that throughout the late medieval period a wider array of pictorial genres, including the Trinitarian *Gnadenstuhl* and the Pietà became increasingly utilised in the visualisation of the Eucharist, suggesting that the Incarnational focus of Visitation imagery served a similar purpose.[270]

The significance of childbearing as active participation in salvation history is emphasised in a panel from an altarpiece produced by Konrad Witz in Basel c. 1445 **(Fig. 57 & 58)**. The altarpiece, surviving in three fragments (one single- and one double-sided panel), depicts the theme of The Counsel of Redemption.

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[269] Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 142-43.

[270] Kristen van Ausdall, "Art and Eucharist in the Late Middle Ages," in *A Companion to the Eucharist in the Middle Ages*, ed. Ian Christopher Levy, Gary Macy, and Kristen van Ausdall (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2012), 545.

The pictorial motif is derived from the text of the *Flowing Light of the Godhead* (c. 1250), a visionary narrative composed by the beguine Mechthild of Magdeburg, who lived under the Dominican rule before joining the Cistercian nunnery at Helfta.[271] The appearance of the motif in a large-scale altarpiece proves its continued relevance to the female monastic audience, who would have likely been familiar with Mechthild's text through its Middle High German translation composed by Heinrich of Nördlingen, the confessor of Margaretha Ebner. Although the exact provenance of the altar remains unknown, its large size and high artistic quality suggest that it would have been owned by a wealthy Dominican nunnery in the Basel area – most likely Maria Magdalena zu den Steinen am Steinenberg or Kloster Klingental in Kleinbasel – as two Dominican nuns are depicted alongside Christ and the Virgin in front of the enthroned God the Father in a scene of intercession **(Fig. 57)**. On a panel from the left-wing interior, the Visitation featuring the occupied womb is placed beside a throne shared by God the Father and Christ **(Fig. 58)**. God the Father points towards the empty pages of a book he is holding, suggesting that they are to be filled with the deeds of the New Testament, and Christ takes his counsel, agreeing to Incarnation so that redemption of humankind can be achieved. The positioning of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb within the scene, which is supplemented by a scene of Nativity in the right wing of the altar **(Fig. 57)**, frames the moment as a key point in the Christological narrative. On the reverse of the Nativity panel, the scene of intercession is supplemented by a depiction of Christ and doubting Thomas. The two instances of the enthroned God the Father are thus presented alongside scenes commenting on the nature of witnessing and belief; Elizabeth's prophetic recognition and immediate acceptance of Mary's role as the mother of God is contrasted with Thomas' doubt in the Resurrection, the occupied womb rendering visible to the viewer the proof of Elizabeth's faith.

The incarnational significance of the Visitation was oftentimes expressed in more symbolic terms, employing wordplay commonly associated with Marian activities such as reading and production of textiles. Although Elizabeth has never been traditionally associated with textile labour to the extent that the

[271] Mechthild of Magdeburg, *"Das Fließende Licht der Gottheit:" Nach der Einsiedler Handschrift in Kritischem Vergleich mit der Gesamten Überlieferung*, ed. Hans Neumann (Munich: Artemis, 1990).

Virgin Mary was, a number of Visitation panels, primarily from Life of Mary altarpieces, depict a bench and spindle positioned at the entrance of Elizabeth's home, conceptually extending Mary's weaving of the Temple veil to her cousin's household and demonstrating an ongoing elaboration of depictions of the Visitation in order to emphasise the parallelism between the two women. Examples of such representations include a Visitation panel from the Albrechtsaltar, produced for the Carmelite church am Hof in Vienna in 1438-39 **(Fig. 59)**; a c. 1460-70 panel by the Master of the Altar-cloth from a pair of altar wings with the Life of Mary and the Passion (Stiftsgalerie, St Lambrecht); and an anonymous Bohemian panel from c. 1495-1505 (Kamenný dům Muzeum, Kutná Hora).

An anonymous Nuremberg panel depicts the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth spinning together with their infants seated at their feet, playing with a spoon and a pot **(Fig. 60)**. Susanne Urbach has argued that although the children are not positioned within their mothers' wombs, like they would be in similar depictions of the pregnant Virgin spinning **(Fig. 42)**, the painting nevertheless represents *in utero* infants appearing to their mothers in a vision.[272] The children are not portrayed as seated directly on the floor, but rather hovering above it, calling to mind the iconographic type of the occupied womb depicting the children as "floating" beyond their mothers' bodies. The weaving process is represented as incomplete, with multiple balls of thread visible beneath Elizabeth's spindle, implying that the children are being created as the women work, each of them weaving both her *filum* (thread) and *filium* (son). The panel depicts Elizabeth as heavily pregnant, while Mary's pregnancy is indicated by the book she is reading. The book symbolizes the divine *logos* made flesh in the Virgin's womb through the Incarnation, employing the linguistic conflation of Latin *liber* (plural: *libri)* as "book" and *līber* (plural: *līberi*) as "child." The visualised wordplay of *filium/filum* and the double meaning of *liber* thus imply that the women's handiwork is, in effect, the production of their sons. [273] This

[272] Susanne Urbach, "Maria und Elisabeth mit ihren Kindern. Die Nürnberger Tafel: Genre, Erzählung, oder Symbol?," in *Begegnungen mit Alten Meistern. Altdeutsche Tafelmalerei auf dem Prüfstand,* ed. Frank Matthias Kammel and Carolina Bettina Gries (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2000), 40–41.

[273] For a recent study on the meaning and significance of the Virgin Mary reading within the Infancy narrative, see Laura Saetveit Miles, *The Virgin Mary's Book at the Annunciation: Reading, Interpretation, and Devotion in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: D. S. Brewer, 2020).

allows Mary and Elizabeth an active role in the unfolding of salvation history, with the women adhering to a predetermined narrative, abiding prophetic instructions written in the always-open book, while triggering crucial elements of the story themselves and shaping the future of salvation history by giving shape to the bodies of their children.

With further elaborations on the Eucharistic notion of Christ's flesh being derived literally from Mary's body gaining popularity throughout the medieval period, the concept of hybridity of the flesh of the Virgin and her child began to find visual representation. The notion of hybridity of Christ and Mary's bodies, understood as the conflation of the fabric of Christ's flesh, which clothes his divinity, with Marian flesh, which clothes Christ, was based in the idea of interconnectedness between milk and blood, and thus, breast and wound, as the nurturing nature of Christ's blood was associated with his mother's milk. The inseparability of Mary's and Christ's flesh, confirmed through the doctrine of the Eucharist, led to Marian milk assuming the qualities associated with Christ's blood, with Heinrich Suso reporting a vision of the Virgin in which she "allowed him to drink milk flowing from her heart." Visionary accounts of thirteenth-century German mystics, including Gertrude of Helfta, frequently centred on devotion to the Sacred Heart; Mechthild of Hackeborn oftentimes wrote of water, milk, or sweetness coming out from Christ's side, allegorizing blood as a metonym for mercy, love, and eternal life. [274] The association between milk and blood thus embedded Christ with nurturing qualities associated with his mother, which led to imagery of a breastfeeding, maternal Christ appearing frequently in Cistercian, Franciscan and Dominican literature, and underscored Mary's co-

[274] The association was derived from Aristotelian medical theory which stated that breastmilk and blood were effectively the same substance, milk being produced from the menstrual blood which accumulated in the womb and nourished the infant during pregnancy. Many formulations of this theory appeared in the medieval period, but effectively they all agreed that menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation represented different stages of one process. Simultaneously, the adaptation of the doctrine of the Eucharist at the Fourth Lateran Council triggered an increase in proliferation of blood relics and devotions related to blood, such as veneration of the Five Wounds and the Sacred Heart. The blood of Christ became a frequent feature of mystical visions and prominent mystics such as St Bonaventure, Angela of Foligno, and Catherine of Siena all spoke of tasting holy blood and ascribing to it nurturing qualities associated with milk, Christ's blood offering spiritual nourishment to the soul. Heinrich Suso, "Leben Seuses. Kap. XVIII: Von dem abbrechene des trankes," lines 49.11-50.31 in *Heinrich Seuse. Deutsche Schriften* http://www.mhdwb-online.de/Etexte/PDF/SEUSE.pdf; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood. Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1-6, 14-15, 187; Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation,* 58-60.

suffering during the Passion, resulting in images depicting Mary alongside the *arma Christi* **(Fig. 41).**

The relationship between Christ and Mary as mediated through blood and milk is expressed visually through the common pictorial form used for denoting both the womb and the wound – the almond-shaped *mandorla,* which was also frequently used to express the divinity of Christ in depictions of the Visitation **(Fig. 7, 28, 54)**. The conceptual link between *vulnus* and *vulva* - notably alluded to in the Infancy Gospel of James, which describes the episode of the midwife Salome examining Mary in order to assert her virginity, clearly mirroring the story of Doubting Thomas - frames the occupied womb as a point of physical and spiritual access to Christ.[275] In his early-seventh-century *Etymologies,* which survive in almost a thousand manuscript copies and are considered amongst the most popular compendia in medieval libraries, Isidore of Seville draws a further connection between the *vulva* and *valva,* a type of double doors, writing that "the *vulva* is analogous to a folding door, *valva* – that is, the door of the belly – because it receives the semen, or because the foetus proceeds from it."[276] Melissa Katz has noted that in the later medieval period, the term *valva* was often associated with the paired doors of a church - it can be found in documents referring to the pilgrimage churches of Conques and Compostela – conceptually linking the womb to the physical presence of the church as a building.[277] Perhaps the most explicit example of the *vulva-valva* analogy are the carved doors of the parish church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Irrsdorf, Austria. The wings of the portal, produced c. 1408, are decorated with nearly life-sized figures of the Virgin and Saint Elizabeth, both including the

[275] "(19.3) And the midwife came out of the cave, and Salome met her. And she said to her, "Salome, Salome, I have a new sight to tell you about; a virgin has brought forth, a thing which her condition does not allow." And Salome said, "As the Lord my God lives, unless I insert my finger and test her condition, I will not believe that a virgin has given birth." (20.1) And the midwife went in and said to Mary, "Make yourself ready, for there is no small contention concerning you." And Salome inserted her finger to test her condition. And she cried out, saying, "Woe for my wickedness and my unbelief; for I have tempted the living God, and behold, my hand falls away from, consumed by fire!" *The Protoevangelium of James* in Elliott, ed. and trans., *The Apocryphal New Testament,* chap. 19 & 20, 64-65.

[276] "*Vulva vocata quasi valva, id est, janua ventris, vel quod semen recipiat,vel quod ex ea foetus procedat*;" Isidore of Seville, *Etymologiarum* XI, 1.137 in *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville,* ed. and trans. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 240.

[277] Melissa R. Katz, "Behind Closed Doors: Distributed Bodies, Hidden Interiors, and Corporeal Erasure in *Vierge Ouvrante* Sculpture," *RES: Journal of Anthropology and Aesthetics* 55/56 (2009): 207.

occupied womb, conflating an optic invitation into the inside of the holy bodies with the physical act of entering the church **(Fig. 61)**. As an object serving a concrete architectural function in addition to its iconographic purpose, the doors require an active act of participation from the users of the building, prioritising movement and touch over simply looking. Carved of wood and hardly monumental in scale, they can be easily opened by a single person, and the polished wood and darkened staining around the figures of the infants suggests frequent rubbing or touching.[278] The act of opening the doors to enter the building – the first active element of participation in liturgy – encourages parishioners to pass between the figures of Mary and Elizabeth, touching the surface on which they are carved, physically taking part in the encounter. The Irrsdorf doors are thus aimed at enabling a personalized and dramatic experience of participation in the miracle of the Incarnation, the faithful entering the church physically passing through the space of transmission of the prophetic knowledge from the *in utero* Christ to John and his mother.

By referencing the virgin birth without depicting it, the occupied womb bridges the gap between the Annunciation and the Nativity, and thus the internal and external worlds, connecting the Marian *vulva* to the *valva* of the church brought into the world with the birth of Christ. Outwith the immediate monastic context, imagery of the occupied womb can be found on wings of folding altars, with full-length figures of the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth frequently depicted opposite each other, both on the exterior and interior panels, reinforcing the association between the holy wombs and the act of opening a door to reveal the divine. Examples of these include a Life of Mary altarpiece by Leonhard of Brixen, painted c. 1469-70 (Diozesanmuseum, Freising, 222/223); the high altar of the church of Durnholz im inneren Sarntal, produced by Andre Haller in 1513 **(Fig. 62);** an altar by Nikolaus Sturhofer, c. 1505-15 (Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, 18/19); and two anonymous late 15th century altars from South Tirol (Museo Civico, Bolzano and Tiroler Landesmuseum Ferdinandeum, Innsbruck, 2/3).

[278] Tina Bawden, “The Mobile Viewer at the Medieval Church Entrance,” *Convivium. Exchanges and Interactions in the Arts of Medieval Europe, Byzantium, and the Mediterranean* 6, no. 1 (2019): 113.

The connection between the Nativity and the Passion as mediated through the occupied womb can be clearly seen in a Bohemian sculpture of *Maria gravida,* where a medallion painted onto the Virgin Mary's visibly pregnant belly depicts the infant Christ holding a cross **(Fig. 63)**. This representation prefigures a category of images portraying this connection between the two events in a much more explicit manner – namely, the single-sheet woodcuts of the infant Christ and John the Baptist with instruments of Passion **(Fig. 64)** which gained prominence amongst the largely popular genre of the *arma Christi*.[279] In this particular woodcut, the infant Christ is depicted framed with a circle inscribed with the words "propheta altissimi vocaberis praeibis enim ante faciem Domini parare vias eius," (Luke 1:76), emphasising the significance of the infant John as a prophet and the parallelism between John and Christ.[280] The *Schmerzenskind* (Child of Sorrows) was also represented frequently in monastic contexts, including wall painting in the Cistercian abbey of Wienhausen. In a visionary experience, perhaps one triggered by the contemplation of such imagery, the relationship between the Infant and the Passion could be transposed onto the visionary herself. The Dominican nun Adelheid von Frauenberg of Töss desired her body to be "martyred" for the infant Christ, with her veins woven into his clothing and her blood used as bathwater, allowing the visionary's flesh to assume the pain experienced by the *Schmerzenskind* during the Passion.[281] Although the *Schmerzenskind* is neither a narrative image, nor a miracle visualised; but rather an iconic devotional image made for meditation and contemplation, its symbolic visual language would have nevertheless been

[279] Andrea Pearson, *Gardens of Love and the Limits of Morality in Early Netherlandish Art* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2019), 250.

[280] "[And thou, child,] shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt, go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways." Luke 1:76. *Vulgate. The Gospel According to Luke - Chapter 1.* http://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_1.htm.

[281] "She desired with a loving desire of her heart that all her body might be martyred to serve the sweet child; she desired that her headcloth might be taken off and used as a napkin for our Lord; her veins woven to make a little dress for him; and desired that her blood might be poured out to make a little bath for him and her bones burnt to make a fire; and desired that all her flesh be used up for all sinners; and she conceived a great misery in her heart, for she wanted to receive just a little drop of the milk that fell from our Lady when she suckled Our Lord." Elsbeth Stagel, *Das Leben des Schwestern zu Töß, Beschrieben von Elsbet Stagel samt der Vorrede von Johannes Meier und dem Leben der Prinzessin Elisabet von Ungarn*, ed. Ferdinand Vetter (Berlin: Weidmann, 1906).

obvious to a devout audience, providing visual cues allowing for a mental reconstruction of the Christological narrative from Infancy to the Passion.[282]

Representations of the occupied womb appeared in the monastic setting alongside other objects referencing the virgin birth and contextualising it within the narrative of salvation history. One such type was the Shrine Madonna, or the *Vierge ouvrante*. An early fourteenth-century sculpture of this type had been linked by Elina Gertsman to a convent in Nuremberg **(Fig. 65)**. In this particular sculpture the reverse side of Mary's chest, which becomes revealed to the viewer when the figure is opened in a manner resembling a winged altarpiece, is painted with the episodes from the Infancy of Christ, with the scenes of Annunciation and Visitation placed at the very top of the "wings," framing the Virgin and the Trinity inside her in a "visual parentheses."[283] Further visual parallels are established between the Nativity and the Presentation in the Temple, and the Annunciation to the Shepherds and the Adoration of the Magi, which are all linked through the theme of offering. The shared shape of the manger and the altar marks both scenes as prefigurations of the sacrifice; one of the shepherds is pointing towards the animals, marking Christ as the sacrificial lamb; the gifts given to Christ by the Magi symbolically prefigure his life and death, frankincense symbolising his priestly role, myrrh anticipating death and embalming, and gold representative of kingship. The elaborate gesture employed in the narrative scenes guides the viewer of the images towards a vertical reading of sequences on either side of the sculpted Trinity. The left "wing" of the sculpture thus presents a narrative cycle of the Incarnation of Christ: from his gestation in the womb during the Annunciation, through his embodiment as an infant in the manger, to his appearance as a child-God in his mother's lap, actively blessing the Magi. In contrast, the right "wing" focuses on the Eucharistic Christ: "baked" in his mother's womb during the Visitation, passed to Simeon over the Temple altar in an implicit sacrifice; his presence in the final scene betokened by the shepherds' lambs. The two sequences of images thus frame the virgin womb as the site of negotiation between the idea of Christ as a human infant and Christ as Eucharistic sacrifice.

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[282] Elina Gertsman, "Signs of Death: The Sacrificial Christ Child in Late-Medieval Art," in *The Christ Child in Medieval Culture: Alpha Es et O!*, ed. Mary Dzon and Theresa Kenney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 77–80.

[283] Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 70-76.

4.1.2 The Eucharistic infant Christ

Alongside the increased artistic focus on representations of Christ Incarnate as created *from* and *by* Mary, imagery of the fully formed Christ Child appearing independently of his mother, usually inside liturgical containers or on altars gained prominence and frequency of representation in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. While the more didactically controlled representations of the Eucharistic Christ Child were likely meant to stress God the Father's sacrifice and endless generosity, the text and imagery existing on the periphery of such boundaries developed towards a greater appreciation of the mother's grief, and Christ's suffering as a pathetic child. The symbolic connection between the figure of a male child, the act of suffering, and the Eucharist was strengthened by the prominence of ritual murder charges against Jews from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century. Those accounts frequently assimilated the act of killing Christian children to killing Christ, in particular in cases where the child's blood had allegedly been used for the baking of *matzoh,* in Passover celebration, or in other acts resembling the Eucharistic rite. Further association between the body of a child martyr and the body of Christ began to emerge when the development of Marian piety granted the Virgin increased importance both in the Eucharistic context and through the proliferation of literature of Marian miracles, which began to acquire anti-Jewish elements in the late medieval period.[284]

By the fifteenth century imagery of the *elevatio* of the Host began to become fused with representation of priests elevating the infant Christ onto the altar, effectively projecting the increasingly graphic themes associated with adult

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[284] The first recorded charge against Jews of committing murder of Christian children for the purpose of collecting blood to be used in ritualistic acts was made in Fulda, Germany in 1235. On Christmas day of that year Jews were accused of murdering five children for the sole purpose of collecting their blood. A second wave of blood libel charges began around 1430, with charges reported in Constance, Lindau, Ravensburg, and Uberlingen, coinciding with the increased proliferation of blood piety and blood legends such as miraculous appearances and Host desecrations. Ernest A. Rappaport, "The Ritual Murder Accusation: The Persistence of Doubt and the Repetition Compulsion" in *The Blood Libel Legend. A Casebook in Anti-Semitic Folklore,* ed. Alan Dundes (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), 308; Bynum, *Wonderful Blood,* 7, 241. For further discussion of blood libel see Miri Rubin, *Gentile Tales: The Narrative Assault on Late Medieval Jews* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); David Biale, *Blood and Belief: The Circulation of a Symbol between Jews and Christians* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008); Hannah Johnson*, Blood Libel: The Ritual Murder Accusation at the Limit of Jewish History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2012).

Christ's sacrifice onto the Christ Child.[285] From a textual standpoint, a clear connection between veneration of the Christ Child and Eucharistic devotion can be found through the genre of Eucharistic miracles, both in accounts produced for monastic contexts and those intended for lay audiences. Based on Browe's work on the Eucharist, Caroline Walker Bynum has noted that the Eucharistic miracle is an almost exclusively female genre; that is, at least eight out of ten categories of Eucharistic miracle Browe identified are said to occur predominantly or exclusively to women.[286] One of those eight categories constitutes the accounts of miracles in which the Eucharistic Host or the chalice appears to change into the infant Christ, or have the Christ Child appear in it, suggesting the key role of women in development of imagery and practices connecting Eucharistic devotion to veneration of the Christ Child.

The direct association between the infant Christ and the Host is demonstrated in a pictorial genre nearly exclusive to German-speaking regions - the "mystical mill." In a Swabian altarpiece dated to c. 1470, Mary and the four Evangelists empty sacks of wheat into a hopper, from which Host wafers emerge. The Host then drops into a chalice held by the Church Fathers Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory, in which the infant Christ can be seen **(Fig. 66).** Although relatively infrequent, the motif of the mystical mill appeared as early as in the twelfth century in a column capital from the basilica of Mary Magdalene in Vézelay **(Fig. 67)** and in a now-lost stained glass window originally

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[285] Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 138-39.

[286] Miracle texts were produced both in Latin and vernaculars, and disseminated both through written copies and through preaching. Beginning with Paschasius Radebertus' *De corpore et sanguine Christi* (c. 831-33), miracle stories began to be compiled in collections of exempla, including Peter the Venerable's *De miraculis* (1135-44), Herbert of Clairvaux's *De miraculis* (1178), and the *Exordium magnum Ordinis Cisterciensis* by Conrad of Eberbach (1193-1221). In turn, those accounts served as the basis for Cesarius of Heisterbach's *Dialogus miraculorum* (c. 1219-33) – a collection of miracle accounts presented as dialogues between a monk and a novice, organised into twelve categories. Stories of miracles occuring to women make up roughly half of the accounts concerned with reception of the infant Christ in vision, visionary appearance of Christ crucified, and Eucharistic miracles. Cesarius' compilation was widely copied and distributed, surviving in almost sixty manuscript copies and seven printed editions. 13th century mendicant material served as a basis for some forty-six exempla collections produced between 1200-1500, including the *Alphabetum narratorium* by the Dominican Arnulf of Liege (c. 1307), which included some eight hundred miracle stories. Caesarius of Heisterbach, *Dialogus miraculorum*, ed. Joseph Strange (Cologne, 1851), referenced in Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women Mystics and Eucharistic Devotion in the Thirteenth Century," *Women's Studies* 11, no. 1-2 (1984): 183; Peter Browe, *Die Eucharistischen Wunder des Mittelalters* (Breslau: Verlag Müller & Seiffert, 1938); Caroline Walker Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: The Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1987), 76-77; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 108-112.

installed in the abbey church of St-Denis. The pictorial genre gained prominence in both painted and sculpted altarpieces of the fifteenth century, appearing predominantly in locations with strong ties to monastic foundations, such the churches of Cistercian abbeys in Bad Doberan (1410-20) and zum Heiligen Kreuz in Rostock (1450), and the Franciscan churches of Göttingen, Saxony (1424), and Toruń, Poland (1450). The presence of the Christ Child amongst the Hosts falling from the mill directly links the Eucharist to the Incarnation and connects the physical process of the making of the wafer to its symbolic meaning. Bynum notes that as Eucharistic retables developed as a genre, they began to visually link the moment of consecration, sometimes depicted as the mystical mill or the infant Christ in a chalice, with the Annunciation or other scenes symbolically depicting the Incarnation, including the Visitation and the Virgin nursing.[287]

Representations of the mystical mill can also be found in female monastic contexts. In a fourteenth-century gradual from the convent of Augustinian Canonesses in Erfurt **(Fig. 68)**, the image appears at the beginning of the manuscript, following the calendar and *credo* and prefacing the *temporale* which contains readings for Christological feasts – the Annunciation (fol. 9v), Nativity (fol. 18r), and the Adoration of the Magi and Baptism of Christ (fol. 22v).[288] At the very top of the full-page miniature, God the Father appears in the clouds, sending the dove of the Holy Spirit to the Virgin Mary, setting in motion the process of Incarnation. Below, the four evangelists empty grain vessels into the hopper, and the twelve apostles turn the crank of the mill. However, rather than grain, it is words inscribed on speech scrolls which fall into the hopper, emerging as the infant Christ appearing in a chalice held by the Fathers of the Church, giving literal representation to the Word being made flesh in Christ. The speech scrolls contain incipits of Gospel verses pertaining to the Incarnation: "In principium erat verbum" ("In the beginning was the Word," John 1:1), "Quod in ea natum est" ("For that which is conceived in [the Virgin Mary]," Mt 1:20), "Videamus hoc verbum" ("Let us see the word," Luke 2:15), and "Hic est filius meus" ("Here is my son," Mark 9:6). The scrolls wrapping around the millstone and emerging from the mill above the figure of the Christ Child contain further

[287] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* 81.

[288] Kunst- und Austellungshalle der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, Bonn, and the Ruhrlandmuseum, Essen, eds. *Krone und Schleier*, no. 278.

references to the Incarnation: “Et Deus erat verbum” (“And the Word was God,” John 1:1), and “Et verbum caro factum est” (“And the Word was made flesh,” John 1:14). The image thus visually links the Incarnation to the Eucharist through the moment of the *elevatio* of the Host and the chalice, when in the process of transubstantiation the real flesh of Christ reappears on the altar.[289] Since the gradual itself is an object which would have had a liturgical use, the inclusion of a full-page miniature of the mystical mill – the only full-page miniature within the manuscript, otherwise illustrated only with fourteen historiated initials – at its very beginning points towards an increased understanding of the Mass not only in terms of the sacrifice of Christ, but also in the broader context of the Incarnation as a timeless miracle which transcends biblical time and extends into the ‘here-and-now’ of the gradual’s readers.

Although in the images discussed above the Host wafers are represented as plain white circles devoid of any distinct markings, already in the early medieval period the unleavened bread that the Eucharistic wafer was made from was stamped with the *IHS* monogram. Hosts stamped with figural representations of Christ began to appear alongside monogrammed ones at the beginning of the twelfth century. Various patterns of figural stamping grew in popularity towards the late Middle Ages **(Fig. 69)**, infusing the wafer with symbolic meanings connected to the metaphors of imprinting or minting, which medical and encyclopaedic texts employed in description of the process of conception within the womb. The literal understanding of the womb as a matrix was present in Macrobian thought as early as in the fifth century, and it exuded an enduring influence on Neoplatonic thought of the Middle Ages. In Macrobius’ *Commentarii in somnium Scipionis* conception is described as a process in which “the seed [is] deposited in the mint where man is coined.”[290] This understanding was extended to the Marian womb in the twelfth century, in the *Sigillum sanctae Mariae* by Honorius of Autun, who found a dual meaning in the symbolism of Mary’s womb as a seal – the preservation of its virginal integrity as an unbroken seal, and

[289] Lenka Panušková, “Die Mühle in der Bildtheologie des Mittelalters,” in *Wassermühlen und Wassernutzung im mittelalterlichen Ostmitteleuropa,* ed. Martina Maříková and Christian Zschieschang (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2015), 111.

[290] Ambrosius Aurelius Theodosius Macrobius, *In Somnium Scipionis Expositio. English Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, ed. William Harris Stahl (New York; London: Columbia University Press, 1990), 112.

conception of Christ as result of imprinting by the divine seal.[291] The association between coinage and the Eucharist has been noted by Miri Rubin, who observed that a particular genre of Eucharistic miracles involved the Host turning into coins, or being mistaken for coinage.[292] As discussed in the preceding chapter, Byzantine coins featuring the Virgin *Platytera* would have been present in German-speaking lands following the crusades, and similar designs were being minted by German rulers until the thirteenth century, providing visual foundations for the mental association.

In his discussion of Mary as a tabernacle of Christ, Gregor Martin Lechner calls attention to a Marian genre, which despite first appearing in Milan in the form of a sculpture, is otherwise almost unique to painted representations from the German-speaking region. The iconography of *Maria im Ährenkleid* – Mary in a dress of ears of wheat **(Fig. 70) -** appeared mainly in non-narrative, votive representations towards the late Middle Ages.[293] This particular iconographic genre depicts Mary dressed in a dark blue gown embroidered with a pattern of stalks of wheat and decorated with the motif of sun rays around the neckline, Mary's uncovered hair and the floor-length belt at the front of the dress denoting her as a Temple virgin. The image thus contains a two-fold meaning: firstly, it forecasts Mary's motherhood, the wheat and sunlight universally symbolic of harvest, fertility, and abundance, linking Mary to the Bride of the Songs of Song who is described to have a belly "like a heap of wheat" (Song of Songs 7:2) and to be "bright as the sun" (Song of Songs 6:10). The symbolism of fertility is likely to have made the image attractive to mothers and mothers-to-be, evoking earlier apotropaic use of Marian imagery discussed in Chapter 3, as female supplicants can be found in numerous representations of *Maria im Ährenkleid*, including an anonymous panel produced in 1434 for the church of the Virgin Mary of the Meadow in Soest, Rhineland, and later in a 1480 panel by a north German painter Hinrik Funhof (Hamburg, Kunsthalle, HK-602). The primary significance of the image is, however, Eucharistic, the stalks of wheat

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[291] Honorius of Autun, *Sigillum sanctae Mariae*, discussed in Rachel Fulton Brown, *From Judgement to Passion: Devotion to Christ and the Virgin Mary, 800-1200* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 258–59.

[292] Miri Rubin, "Whose Eucharist? Eucharistic Identity as Historical Subject," *Modern Theology* 15, no. 2 (1999): 202.

[293] Lechner, *Maria Gravida,* 233.

referring to the conception of Christ within Mary's womb and his presence in the wafer of the Host.

According to medieval embryology, which largely followed classical anatomical theory, the mother was an oven, or a vessel in which the foetus was cooked. The concept of the womb as an oven appears prominently in the writings of Aristotle, who likens the 'hot' womb within the 'cold' body of a woman to an oven (*kaminos*) and argues that bone and sinew are created by 'baking' in the womb. Similarly, Hippocrates described the womb as an oven due to the temperature it generates, noting that intercourse heats the blood and thus produces heat in the whole body, and that the warm environment of the womb allows for development of the seed. The baking metaphor was further expanded by Galen, for whom the formation of the embryo in the amniotic sac was akin to "bakers […] gently pouring moist dough on a hot flat pan," the foetus later separating from the uterus "like the cake from the bronze pan."[294] While those concepts were primarily disseminated through medical and encyclopaedic texts, outwith the scientific realm, the metaphor of the "baking" of Christ was discussed extensively by key medieval theologians. Thomas Aquinas wrote:

> "The figurative cause is that the bread signifies Christ who is the "living bread" (Jn 6:41, 51). He was indeed an ear of corn, as it were, during the state of the law of nature, in the faith of the patriarchs; He was like flour in the doctrine of the Law of the prophets; and He was like perfect bread after He had taken human nature; baked in the fire, i.e. formed by the Holy Ghost in the oven of the virginal womb; baked again in a pan by the toils which He suffered in the world; and consumed by fire on the cross as on a gridiron."[295]

The oven itself is a well-established image in Eucharistic theology and Biblical commentary, which despite the absence of fire in the act of consumption of the Eucharist nevertheless saw all aspects of Old Testament burnt sacrifice, including the ritual, the victims, and the place of immolation - the Temple,

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[294] Aristotle, *On the Generation of Animals,* 764a 12–20 and 743a8-20 and Hippocrates, *Generation,* 4, I. 7.474-76 and *On the Nature of the Child,* 12, I.7.486-88, discussed in Helen King, *Hippocrates' Woman. Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London; New York: Routledge, 1998), 33; Galen, *On Semen*, ed. and trans. Phillip de Lacy (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1992), 79.

[295] Thomas Aquinas, *The "Summa Theologica" of St Thomas Aquinas*, First Part of the Second Part, Question 102 [Accessed March 2021] https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Summa_Theologiae/First_Part_of_the_Second_Part/Question_102.

tabernacle, and the altar of holocaust, as divinely prescribed so that their outward forms would symbolically foreshadow the Crucifixion and the Eucharist.[296] The altar of burnt offerings was itself sometimes depicted in medieval art either as a grill, a baker's oven, or even a household hearth. The moralization of Leviticus 2:4 in a thirteenth-century *Bible moralisée* (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley MS 270b, fol. 59v) encapsulates the relationship between the baking of sacramental bread and Christ's presence in the womb through a pairing of two images illustrating the moralization of Leviticus 2:4 **(Fig. 71)**. The pair of vertically aligned roundels depicts a group of Jews putting sacrificial loaves into an altar-oven above, and an Annunciation scene below, for which the adjacent commentary states that the "Jews placing unleavened bread into the oven to bake in the fire signifies God placing his son in the virginal womb."[297]

A clear visual reference connecting the Eucharistic wafer to Visitation imagery can be found in four illustrations from a manuscript of a Marian legend from the mid-fifteenth century (Burgerbibliothek, Bern, Codices Mss.h.h.X.50) produced in the Basel region for Jacob Amgrund, the head of the Benedictine convent of Saint Leodegar in Lucerne. The manuscript contains a selection of texts including spiritual treatises and prayers, the Bern play of the Last Judgement, Heinrich Suso's *Little Book of Eternal Wisdom,* and two accounts of the Life of Mary. In four of the illustrations to one of the Marian legends (the scenes of the Tree of Knowledge (fol. 127), the Visitation (fol. 131) **(Fig. 72)**, the birth of John the Baptist (fol. 133), and Joseph's doubt (fol. 134)), the *in utero* Christ Child is represented by a disc inscribed with the monogram *IHS*, surrounded by rays of light. In the Visitation folio, however, it is only the infant Christ whose presence is represented by a monogram enclosed in a circle – the *in utero* John the Baptist is depicted in full-length as a nude, kneeling infant, demonstrating that the author of the images was familiar with the tradition of representing the occupied womb with figures of children. The representation of the Marian womb

[296] Carra Ferguson O'Meara, ""In the Hearth of the Virginal Womb:" The Iconography of the Holocaust in Late Medieval Art," *The Art Bulletin* 63, no. 1 (1981): 76-78.

[297] The Latin commentary accompanying both images reads: "*Filii Israel feceru(n)t panem azimum et posuerunt eum I(n) clibano succenso et coxerunt. Judei qui panem miserunt in' gnem fig(u)ra(n)t q(uod) deus pat(er) filiu(m) suum misit in uteru(m) virginalem*," cited and translated in Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, "From the Ancient Grain Goddess to the Virgin Mary. Iconography of the Bake Oven in the Late Middle Ages," *The Profane Arts* 5, no. 1 (1997): 91.

in a manner resembling the wafer of the Host thus becomes a deliberate artistic choice, directly linking Visitation imagery to Eucharistic devotion. References to the liturgical rite of the Eucharist, such as "golden monstrance" and "heavenly bread" are also found in the text of the legend:

> "[..] emphant sant elsbeth das sich das kindlin johannes in irem lib bewagt als ob es ir welt ein gruss erbietten: aber die christlichen lerrer ambrosius und jeronimus sprechten das sant johannes uff knuwte in siner mutter lib gegen der guldinen munstrantz in denen da lag verwirckt das lebendig himmelbrott und ewig wort."[298]

Within images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, the Marian body could thus be understood not only as an oven in which Christ is baked, but also as a matrix where his human form is stamped, as evoked by images of Christ stamped on Eucharistic bread. The rendering of the occupied womb in a manner resembling a contemporaneous Eucharistic wafer and the reference to Eucharistic rite within the text of the legend reaffirm the metaphorical connection between the infant in the "oven" of the womb and the bread consumed at Mass, directly linking the Infancy narrative to the everyday devotional practices of the medieval faithful. The very presence of the occupied womb itself thus turns the Visitation from a singular occurrence within the narrative of salvation history into a shorthand for the regular reappearance of Christ on the altar in the form of Eucharistic bread. In turn, the inclusion of a kneeling figure of the praying infant John frames him and his mother Elizabeth as recipients of a Eucharistic miracle, the privilege of their prophetic knowledge allowing them to witness and recognize the mystery of the Incarnation.

4.1.3 John the Baptist and the Eucharist

Although devotional practices focused on the theme of the Visitation functioned primarily in the context of Marian devotion, the episode also constitutes an integral part of the narrative of the Life of John the Baptist. Devotion to the two Saint Johns (the Evangelist and the Baptist) was particularly strong in women's

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[298] "Saint Elisabeth realised that the child John moved as if he wanted to share a greeting with her: but the Christian scholars Ambrose and Jerome said that Saint John knelt in his mother's womb in front of the golden monstrance in which laid forfeited the living heavenly bread and eternal word." Own translation. Karl J. Benziger, *Eine Illustrierte Marienlegende aus dem 15. Jahrhudert (Codex Mss. Hist. Helv. X. 50, Stadtbibliothek Bern)* (Strasbourg: Heitz, 1913), 26; own translation.

Dominican houses. The convent at Unterlinden was dedicated to the Baptist, its full name being "Saint John the Baptist under the Linden Trees," and the patron saint is depicted in historiated initials in two fourteenth-century illuminated graduals from the convent **(Fig. 73)**.[299] A historiated initial 'D' depicting the Visitation featuring the occupied womb **(Fig. 74)** opens the Mass for the Feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist in the gradual from the Cistercian convent of Wonnental. The reading opens with the words *De ventre matris mea vocavit me Dominus nomine meo* ("From the womb of my mother the Lord called me by my name"), drawing direct connections between the feast and the Gospel account of the Visitation. A similar placement of the Visitation initial can be found in the Katharinental Gradual **(Fig. 47)**, where it appears at the start of a set of six illuminations depicting the Life of the Baptist. The symbolic parallel would have been made clear through the liturgy, with the Feast of the Visitation chronologically falling between the Feasts of the Nativity and the Decollation of Saint John. In the Seligenthal Antiphonary, produced for Cistercian nuns, the text of the office of the Feast of the Visitation, illustrated with a historiated initial 'A' (*Accedunt laudes virginis admirande*), featuring a depiction of the occupied womb **(Fig. 52)**, had been inserted directly before the office of the Feast of the Decollation of John the Baptist, with no further feasts or readings separating the two, even though other events of the liturgical year, such as the Feast of Assumption of the Virgin should have been located in between.

The decollation of John the Baptist is one of the key episodes which exemplify the Eucharistic parallelism between Christ and the Forerunner in exegetical texts, influencing artistic depictions which include John alongside the instruments of Christ's Passion, such as the *Schmerzenskind* **(Fig. 64)**. According to the Synoptic Gospels, Herod, the tetrarch of Galilee, imprisoned John the Baptist because he reproved Herod for divorcing his wife and unlawfully taking Herodias, his sister-in-law, as his new one. On Herod's birthday, Herodias' daughter Salome danced before the king and his guests, and Herod promised to give her anything she desired. When Salome asked her mother what she should request, she was told to ask for the head of John the Baptist on a platter (Mt 14:1–11; Mk 6:17–28; Lk 9:9). The Eucharistic significance of the image thus stems chiefly from the fact that in his death and suffering, John the Baptist

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[299] Bibliothèque de la Ville, Colmar, Ms. 317, f. 122v and Ms. 136, f. 165v.

preceded Christ's sacrifice. The symbolic association between the Son of God and his precursor had been noted already by early medieval scholars such as Paschasius Radbertus (785–865), who emphasized the symbolic connection between the platter and the altar:

> "Give me [the head] on a platter, [the girl] said. Why, then, on a platter, unless to signify the sacrament of our redemption? For precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his faithful ones [Psalm CXVI, 15]. So that, on a platter as on the altar table, where the body of Christ, that is, the head of the martyrs, is consecrated, [the faithful] may partake of eternal salvation with the head as an offering."[300]

The *Glossa ordinaria* – the standard commentary on Scripture used throughout medieval Europe from the twelfth century onwards - made the connection between the passion of John the Baptist and the sacrifice of Christ on the altar even more explicit. In the commentary on the Gospel of Mark, in the verse "sed misso speculatore praecepit adferri caput eius in disco et decollavit eumin carcere" ("but sending an executioner, he commanded that his head should be brought in a dish;" Mk 6:27), the phrase "caput eius in disco" ("his head in a dish") is glossed with "Caput legis quod est Christus." ("the head of the Law is Christ").[301] Similarly, in the exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, the *Glossa* notes that "caput Joannis in disco significat corpus Christi in altare" – "the head of John in the dish signifies the body of Christ on an altar."[302]

The Eucharistic significance of the figure of John the Baptist in representations of the occupied womb is not readily apparent, as he is usually depicted kneeling and praying, rather than bearing the medallion with an image of the Agnus Dei.

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[300] "*Da mihi, inquit, in disco. Cur autem in disco? Nisi ut sacramentum gurâretur nostrae redemptionis. Quia pretiosa in conspectus Domini mors sanctorum ejus. Ut in disco et mensa, quo corpus Christi sacratur, quod est caput martyrum, ipsi participarent cum suo capite in oblatione aeternae salutis*," *Patrologia Latina* vol. 120, col. 514 http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=3&id=Z300164865&FILE=../session/1574954163_6675&CURDB=pld. Paschasius Radbertus' treatise *De corpore et sanguine Domini* is universally recognised as the first monograph ever written on the Eucharist, and it remained influential throughout the medieval period, with a printed edition being published in the year 1531.

[301] *Patrologia Latina* vol. 114, col. 0201D. http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=4&id=Z400168775&FILE=../session/1602527199_8490&CURDB=pld

[302] *Patrologia Latina* vol. 114, col. 0881A. http://pld.chadwyck.co.uk.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/all/fulltext?ALL=Y&ACTION=byid&warn=N&div=3&id=Z300169114&FILE=../session/1602527199_8490&CURDB=pld

Depictions of the adult John with the medallion or the infant holding a lamb, however, immediately call to mind the communion hymn sung during the distribution of communion with the words, *Ecce Agnus Dei*. For instance, in the Katharinental Gradual John appears twice with the Agnus Dei medallion – in a historiated initial depicting the baptism of Christ (fol. 21r) and in a decorated margin with the scenes of his life (fol. 190r). According to Scripture, John the Baptist, pointing to Jesus, uttered, "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29), mirroring his recognition of the infant Christ *in utero*. Since representations of John with the Agnus Dei medallion were known in monastic environments, it is possible that the viewers of the imagery would have been able to connect the figure of the kneeling infant with the address to the Lamb of God, which refers not to Christ in general, but specifically to Christ present in the Eucharist as a sacrificial offering.

Through its connection to the burnt offerings of the Old Testament discussed in the section above, the Agnus Dei itself bears Eucharistic significance, with depictions of the hearth representative of the sacrificial altar appearing in images of the Baptist's birth and death, including Rogier van der Weyden's Altar of Saint John **(Fig. 23).** Moreover, as noted by Kathryn Rudy, Agnus Dei was one of the most frequent motifs decorating metal badges commemorating the taking of Communion, both in the surviving tokens themselves and in representations of such objects painted into illuminated manuscripts. As the badges are understood to be modelled on the Eucharistic wafers themselves, it can be suggested that the Agnus Dei appeared frequently on Host wafers, implicitly linking John to Eucharistic practices **(Fig. 69).**[303]

More overt references to the Eucharistic significance of the infant Baptist can be found within the genre of the Holy Kinship. A Lower Rhenish Holy Kinship altarpiece includes a depiction of the Lamb bleeding into a chalice to which the infant John the Baptist is pointing, positioned on a vertical axis with the nude infant Christ, effectively conflating the themes of the Passion and the Eucharist, Holy Kinship, *Anna Selbdritt*, and *hortus conclusus* in one painting **(Fig. 75)**, establishing connections between birth and death, motherhood and sacrifice,

[303] Kathryn Rudy, "Sewing the Body of Christ: Eucharist Wafer Souvenirs Stitched into Fifteenth-Century manuscripts, Primarily in the Netherlands," *Journal of Historians of Netherlandish Art* 8, no. 1 (2016).

and joy and suffering. Other depictions of the Holy Kinship and *Anna Selbdritt* include a range of more symbolic references to the Eucharist, such as the cousins of Christ pouring wine into a chalice at Saint Anne's feet (Geertgen tot Sint Jans – Holy Kinship, c. 1490. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, SK-A-500) or the sons of Mary Cleophas picking cherries and placing them on a paten (Hans Döring – Triptych with the Holy Kinship, c.1515. Castle Huis Bergh, Netherlands). Such symbolism appears also in works produced by nuns themselves. In a late fifteenth-century Holy Kinship antependium, possibly from the convent of Sankt Nikolaus in Undis in Strasbourg, which includes a self-portrait of a Dominican nun as a diminutive supplicant positioned to the far left of the scene, the infant John can be seen holding the sacrificial lamb and wearing a hair shirt, effectively imbuing the child with the qualities of the adult Baptist represented by his attributes **(Fig. 76)**.

John the Baptist is connected to Eucharistic devotion in the visionary account of Mechthild of Magdeburg, which recalls the scene of the Visitation and indirectly refers to iconography of the occupied womb by describing John as being "consecrated in his mother's womb." Recorded in Book 2, Chapter 4 of *The Flowing Light,* the passage describes the Baptist appearing to Mechthild in order to celebrate Mass:

> "Then the same priest who was consecrated in his mother's womb by the Holy Spirit performed the solemn Mass. As he took the white wafers into his hands, the same lamb which had been standing on the altar rose and, as he spoke the words, transformed the wafers with the wonder of his hands, and the wafers to the lamb, so that I no longer saw the wafers, instead a bleeding lamb, hanging from a red cross. It looked at us with such sweet eyes that I shall never forget it."[304]

While the preceding chapter of *The Flowing Light* describes a vision of the scheme of salvation in more universal terms, Chapter 4 appears to be largely concerned with a more personal application of the schemes of redemption and restoration to Mechthild herself. The visions recounted in this chapter take as their point of departure the parable of the lost drachma recounted in Luke 15:8-

[304] Mechthild of Magdeburg, "*Das Fließende Licht,*" vol. 1, 2.4, lines 87-9, 43–44, translated in Jeffrey F. Hamburger, *St. John the Divine: The Deified Evangelist in Medieval Art and Theology* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002), 80.

10.[305] Similar in nature to the parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:4-7), the Gospel account frames the lost-and-found coin as a metaphor for a sinner finally doing penance. In an account of an earlier vision, Mechthild speaks of receiving a golden coin from the Virgin, which she understands to represent her free will. The coin appears to be stamped with an image of Christ's deposition from the Cross on one side, and an image of an ascent – the nine choirs of heaven leading up to the throne of God – on the other. Equating her will with the coin, Mechthild identifies it with the *imago dei* imprinted in her soul.[306]

The latter part of Mechthild's vision reframes the coinage of *imago dei* in sacramental terms. The Mass, celebrated by the Baptist, occurs when Mechthild offers up the coin received from Mary to God the Father, returning to him the image in which she was created. She is thus cleansed by her confession and restored through communion, with the Baptist offering her the sacramental wafer, which, as noted above, greatly resembled Byzantine and medieval coinage, both in shape and in bearing of imprinted images.[307] The reference to consecration in the womb completes the cycle of purification and sanctification – just as John was cleansed from the original sin inside his mother's womb, at the moment of his first encounter with Christ, so too Mechthild is cleansed through the Eucharistic rite, which later makes possible her own version of spiritual pregnancy. As Mechthild chews on the Host-Lamb offered to her by the Baptist, it receives reciprocal nourishment from her as well, suckling on her heart-soul, Mechthild becoming a counterpart to Elizabeth in her vision of John and carrying of Christ within her.[308]

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[305] "Or what woman having ten groats, if she lose one groat, doth not light a candle and sweep the house and seek diligently until she find it? And when she hath found it, call together her friends and neighbours, saying: Rejoice with me, because I have found the groat which I had lost. So I say to you, there shall be joy before the angels of God upon one sinner doing penance." Luke 15:10-80. *Vulgate. The Gospel According to Luke - Chapter 15.* http://vulgate.org/nt/gospel/luke_15.htm.

[306] Mechthild von Magdeburg, "*Das Fließende Licht,"* vol. 1, 2.4, lines 75-86, 43.

[307] Hamburger, *St. John the Divine,* 81.

[308] Mechthild von Magdeburg, "*Das Fließende Licht,"* vol. 1, 2.4, lines 83-101, 44.

4.2 The Visitation as a devotional model

From its very inception, Visitation imagery has invoked the themes of sight, recognition, and witnessing. The very first monumental representation of the scene – the Poreč basilica mosaic, discussed in the preceding chapter – features an additional character who does not appear in the Biblical narrative **(Fig. 33)**. The mosaic depicts a smaller-scale male figure, possibly a servant, watching the scene from behind a curtain that he has pulled back with one hand, his other hand curled upwards, with a finger resting on his chin in a gesture of curiosity. The curtain covering the doorway to Elizabeth's home frames the household as a church; its red border and cross pattern mirroring the detail of the miniature basilica depicted in the mosaic of the donor, bishop Euphrasius, presenting the building **(Fig. 77)**. Doorways to churches were adorned with curtains throughout the late antique and Byzantine periods, creating a liminal threshold between the mundane and the sacred, the act of pulling back the curtain to reveal heavenly splendour constituting the very first active gesture of participation in a liturgical service.[309] The male servant peeking from behind the curtain to observe the Visitation thus stands in for the Christian faithful being offered the privilege of witnessing the holy, his gaze directed towards the timeless golden realm extending beyond the church. The motif of Elizabeth's house as a church does not feature prominently in later depictions of the Visitation. One of the few instances of its appearance in the medieval period is the tympanum of the south portal of the twelfth-century basilica of Mary Magdalene in Vézelay, France. The main scene of the tympanum – the Adoration of the Magi – is supplemented by a lower register containing relief sculptures of the Annunciation, Visitation, and Nativity. Within the Visitation scene, Mary and Elizabeth are pictured outside a

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[309] Curtain hooks are still in place in several Byzantine churches, including above the south and central doors leading to the inner narthex of the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, in the Euphrasiana in Poreč, and in the basilica of Sant'Apollinare in Classe. The spiritual significance of the curtain as a threshold through which one enters the presence of the divine is derived from the biblical account of Moses building the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-31 and 35-40). God's instructions to Moses specify that he "[…] shalt make ten curtains of fine twisted linen, and violet and purple, and scarlet twice dyed, diversified with embroidery. The length of one curtain shall be twenty-eight cubits; the breadth shall be four cubits. All the curtains shall be of one measure. Five curtains shall be joined one to another, and the other five shall be coupled together in like manner. Thou shalt make loops of violet in the sides and tops of the curtains, that they may be joined one to another. Every curtain shall have fifty loops on both sides, so set on, that one loop may be against another loop, and one may be fitted to the other. Thou shalt make also fifty rings of gold, wherewith the veils of the curtains are to be joined, that it may be made one tabernacle" (Exodus 26:1-6). Béatrice Caseau, "Experiencing the Sacred," in *Experiencing Byzantium: Papers from the 44th Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Newcastle and Durham, April 2011*, ed. Claire Nesbitt and Mark Jackson (London; New York: Routledge, 2016), 64.

building with a tower on the façade and round arches and columns in the interior, evoking a Romanesque basilica **(Fig. 78)**. Two figures are shown inside the building, with one of them, a smaller-scale male, peeking from behind the building's monumental door, clearly resembling the servant figure within the Euphrasian mosaic.

In the later medieval period, the additional character in the scene became represented almost universally a female servant, appearing in a number of representations including altarpieces by Leonhard of Brixen (1460-70, Diozesanmuseum, Freising, 222/223) and Marx Reichlich (c. 1511, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, 459) which feature depictions of the occupied womb. The seventh-century Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, which constituted a Latin rewriting and elaboration on the Protoevangelium of James, provided some justification for the presence of female servants within Infancy scenes. It stated that before the Annunciation, five virgins had resided with Mary at Joseph's house, helping her weave the veil of the Temple; and that a girl as well as Joseph's sons accompanied the holy family on their flight into Egypt.[310] Moreover, throughout the Byzantine period, the apocryphal midwives Salome and Zelony were oftentimes depicted bathing the Christ Child, the action functioning as an expression of their continued service to the Virgin Mary, emphasising the Christian duty of service to Christ, his mother, and the church.[311] Much like those characters, the figures of female servants in late medieval depictions of scenes from the Infancy narrative act as a model for imitation of the Virgin's own role as

[310] Hawk, ed. and trans., *The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew* chap. 8 & 18, 61, 74.

[311] Although Salome and Zelony appear in the Gospel of James, the scene of bathing the infant Christ is not described in any literary source, and it appears to be a novel pictorial motif invented in the 5th or 6th-century Byzantine East. Throughout the 8th and 9th centuries, the scene of bathing became a stock motif in Byzantine representations of the Nativity, where its dogmatic significance was to underscore the importance of the Incarnation: although Christ had no need of ablution, he nevertheless submitted to the care required by an ordinary infant to demonstrate that he received human nature. The motif of the washing of the Christ Child did not achieve popularity in the Latin West, but it did appear sporadically in some Byzantine-influenced works, such as for instance the 8th-century fresco from the catacomb of San Valentino in Rome (damaged in 1986 and surviving in engravings included in Antonio Bosio's *Roma Sotterranea* (Rome: G. Facciotti, 1623), 579); and the gold enamel cross and its silver casket from the *Sancta Sanctorum*, likely made in Rome for Pope Paschal I (8l7-824) (Vatican, Musei Vaticani, Cat. 61881). Robert Deshman, "Servants of the Mother of God in Byzantine and Medieval Art," *Word & Image* 5, no. 1 (1989): 33-35.

ancilla Dei (Luke 1:28), whose service and humility throughout salvation history were ultimately rewarded with heavenly queenship.[312]

The presence of the female servant is not the only method of visualising the concern with vision and witnessing within the scene of the Visitation. As servants of the holy in their own right, nuns can appear as supplicants within depictions of Visitation scenes, as for instance in the gradual from the Cistercian convent of Wonnental **(Fig. 74)**, where a diminutive praying nun is pictured kneeling to the left-hand side of the historiated initial 'D' with depiction of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb. Less frequently, depictions of the episode include elements such as an open door or shutter of a window of a building in the background of the image, or even supernatural witnesses such as the dove of the Holy Spirit appearing in the sky above, or the Trinitarian Godhead.[313] The Godhead appears to the left of the Visitation scene featuring the occupied womb in a Life of Mary antependium which was made for the Dominican nunnery Adelhausen and later used in the Katherinenkloster in Freiburg im Breisgau, indicating that the scene is being observed by the divine realm **(Fig. 79 & 80)**. The speech scrolls emerging from the Godhead's mouths read: "Ich sende dich us" ("I send us you" – God the Father); "Ich bi(n) gehorza(m)" ("I am obedient"- the Son); "Ich bi(n) mitvierker" ("I am the co-creator" – the Holy Spirit). Many elements suggesting witnessing appear in a Middle Rhenish or Westfahlian

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[312] Additional female characters also feature prominently in Italian depictions of the Visitation from the early *trecento* onwards. Both of Giotto's depictions of the subject (1306, Scrovegni Chapel, Padua and 1310s, Lower Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi) depict Mary and Elizabeth in company of other women. Three Temple virgins, or possibly servants of Mary appear in a depiction of the Visitation from a cycle of Life of John the Baptist by Lorenzo and Jacopo Salimbeni (1416, Oratory of John the Baptist, Urbino), and Elizabeth's servant can be seen peeking out from behind a doorway in a predella panel by Fra Angelico (1433-34, Museo Diocesano, Cortona). Mary and Elizabeth are surrounded by a large group of women in a fresco from the Tornabuoni Chapel painted by Domenico Ghirlandaio (1486-90, Santa Maria Novella, Florence), where one on the women witnessing the event from Elizabeth's side of the scene has been identified as Giovanna degli Albizzi, the wife of Lorenzo Tornabuoni (son of the fresco's donor, Giovanni Tornabuoni). Her inclusion in scenes centred on the theme of pregnancy (Giovanna had also been depicted in the scene of the Birth of John the Baptist) can be understood as posthumous commemoration, since Giovanna died in childbirth in 1488. Dale Kent, "Women in Renaissance Florence," in *Virtue and Beauty: Leonardo's Ginevra de' Benci and Renaissance Portraits of Women,* ed. David Alan Brown (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 2001), 40.

[313] For discussion of symbolism of landscape and vegetation in late medieval depictions of the Visitation, see Susanne Urbach, "Die Heimsuchung Mariä, ein Tafelbild des Meisters MS (Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Entwicklungsgeschichte des Heimsuchungsthemas) Teil 1," *Acta Historiae Artium Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 10 (1964): 79-115; Ülle Sillasoo, "Landscapes, Vegetation, and Folklore in Late Medieval Art: An Iconographic Study Based on Selected Austrian and South German Panel Paintings," *Landscape Research* 39, no. 4 (2014): 455-79.

Visitation panel featuring the occupied womb which originally constituted an element of an altar of the Life of Mary **(Fig. 81)**. Here, the scene is being witnessed by six angels peeking from behind a large boulder positioned behind Mary and Elizabeth. The dove of the Holy Spirit appears between the women, its golden halo visually mirroring the gilt occupied wombs and connecting the episode to the Annunciation, as well as responding to the Gospel account, which states that Elizabeth was “filled with the Holy Spirit” (Luke 1:41). The presence of the dove underscores Elizabeth’s gift of recognition and prophecy, while the angels act as divine witnesses to the event, their presence marking it as the next step of the divine plan, continuing from the Annunciation.

Within the monastic realm, the focus on depicting the actions of looking and witnessing within the pictorial space of a Visitation scene can be clearly observed in a panel from a wing of the high altar of the Cistercian nunnery Lichtenthal. The panel **(Fig. 82)** – one of four images of the Life of the Virgin produced by an anonymous master c. 1489 – sets the scene of the Visitation against an elaborate architectural structure of the house of Zechariah. The geometric lines of the building emphasise the use of one-point perspective, which draws the viewer’s eye towards the figure of a female servant emerging from a doorway, peeking out from behind a column. The red colouring of Elizabeth’s gown is repeated in a piece of fabric hanging from a balcony directly above the women, where Zechariah can be seen leaning over the wall, observing the scene below. A set of stairs in the foreground of the image, cut off by the frame of the panel, leads the viewers’ eye directly towards the figure of Elizabeth and the occupied womb. The complex set of lines of architecture and gaze engages the viewer as yet another witness to the scene, encouraging them to behold it by encountering models of witnessing – the servant, Zechariah, and most importantly, Elizabeth – within the pictorial space of the painting. The development of Visitation imagery towards complex representations focused on the process of beholding the divine points towards the changing roles of vision and sensation in the process of engagement with devotional artwork, locating the images within a culture increasingly searching for the appropriate models of concealment and revelation. The inclusion of multiple witnesses within the image itself thus turns the secretive act of peeking into outright observing the divine, legitimizing the act of looking as a reward to the faithful.

4.2.1 The role of Saint Elizabeth

Despite the similarities in textual representation of Saints Elizabeth and Anne discussed in Chapter 2, the German-speaking areas did not see a development of a significant cult of Elizabeth in the late medieval period or otherwise. While both Elizabeth and the apocryphal Anne were described as elderly women who suffered reproach due to their infertility and were recipients of miraculous pregnancies, Elizabeth was rarely depicted either in her own right or in the context of the Holy Family, as Anne was. Although patristic exegesis and apocryphal accounts repeatedly reaffirmed the miraculous nature of Elizabeth's pregnancy, visual representations appear to have little interest in Elizabeth's motherhood of John the Baptist beyond her parallelism of the Virgin Mary, and unlike the apocryphal Anne, Elizabeth does not appear widely in visual representations besides those of the Visitation and the Holy Kinship.

The primary significance of Saint Elizabeth in representations of the Visitation must thus be found elsewhere. If Mary's womb is the locus of the Incarnation where enfleshing anticipates the real appearance of Christ's flesh in the Eucharist, then Saint Elizabeth can be understood to serve as a model for Eucharistic devotion, fulfilling the need for guidance in engaging with images employing complex theological meanings centred on the tension between Christ's obvious presence within the Virgin's pregnant body and his physical concealment within it. As the first person to recognize the presence of Christ in Mary's womb, Elizabeth serves as a prototype for recognizing the miracle of transubstantiation. The words uttered by Elizabeth at the time of the meeting with Mary, “And who am I that the mother of my Lord should come to me?” (Luke 1:39) not only confirm the status of the Visitation as the first affirmation of the Incarnation, but also point towards the significance of Elizabeth as a model for recognising the divinity of the infant Christ, framing her as a witness to the Virgin, similarly to John bearing witness to Christ.

In this context, the presence of Elizabeth within Marian imagery can be seen in a similar manner to the inclusion of the mourning Three Marys in depictions of Christ entombed. Jill Bennet has noted that such images are not mere

representations of feelings; rather, they actively engender sensation.[314] In scenes of the Visitation Elizabeth can thus be understood as a model for witnessing the divine, demonstrating the process of recognition and appropriate behaviour in the presence of Christ. In this function, she constitutes the antithesis of the doubting Joseph beholding his wife's unnatural pregnancy **(Fig. 42)**, whom scholarship has understood as a tool of instructing the audience – in the context of text, image, and liturgical drama - on how to deal with that which cannot be confirmed and comprehended through visual or material proof.[315] While Joseph can be interpreted as a multivalent figure through which one might examine, laugh at, critique, and even participate in the persistence of doubt, Elizabeth's unquestionable recognition and acceptance of Mary's fate provides much more structured guidance, asserting the proper method of immersion in a devotional experience and preventing inappropriate interaction.

The problem of (in)appropriate gaze looms large in the visual culture of the late medieval period. Despite devotional objects increasingly foregrounding the dynamics of concealment and revelation encouraging a degree of voyeurism – not as a sexual deviation, but more broadly as "curiosity, peering, violation of privacy, and the desire of cognizance" - the cultural anxiety surrounding violation of the holy through inappropriate looking resulted in representations aiming to structure and regulate the viewing experience. While representations of the occupied womb invite the same ocular penetration of the Marian womb which Assaf Pinkus sees as a consequence of gazing at the split-open womb of the Shrine Madonna **(Fig. 65)**, the iconography itself can be understood as overtly denying a voyeuristic gaze.[316] The vast majority of depictions of the occupied womb discussed in this thesis depict the two women standing in a half-embrace, with their lower bodies at a distance from each other and angled towards the viewer of the image, openly inviting their gaze. A large number of painted representations of the occupied womb clearly encourage an active, investigatory gaze by employing strategies such as the use of gilding **(Fig. 52,**

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[314] Jill Bennett, "Stigmata and Sense Memory: St Francis and the Affective Image," *Art History* 24, no. 1 (2001): 6.

[315] Sarah Elliott Novacich, "Transparent Mary: Visible Interiors and the Maternal Body in the Middle Ages," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 116, no. 4 (2017): 468-69.

[316] Assaf Pinkus, *Sculpting Simulacra in Medieval Germany, 1250-1380* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), 150.

81), clearly defined outlines **(Fig. 4)**, or representing the infants as physically occupying niches located on their mothers' chests **(Fig. 74, 79).** Such a rendering visually sets apart the infants from their mothers' bodies, demanding that attention be dedicated precisely to this emphasised element of the image. Sculptural representations of *in utero* infants frequently employ semi-transparent or removable openings **(Fig. 6, 8)**, encouraging and legitimising the process of physically revealing the contest of the womb. While Pinkus views such encounters, which necessitate an attentive, close gaze, as voyeuristic; in the context of female monasticism such practices can be seen as fully legitimate, structuring the viewing experience as a process of revealing a joyful mystery to a privileged, worthy audience, allowing what Barbara Newman has described as a "radical democratization of grace."[317]

Representations of the occupied womb which deny any naturalism of the pregnancy might have thus functioned similarly to the body of the Shrine Madonna: reflecting the concept of Mary as a gate that offers access to the divine while denying physical perviousness which would endanger her physical integrity.[318] The ambiguous, decorative womb functions as a liminal space, allowing for a cognitive blending of the interior and the exterior while simultaneously constructing a boundary between what is revealed and the recipient of the revelation. As a witness to the Virgin Mary's pregnancy, Saint Elizabeth becomes a mediator between the viewer and the Virgin, demonstrating the "correct" way of interacting with the divine, forbidding any transgression. The questions of "naturalism" of the occupied womb, discussed in Chapter 1, thus becomes resolved if we allow the images to remain deliberately ambiguous, inhabiting the threshold that both delineates and blurs the space between the interior and the exterior, the human and the holy, the spiritual and the material, mediating the uncertain space between the viewer and the divine.

In her discussion of the Katharinental Visitation group **(Fig. 8)**, produced for the Dominican nuns of Sankt Katharinental, Jacqueline Jung has observed that

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[317] Pinkus, *Sculpting Simulacra,* 150; Barbara Newman, "The Visionary Texts and Visual Worlds of Religious Women," in *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 163.

[318] Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 17-18.

despite their obviously unequal standing in terms of significance within the salvation narrative, the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth are depicted in a nearly identical manner, with similar facial features and clothing, the only difference being that Elizabeth's veil covers her hair more thoroughly than Mary's does hers. Indeed, in depictions of the occupied womb which can be linked to the monastic context, the difference in the women's age and status does not appear to receive as much attention as it does in the case of non-monastic representations which may portray Elizabeth as elderly or submissive to Mary, kneeling in front of her. A shift towards such depiction is clearly noticeable in the mid-fifteenth-century Visitation panel by the Master of the Carrying of the Cross from Vyšší Brod **(Fig. 83)**, which depicts Elizabeth with wrinkles and sagging breasts, her hair covered with a veil while Mary's is long and flowing, the older woman wearing a chatelaine which denotes her as the caretaker of the household. Meanwhile in representations produced for the female monastic context, such as the Wonnetal **(Fig. 74)** and Seligenthal **(Fig. 52)** manuscripts owned by Cistercian houses, as well as the Adelhausen antependium **(Fig. 79 & 80),** a panel from a Life of Mary altarpiece produced for the nuns' choir in the church of Saint John the Baptist at the convent of Augustinian Canonesses of Inzigkofen **(Fig. 84),** and the Nuremberg sculptural group from the Benedictine Kloster Niedernburg **(Fig. 6),** the only difference between the women appears to be their head coverings. No known monastically-owned representation depicts Elizabeth as kneeling or bowing in front of the Virgin – a pose which became increasingly common in depictions of the Visitation towards the later medieval period, in late fourteenth-century and fifteenth-century French books of hours and across various media during the later Italian *quattrocento*.[319] Instead, the women are almost universally portrayed standing as equals, holding hands **(Fig. 8)** or embracing **(Fig. 6, 52, 74, 79, 82),** even though there is no textual basis in the Gospel account for portraying such interactions.

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[319] See for instance Master of the Paremont of Narbonne - The Visitation, from the *Tres Belles Heures of Notre-Dame de Jean de Berry*, c.1380 (Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, MS NAL 3093, fol. 27v); The Boucicaut Master - The Visitation, from a Book of Hours, 1400-1425 (The British Library, London, MS Add. 16997, fol. 45v); Attributed to the Egerton Master - The Visitation, from the Hours of René of Anjou, c.1410 (British Library, London, MS Egerton 1070, fol. 29v); Lorenzo Monaco – The Visitation, from a predella, c. 1405-10, tempera on panel (Courtauld Institute of Art, London); Luca della Robia – The Visitation, 1440, glazed terracotta (San Giovanni Fuorcivitas, Pistoia); Domenico Ghirlandaio – The Visitation, 1491, tempera on panel (Louvre, Paris, 297).

In the vast majority of images which include the motif of the occupied womb, both produced for monastic and non-monastic use, the wombs and the children of both women are rendered nearly identically to each other, regardless of what visual strategy the object employs. Both Mary and Elizabeth can be found depicted with crystal or glass inserts representing their wombs in sculptural form **(Fig. 8)**; painted with both their children contained within mandorlas **(Fig. 28, 81)** or gilded medallions **(Fig. 52)**, or seemingly "floating" beside or in front of their mothers **(Fig. 58, 79),** the occupied wombs identical to each other in all instances. Such depiction strongly underlines the similarities between Mary's and Elizabeth's supernatural and natural pregnancies discussed in Chapter 2, opting to draw visual parallels between the infants, wombs, and mothers. The mirror-like structure of imagery of the occupied womb, which depicts the women standing on equal footing despite their understood differences, exemplifies a "dialogical relationship between an exuberant figure and her companion," which leads to the latter assuming the qualities of the former.[320]

While the Virgin Mary does speak in the Biblical account of the Visitation, proclaiming the *Magnificat,* in numerous representations of the occupied womb, including ones produced for monastic use, Elizabeth is the one more frequently portrayed with a speech scroll, bearing one even in representations where Mary remains visually voiceless **(Fig. 4, 8)**. The scroll invariably holds a version of the words "et unde hoc mihi ut veniat mater Domini mei ad me" ("And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me?" Luke 1:43). In her discussion of the words of salutation inscribed on Simone Martini's Annunciation altarpiece, Ann van Dijk argues that the words inscribed on the panel, emanating from the angel's mouth, became a model of devotional practice for viewers to imitate. The emphasis on vocalizing the words would thus encourage the viewers themselves to say them aloud, adopting the angel's salutation as their own.[321] By encouraging the viewer to meditate on the Gospel words and to repeat them, Elizabeth offers a reflection on Marian presence in the life of a devout woman and mimics the appropriate veneration. The process of *imitatio Mariae* thus incorporates *contemplatio Mariae*, encompassing a rich visual literacy that involves negotiating the spatial and material facts of the image

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[320] Jung, "Crystalline Wombs and Pregnant Hearts," 236.

[321] Van Dijk, "The Angelic Salutation," 421.

while activating an internal imaginative response based on appropriate models. The gesture of *dextrarum iunctio* (joining of right hands), traditionally utilised in depictions of marriage frames the Katharinental **(Fig. 8)** and Wonnetal **(Fig. 74)** images as visual representation of the lessons taught by the Sister-Books: cloistered women teaching one another by example and taking on their fellow sisters as moral and devotional models.

4.2.2 Vision and materiality, transparency and enclosure

The crystal cabochons of the Katharinental Visitation group **(Fig. 8)** and the now-lost glass coverings of the Nuremberg Visitation sculpture **(Fig. 6 & 7)** reflect a dual nature of the Marian and Elizabethan wombs. On the one hand, the transparent materials utilised to depict the pregnant bodies create a disruption in the visual integrity of the sculpted figures, offering access to the inside of the holy bodies by fragmenting and penetrating. On the other hand, however, the semi-transparent materials act as signifiers of the very impenetrability of the holy wombs, allowing ocular penetration without compromising their somatic integrity. The glass openings of the Nuremberg group **(Fig. 6)** could thus be understood analogously to the *topos* of the sunbeam through glass, which had been commonly used to refer to the mechanics of the Incarnation since at least the Patristic period. In Middle High German the *topos* appears as early as in the late eleventh century, in a manuscript later in the possession of the Premonstratensian house at Arnstein in the Rhineland. In Latin it forms the core of the anonymous thirteenth-century hymn *Salve, porta crystallina*, which was copied and quoted in other hymns throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[322]

The use of glass and concave openings in the sculptural representations of the occupied womb clearly evokes another genre of objects ubiquitous to medieval piety – reliquaries and monstrances. Although rock crystal had been used to decorative ends since at least the Carolingian period, it was in the late Middle Ages that devotional containers displaying a degree of transparency achieved through the use of polished rock crystal, and to a lesser extent glass (both as the main material of containers and in decoration as cabochons) overtook in

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[322] Andrew Breeze, “The Blessed Virgin and the Sunbeam Through Glass,” *Celtica* 23 (1999): 19–29.

popularity the entirely opaque metalwork containers. Although those containers appear to have served a vastly different devotional and liturgical function from panel painting and sculpture, Bynum has noted a conflation between functions of objects that refer specifically to the physical presence of the divine. The thirteenth century in particular saw the Eucharist reserved in pyxes or reliquaries, mobile tabernacles being modelled on reliquaries, and all of these objects displayed alongside one another. The practice of burning candles or lamps before the reserved Host was borrowed from the manner in which relics were presented.[323]

From an art historical perspective, this overlap between forms, functions and practices justifies an inquiry into an array of objects of varying genres and mediums on similar terms and alongside one another. The covered openings in the sculpted Visitation groups can thus be analysed as functioning in a similar manner to the liturgical and devotional objects mentioned above. The use of crystal, glass, or gilding to represent the occupied womb provides a material analogy, both in terms of optical and metaphorical qualities, for the interior of a holy body, with the seamless, revelatory relationship between the inner and the outer constituting the representational and devotional focus. As such, these objects visualize the intrinsic connection between the Incarnation and the Nativity, resulting in a mode of representation that bridges the gap between Christ Incarnate and Christ Revealed and reaffirms both of Christ's natures – human and divine – within one image. Through the penetrative gaze allowed by the material qualities of the image, the devout viewer can enter the Marian womb and witness, through spiritual vision, the unborn Christ Incarnate – the Word made Flesh at the moment of the Annunciation. The imagery of the occupied womb emphasises the process of the enfleshing itself, providing a link between the moment of Incarnation – the Annunciation, and the externalizing event, the Nativity, stressing both the humanity of Christ and the role of Mary as the source of her son's flesh. The implied transparency and the explicit corporeality of the occupied womb evokes the ocular communion, with the process of looking inside the womb mirroring the concept of absorption of the salvatory grace of the Host through the process of recreating the image in the mind's eye and incorporating it into the body and soul of the beholder, the

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[323] Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption,* 145.

complex dynamics of visual exposure embodying the late medieval concern with visual availability as an instrument of knowledge and privilege.[324]

The notion of material transparency appears as a central motif in numerous visionary accounts centred on the themes of the Eucharist and the body. According to her *Vita,* the Augustinian nun Christina von Retters of Kloster Hane was able to see the Host through a convent wall, as if the stone had temporarily become glass.[325] The Dominican Mechthild von Hundersingen of Kloster Weil "had received the body of our Lord, and then as she lay before it and grieved she saw within herself as if a pure crystal, that transmitted light as if the sun shone through it. And then she recognised that the crystal was her own clear soul, and that clear light the Lord's body that she had received."[326] In a vision experienced during the feast of Nativity, Gertrude of Helfta saw the womb of the Virgin Mary "transparent like a most pure crystal; through it all her inner organs shone forth, shot through and filled with his divine nature, just as gold wrapped in parti-colored silk is accustomed to shine through crystal. She also saw the dewy-fresh little boy, the only child of the Highest Father, sucking at the heart of the Virginal Mother with hungry pleasure."[327] Perhaps the most explicit link between vision, transparency, and devotion to the infant Christ appears in the account of the visionary experience of yet another Dominican, Anne von Ramschwag of Katharinental. The vision is described as follows: "It seemed to her that her body split open so that she could look into herself. There she saw two beautiful babies embracing each other sweetly and lovingly […] [S]he recognized that one child was our Lord and the other her soul, and that she and God were united. Then her body closed together again."[328]

Although the phenomena of glowing and transparency recorded in visionary accounts are associated chiefly with miraculous events resulting from prayer and

[324] Thomas Lentes, "As Far as the Eye Can See…: Rituals of Gazing in the Late Middle Ages," in *The Mind's Eye. Art and Theological Argument in the Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Anne-Marie Bouché (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 360–73; Gertsman, *Worlds Within*, 42.

[325] Franz Paul Mittermeier, "Lebensbeschreibung der Sel. Christina von Retters," *Archiv für Mittelrheinische Kirchengeschichte* 17 (1965): 243.

[326] Karl Bihlmeyer, "Mystisches Leben in dem Dominikanerinnenkloster Weiler bei Esslingen im 13. und 14. Jahrhundert," *Württembergische Vierteljahrshefte für Landesgeschichte* 25 (1916): 70.

[327] Gertrude of Helfta, "Chapter 3: On the Honey-Sweet Nativity of the Lord," 23.

[328] Meyer, ed. *Das "St Katharinentaler Schwesternbuch,"* 131.

contemplation, they are also frequently found described as a demonstrable result of exemplary practice of monastic virtues of humility and obedience, which could have been achieved by lay sisters and professed nuns alike. The Dominican Sister-Books provide examples of an anonymous porter from Weil who saw her face "shining like the sun," and the cook Mechilt von Essenz of Katharinental who was observed by another sister to be "glowing brightly like a crystal."[329] In both cases the light is not only a sign of a miraculous event, but also an external signifier of the women's virtue. The language of miraculous properties of devotional objects and its transposing onto the female body would thus have been recognized not only by those involved in or witnessing miraculous, visionary events; it would also have been widely understood throughout the community, being intrinsically linked to its governing principles, and utilized to conceptually connect moral virtue and devotional practice. *Vitae* that emphasize clarity and brightness of body and soul thus construct a system of witnessing and authority, where true holiness can be discerned and reflected upon by those seeking spiritual improvement through witnessing others' religious practice, allowing those accounts to function as a part of the interpretive framework of Visitation imagery.[330]

Visionary experiences of medieval nuns have been often characterised as "cultivated," as opposed to the "spontaneous" visions of the Old Testament prophets. Rather than arriving unexpectedly, these visions can be understood as a result of a complex spiritual discipline and "a privileged cultural practice by which those with appropriate qualifications [...] might court sacred encounters through techniques for the deliberate alteration of consciousness."[331] Training of the gaze on a tangible object can be understood as one such technique, and thus, a catalyst for visionary experience. I suggest that the occupied wombs of Mary and Elizabeth served as meditational foci, triggering a visionary experience centred on the transgression of boundaries between the interior and the exterior

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[329] *Weiler Schwesternbuch* (c. 1350), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Munich, Cgm 750, fol. 72v (manuscript copied by Anna Ebin at the Augustinian nunnery Pillenreuth in 1454-68); *St Katharinenthaler Schwesternbuch* (c.1345), Benediktinische Stiftsbibliothek, St Gallen, cod. 603, fol. 519 (manuscript copied at the Dominican nunnery St Gallen in 1493), both cited in Garber, *Feminine Figurae,* 74-77.

[330] Ayanna, "Bodies of Crystal, Houses of Glass," 34-45.

[331] Barbara Newman, "What Did It Mean to Say 'I Saw'? The Clash Between Theory and Practice in Medieval Visionary Culture," *Speculum* 80, no. 1 (2005): 3–6.

of not only the devotional image, but also of the boundaries of the bodily self of the visionary. In the visionary accounts of late medieval female mystics, the nuns' bodies become split or transparent, but they never disappear, becoming crystalline despite their material presence, embedding the bodies with the material qualities of devotional objects such as tabernacles or reliquaries made of glass or painted with gold to signify divine presence. The bodies of visionary nuns are fragmented and opened, creating a liminal site for the mystical union with the divine that mirrors the dynamic state of the Eucharistic Host. As Kathleen Biddick argued, the Eucharist "was both a "classical" body in the Bakhtinian sense, elevated, static, and monumental, and a "grotesque" body, broken, bleeding, excessive, maternal, paternal, a body which upset any fixed gender binary, a fluid body that troubled any container."[332] The Eucharist can thus be understood to exist in a liminal state between purification and contamination, elevation and containment; its unstable state mirrored both in the bodies of the women practicing Eucharistic devotion and the multivalent, dynamic objects facilitating their devotional practices.

The language of transparency apparent in monastic women's visions echoes the dynamics of conventual enclosure and the practice of monastic virtues, offering a view into holy spaces and holy bodies beyond the physical environment of the convent's buildings. Regarding enclosure, Hamburger has argued that the practice at any particular monastic house was often not as strict as surviving legislation dictated, since the very need for legislation implies instances of transgressions.[333] While none of the nine surviving Dominican Sister-Books describe any instances of nuns moving between the realm of enclosure and the outside world, it is most likely that due to practical concerns the women would have nevertheless ventured beyond the convent walls. A common theme within the Sister-Books and monastic chronicles, however, is the breaking of enclosure through optic and visionary means. Already in the twelfth century the Benedictine writer Peter of Celle claimed that, "the cloister lies on the border of angelic purity and earthly contamination," indicating the sensory "windows"

[332] Kathleen Biddick, "Genders, Bodies, Borders: Technologies of the Visible," *Speculum* 68, no. 2 (1993): 410.

[333] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 41.

of the body – primarily sight – as the gatekeepers of this liminal state.[334] Biernoff has noted that the majority of medieval commentators on enclosure tended to treat sight as exemplary in the discourse of custody of sensation, with the eye being understood as an active organ capable of transgressing corporeal and architectural borders, defining and disrupting spaces it penetrated.[335]

Towards the thirteenth century the sense of sight became key in the process of receiving the Eucharist, with lay worshippers engaging predominantly in "ocular communion" and receiving oral communion as seldom as once a year. At the elevation of the Host, with the words "hoc est corpus meum" ("this is my body") marking the moment of consecration, worshippers were able to witness the moment of transubstantiation itself without the need to taste the body and blood of Christ. The value of sacramental seeing of the Host was universally recognized in the late medieval period, when accounts emerged of the faithful racing from church to church to see as many elevations as possible, or guild members bringing charges against a priest who assigned them a place in the church from which they were not able to see the elevated Host. The introduction of monstrances into the church rite, which likely correlated to the institution of the feast of Corpus Christi, allowed for the display of the Host to be separated from Mass, and thus to further separate reception from consecration. The consecrated wafer was now carried in feast day processions and displayed on the altar, allowing it to be seen more frequently without the fear of trivializing its significance through too-frequent reception.[336]

While late medieval nuns received communion on average no more than fifteen times a year, the ocular reception of the Eucharist remained central to monastic devotional practice.[337] Building renovations taking place in 1305 at Katharinental allowed the nuns to see the elevated Host through a grille in the choir - a view that had been hindered prior to this date.[338] Rather than limit access to the Eucharist, the monastic enclosure itself could constitute a privilege which aided

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[334] Peter of Celle, *Selected Works*, trans. Hugh Feiss (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1987), 79.

[335] Biernoff, *Sight and Embodiment in the Middle Ages,* 115.

[336] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* 57-58; Rubin, *Corpus Christi,* 63-64.

[337] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 89.

[338] Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters,* 36-37.

in the process of viewing. Anna von Buchwald, a prioress of the Benedictine convent at Preetz (1484-1508) documented the alterations to the nuns' choir in her *Buch im Chor* – an account combining her personal diary with the convent's chronicle, account book, and Rule. She wrote, "All our predecessors took Communion at the high altar, on account of which we were often obstructed by clerics and the laity, who were always standing about there. Because of this I had one altar enclosed in our choir and had it consecrated [...] there we henceforth undertook to take communion and I had the doors to the choir closed."[339] In this case, it is the lack of enclosed space that inhibits access to the Eucharist. The erection of a physical boundary in the nun's choir at Preetz not only provided the women with separation from the crowd around the high altar, but also allowed them an unobstructed view of the Host, the direct encounter with the Eucharist becoming a positive result of enclosure.

In addition to the nuns themselves appearing to break enclosure by seeing through convent walls, as in the case of Christina von Retters cited above, enclosure could also be broken into by a devout outsider perceiving the inner workings of a convent through a visionary experience. In one of Berta von Herten's visions recorded in the Katharinental Sister-Book, the nun sees Christ beckon to her in the convent's refectory, whereupon, evoking the sculptures of Christ and Saint John which populated the Katharinental convent **(Fig. 45)**, he "took her up and laid her head upon his lap, and treated her all sweetly and lovingly." Then, Berta witnesses Guta, a recluse unaffiliated with the convent, watching through the refectory wall, which has changed "as if to glass […] as if her heart would break, so gladly would she pass through the wall to meet our Lord." Through her enclosure in the convent Berta is able to initiate an affective, mystical, and even physical connection to Christ; while Guta is only able to witness the event as an outsider, gazing through the wall of the refectory which provides her with a view into a world she will never be able to experience herself. In this account, the crystalline enclosure of the convent becomes analogous to the transparent Marian womb, becoming the locus of

[339] Anna von Buchwald, *Buch im Chor*, Kloster Preetz, 1471-87, fol. 154r (Klosterarchiv, Preetz HS1), transcribed and translated in Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 69.

divine presence – a communal womb from which would emerge "an idealized sense of a community's own reborn potential."[340]

The enclosed, redemptive womb can only be accessed by outsiders through mystical gaze, once again calling to mind the panel of Mary spinning by the Erfurt Master **(Fig. 42)** which paradoxically asserts the disclosure and protection of Mary's interior while suggesting an uncertain threshold "between what can be heard, seen, speculated upon, and known, and what remains within a conceptually and architecturally privileged space to which the viewer is denied access."[341] The occupied Marian womb is presented frontally to the panel's viewer, unobscured by gesture or drapery, providing seemingly unlimited visual access. At the same time, however, the miniscule scale of the infant, and his rendering in the same colour as the background of the *mandorla*-shaped womb makes the Christ Child physically difficult to see, necessitating intimate, close viewing. Referring to miniature books, Susan Stewart has argued that the intimate encounter necessitated by miniature scale offers protection from contamination; perhaps the same can be said for representations of the occupied womb.[342] The Erfurt panel implies that nothing can be hidden from intruders such as Joseph – whose line of gaze, trained on Mary's distaff, nevertheless appears to be missing what he is supposed to be looking at - or the recluse Guta, aware of the impossibility of physical access to the complete spiritual experience of mystical union. On the other hand, however, the double enclosure – of Christ in Mary's womb, and of Mary within an architectural structure, seems to imply that despite the foreign intrusion, certain mysteries, revelations, and experiences cannot be seen or comprehended, echoing the tension between ideas of revelation and disclosure mediated both by the Marian womb and conventual enclosure.

Such layering of boundaries is emphasised in an historiated initial 'D,' which opens the reading for the feast of Nativity of John the Baptist (June 24th) in a

[340] Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards, "Introduction: Intersections of Time and Space in Gender and Enclosure," in *Anchorites, Wombs, and Tombs. Intersections of Gender and Enclosure in the Middle Ages*, ed. Liz Herbert McAvoy and Mari Hughes-Edwards (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010), 18.

[341] Novacich, "Transparent Mary," 474.

[342] Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 69.

gradual from the Cistercian house of Wonnetal **(Fig. 74)** with the hymn *De ventre matris mea vocavit me Dominus nomine meo* and a scene of the Visitation.[343] Here, the figures of the infants are doubly enclosed within the niches representing their mothers' wombs, and within the initial itself, to which the kneeling Cistercian nun, positioned to the left hand side of the initial, has access only through her spiritual vision. A grotesque serpentine figure appears enclosed in the upright of the initial, her decorative tail threatening to stand in the way of the nun's vision. Although the manuscript is richly decorated with grotesques, with a vast number of its pages populated with human-animal hybrids bearing male or non-gendered features (e.g. fol. 14v and fol. 126v), grotesque figures possessing distinctly female features appear much less frequently. They can be found solely in penwork initials with no supplicants, alongside multiple animal grotesques, but no human figures (fol. 152r and fol. 161r). The serpentine grotesque in the Visitation initial is not only larger and executed in more detail than the other female-headed grotesques; she is also the only one to constitute an integral part of a historiated initial, directly facing its supplicant and standing in her line of gaze, suggesting that perhaps the figure is to be interpreted beyond its decorative function. The serpent grotesque is depicted wearing a wimple which matches the head covering of the supplicant nun, encouraging the viewer to read the figures in relation to each other.

The female grotesque bears particular resemblance to representations of the female-headed serpent first described in Peter Comestor's *Historia scholastica.* Despite the words *serpens, draco, diabolus,* and *daemon* all being gendered masculine in Latin, Comestor decided to depart from the Biblical account and introduce a description of the serpent in Eden as possessing "a virgin's face, for like praises like (*similia similibus applaudunt*)," thus not only underscoring the fact that the serpent's first lie was the manipulation of the significations of appearance, but also implying that Eve's deceit of Adam mirrored the behaviour of her own tempter.[344] The motif was present in painted and sculpted depictions

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[343] The introit for the feast is derived from the Book of Isaiah: "*De ventre matris meae recordatus est nominis mei et posuit os meum quasi gladium acutum in umbra manus suae protexit me et posuit me sicut sagittam electam*" ("The Lord hath called me from the womb, from the bowels of my mother he hath been mindful of my name. And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword: in the shadow of his hand he hath protected me, and hath made me as a chosen arrow.") (Isaiah 49: 1-2).

[344] Peter Comestor, *Historia Scholastica: Libri Genesis*, PL 198:1072C, cited and translated in Nancy Mandeville Caciola, "Serpents and Lies," *Speculum* 93, no. 1 (2018): 101-10. For

of the temptation of Eve from the thirteenth century onwards, first appearing on the trumeau of the western façade of the cathedral of Notre-Dame de Paris.[345] In the German manuscript tradition, the motif can be found within a copy of the *Speculum humanae salvationis* produced in the late fourteenth century in Alsace (British Library, London, MS Harley 4996, fol. 4v). The portrayal of the serpent with a female head, frequently crowned or veiled, was meant to not only underscore the duplicity of sin, its initial attractiveness concealing the dreadful consequences, but also to stress the primacy of *luxuria* in the Fall, the first woman tempted by a mirror image of herself.[346] The feminization of the figure of the serpent renders two women responsible for the fall of man, leading to a direct association between femininity and temptation, falsity, and deceit. The presence of a female-headed serpentine grotesque in the Wonnental initial **(Fig. 74)** might thus be understood to reflect the nun's female nature – in particular her vanity and self-love, which she agrees to reject upon entry into the monastic community - back onto herself, suggesting its enduring presence as an obstacle to spiritual vision. While the grotesque's materiality as a penwork image renders her semi-transparent and perhaps secondary to the tempera image of the supplicant, suggesting that the nun's vision might be able to penetrate through her, her coiled tail nevertheless stands in the way of the nun's spiritual sight, constituting yet another barrier to overcome in the process of accessing the innermost mystery of the holy wombs.

In images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb, the foetal movement within Mary's and Elizabeth's bodies was made visible, finding articulation and dissemination via apocrypha, plays, and artwork, revealing the mystery to curious onlookers. However, the intimate posture of the women, with their embrace enclosing their wombs and threatening to prevent visual access, suggests the possibility of the truth of the miracle remaining secret from those who view it, allowing itself to be perceived only by those spiritually equipped to do so. Unlike Marian representations which trade in invasive vision, such as a

extensive discussion of textual sources for iconography of the woman-headed serpent, see Nona C. Flores, "*'Effigies Amicitiae...Veritas Inimicitiae*:' Antifeminism in the Iconography of the Woman-Headed Serpent in Medieval Art and Literature," in *Animals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Nona C. Flores (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), 167-95.

[345] Caciola, "Serpents and Lies," 101-10.

[346] Flores, "*'Effigies Amicitiae...Veritas Inimicitiae,*" 176.

Shrine Madonna opened by a priest, or theatrical performances concerned with the trial verifying Mary's virginity, the occupied womb viewed by a female monastic audience constitutes a viewing experience more akin to a joyful revelation that amplifies the positive meanings associated with spiritual motherhood, monastic virtue, and conventual enclosure, rather than a transgressive encounter bordering on violation.[347]

Although Eucharistic and Marian devotion can be identified as two separate cults equipped with their own sets of devotional practices and related imagery, the undeniable overlap between Christocentric and Marian theology resulted in an intimate connection between the two strands of devotion. From its very inception in the mosaics of the Euphrasian Basilica, Visitation imagery played a dual role, responding both to the growing cult of the Virgin and the increased interest in her role as mother, as well as conveying Christological messages by reaffirming the doctrine of the Incarnation.[348] The artistic production and devotional practices of the late Middle Ages demonstrate a growing interest in the connection between the Virgin and Christ, the Infancy and the Passion, and between Mariology and the Eucharist. The reverence for Mary found in particular amongst thirteenth-century female mystics is thus less for Mary as a "representative woman" than for Mary as a conduit for the Incarnation, her physical motherhood largely displaced by symbolic readings relating her pregnancy to the wider context of Eucharistic devotion.[349] The presence of Saint Elizabeth within representations of the occupied womb can in turn be understood not only as devotional guidance, but also as a safeguard from voyeuristic transgression. In providing a visual mirror to the figure of Mary, with her womb also on display, Elizabeth decreases the degree of "otherness" of Mary's miraculous pregnancy. That is not to say that from a theological standpoint Mary would no longer be seen as exceptional, or that the two women would be understood as equals. Rather, Elizabeth's presence within the image decreases the distance between Mary and the viewer, normalising the encounter and forbidding a dangerous level of unsanctioned curiosity.

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[347] Novacich, "Transparent Mary," 466.

[348] Marina Vicelja-Matijašić, "Christological Program in the Apse of Basilica Eufrasiana in Poreč," *IKON: Journal of Iconographic Studies* 1 (2008): 95.

[349] Madeline Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages: Sight, Spectacle and Scopic Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 14.

Chapter 5. The Visitation and the monastic community

As demonstrated above, a large number of representations of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb were owned by women's monastic houses. The depictions constituted an integral part of the sensual environment of late medieval nunneries – spaces populated with images, devotional practices, and visionary experiences, which surrounded the cloistered women not only in the course of liturgy or private prayer; rather, they accompanied them through their daily activities and personal lives as well. Thus, the very fact of membership in a monastic community – a cross-generational, diverse kin group - became an integral part of the interpretive framework of religious imagery, with the nuns' gender, age, and social status all contributing to their reception of devotional images.

While the gendered aspects of devotional practice discussed in the previous chapter can be seen as inherent to interaction with objects focused on the themes of pregnancy and motherhood, the dynamic of gender within monastic communities in general is much more complex. On an individual, personal level, the monastic construct of gender is far from one-dimensional. The very person at the helm of every nunnery – the abbess – was a multiply gendered figure herself. In her study of *Amtscharisma* – charisma necessary for rulership – in the monastic context, Felice Lifshitz has argued that the figure of the medieval *abbatissa* cannot be viewed as maternal. Even from a linguistic standpoint, the *abbatissa* is not a mother (*amma* or *mater*); she is a female father (*abba*). However, Lifshitz also notes that in the context of Benedictine rule in particular, the abbess is understood to perform a multivalent role of authority as a "female father who stands in the stead of Christ." The ordination ceremony of the abbess, however, rendered her *materna in cathedra* ("in the maternal throne"), immediately calling to mind the imagery of the Marian Throne of Wisdom.[350] The masculine implications of the *abbatissa*'s task of ruling in Christ's stead became largely complicated with the increased focus on the maternal nature of Christ, prevalent in women's devotional practices from the mid- to late Middle Ages,

[350] Felice Lifshitz, "Is Mother Superior?: Towards a History of Feminine Amtscharisma," in *Medieval Mothering*, ed. John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013), 122, 131.

rendering the abbess an exemplary figure for the multiplicity of gender expression found within women's monastic houses.[351]

The issue of gendering can be further extended from the individual nun to the entirety of a monastic community. On the one hand, monastic life in the medieval period can be read as completely non-gendered due to its removal from what Sarah Salih has described as the "heterosexual economy."[352] Cloistered women would have used a nearly identical rule to the one obeyed by monks, since the Rule of Saint Benedict, on which almost all subsequent Rules are based, remained virtually unchanged in its adaptation for female communities.[353] Although gender-specific rules had been composed throughout the centuries, including Caesarius of Arles' *Regula virginum* (512), Peter Abelard's rule for the nuns of the Paraclete (around 1130), and Saint Francis' rule for Saint Clare and her sisters at St Damian (approved by the Pope in 1253); they were never broadly applied beyond the houses for which they were composed. The decisive ruling on the nature of the rule for women's houses came from the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which in light of demands to limit the number of new monastic orders decreed that women's houses were to follow the papally approved Augustinian and Benedictine rules.

While the Cistercian and Benedictine nuns followed the Rule of Saint Benedict, the Dominicans adhered to the Rule of Saint Augustine; the primary difference between the two Rules being their insistence on, respectively, the

[351] For an extensive discussion of the female nature of Christ in medieval devotional practice see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 1982). Although Bynum does not relate the feminisation of Christ to the gender ambiguity of the role of the abbess, she notes that cloistered women's sense of religious authority appears to be constructed not based on office, but rather through a direct contact with the divine. In her discussion of Gertrude of Helfta - who was not an abbess, but nevertheless held a priest- or confessor-like position of spiritual authority - Bynum argues that Gertrude's authority is constructed through an *imitatio Christi* centred around service to her community, her "clerical" role commissioned directly by Christ and comprising elements of both maternal nurture and paternal counselling and teaching.

[352] Salih, *Versions of Virginity*, 115.

[353] Some of the earliest surviving monastic rules composed specifically for women, such as Donatus of Besancon's *Rule for Nuns of Jussa* (before 660 - the oldest textual witness for reception of the Rule of Benedict) and the anonymous *Cuiusdam Patris Regula ad Virgines* (8th century) demonstrate a high degree of content being derived directly from the text of the Rule of Benedict. The *Cuiusdam Patris Regula* incorporates Benedict's teaching on the office of abbot and other monastic officials while merely substituting 'abbess' for 'abbot' while Donatus includes not only Benedict's teachings on the twelve steps of humility, but also the text of "Instruments of Good Works" in his rule. Marilyn Dunn, "Mastering Benedict: Monastic Rules and Their Authors in the Early Medieval West," *The English Historical Review* 105, no. 416 (1990): 569-70.

contemplative and the active life. In principle, while the latter, much longer rule of Saint Benedict sets out detailed instructions for prayer cycles and ascetic renunciation, the fundamental ideas of the very brief Rule of Saint Augustine are constituted around the notions of community, love and the human heart and soul. However, the Rule of Saint Benedict appears to be at least partially based on the Rule of Saint Augustine, which had been composed over a century prior, and despite their surface contrasts, the two rules have much in common. The Benedictine chapter on the labour of monks is manifestly inspired by Augustine's treatise *De opere monachorum* ("The Work of Monks"), and Benedict's teaching concerning religious poverty is clearly formulated in Augustine's sermons *De vitae et moribus clericorum suorum* ("The Life and Customs of Clerics"). In addition to the two Rules being largely similar, the general unavailability of the active life - which most frequently involved teaching and preaching outwith the convent walls - to cloistered women rendered the key tenants of the Rule of Augustine obsolete for female Dominicans, and thus little difference in adherence to a particular monastic rule can be found between women's houses in late medieval Germany.[354]

Alongside their similarity in terms of the rule, men's and women's houses also followed the same timetable of prayer, resulting in a similar organisation of daily lives on both material and spiritual terms.[355] However, the very nature of female monastic communities makes them implicitly gendered. Monastic mystical discourse, which formed an integral part of the daily lives of the communities discussed in this thesis, incorporated two fundamental elements of the medieval women's experience: biological femininity and membership in a community. Because of their connection to the female worlds of work and ritual, as well as the practice of enclosure, medieval nuns' spirituality directly reflected their immediate gendered social world - that is, the local and cyclically temporal world within gendered enclosure.[356] This chapter will thus

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[354] Jean Besse, "Rule of Saint Augustine," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia,* vol. 2 (New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907) [Accessed March 2021]. http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02079b.htm.

[355] Salih, *Versions of Virginity,* 110-15.

[356] Ulrike Wiethaus, "Thieves and Carnivals: Gender in German Dominican Literature of the Fourteenth Century," in *The Vernacular Spirit. Essays on Medieval Religious Literature*, ed. Renate Blumenfeld-Kosinski, Duncan Robertson, and Nancy Bradley Warren (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 216.

discuss Visitation imagery in relation to the gendered, homosocial, and communal character of female monastic life. Firstly, the chapter will discuss the social relationships within women's communities in order to investigate how the social structure of monastic houses could have impacted interaction with imagery which has at its core a relationship between two women, at once similar and different from each other in terms of their age, status, and role in the narrative of salvation history. Secondly, the chapter will place Visitation imagery between the two spheres continuously shaped by the act of participating in a female religious community – private and public devotional practices - aiming to interrogate the function of the motif of the occupied womb as a bridge between the two.

5.1 Family, motherhood and pregnancy in the daily life of the nuns

The period between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries saw significant changes in attitudes towards childbearing, motherhood, and the family across Western Europe. Familial relationships interested both secular and religious audiences, with an increased number of representations of children, families, and the domestic sphere appearing in the arts and literature.[357] Towards the end of the fifteenth century, genealogical representations of Christ began to emphasise extended family relationships, dealing principally with the theme of female ancestry. The subject of the Holy Kinship **(Fig. 20, 75, 76)**, which depicts the infant Christ amongst his relatives descended from his maternal grandmother, Saint Anne, appeared particularly frequently in Germany and the Low Countries until the mid-sixteenth century. In those representations Saint Anne occupies the central space as the family matron, having replaced the recumbent Jesse found in earlier representations which employed schematised, patrilinear genealogy. Although the family members depicted in kinship scenes can vary in iconography informed chiefly by apocryphal material, the basis for the representation is the tradition of Anne's *trinubium* (referring to her conception of the three Marys), which was outlined by Jacobus in the *Golden Legend*.[358] Depictions of the Holy Kinship thus came to traditionally include Saint

[357] Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation,* 144-45.

[358] "*Anna solet dici tres concepisse Marias,/ Quas genuere viri Joachim, Cleophas, Salomeque./ Has duxere viri Joseph, Alpheus, Zebedeus./ Prima parit Christum, Jacobum secunda*

Anne alongside the Holy Family, Saint Elizabeth (daughter of Anne's sister Esmeria) and John the Baptist, and the Virgin's sisters Mary Salome and Mary of Cleophas alongside their husbands and children, including the apostles John the Evangelist, James the Greater, James the Less, Simon and Jude, and Joseph Barsabbas. The family is frequently depicted seated together within an enclosed space of a garden, the women and children separated from the men by architectural elements **(Fig. 75)**. The inclusion of horticultural themes connects the motif to the Northern European variant of the *sacra conversazione* known as *virgo intre virgines*, which depicted the Virgin and female saints in a garden setting within an architectural enclosure of a *hortus conclusus*, constituting a metaphor for the virginal yet fertile Marian womb. It is likely that the enclosed landscape setting of the Holy Kinship would have functioned in a similar manner, foregrounding the theme of holy female fertility.

Altarpieces such as the triptych by the Cologne Master of the Holy Kinship the Elder **(Fig. 20)** supplemented the scene of kinship with narrative scenes from the Nativity and Infancy of Christ, further emphasising the theme of his lineage. The turn of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries saw increasingly elaborate treatment of the theme of Holy Kinship, incorporating other pictorial motifs emphasising childbearing and ancestry. For example, in the Kinship altar by the Master with the Carnation, rather than present the kinship scene as a single group portrait, the representation is composed of three separate panels depicting the marriage of Mary, *Anna Selbdritt* with Joachim, and the Visitation featuring the occupied womb **(Fig. 21)**. Rather than simply depict the family within a timeless, genealogical setting, the altarpiece combines the kinship theme with the Infancy narratives which traditionally would surround it within a winged altarpiece, thereby framing Christ's ancestors as active agents in salvation history. Such depiction extends the Infancy narrative beyond the Annunciation, combining the Gospel account with apocryphal material and thus elevating the importance of non-canonical figures such as Anne and Joachim,

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minorem,/ Et Joseph justum peperit cum Simone Judam,/ Tertia majorem Jacobum volucremque Johannem," "Anna is usually said to have conceived three Marys, whom her husbands Joachim, Cleophas, and Salome begot. These [Marys] the men Joseph, Alpheus, and Zebedee took in marriage. The first bore Christ; the second bore James the Less, Joseph the Just, with Simon [and] Jude; The third, James the Greater and the winged John." Jacobus da Voragine, "The Birth of the Virgin" in *The Golden Legend*, 536.

further emphasising the narrative of salvation history being set in motion by Christ's maternal ancestors.

In late medieval kinship representations, secondary figures such as Saint Elizabeth began to receive their own genealogical representations, as observable in the Kinship altar of the Saint Anne chapel of the Cistercian nunnery of Mariä Himmelfahrt in Kirchheim am Ries, produced c. 1500 in Nördlingen **(Fig. 85)**. Elizabeth appears in two side panels: once with her apocryphal mother Esmeria (sister of Saint Anne) and brother Eliud; and once with her husband Zechariah and son John the Baptist. Unfortunately, it is impossible to establish how the Elizabeth panels compare to representations of Mary and her parents and son, as the central panel of the altar was lost around 1870, at the same time when much of the cloister was destroyed. The surviving elements of the altarpiece, which had been assembled without the central panel include the right wing with the two Elizabeth panels, the left wing with a panel of Saint Anne with her parents Emerentia and Stollanus and a panel of Memelia (wife of Eliud) with her son Saint Servatius, as well as two wings with female saints, one including a supplicant Cistercian abbess. By depicting little known figures such as Eliud and Memelia the panels demonstrate the broad knowledge of ancestry apocrypha amongst cloistered women, and the presence of the abbess indicates that the altarpiece was a significant commission or donation for the nunnery, once again foregrounding the significance of genealogical themes to female monastic audience.

In other depictions of Holy Kinship, the significance of extended family was underscored by expanding the range of gestures, gazes, and interactions between family members, demonstrating a shift towards increasingly dynamic depictions of the family as an interconnected unit rather than merely a catalogue of holy mothers and their many children. In the Ortenberg Altar, which was likely produced for the Premonstratensian canonesses of Konradsdorf, Hessen; the Christ Child is leaning away from his mother's hold and looking upwards towards Saint Elizabeth, who is snuggling up to him or giving him a kiss on the cheek while holding the infant Baptist in her lap **(Fig. 86)**.[359] The

[359] Although the altar is conventionally referred to as the Ortenberg Altar due to having been located in the parish church of Ortenberg before being moved to the Hessisches Landesmusem in Darmstadt in 1866, it is very likely that it was originally made to be the high altar for the

diversion of Christ's attention to his mother's cousin not only elevates her significance amongst the almost exclusively female crowd but also highlights the importance of dynamic, emotional relationships between family members. The altar combines the theme of Holy Kinship with *virgo intre virgines,* Christ's maternal relatives accompanied by Saints Agnes, Barbara, and Dorothy. Saint Barbara is depicted kneeling below Elizabeth, her chalice and wafer positioned on a vertical axis with the nude infant John, perhaps suggesting his future role in identifying Christ as the sacrificial lamb and prefiguring his path of suffering, constituting a Eucharistic reference similar to the ones discussed in the preceding chapter.

Numerous representations of kinship scenes were also produced by the cloistered women themselves, including a Middle Rhenish antependium which includes a self-portrait of a Dominican nun **(Fig. 87)**, in which the central figures of the biblical narrative are depicted on visually equal terms with a multitude of their lesser-known apocryphal relations, once again emphasising communality over hierarchy.[360] An unusual feature of this antependium is the portrayal of John the Baptist as an adult who appears not to interact with the kinship group. Such representation is uncommon for scenes of the Holy Kinship, which usually depict the saint as an infant, positioned centrally alongside the Christ Child. This depiction of an adult John is, however, consistent with representations of him as a patron saint of monastic houses. As discussed in the preceding chapter, the Dominican convent at Unterlinden was dedicated to John the Baptist, and the patron saint pictured as an adult and holding the Lamb medallion had been depicted in other objects produced within the convent. By stressing the

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convent of Konradsdorf, which had been rebuilt after a fire in 1417. While the subject of Holy Kinship is not strictly a monastic one, altarpieces employing it as a central motif are usually found in churches with strong ties to brotherhoods, guilds, and other proponents of the cult of Saint Anne, which is not the case with Ortenberg. Moreover, those altarpieces usually depict husbands of the holy women, rather than the holy mothers on their own, further suggesting that the subject matter of *virgo entre virgines* conflated with the Holy Kinship was not the best suited for a parish church. The only man represented in the Ortenberger Altar is St Servatius, a cousin of the Virgin and patron saint of viticulture, which was widely practiced in the Ortenberg area. Scholarship has noted that the gothic *mensa* surviving in the Ortenberg parish church would have simply been too big for the relatively small altar, the altar itself being too petite for the choir of the church. Wolfgang Beeh, "Mittelalterliche Abbilder als Legitimationsnachweis. Die Tafel mit der Anbetung der Könige in Lenzburg und der Ortenberger Altar," *Kritische Berichte* 4, no. 4 (1976): 10.

[360] From left to right, the family members depicted include: John the Baptist; Mary of Jacob with James the Just; Alpheus with Simon the Apostle; Mary of Cleophas with Thaddaeus (Jude the Apostle) and James the Lesser; Saint Anne, the Virgin Mary with Christ Child and Joseph; Mary Salome and Zebedee with James the Great and John the Apostle.

'horizontal' structure of the extended family, rather than the 'vertical' emphasis on agnate ancestry apparent in the Tree of Jesse, representations of the Holy Kinship thus put at their forefront the themes of domesticity, communality, and mutual support. These themes found particular resonance with the late medieval female monastic communities, whose own social structures and daily lives closely mirrored those of the female relatives of Christ through their enactment of duties of care, both towards physical care for the kin group of the convent and spiritual care in prayer and devotion.[361]

5.1.1 Conventual domesticity and motherhood

Building on the tradition of the earlier *Frauenstifte* – foundations of canonesses where aristocratic women lived without binding vows or enforced enclosure - later medieval monastic communities remained composed chiefly of noblewomen and patricians, many of whom did not fully abandon their familial ties upon entering the convent. Surviving correspondence confirms that convent women were engaged in elaborate social networks, exchanging advice and gifts with other cloistered women as well as laypeople, including family members. The legally prescribed enclosure appears to have done little to prevent laywomen from breaching the boundaries of the convent, and the nuns from venturing into the outside world.[362] Numerous pilgrimage badges discovered beneath the floorboards of the nuns' choir at Wienhausen suggest that the community would have received frequent visitors wishing to venerate the convent's relic of Holy Blood, apparently gaining access to some of the most interior spaces of the monastic enclosure.[363] Nuns crossing the physical boundary of the nunnery walls would not have been received as transgressive outsiders.

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[361] Ton Brandenbarg, "Saint Anne: A Holy Grandmother and Her Children," 41.

[362] Strict claustration of Catholic nuns of all religious orders was prescribed in the papal decretal *Periculoso,* issued by Pope Boniface VIII in 1298, later incorporated into *Liber Sextus* of the *Corpus Juris Canonici* – the collection of canon law of the Catholic church. The goal of the decretal was to formalize the largely unstandardized female monastic life by differentiating between enclosed, professed nuns and unregulated religious women such as the Beguines. Although *Periculoso* was first confirmed in 1309 by Pope Clement V and continued to be upheld throughout the 16th century by papal bulls intended to reinforce its basic principles, in practice the severity of its enforcement varied greatly across Europe, in part due to the fact that strict enclosure undermined the economic foundations of many monastic houses, and in turn, their surrounding communities. See Salih, *Versions of Virginity,* 138; Elizabeth Makowski, "Monasticism, Women's: Papal Policy," in Margaret Schaus, ed. *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 587-89.

[363] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 16.

On the contrary, they were fully integrated into the social fabric of their surrounding communities, connected to them by local politics, educational and advisory roles, and most prominently, patterns of exchange along family ties, both in form the sharing of news, prayers, and advice, and extensive gift-giving.[364] Ties to the secular world were commemorated and celebrated in convent-made or commissioned objects, which often featured the heraldic shields of local noble families. The heraldry not only denoted both the genealogy of the nuns of the convent and the patrons of the artworks, but also functioned as a marker of social status and a means of constructing institutional memory in relation to the community's noble ancestors.[365]

Heraldic themes can be frequently found in those objects which would have found their way into the nunneries as gifts for novices from their families, such as a *jésuseau* produced in Liège in the early fifteenth century and owned by the Cistercian convent of Marche-les-Dames near Namur. The miniature crib features heraldic pendants emblazoned with coats of arms hanging between the bells on the side rails of the crib, referencing secular belonging and temporalizing the crib as evidence of the genealogy of a particular nun **(Fig. 88)**.[366] Alongside heraldry, other examples of infant Christ cribs include a variety of more subtle references to family structure. The coverlet of a South Netherlandish *jésuseau* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 1974.121a–d) is embroidered with a representation of the family tree of Christ, and the headboard of a cradle made in late sixteenth-century Brabant (Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 50.239) includes a relief sculpture of Saint Martin, who likely would have been the patron saint of the family of the owner or donor of the crib.[367]

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[364] Garber, *Feminine Figurae*, 159.

[365] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 62, 67.

[366] Annette LeZotte, "Cradling Power: Female Devotions and the Early Netherlandish Jesueaux," in *Push Me, Pull You,* vol. 2: *Physical and Spatial Interaction in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art*, ed. Sarah Blick and Laura D. Gelfand (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 70-71.

[367] For in-depth discussion of infant Christ cribs, see LeZotte, "Cradling Power;" Peter Keller, *Die Wiege des Christuskindes: ein Haushaltsgerät in Kunst und Kult* (Worms: Wernersche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998); Frank Matthias Kammel, "Das Christkind in der Eigenen Stube: Private Bilder zum Weihnachtsfest im Spätmittelalter und Heute," in *Im Zeichen des Christkinds: Privates Bild und Frömmigkeit im Spätmittelalter: Ergebnisse der Ausstellung Spiegel der Seligkeit*, ed. Frank Matthias Kammel (Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, 2003), 37-61; Bynum, "Holy Beds: Gender and Encounter," 59-96.

Heraldry and secular donor portraits feature prominently in two of the manuscripts discussed extensively in this thesis – the Wonnental and Katharinental Graduals – in which nuns and laypeople are frequently depicted alongside each other and are often identified by heraldic shields. In a depiction of supplicants before an image of the Nativity from the Cistercian Wonnetal Gradual, a heraldic shield is suspended between the figures of a kneeling nun and laywoman, suggesting common ancestry **(Fig. 89).** Although monastic dress varied greatly between houses and papal legislation regarding nuns' habits was not always upheld, the sartorial distinction between a noble laywoman and a novice or perhaps a lay sister is clear.[368] While no official rules dictating the dress of a novice in female monastic communities in medieval Germany survive, the two fundamental requirements seem to have been the renunciation of lay dress and at least partial shearing of hair, which the nun would then be allowed to grow out again when she received a full veil. Novices were also frequently distinguished by their white, as opposed to black veil. While there is a similar lack of information regarding the dress of lay sisters, unprofessed sisters were often members of lower gentry or peasant classes, as opposed to the noble-born nuns, and their social and financial status would not allow them to own the coloured gowns and elaborate headdresses pictured in the gradual.[369] By

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[368] The formalization of women's monastic dress began at the Synod of Rouen (1214) which declared that anything decided under papal authority about the clothing of monks was also valid for nuns. Shortly thereafter, legislation regarding specifically women's monastic dress was approved at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, when it was decided that a habit should be of a length neither noticeably short nor long (it should cover the feet), and coloured fabrics and jewellery decorated with precious stones were forbidden. These provisions were made even more concrete by later episcopal synods: the Synod of Trier (1273) proclaimed that abbesses and nuns were forbidden to wear mantles or surcoats made of black or brown brunat (woollen fabric) or expensive furs with colourful workings, and habits should not have narrow, form-revealing, or sewed-on sleeves. Eva Schlotheuber, "Best Clothes and Everyday Attire of Late Medieval Nuns," in *Fashion and Clothing in Late Medieval Europe,* ed. Rainer Christoph Schwinges, Regula Schorta and Klaus Oschema (Riggisberg: Abegg-Stiftung; Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 2010), 141.

[369] The practice of admitting lay sisters and brothers from lower social classes into monastic communities became prevalent amongst the Cistercians from the 12th century onwards. The introduction of lay brethren oftentimes went alongside acquisition of land in villages where those peasant laborers were born, which allowed for better integration of the monastic order into the community and avoided the problem of having to lease the land to dependent peasants. Despite being separate from a monastic community, *conversae* and *conversi* were understood to be a formal part of it. Moreover, while the lay brothers' and sisters' main responsibilities involved physical labour, documents such as the Cistercian *Usus conversorum* (1120) demonstrate that *conversi* were understood to be spiritual members of a monastic community, rather than just glorified serfs. The virtue of humility of lay brethren was particularly highlighted, both in prescriptive texts and in collections of edifying exempla used for instruction and preaching. Although numbers of lay brothers and sisters within monastic communities declined towards the 14th and 15th centuries due to increasing papal regulation of monastic life, as well as population decline caused by wars and the Black Death, *conversae* and *conversi* nevertheless remained

portraying the laywoman dressed in a two-tone gown, with her long hair clearly visible through a sheer veil and lacking a wimple, the Wonnetal Gradual makes a clear distinction between the two paths available to devout women. However, the depiction of both figures as identical in scale and positioned next to each other, with equal access to the Nativity scene before which they are praying, suggests the equal value ascribed to the devotions of both women, drawing parallels between secular and monastic devotion, and uniting the women through their shared ancestry.

Heraldic elements and portraits of patron saints form an integral part of devotional images produced in fifteenth-century South Bohemia, distinguished by their richly populated frames. The Švamberk Visitation **(Fig. 90)** depicts a kneeling donor with a heraldic shield of the Švamberk family placed within the Visitation scene featuring the occupied womb, implying that the theme of ancestry informed the viewer's engagement with the image, both in terms of the genealogy of Christ and their own family history. While the presence of the Evangelists and the Holy Virgins (Saints Catherine of Alexandria, Barbara, Dorothea, and Margaret of Antioch) is a common feature of Marian imagery featuring similarly decorated frames, the depiction of a Franciscan nun in the bottom of the frame suggests further personal references. Although the provenance of the image beyond the Švamberk family is unknown, the nun could be tentatively identified as Saint Clare of Assisi, as a nearly identical figure depicted in full length appears alongside Saint Francis in the frame of the Madonna of Krumlov **(Fig. 91),** produced in the same area and period for the double monastery of the Poor Clares and the Friars Minor in Český Krumlov. The presence of Saint Clare in the Švamberk Visitation potentially links the panel to the same monastic foundation, in particular considering that the monastery was founded by the Rožmberk family, to which the Švamberks often married – to the extent that according to a 1484 treaty concerning mutual inheritance, if the Rožmberk lineage were to die out due to childlessness, their major possessions

an integral part of monastic communities across all orders. Constance H. Berman, "*Conversae* and *Conversi*," in Margaret Schaus, ed. *Women and Gender in Medieval Europe: An Encyclopedia* (New York; London: Routledge, 2006), 169-70; Megan Cassidy-Welch, "Lay Brothers and Sisters in the High and Late Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West,* ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1027-38.

were to be given to the Švamberks.[370] The similarity in the date and place of production of the Švamberk Visitation and the Krumlov Madonna, the intimate connection between the patron families, and the depiction of Saint Clare in the frames of both paintings suggest that the Švamberk Visitation would have been owned by the Poor Clares, situating the monastic family legacy denoted by the kneeling donor within the interpretative framework of the image **(Fig. 90).**

The positioning of the donor figure towards the centre of the set of concentric frames, straddling the border between the frame of the image and the Visitation scene itself attests to the significance of familial relations within the monastic community for engagement with the themes of holy motherhood. While medieval depictions of the Visitation in general can portray the scene as taking place within a landscape outside the city of Judah **(Fig. 72),** outside of Elizabeth's house **(Fig. 82)**, or as set against a plain, decorative pictorial surface **(Fig. 47, 52)** Bohemian painting in particular increasingly brought the Visitation into a domestic interior, further reaffirming the familial significance of this subject. Domestic settings appear in the background of a range of Bohemian Visitation panels, including a panel by the Master of the Carrying of the Cross from Vyšší Brod **(Fig. 83),** a Visitation panel from the St James Altar from the workshop of the Master of the Rajhrad Altarpiece (National Gallery, Prague) and an anonymous panel produced in Kuklov (Jihoceské Muzeum, České Budějovice, N.J.43). All three include depictions of the occupied womb, clearly connecting the focus on miraculous pregnancy with the increasingly prominent readings of biblical episodes in terms of the domestic and familial lives of holy women.

In the Švamberk Visitation **(Fig. 90),** Saints Dorothea and Catherine are depicted in the same scale and within the same domestic space as the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth, bearing resemblance to Holy Kinship scenes incorporating the theme of *Virgo intre virgines* **(Fig. 86).** A placement of a scene of Visitation featuring the occupied womb in the company of female saints can also be observed in an altarpiece from the Augustinian house of Stift Inzigkofen **(Fig. 84)**. While the large-scale altar from the nuns' choir in the convent church had been broken up into fourteen panels following the dissolution of the community

[370] Martin Jakab, "The Švamberks," in *Aristocratic Families in the Český Krumlov Region, Český Krumlov Encyclopedia*, n.d. [Accessed March 2021]. http://www.encyklopedie.ckrumlov.cz/docs/en/region_histor_slerod.xml.

in 1803, it is known to have included scenes from the Life of Mary, as well as depictions of pairs of saints, including women known for their motherhood. These include panels of Saint Monica (mother of Augustine of Hippo) with her daughters Saint Perpetua of Hippo and Saint Basilica of Thagaste accompanied by the abbess Magdalena Weinschenk (Würth Collection, Schwäbisch Hall, 6523), and Mary Salome and Mary of Cleophas with their children (Würth Collection, Schwäbisch Hall, 6531), which would have flanked the Marian scenes from the wings of the altar, adding elements of Holy Kinship and *sacra conversazione* to the cycle of Life of Mary. Through its employment of heraldry, populated frame, domestic space, and additional female figures, the Švamberk Visitation thus situates Mary and Elizabeth, their infant children, and the donor of the image within a community of women, facilitating contemplation of the image with a clear focus on the themes of motherhood and community, both in religious and secular terms. Such reading is further supported by the unique nature of the Krumlov convent; in 1375, six years after the founding of the Clarissian community, a foundation of beguines was added to the nunnery. However, rather than reside in a separate architectural complex, the pious laywomen were housed in buildings directly incorporated into the convent, resulting in a unique environment where monastic piety intersected with devotional practices and lay spirituality of unenclosed women.[371]

In the German-speaking realm, a depiction of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb located within a domestic interior can be found in a panel from an altarpiece of the Life of Mary produced in Augsburg c. 1410-30 **(Fig. 92)** and tentatively linked to the Cistercian nunnery of Kloster Oberschönenfeld in Gessertshausen, Bavaria.[372] In this panel, the two women are positioned against

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[371] The quasi-monastic female community in Český Krumlov was founded by Anne of Rožmberk in the immediate proximity of the double monastery. Anne bequeathed her private house to a community of laywomen from all social strata for the purposes of lodging and operating a school, which was to be supervised by the neighbouring Friars Minor. Anne's house was likely fully incorporated into the double monastery complex and rebuilt after 1400 when the third cloister was erected there. It is clear from the ground plan of the Český Krumlov monastic complex that it was planned as a triple monastery from its inception. Daniela Rywiková, "Art and Devotion in the Female Religious Communities of Late Medieval Český Krumlov," in *Medieval and Early Modern Art in Central Europe,* ed. Waldemar Deluga and Daniela Rywiková (Ostrava: Ostravská Univerzita, 2019), 68.

[372] The panel, formerly dated to 1510, is currently held in the museum of the Benedictine abbey Ottobeuren. The panel resided at the castle of Nassenfels near Eichstätt until 1808, but no further information on its original location, commissioning or use is known. Urner-Astholz, "Die beiden ungeborenen Kinder," 35.

a background of a bed decorated with two pillows and a canopy, which were common features of sleeping spaces both in nunneries and gentry homes.[373] A similar set of furnishings was depicted in a Visitation miniature from an early fifteenth-century Bohemian vesperal (Stadtbibliothek, Zittaau, Ms. A. VI, fol. 124v), likely produced for the convent of the Augustinian Canons in Prague, which also features a representation of the occupied womb. In her study of convent interiors, Marilyn Oliva observed that furnishings in the non-religious spaces of the convent, including dormitories, dining halls, parlours, chapter rooms and inner halls, differed little from the domestic interiors occupied by the gentry class.[374] Much like the enclosed spaces of the convent, lay domestic interiors were largely gender-segregated and allowed women limited freedom of movement, suggesting further parallels between day-to-day conventual and secular life. Domestic interiors depicted in Visitation scenes would have thus played a multivalent role, allowing the setting to be read either as a secular home or a monastic interior, its meaning shifting in the process of transmission from donor to convent yet remaining fixed in its insistence on the centrality of family and household.

Reading of religious images through the lens of communality and domesticity would have been facilitated through the very structure of a medieval convent, which was organized around familial relationships. Women could join monastic communities as young as five years old, or as late as in their sixties. The average lifespan of an abbess in the Middle Ages, estimated at 56.4 years, exceeded by almost thirty years that of a woman outside the convent, who lived on average only 27.7 years.[375] The Dominican Sister-Books mention sisters, such as Adelhait

[373] Nuns' bedding at the Dominican convent Klingental in Basel consisted of embroidered pillows, woven bed covers, and coverlets of fur or serge. In wealthier houses the beds could have been canopied with linen, buckram, or embroidered hangings. Most sleeping quarters were communal, and would have been subdivided with woven hangings, which would have been used both for privacy and warmth. Renée Weis-Müller, *Die Reform des Klosters Klingental und ihr Personenkreis* (Basel; Stuttgart: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1956), 31-32.

[374] Marilyn Oliva, "Nuns at Home: The Domesticity of Sacred Space," in *Medieval Domesticity. Home, Housing, and Household in Medieval England*, ed. Maryanne Kowaleski and P. J. P. Goldberg (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 150-52.

[375] The life expectancy of laywomen appears to be related to the average age at the time of their first marriage, which in late medieval Germany and England was 18 years old. Excavations of English cemeteries have found that women who died while pregnant were at least 20 years old, suggesting that marriage was not immediately followed by childbearing. While royals and upper nobility tended to marry and have children at a younger age, the lower nobility, gentry, and peasant women were under much less pressure to produce a dynastic heir and remaining unmarried and childless allowed them to contribute to household income. This perhaps explains

von Lindow and Elsbet von Cellinkon of Töss and Metzi van Waltherhoven of Adelhausen, who reached almost one hundred years of age, proving that a monastic community was a truly cross-generational one.[376] Throughout the medieval period, the natal family frequently became intertwined with the monastic family. It was not uncommon for groups of relatives – mothers, daughters, sisters, and aunts - to enter the same convent as nuns or lay monastics.[377] Unlike modern-day convents, which sometimes impose family quotas, medieval orders did not limit the number of members of one family allowed to enter a monastic community. In fact, it was believed that familial ties strengthened a convent, as kinship ties were understood to create strong loyalties within the cloister.[378]

Before the decrees of the Council of Trent restricting the nuns' interactions with the secular world were promulgated in 1564, convents offered shelter to abandoned wives, to women facing poverty and prostitution, and to chaste widows, whose place in their own families was often ambiguous. To married women, especially those educated in a convent school, the nunnery would have provided asylum during periods of marital conflict or a temporary retreat while their husbands undertook long journeys abroad.[379] Even the fifteenth-century reforms associated with the Observant movement, which attempted to prohibit the practice of women's monasteries educating outsiders, could not prevent nuns from interacting with laity. The Benedictine convent of Lüne for instance, ignored the prohibition and continued to offer education to young girls who did not intend to join the monastic community as late as in 1555, and a school operated at Maria Medingen from the mid-fourteenth to the fifteenth century,

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the accessibility of convent life to older women, and the longer lifespan of cloistered women who avoided the dangers of childbirth prior to and during their membership in the monastic community. Elke Disselbeck-Tewes, *Frauen in der Kirche. Das Leben der Frauen in den Mittelalterlichen Zisterzienserklöstern Fürstenberg, Grafental, und Scheldenhorst* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1989), 61–63; Fiona Shapland, Mary Lewis and Rebecca Watts, "The Lives and Deaths of Young Medieval Women: The Osteological Evidence," *Medieval Archaeology* 59, no. 1 (2015): 272-289.

[376] Elsbeth Stagel, *Das Leben des Schwestern zu Töß,* 85, 94; Anna von Munzingen, "Die Chronik der Anna von Munzingen. Nach der Ältesten Abchrift mit Einleitung und Beilagen," ed. Joseph König, *Freiburg Diözesan-Archiv* 13 (1880): 176.

[377] Anne Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles. Women Writing About Women and Reform in the Late Middle Ages* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 31.

[378] Johnson, *Equal in Monastic Profession,* 248-49.

[379] Weis-Müller, *Die Reform des Klosters Klingental,* 38.

when reformers threatened to excommunicate nuns providing schooling to anyone who would not be entering the convent.[380] For aging widows, the convents could have offered lifelong care. In exchange for bequeathing their money and property to the convent, lay pensioners at Klingental in Basel were provided with housing, firewood, food, and wine, and were guaranteed burial in the cloister cemetery and intercessory prayer after their deaths.[381] For a socially marginal woman in general, the nunnery could have provided an alternative family, offering a sense of continuity, community, and commitment to those displaced within their secular family relations.

The Dominican Sister-Books in particular stress the positive significance of difference and variety within the monastic community, moving away from the feminine good-evil binary of the Virgin Mary and her predecessor Eve which was emphasised in the majority of contemporary texts dealing with the notion of womanhood. Instead, the Sister-Books and other convent chronicles included a number of positive *exempla* accounting for a variety of life paths, all connected by the emphasis on monastic virtues of humility, obedience, and service to the community. Women whose *vitae* were viewed as models of ideal behaviour, carefully selected in order to shape and guide the community, include lay sisters and professed nuns, virgins and widows, matrons and children, all viewed as exemplary for their grace and virtues.[382] Even following the reforming efforts of the late fifteenth century, lay sisters remained prominent members of the monastic houses. For instance, a 1471 post-internal reform charter from Maria Medingen records seventy-one choir nuns, fourteen novices, and twelve lay sisters as the community's members.[383] While references to lay brothers can sometimes be found in convent writing, the vast majority of texts firmly emphasises sororal assistance by erasing male figures of authority, such as confessors, advisors, or official visitors, from their narratives. Abbesses are included on an equal basis with other nuns, and some care is taken to bring the *conversae*, the elderly, and the feeble-minded into the foreground, with the

[380] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions*, 7.

[381] Rudolf Wackernagel, *Geschichte der Stadt Basel,* vol. 2 (Basel: Helbing and Lichtenhahn, 1916), 692-93.

[382] Garber, *Feminine Figurae,* 63, 69.

[383] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions*, 6-7.

severe austerities experienced by individuals celebrated according to a common ethos.

Alexandra Barratt has noted that a noblewoman who had retired to the convent may have been described within a series of twenty-two stories of exemplary deaths and glorifications which open Book 5 of *The Herald of Divine Love* – a visionary account produced by the Cistercian mystic Gertrude of Helfta. The volume recounts the passing away of Helfta's abbess Gertrud and the visionary Mechthild of Hackeborn, alongside the accounts of the deaths of novices and nuns of all ages, girls who had not taken their vows yet, and five lay brothers. Writing about "M.B," Gertrude notes that she is at fault because "she had sometimes taken pleasure in outward things, such as that her bed was draped with embroidered fabrics with designs in gold […]." In response to this passage, Barratt observes that such possessions could have been retained from the woman's life outside convent walls, proving her status as a wealthy pensioner, who despite retaining connections to the secular world was still included in the most prominent textual account produced within the convent.[384]

Mimicking a kin group, a convent took responsibility for its members from their entry into the community, through their old age, and even beyond the grave, offering prayers for the dead and even bringing the departed nuns back to the convent in visions. The very nature of everyday life within the monastic community thus appears to support Ambrose's exegesis of the Visitation discussed in Chapter 2. In his exegesis of the Gospel of Luke, Ambrose sees the Visitation as a model for pious women and the nature of their daily interactions. His insistence on the importance of respect and humility in the context of inter-generational relations, as well as the significance of love and duty that Mary felt towards her elderly cousin, allows for this guidance and its daily enactment through convent life to be understood as an interpretive strategy for representations of the Visitation:

> "My sisters, you have learnt Mary's purity and refinement. Learn, too, her humility. She comes as a cousin to her cousin, as a younger woman to an elder. Not only does she come, but she is the first to

[384] Gertrude of Helfta, "Chapter 8: The Soul of M., who was Helped by the Prayers of Her Friends" in *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness,* Book V, 65; Alexandra Barratt, "Introduction," in *The Herald of God's Loving-Kindness,* Book V, xvi.

> address a greeting. It is highly becoming that the more chaste a virgin is, the more humble she should be. She should show respect for her elders. If she professes chastity, then she should be a model of humility."[385]

While (auto) biographical accounts produced by the nuns themselves provide ample evidence for active participation of women of various age groups in both the social life and devotional practices of a monastic community, they contain little detail regarding the status of individual women as actual mothers. However, that does not mean that professed nuns can be understood as having lived in complete separation from the reality of the motherly experience. Indeed, the very structure of a monastic community proves that the nuns had significant experience of what John Carmi Parsons and Bonnie Wheeler refer to as "mothering." Unlike motherhood, which is essentially female and feminine, rooted in the female body through birth and breastfeeding, mothering is a culturally constructed activity. The act of participating in cultural practices considered maternal is what designates one as a "motherer," regardless of their gender and therefore biological capacity to bear children.[386]

References to monastic "mothers" and "children" appear already in the seventh-century *Regula cuiusdam ad virgines*, which mandates older and younger nuns to share a dormitory, so that the younger women can be "watched with special care lest through negligence of maternal solicitude (*maternae sollicitudinis*) adjacent members might incur harm."[387] Practices of mothering had endured in the monastic realm over the course of centuries, and are recorded in many of the monastic chronicles produced by the nuns themselves. Fifteenth-century records from the Dominican convent of Klingental describe how, upon entering the convent for schooling between the ages of five and ten, each child was placed in the care of a "convent mother," with whom she would share a cell. If the girl chose to remain in the cloister, she would continue to live alongside her

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385 Ambrose of Milan, *Commentary on the Gospel According to Luke,* 34.

386 Parsons and Wheeler, *Medieval Mothering,* x - xii.

387 "[*T]amen solerti custodia specialiter intuendum, ne per negligentiam maternae sollicitudinis subjecta membra damna capiant imbecillitatis*;" *Regula cuiusdam patris ad virgines*, Patrologia Latina 88, col. 1065, cited and translated in Susan Wade, "Spiritual Motherhood and Monastic *Familia*: Defining Boundaries between Blood Kin and Monastic Familia in the Early to Central Middle Ages" in *Imagining the Self, Constructing the Past: Selected Proceedings from the 36th Annual Medieval and Renaissance Forum,* ed. Robert G. Sullivan and Meriem Pagès (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016), 18.

"mother" and would care for her when she became old and feeble, effectively reversing the mothering relationship. At her death, the mother would usually bequeath her cell and her property to her daughter in a manner resembling a lay family inheritance.[388]

Such relationships between conventual mothers and daughters were depicted in manuscripts produced in nunnery scriptoria, as in an image of a theological conversation from the Dominican convent of Maria Medingen **(Fig. 93)** and in an illustration of a music lesson from the Benedictine nunnery of Ebstorf **(Fig. 94)**, in which the image of the nun and her pupil appears to be modelled on the iconography of Saint Anne teaching her daughter, the Virgin Mary, to read.[389] The Maria Medingen manuscript shifts the conventional dynamic of the "spiritual daughter" being taught by a "spiritual father" – usually a confessor – by replacing the male figure of authority with a female one. In the accompanying didactical text, the older nun instructs her younger companion on seventeen theological problems, not only demonstrating the complexity of monastic education during a period associated with a decline in standards of learning, but most importantly, reaffirming the significance of relationships of learning and guidance between the members of cross-generational monastic communities.[390]

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[388] Weis-Müller, *Die Reform des Klosters Klingental,* 20-21.

[389] Despite the lack of textual sources justifying such depictions, a significant number of representations of the apocryphal Saint Anne produced in the medieval period emphasise her role as a teacher. Regardless of whether she is depicted only with Mary, or both with Mary and the Christ Child (Fig. 19), Anne is usually seen carrying a book, reading to her family, or showing them the contents of the book. The miniature in the Maria Medingen manuscript could have been modelled on a representation which emphasizes the act of teaching even further by not including the infant Christ in the scene and depicting Anne and Mary holding multiple books, Anne pointing towards pages in a gesture of instruction, such as for instance the Master of Saint Benedict – *The Education of the Virgin.* Hildesheim, c. 1510 (Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1930-1-163a). For an in-depth discussion of the history and significance of this iconographic motif, see Pamela Sheingorn, ""The Wise Mother:" The Image of St Anne Teaching the Virgin Mary," in *Gendering the Master Narrative: Women and Power in the Middle Ages*, ed. Mary C. Erler and Maryanne Kowaleski (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 107; Michael Clanchy, *Looking Back from the Invention of Printing: Mothers and the Teaching of Reading in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), 176-85.

[390] Although recent scholarship has sought to challenge the idea of monastic learning becoming stagnant and obsolete from the 12th century onwards, the paradigm of decline of organized religious life, including its intellectual and spiritual aspects, continues to inform general surveys of medieval monasticism and monographs on individual religious orders. Over the course of decades significant historiographies of medieval monasticism have chosen to employ the 13th century as the endpoint to their narrative, implying that the later period is not worthy of study alongside the 'high' era of monasticism (see for instance Bruce L. Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Medieval Society: Nunneries in France and England, 890–1215* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997); and Christopher Brooke, *The Age of the Cloister: The Story of Monastic Life in the Middle Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003)). The idea of intellectual

The Ebstorf manuscript, which contains texts of hymns, musical instructions, and grammar lessons, similarly stresses the importance of women learning from other women. The folio (Kloster Ebstorf HS V 3, fol. 201r) opposite the depiction of the Guidonian hand (a mnemonic device used in teaching of singing) supplements lines of musical notation with depictions of a landscape populated with abundant greenery, through which two nuns are strolling alongside their two students. Katharina Ulrike Mersch has noted that the flora and fauna of the image visually connect the image to representations of the Marian *hortus conclusus*, implying the safety, self-sufficiency, and mutual reliance of the women within conventual enclosure.[391] Both manuscripts thus provide evidence for the centrality of those relationships within monastic communities, as they are clearly seen as valuable enough to be afforded a place within the artistic production of the nuns themselves.

Regardless of their status as mothers or motherers, many cloistered women, especially in the later medieval period, would not have been unfamiliar with the processes of pregnancy and childbirth.[392] Some of them may have entered

decline of monastic houses is based in three principal notions: the rise of universities and the scholastic tradition apart from monastic learning; the decrease in involvement of both men's and women's houses in the schooling of children and adolescents; and the resistance to post-Lateran Council reform as evidential of spiritual and intellectual stagnation. More recent studies, however, have demonstrated these assumptions to be largely overstated and based in privileged normative evidence, such as visitation records, legal statutes, and reform treatises, signalling the need for reassessment of many of the facets of monastic learning and education in the late Middle Ages. Late medieval visitation records are a problematic source, as they were simply designed to record and report the shortcomings and misbehaviours encountered in monastic communities – they were not meant to offer praise of the positive aspects of the cloistered life. The picture of medieval monasticism emerging from visitation records, which is usually far removed from the austere asceticism and ideals offered by the monastic rules is thus extremely biased, and the negative nature of these sources has led to an emphasis on the failings of late medieval monks and nuns that is absent from the studies on earlier periods as they offer no comparable sources. Christian D. Knudsen, "Daily Life in Late Medieval Monasteries," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West,* ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1110-12. For an overview of historiography of late medieval monasticism and origins of the decline narrative, see Elisabeth Lusset and Bert Roest, "Late Medieval Monasticism: Historiography and Prospects," in ibid., 923-40; and Bert Roest, "A Crisis of Late Medieval Monasticism?," in ibid., 1171-90.

[391] Katharina Ulrike Mersch, *Soziale Dimensionen visueller Kommunikation in hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Frauenkommunitäten: Stifte, Chorfrauenstifte und Klöster im Vergleich* (Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2012), 326.

[392] While research on medical knowledge within late medieval nunneries remains extremely limited, it appears unlikely that cloistered women would have been involved in any medical care involving childbirth. While both the Benedictine and Augustinian Rules contain instructions on tending to the sick, and mendicant orders in particular played an active role in medical matters of their surrounding lay society through dispensing alms and founding hospitals and *leprosaria,* the strict enforcement of monastic enclosure following the issuing of the *Periculoso* (1298) prevented nuns from carrying out tasks such as administration of leprosy houses and hospitals for the sick poor, effectively separating them from the medical realm. Sister-Books and

convents as chaste widows, after having had children, reclaiming what Newman calls their "manqué virginity," and others, while they were still young girls living within secular households, would have witnessed their female relatives giving birth.[393] Monastically-owned and produced images of the occupied womb were thus potentially activated and animated by those memories. Elina Gertsman has argued that the cultural memory of childbirth would have been present even in female communities defined by lack thereof. Employing the category of "post-memory" – a term coined by Marianne Hirsh in her discussion of transgenerational transmission of trauma and knowledge amongst Holocaust victims - Gertsman suggests that the knowledge of birth is fundamental to all of humanity, internalised even by those who have not witnessed or experienced it first-hand. Hirsch identifies familial spaces as the locus of this cross-generational transmission.[394] For cloistered women, the conventual setting functioned as such familial space, inhabited by generations of women united in a "family of choice" and encouraged to act like "holy housewives," focusing their devotional practices on nurture and care and thus enacting traditional domestic roles within a non-secular environment.

5.1.2 Textile work, *imitatio Mariae* and spiritual pregnancy

Creation and use of textiles constituted one of the possible vehicles of translating such practices of secular domestic piety into the monastic setting, reflecting the previously discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 textile metaphors in the practices of daily labour and textile economies. A detail from a border of a fifteenth-century Passion tapestry produced at the Dominican convent Heilig Grab in Bamberg, depicts two nuns at a loom, assisting each other with their work **(Fig. 95 & 96)**. The miniscule figures of the nuns are located towards the

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chronicles from late medieval German nunneries do however emphasise the inclusion of elderly and disabled women in monastic communities, suggesting that a degree of medical knowledge necessary for tending to these individuals would have been present within women's houses. However, very few medical texts survive from monastic communities, making it difficult to establish how medicine was practiced by members of the monastic houses. Emma Brenner, "The Medical Role of Monasteries in the Latin West, c. 1050–1300," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Monasticism in the Latin West,* ed. Alison I. Beach and Isabelle Cochelin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 865-81.

[393] Barbara Newman, *From Virile Woman to WomanChrist. Studies in Medieval Religion and Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 84–69.

[394] Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103-28; Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 97.

left in the lower border of the tapestry, camouflaged within the floral decoration. Unlike the Dominican nun in the scene of the Holy Kinship **(Fig. 87)**, who places herself as an active supplicant of the scene, the weaving figures appear not to have any direct correlation to the Passion scenes, as they are not looking towards or praying in front of the figures of the narrative, instead focusing on their work, hunched over the loom. The minute detail of the representation, which clearly depicts a floral tapestry starting to take shape and the colourful balls of thread in a basket at the nuns' feet, suggests the significance of (self-) acknowledgement of the cloistered women as makers of religious imagery, and the communal aspect of its production. The connection between textile labour, cross-generational relationships, and the pursuit of salvation can be found recorded in many of the medieval Sister-Books. The Sister-Book of the Augustinian convent of St Agnes in Emmerich relates how older, more experienced spinners would help the younger sisters with their tasks, which included meeting a daily quota of spun yarn. In addition, the account, written in Dutch, describes how one day a younger sister, tired of her work, came to an older sister, Beel te Mushoel, complaining that she would rather die than continue spinning. Beel replies that "with this spinning you shall gain heaven," directly demonstrating the religious aspect of daily domestic activities.[395]

Considering the prevalence of the textile metaphor within monastic discourse, the production of textiles could be understood to constitute a form of *imitatio Mariae*. The milestones of convent life, such as the *oblatio* **(Fig. 97)** – the veiling of a novice, depicted in a processional from the Cistercian house of Marienstern as the act of shearing of hair and taking of a white veil - could be allegorized to create the experience of continuous identification with the Virgin, beginning with her entrance into the Temple.[396] The daily labour of spinning and weaving would then enact Marian motherhood not only through the symbolism of Mary weaving the humanity of Christ, but also in more literal terms, through mimicking of the Virgin depicted as sewing or weaving in scenes from Infancy

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[395] Kloster St Agnes in Emmerich, "Schwesternbuch von Sankt Agnes," in *Schwesternbuch und Statuten des St Agnes-Konvents in Emmerich,* ed. Anne Bollmann and Nikolas Staubach (Emmerich: Emmericher Geschichtsverein, 1998), 246.

[396] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 68.

narratives **(Fig. 41)**.[397] The association with apocryphal accounts of Mary weaving the Temple veil situates the process of weaving as a possible trigger for the experience of spiritual pregnancy, while apocryphal narratives of Mary's life as a Temple virgin, which elaborate in considerable detail on the presence of other women of noble lineage who served as custodians of the Temple extend Mary's labour to a community of women.[398]

In the context of liturgical textiles of the fifteenth and pre-Reformation sixteenth centuries, the scene of the Visitation – with or without the *in utero* infants - appears almost exclusively within the cycles of the Life of Mary, further stressing the significance of the scene within the wider context of Marian devotion. Notable examples of textiles depicting a Visitation scene as a part of a cycle of the Life of the Virgin include an altar antependium of the Life of Mary including the Visitation featuring the occupied womb produced in the Dominican convent of Adelhausen (**Fig. 79 & 80);** a Swiss example from an unknown Dominican house discussed below **(Fig. 99)**; a six-scene Life of Mary antependium produced in Strasbourg (The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, 57.126); the two-part Halberstadt Marienteppich (Halberstadt Domschatz, Halberstadt, 523 & 524); as well as a textile fragment depicting the Visitation, cut to be used as a cope and presumably originating in a larger tapestry of the Life of the Virgin (The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, 46.45).

A Swiss antependium currently held in the Burrell Collection places a diminutive figure of a praying Dominican nun within between the scenes of Nativity and Visitation **(Fig. 98 & 99)**.[399] Unlike the Holy Kinship antependium **(Fig. 87)** which maintains the distance between the nun and the figures she is venerating by placing her to the side of the image in a sphere occupied by the adult John the

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[397] Sheingorn, ""The Wise Mother,"" 107.

[398] Adolf Vögtlin, ed. *Vita beate virginis Marie et Salvatoris rhytmica*, Bibliothek des litterarischen Vereins in Stuttgart (Tübingen: Litterarischer Verein in Stuttgart, 1888), 27, transcribed in Renate Kroos, *Niedersächsische Bildstickereien des Mittelalters* (Berlin: Deutsches Verlag für Kunstwissenschaft, 1970), 158.

[399] The catalogue of tapestries from the Burrell Collection refers to the nun pictured in this antependium, as well as similar representation in a Swiss tapestry of Life of Christ as "donor" and "patroness," who would have commissioned the tapestries for their religious houses. However, considering the extent of monastic textile production and its stylistic features discussed extensively by Mecham, it is likely that the tapestries would have been woven by the Dominican nuns themselves. Elizabeth A. H. Cleland and Lorraine Karafel, *Tapestries from the Burrell Collection* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, in association with Glasgow Museums, 2017), 94-97; Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 57-87.

Baptist, this tapestry positions the supplicant directly within the central scene of the Nativity. Rather than gaze at the Christ Child, the praying nun appears to engage in direct eye contact with the Virgin, whose kneeling pose she mirrors. The nun is given the power to speak within the representation, her speech scroll reading “Gloria tibi domine,” granting her additional agency as a witness to the scene. The geometric red background of the scene ensures that the diminutive figure of the supplicant is clearly visible within the crowded space of the image. The antependium, which despite its complex narrative and rich decoration appears to ensure the visibility of the direct connection between the nun and Mary, thus implies the importance of the Virgin to cloistered women manifested through their self-representations crafted through weaving.

Images such as a miniature from an antiphonary owned by the Dominican convent of Paradies at Soest **(Fig. 100)**, which depicts a nun as an assistant at the birth of John the Baptist demonstrate the ongoing desire for a very literal fulfilling of the maternal aspects of *imitatio Mariae,* and the inventive ways of performing the elements of Mary’s life which were physically inaccessible to the cloistered community, such as attending birth.[400] The image shows the Virgin being handed the new-born John the Baptist from his mother, Saint Elizabeth, while a nun warms the clothes of the infant over a fire. The nun depicted in the initial appears almost identical in size to the Virgin, apparently escaping the principle of hierarchical scaling applied to the diminutive nuns depicted in the tapestries discussed above. This might signify the increased desire for participation in the episode, as an active agent equal to the community of women conventionally depicted in scenes of holy births, rather than a passive, observing supplicant; perhaps reflecting or prescribing devotional practices in which women would imagine themselves as present during Infancy episodes.

[400] Even though the attendant is not wearing the full Dominican habit, she was identified as a nun by Susan Marti. Similar depictions of costume – a black veil with a wimple and a white tunic, lacking the black outer layer of the habit – can be found in other images clearly depicting Dominican nuns (e.g. Fig. 95 & 96 and 98 & 99). Moreover, in representations of nativities in general (e.g. Fig. 18, 19) the attendants and midwives usually wear a white headdress rather than a black monastic veil or wear no head coverings at all. This is particularly noticeable in a historiated initial from the Katharinental Gradual (Fig. 48) where the long-haired attendant at the birth of John the Baptist is clearly distinguished from Elizabeth and Mary, who both wear white veils partially covering their hair, and the Dominican nuns consistently pictured throughout the manuscript wearing black veils. Susan Marti, “Sisters in the Margins? Scribes and Illuminators in the Scriptorium of Paradies near Soest,” in *Leaves from Paradise: The Cult of John the Evangelist at the Dominican Convent of Paradies Bei Soest*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 5–54.

During the late medieval period, domestically modelled piety of cloistered women expanded well beyond the relatively abstract notions of nurture and care, which were easily adjusted to suit the social and devotional realities of the monastic sphere. Dominican convents in particular saw an elaboration of this sphere of religious practice into cultivated visionary experiences focused on mystical and dream pregnancies. Christina Ebner of Engelthal wrote in her revelations that she dreamed she was pregnant with the infant Christ:

> “[…] she dreamt that she was pregnant with our Lord […] And it was in sweetness without any discontent such that no sorrow and no sadness touched her, and after a while she dreamt how she would bear him without pain and received a super abundance of joy from the sight of him. When she had gone about for some time with this happiness she was no longer able to conceal it and took the child in her arms and carried it to the gathering of sisters in the refectory and said, "Rejoice with me: I can no longer conceal my joy from you; I have conceived Jesus and given birth to him”; And she showed them the child. And when she was feeling such great joy, she awoke.”[401]

Christina’s visionary account uses the Middle High German verb *enfahen* to mean "to conceive” or "to become pregnant.” As Rosemary Hale has noted, the same verb is used almost exclusively throughout visionary accounts to indicate the reception of the Eucharistic Host.[402] The verb *verwandeln* (“to change”), used to describe transubstantiation, is employed in Adelheid Langmann’s *Offenbarungen* to describe the Christ Child changing into the Host, once again linking visions of the infant to Eucharistic piety:

> “[…] during the *sequentia* she began to go into ecstasy and during the gospel our Lord came down from the altar in the form of a small child. Then he sprang up and walked back to all who were his friends and embraced them and when the priest began the Preface then he jumped up on the altar again and when the priest elevated the host the child changed (*verwandelt)* himself into the host and when the priest wanted to receive him the host was again a child and strained with his hands and feet.”[403]

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[401] Georg Wolfgang Karl Lochner, ed. *Leben und Geschichte der Christina Ebner, Klosterfrau zu Engelthal* (Nürnberg, 1872), cited and translated in Hale, “*Imitatio Mariae:* Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs,” 194.

[402] Hale, “*Imitatio Mariae.* Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs,” 195.

[403] “[…] unter der sequencien do kom sie ein teil von ir selber und unter dem ewangelio kom unser herre uf der alter in eins kindleins weis. do sprank ez herab und lief hintz allen den die sein freund woren und traut di, und do der prister den prefacionen anhuebe, do sprank ez wider uf den alter und do der prister daz oblat uf hueb, do verwandelt sich daz kindlein in daz oblat un

The verb *verwandeln* was also used by visionary authors to indicate interior changes resulting from the effects of their mystical experience, linguistically connecting the individual spiritual interior, including a spiritual conception and pregnancy, to the communal experience of celebration of mass. According to Bynum, during Mass medieval worshippers "more than occasionally saw the celebrant pregnant with the Host."[404] The association of consuming the Host and divine impregnation is clearly expressed in the *vita* of Dorothea of Montau, a fourteenth-century Pomeranian visionary, which provides an account of the anchoress becoming visibly gravid upon the reception of the Eucharist: "Sometimes [the Lord] enlarged her womb. Then she felt a lovely child moving about this way and that, kicking merrily as though it enjoyed great affection and delight."[405] During her pilgrimage to Bethlehem, Birgitta of Sweden, secular mystic and founder of the order of Birgittines, received a vision of the Virgin kneeling and giving birth.[406] Shortly thereafter, Birgitta experienced a mystical pregnancy herself. Her *Revelations* record how on Christmas Eve she felt an exultation followed by movement in her heart, "like that of a living child turning around and around."[407] Similarly, when Dorothea of Montau speaks of becoming "pregnant" after physically ingesting the consecrated wafer of the Host, which becomes located inside her body identically to the "living bread" growing in Mary's womb, she enacts both Eucharistic piety and *imitatio Mariae*.[408] In their

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do er in enpfahen wolt, do wart daz oblat zu eim kinde und strebet wider mit handen und mit füezzen." Adelheid Langmann, *Die Offenbarungen der Adelheide Langmann*, 18, cited and translated in Hale, "*Imitatio Mariae.* Motherhood Motifs in Devotional Memoirs," 195.

[404] Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* 278.

[405] Johannes of Marienwerder, *Life of Dorothea von Montau, a Fourteenth-Century Recluse*, trans. Ute Stargardt (Lewiston, NY: E. Mellen Press, 1997), 238.

[406] Medieval birthing positions are discussed by Caviness, who notes that although 12th century representations of the Throne of Wisdom depict Mary in a position resembling the customary birthing pose (seated upright on a stool with spread knees), they largely dehumanise her motherhood. The later medieval period sees a development of more natural-looking representational codes, including depictions of Mary resting after giving birth, culminating in realistic depictions of advanced pregnancy which she suggests "appealed most strongly to women." Caviness, *Visualizing Women in the Middle Ages*, 8.

[407] Birgitta of Sweden, "Chapter 88. Birgitta Feels a Physical Stirring of her Heart" in *The Revelations*, vol. 3: *Liber Caelestis*, Book VI, 155-56.

[408] More recent scholarship has seen a trend towards the interpretation of spiritual pregnancies of Dorothea and Birgitta as detached from any actual experience of motherhood or mothering. In her extensive study of the visionary and prophetic experience of Birgitta of Sweden, Sahlin suggests that there are no grounds to link Birgitta's spiritual pregnancy to her personal experience as a mother. Offering an alternative explanation for the phenomenon, Nieuwland argues that spiritual pregnancy offered a form of *imitatio Mariae*, in that women could bear inside their hearts and wombs the "divine message" of Christ. Nevertheless, it remains a historical fact that Dorothea gave birth to nine children, and Birgitta to eight, and therefore

connection of the Eucharistic and Marian devotion, the heart and the womb, the personal experience of motherhood and communal celebration of mass, spiritual pregnancies could have contributed to the interpretive framework of images of the occupied womb, many of which refer to such conflation quite explicitly, often placing the infants over their mothers' breasts rather than their abdomens **(Fig. 4, 74, 79)** in order to depict conception and nourishment within the heart.

The idea of spiritual pregnancy might have been particularly relevant in the German context due to the wide circulation of the *Speculum virginum,* an anonymous Rhenish dialogue written for nuns, which repeatedly encouraged virtuous virgins to give birth to Christ spiritually through imitation of his mother.[409] Although the model described in the *Speculum* is addressed strictly to virgins, the revelations of Birgitta of Sweden provide evidence that non-virginal women could have used it as inspiration for their devotion as well, since as noted by Claire Sahlin, the text was read to Birgitta by her confessor Peter Olafsson and it is explicitly referred to in her visionary account.[410] Kathleen Coyne Kelly has argued that in the medieval period, the idea of virginity "was not monologic […] but heteroglossic, conflicted and conditional;" and Felice Lifshitz observed that while medical texts gradually developed an understanding of female virginity in the modern sense – as a woman never having engaged in sexual intercourse, which can be proven by her intact hymen - from the beginning of the development of categorised litanies of the saints, non-virginal women such as Saints Felicitas and Symphorosa were included in the list of *virgines.*[411] In the eleventh century in particular, Mary Magdalene, who was understood to have been a former prostitute by the time her cult began to grow in popularity, appeared in litanies at the head of such lists. This tradition

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interpretation of their visionary experience through their lived experience of motherhood remains a valid, if currently unfavoured, interpretive strategy. Claire Lynn Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden and the Voice of Prophecy* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2001), 84; Jeannette Nieuwland, "Motherhood and Sanctity in the Life of Saint Birgitta of Sweden: An Insoluble Conflict?," in *Sanctity and Motherhood. Essays on Holy Mothers in the Middle Ages*, ed. Anneke Mulder-Bakker (New York: Garland Publishing, 1995), 320.

[409] The text was widely read until the Protestant Reformation and it survives in 26 Middle Low German and in 30 Latin manuscript copies, with the majority of the surviving manuscripts dating to the 15th century, despite the text being composed in the mid-12th century. Jutta Seyfarth, ed. *Speculum Virginum* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991), 32–42.

[410] Sahlin, *Birgitta of Sweden,* 89.

[411] Kathleen Coyne Kelly, *Performing Virginity and Testing Chastity in the Middle Ages* (London: Routledge, 2000), 141.

continued into the fifteenth century, when late medieval visionary matrons claimed that corporeal virginity could have been restored to those who had previously lost it.[412]

Salih has further argued that monastic virginity is largely performative and constituted with reference to symbolic practices such as the double enclosure of the veil and the convent walls. The monastic environment can be read as a symbolic practice of virginity in that it not only guards, but also figures and replicates the virgin body, with the profession ceremony itself defining the relationship between the individual and the community as linked by the *practice* of virginity.[413] The moment of entry into a monastic house begins the process of a two-fold restructuring of personal identity: firstly, through denial of one's previous identity, and secondly, through construction of a new, alternative sense of self rooted in the religious and moral ethos of membership in a community, the veil functioning as a symbol of commitment to enactment of virginity regardless of the woman's previous bodily experience.[414] As Julie Hotchin has argued, convent entrance ceremonies carried significance beyond the religious and the spiritual. The rituals of *oblatio,* investiture, and profession socialised girls and women into the monastic community, providing them with social, spiritual, and emotional maps for their future life as a nun through a form of "emotional management" through which nuns ensured the continuity of their community regardless of the physical status of its members.[415]

Texts of veiling ceremonies do not offer different forms of profession for maidens and widows, effectively erasing the difference between the two states and integrating them into an egalitarian community. The understanding of monastic virginity as a construct, rather than lived experience, thus allows that identification with imagery of the occupied womb would have been possible for women of all ages and walks of life, rather than just the professed virgins, who

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[412] Felice Lifshitz, "Priestly Men, Virginal Women: Litanies and Their Discontents," in *Gender and Christianity in Medieval Europe: New Perspectives*, ed. Lisa M. Bitel and Felice Lifshitz (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 89.

[413] Salih, *Version of Virginity,* 109-127.

[414] Roberta Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Religious Women* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 18.

[415] Julie Hotchin, "Emotions and the Ritual of a Nun's Coronation in Late Medieval Germany," in *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe, 1200-1920: Family, State and Church*, ed. Merridee L. Bailey and Katie Barclay (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 173.

would have employed it as a tool of their *imitatio Mariae*. As noted in the preceding chapter, the fact that in the majority of monastically owned images of the Visitation, the Virgin Mary and Saint Elizabeth appear almost equal in status and both are designated as recipients of miracles by their luminous wombs suggests the availability of the images, and thus their role as devotional models to various women who constituted the monastic community, negating the conventionally understood superiority of professed virgins over widows and *conversae*.

5.2 Between public and private

The social realities of convent life described above – of community, familial structure, and mutual assistance - contrast sharply with the often idiosyncratic, deeply personal spiritual and devotional experiences and practices, such as mystical visions or affective piety, resulting in the need for the ongoing negotiation between the nuns' individual and the communal selves. The physical spaces of monastic houses embodied this complicated relationship. While the architecture of male Dominican monasteries usually included individual cells for each friar, the sleeping quarters in many female convents were communal, with additional purpose-built dormitories only added when the population of the convent grew beyond what such spatial arrangements could accommodate. The dormitory was traditionally a large room, frequently located in the upper story of the east range of the cloister arcade, connected to the nuns' choir by stairs. While during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries many monastic houses began to provide individual rooms or cells for the nuns, this trend was far from universal, and numerous communities maintained a common sleeping room, whereas others broke up their dormitories into smaller units which mimicked the secular clustering of women's quarters in manor houses and castles. Neither male nor female Dominicans ever embraced the architectural hierarchy for sleeping rooms that placed the lay brothers or sisters in a specific place within the monastery.[416] In both rich and poor houses, dormitories and other non-religious spaces were often decorated with religious imagery in the form of wall hangings, coverlets, and wooden furniture, which effectively obscured the divide between

[416] Gertrud Jaron Lewis, *By Women, For Women, About Women: The Sister-Books of Fourteenth-Century Germany* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1996), 45; Lindgren, *Sensual Encounters,* 78.

the utilitarian function of sleeping quarters and the religious purpose of spaces such as churches, chapels, and choirs.[417] Although within the semi-private, semi-secular space nuns were allowed time for individual prayer (*orationes peculiares*) in order to collect their thoughts (*recolligere animum*) daily at Compline, this single allowance of private prayer was meant to take up "no longer than the time required to say seven Psalms with a litany."[418]

While Dominican statutes from the mid-thirteenth century stipulate that "nuns neither install pictures by their seats nor procure for themselves images or little chapels," the trappings of private devotion appear to have been an enduring issue throughout the late medieval period.[419] Private and semi-private para-liturgical practices were shunned by fifteenth-century reformers, as per the example of Johannes Busch of the order of Augustinian canons, whose *Liber de reformatione monasteriorum* (c. 1470-74) recounts how he and his fellow reformers removed "images of Christ, both sculpted and painted" from behind the altar (that is, from the nuns' choir) at the convent of Heilig Geist in Erfurt, where the nuns had placed them "for their own devotion." Rather than remove or destroy the objects, the reformers replaced them "in the space between their choir and church, so that all could see them equally, have devotion for them in common and not in private in the manner to which they were accustomed."[420] Busch's account stems from a period where small-scale devotional objects gained increasing prominence within the monastic setting, with nuns openly using objects such as Christ Child dolls and cradles, portable altars, and single sheet drawings to aid to their devotions. Such objects were amassed in choir stalls or attached to oratories in a manner resembling pious laywomen's "saints'

[417] Oliva, "Nuns at Home," 149-53.

[418] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 87

[419] Edme Ritzinger and Heribert C. Scheeben, "Beiträge zur Geschichte der Teutonia in der zweiten Hälfte des 13. Jahrhunderts," *Archiv der Deutschen Dominikaner* 3, no. 11-95 (1941): 26, cited and translated in Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Robert Suckale, "Between This World and the Next. The Art of Religious Women in the Middle Ages," in *Crown and Veil: Female Monasticism from the Fifth to the Fifteenth Centuries*, ed. Jeffrey F. Hamburger and Susan Marti (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 97.

[420] Johannes Busch, *Des Augustinerpropstes Iohannes Busch Chronicon Windeshemense und Liber de reformatione monasteriorum,* ed. Karl Grube (Halle: Otto Hendel, 1886), 556-57, cited and translated in Hamburger and Marti, eds. *Crown and Veil,* 97.

cabinets” - miniature altar-like settings, populated with figures of saints and attached to church pews.[421]

In addition to private objects invading communal settings, publicly displayed images often found themselves as tools private devotion. In assuming their dual significance for both private and communal devotions, objects present within convent walls offered a medium of preservation of communal memory as well as individual spiritual identity, bridging the gap between the apparently mutually exclusive spheres of experience. While interaction between cloistered women and devotional objects such as representations of the occupied womb has been largely understood as representative of private, affective piety as opposed to communal devotion; it is clear that the highly communal environment of convent buildings would make such individual practice a much rarer occurrence than often assumed. That is not to say that cloistered women would not have had any opportunities at all to exercise their devotions in private; rather, such private practices would have functioned in tandem with public, communal devotions, with the two spheres largely overlapping. Richard Kieckhefer has noted that the Dominican Sister-Books in particular make an effort to “accommodate, integrate, and absorb” the singularity of devotional experience of the sisters into a narrative of a community, with the individual visionary experience employed to emphasise that while an individual might perceive the physical presence of Christ, his spiritual presence in the lives of all members of the community is no less real.[422]

5.2.1 Infant Christ dolls and the occupied womb

As discussed in Chapter 4, Visions of the infant Christ, modelled on those experienced by Saint Clare of Assisi, occurred commonly in German-speaking convents of the fourteenth century. An altarpiece likely produced for the convent of Poor Clares in Nuremberg depicts the coronation of Saint Clare with the saint praying in front of an altar on which the infant Christ appears in a Host

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[421] Corine Schleif, “St Hedwig’s Personal Ivory Madonna: Women’s Agency and the Power of Possessing Portable Figures,” in *The Four Modes of Seeing. Approaches to Medieval Imagery in Honor of Madeline Harrison Caviness*, ed. Evelyn Staudinger Lane, Elizabeth Carson Pastan, and Ellen M. Shortell (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009), 388-89.

[422] Kieckhefer, “Ihesus ist unser!*,”* 168, 192.

wafer emerging from an open pyx **(Fig. 101).**[423] The infant appears to be striding, arms outstretched towards Clare; his emergence from a ciborium, dynamic pose, and the intention of touching the nun clearly corresponding to the accounts of visions recorded by German mystics. Although encounters with a primarily visual Christ Child do appear in the records of the nuns' visions, the vast majority of surviving accounts describes a solid, three-dimensional child that could be held in the hands, hide under skirts, suckle at breasts, sit on the refectory table, or ask to be dressed or put into (or taken out of) bed.[424] The most prominent accounts of such visions of the infant originate in nunneries including Töss in Winterthur, Oetenbach in Zurich, Unterlinden in Colmar and Adelhausen in Freiburg im Breisgau. The nun Adelheid von Rheinfelden from the Dominican convent at Unterlinden describes experiencing a vision of a crying new-born Christ, his face appearing incomparably lovely and harmonious, his body more beautiful than any other human being's. Mechthilde von Hackeborn, a Benedictine nun from the community at Helfta, produced accounts of visions of the Christ Child received on Christmas Eve, in which she describes the desire to kiss the infant and embrace him with her soul. The *vita* of the mystic Wilbirg from the Augustinian house of St Florian bei Linz provides an account of the Christ Child emerging from a container used to hold the consecrated Host, illuminating Wilbirg with divine light and remaining by her side for as long as she continued praying, confirming the connection between the visionary experience, Eucharistic devotion, and imagery of the infant Christ analysed in the preceding chapter.[425]

[423] The altar survives only partially, with a panel depicting the coronation of the Virgin on one side and Christ carrying the cross on the other currently held in the Städel Museum, Frankfurt (SG 443). The museum catalogue connects the panel to the convent of the Poor Clares in Nuremberg, noting that the speech scrolls in the coronation scene, which quote the Song of Songs, appear to be related to women's mysticism and its focus on the marital relationship with Christ. Three stylistically similar panels, which are also presumed to form a part of another Saint Clare altar, also made c. 1360 for the Nuremberg Poor Clares, are held in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg. They depict the death and coronation of Saint Clare (GM 1187), the confirmation of the rule of the order by Pope Innocent IV (GM 104), and the infant Christ appearing to Clare in a ciborium (GM 1217). The subject of the Christ Child appearing in the Eucharist would have been particularly significant to Clarissian spirituality, as the scene appears yet again, in a third altar produced between 1360-70 for the Nuremberg Poor Clares (GM 105), similarly placing Clare in front of an altar on which the infant Christ appears from a tabernacle.

[424] See Rublack, "Female Spirituality and the Infant Jesus," 37–57.

[425] All cited and translated in Zierhut-Bösch, "Ikonografie der Mutterschaftsmystik," 50.

Perhaps the most widely discussed of such encounters is the one experienced by Margaretha Ebner, a nun of the Dominican convent of Maria Medingen, whose confessor Heinrich von Nördlingen encouraged her to focus her contemplation on the Christ Child by linking her visionary meditations on the birth of God in the human soul to an image of the divine child in the cradle. Further suggesting the topic of maternity, he wrote to her in a letter: “Mary shall lay her child Margaretha [...] in the manger of her devout heart, in which her little child must laugh and cry.”[426] The metaphorical concepts of the “cradle of the soul” and the “cradle of the heart,” which appear frequently throughout the correspondence, seem to find mutual reflection in the Christ Child doll and cradle owned by Margaretha. Maragretha’s account provides one of the most extensive descriptions of the possible usage of Christ Child dolls in the monastic context, as well as constituting substantial evidence for the cultivated nature of the visionary experience.

The nun received the figurine, preserved to this day in the convent church of Maria Medingen, together with a cradle, now lost, as a gift from her confessor in the year 1344 **(Fig. 9)**. The Dominican nun had been experiencing visions since 1311, and she recorded them in her *vita*, which she compiled herself in the years 1344-1348. Visions concerning the Christ Child did not appear in the account until December 26th, 1344; that is, after Margaretha had come into possession of the Christ Child doll and its cradle. In the first vision, the wooden Christ Child came to life, turning to Margaretha and asking to be held and suckled. As Margaretha took the image of the child out of the cradle and put it against her bare breast, she felt graced by the presence of God and became overcome with a desire to become a better person. The second vision was similar. The infant Christ again demanded maternal attention, threatening not to let Margaretha sleep if she did not take him in her arms. The nun records that again, she joyfully took the image of the child out of the cradle, put it on her lap, and asked it to hug and kiss her.[427] In accounts of both visions Margaretha refers specifically to interacting with “daz bilde” or “ain bilde der kinthait unseres

[426] Philipp Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Deutschen Mystik* (Freiburg im Breisgau, Tübingen: Mohr, 1882), 182.

[427] Margaretha Ebner, “Two Selections from Margaretha Ebner’s Offenbarungen,” ed. and trans. Rosemary Drage Hale, *Vox Benedictina: A Journal of Translations from Monastic Sources* 4, no. 4 (1987): 321–37; Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen,* 87–91.

herren"– an "*image* of the childhood of our Lord," demonstrating that despite experiencing a mystical vision, she is aware of the interaction being triggered or communicated by a physical object constituting a devotional image.[428]

Although some scholarship tends to frame such devotional practices as either subversive of religious norms and customs, or, as simply bizarre and evidential of decline in women's religious practice, the evidence of large numbers of small-scale figures including cradles and figures of the Christ Child found in monastic inventories prove that devotions based in a literal understanding of *imitatio Mariae* were far from uncommon or frowned upon. The 1534 inventory of the Birgittine convent of Mariaenwold counted fifteen cribs amongst the nuns' possessions, with each sister reported to have possessed her own doll and cradle.[429] Numerous figures from Brabant are preserved in Benedictine houses of Preetz and Walsrode, and the surviving garments suggest that similar objects could have been used at the Cistercian convent Wienhausen. Nuns of the Cistercian convent zum Heiligen Kreuz in Rostock decorated at least six small statues with robes and crowns, including a Brabant-made statue of the Christ Child as king dressed in a robe of blue velvet and a silk undergarment, adorned with a golden crown and a coral bead rosary **(Fig. 102).**[430] It was customary for religious women and secular matrons alike to donate or bequeath their figures to other women, linking devotion to the Christ Child to the multi-generational structure of the monastic community and indicating the existence of a feminine religious culture which transcended the divide between monastic and lay piety.[431]

Due to the gaps in the provenance of many of the objects owned by medieval nunneries, it is nearly impossible to establish whether particular items would have been produced in the same region or commissioned by the same

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[428] Strauch, *Margaretha Ebner und Heinrich von Nördlingen,* 87.

[429] Although there is no concrete evidence that Birgitta's own visionary experience responded to any particular devotional objects, the fact that the visions occurred during the Christmas period in a monastic context suggests that imagery of the Nativity or the infant Christ, as depicted in liturgical textiles and altar sculptures, would have been present. Kammel, "Das Christkind in der Eigenen Stube," 39.

[430] Kristina Hegner, *Kleinbildwerke des Mittelalters in den Frauenklöstern des Bistums Schwerin, Vornehmlich im Zisterzienserinnennkloster zum Heiligen Kreuz in Rostock und im Klarissenkloster Ribnitz* (Münster: Lit, 1996), 111–17.

[431] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 77.

community. However, iconographical similarity must be noted between the representations of the infants Christ and John in imagery of the occupied womb and the dolls of the infant Christ, which appeared in the monastic setting from at least the fourteenth century.[432] Of particular significance here are images of the occupied womb in which either both children, or, less commonly, Christ alone, are depicted in a manner resembling sculptures placed in a niche. Those include a historiated initial from the Cistercian nuns' Wonnental Gradual **(Fig. 74)**, a stained glass panel of unknown provenance currently held in the Burrell Collection **(Fig. 4)**, and the Nuremberg Visitation group once owned by the Benedictine convent of Niedernburg, Passau **(Fig. 6 & 7)**, in which the figures of infants are made of clay, unlike the rest of the sculpture, which is made of sandstone.[433] In the three representations of this iconographic variant, the infant Christ is positioned firmly upright, performing the gesture of prayer in the Burrell stained glass panel **(Fig. 4)**, and the gesture of blessing in the Wonnental initial **(Fig. 74)**. Although the figure of the infant Christ in the Nuremberg Visitation is partially damaged, and therefore its exact gesture cannot be recognized, the infant appears to be either blessing or pointing to a now-missing object held in his left hand, his pose clearly resembling the upright standing position and gesture of the Christ Child dolls. The use of clay can potentially link the infants of the Nuremberg group to small-scale figures, including representations of the infant Christ, produced towards the middle of the fifteenth century by the so-called *Bilderbäcker* – "bakers of images," who specialized in production of small-scale clay figures and objects and operated in major cities including Frankfurt, Cologne, Utrecht and Wrocław.[434]

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[432] Jacqueline E. Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary: Notes on the Place of Sculpture in the Medieval Religious Imagination," in *Looking Beyond: Visions, Dreams, and Insights in Medieval Art and History*, ed. Colum Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Index of Christian Art, 2010), 236; Natalia Keller, "'Pick Him up and Hold Him in Your Arms.' The Function of the Holy Dolls in the Convent Life of the Late Middle Age," in *Dolls, Puppets, Sculptures and Living Images from the Middle Ages to the End of the 18th Century*, ed. Kamil Kopania (Warsaw; Białystok: The Department of Puppetry Art in Białystok, 2017), 78; LeZotte, "Cradling Power: Female Devotions and the Early Netherlandish Jesueaux," 60.

[433] Outwith the monastic context, a depiction of the infants Christ and John standing upright with hands clasped in prayer, enclosed within arched niches positioned on their mothers' torsos appears within the Visitation scene in the wall paintings of the nave of the church of St Georg in Rhäzüns, Switzerland, produced c. 1370-80. The similarity of the depiction to a "reliquary" is noted by Urner-Astholz, "Die beiden ungeborenen Kinder," 33.

[434] Tomasz Borkowski, "Produkcja Figurek Ceramicznych w Późnośredniowiecznym Wrocławiu," in *Wrocław na Przełomie Średniowiecza i Czasów Nowożytnych. Materialne Przejawy Życia*

Although the visions experienced by cloistered women suggest that Christ Child dolls were meant to be swaddled and cradled, seemingly necessitating a particular pose or dynamic elements to enable a "realistic" performance, the surviving examples rarely employ pose or gestures that facilitate those activities. Christ Child dolls with moveable joints only began to appear in the sixteenth century, even though crucifixes with jointed limbs can be found as early as the mid-fourteenth century.[435] The earlier Brabant or Mechelen type dolls **(Fig. 102)**, widely found throughout Northern Europe, did not include any moveable parts and often positioned the infant on a plinth. Margaretha Ebner's *Kindl* holds a bird in one hand and performs the gesture of blessing with the other, his chin tilted subtly forward and toes pointing downwards, as if he were standing rather than laying down **(Fig. 9)**; a similar fifteenth-century doll from the Benedictine convent at Preetz holds a gilded orb while making the gesture of blessing **(Fig. 103)**, clearly resembling the painted infants within niches. The infant doll from the Cistercian nunnery in Rostock, which stands particularly tall at 32 centimetres, would have been used in at least two capacities: for interactive play involving the changing of the many layers of his clothing, and as a display object housed within a relic cabinet **(Fig. 104)**, the two functions of the object seen by Hamburger as evidence for the Christ Child dolls mediating between the private and public spheres of devotional experience.[436]

Codziennego, ed. Jerzy Piekalski (Wrocław: Instytut Archeologii Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 207–09.

[435] The earliest known movable crucifix was produced for the church of St Benedict at Hradčany in Prague (1350). In German-speaking areas, crucifixes with moveable arms were made for the parish church of Steirisch-Laßnitz, Austria (c. 1350-60), the Carthusian monastery in Astheim, Bavaria (c. 1350-75), and the basilica church of St Lawrence in Kempten, Allgäu (c. 1350). For a catalogue of surviving moveable crucifixes from the period from 1350 to the early 1600s see Kamil Kopania, *Animated Sculptures of the Crucified Christ in the Religious Culture of the Latin Middle Ages* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Neriton, 2010); see also Markus Rath, *Die Gliederpuppe: Kult – Kunst – Konzept* (Boston: De Gruyter, 2017), 138-40; Petr Uličný, "Christ in Motion: Portable Objects and Scenographic Environments in the Liturgy of Medieval Bohemia," *Theatralia* 14, no. 1 (2011): 32-33.

[436] The cabinet was lost in World War II. Relic cabinets are known to have existed in German monastic churches since the late 13th century, the monumental sacristy cabinet from the Cistercian abbey of Bad Doberan (c. 1275) being one of the most widely discussed examples. Although no additional items of clothing for the Rostock Christ Child survive, Mecham notes that the Rostock nuns owned at least sixteen crowns with which they dressed their statue of the Virgin, suggesting that it is very likely they would have owned additional items of clothing for the infant Christ as well. Jeffrey Hamburger, "Am Anfang war das Bild: Kunst und Frauenspiritualität im Spätmittelalter," in *Studien und Texte zur literarischen und materiellen Kultur der Frauenklöster im späten Mittelalter: Ergebnisse eines Arbeitsgesprächs in der Herzog August Bibliothek Wolfenbüttel, 24.-26. Febr. 1999,* ed. Falk Eisermann, Eva Schlotheuber, and Volker Honemann (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 9; Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 83.

These features not only complicate the understanding of Christ Child dolls' sole function as "motherhood" play, as they are formally more suited for display than cradling or frequent change of clothing, but also render them similar to depictions of the infants in representations of the Visitation and *Maria gravida*, which almost universally employ gesture and sometimes appear equipped with attributes, such as the Cross **(Fig. 63)**. At least one known example of *Kindli* would have constituted a removable part of a larger sculpture – another Christ Child doll from the Benedictine nunnery Preetz, equipped with embroidered bedding, could have been removed from a Nativity group **(Fig. 105 & 106);** and figures of the pregnant Virgin featuring a miniature removable Christ Child were found in monastic settings as early as the start of the fourteenth century, for instance in the Dominican nunnery zum Heiligen Kreuz in Regensburg **(Fig. 44).**[437] It is therefore likely that by employing a visual vocabulary which clearly resembles the contemporaneous Christ Child dolls, the publicly viewed Visitation imagery would have provided a vehicle of connecting the private devotional experience to the communal one.

Sources from the parish church of St Lorenz in Nuremberg demonstrate how objects such as the Christ Child dolls would have been used in conjunction with larger images during liturgical celebrations. The sacristan's manual, compiled in the year 1493, provides an inventory of twenty-six small-scale figurines owned by the parish, and outlines how they were used in a communal setting. The figures could be placed on the altar to draw out one member of a shared dedication, such as an Apostle or a Church Father, or to expand the dedication of an altar beyond its titular saints, demonstrating the possible connection between smaller and large-scale objects through para-liturgical practices.[438] Although the parish context, in which the figures were not owned by individuals,

[437] Little documentation is available of the two *Kindli* from Preetz. The photograph in Fig. 103, taken in 1906 is the only surviving record of the object. Moreover, according to the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg, the Nativity group was severely damaged sometime prior to 1977, and the empty crib suggests that the Christ Child doll has been destroyed or has gone missing. The photographs (Fig. 105 & 106) taken around 1950-70 are the only record of the sculpture with the Christ Child doll placed in the crib. An additional photograph from 1906-08 shows the doll in its bedding (https://www.bildindex.de/document/obj20771895/mi02727f01), however no photographs of the doll without the textiles appear to have been taken. This lack of documentation makes it near impossible to establish the original location of the objects and their possible placement in liturgical setting.

[438] Albert Gümbel, *Das Mesnerpflichbuch von St Lorenz in Nürnberg vom Jahre 1493* (Munich: Kaiser, 1928); Schleif, "St Hedwig's Personal Ivory Madonna," 390.

appears largely different from the monastic one, Elina Gertsman has suggested that by the late medieval period devotional practices were shared by laypeople and monastics.[439] In smaller towns, where the convent church was also the parish church, as for instance in the case of the Benedictine nunnery at Preetz described above, nuns and parishioners, although separated by a screen, would worship together, with the proximity of lay people to holy women being highly valued as it was understood to heighten the power of parishioners' prayers.[440] At the Cistercian convent of Wienhausen, the chapel of Saint Anne was directly shared by the nuns and parishioners, with the laity actively participating in the convent's Easter celebrations and oblation ceremonies, effectively bridging the gap between the enclosed women and their local community. Nearing the era of the Reform, the Wienhausen sisters were even criticized for admitting secular persons into their choir, and Observant reformers actively attempted to prevent shared use of church spaces by nuns and laypeople at Ebstorf and Preetz.[441]

Although there is no concrete evidence of a connection between the Christ Child dolls and imagery of the occupied womb beyond the obvious visual parallels, scholars have argued extensively that lay piety and female piety were closely connected due to the intimate connection between the clergy and the social function of men, which in turn equated the lay with the feminine.[442] June Mecham has noted that small-scale figures often functioned as physical links between lay and cloistered women, being given as gifts both to women entering a convent and those entering a marriage, further implying similarities in the lay and monastic women's use of small-scale objects.[443] Numerous records of feast-day processions document the intimate, tactile engagement of laypeople with

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[439] Gertsman, *Worlds Within,* 109.

[440] Anna von Buchwald, *Buch im Chor*, fol. 154r, transcribed and translated in Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 69; Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles,* 20.

[441] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotion,* 74.

[442] Bynum traces this equation to Eucharistic practice and celebration of Mass, where the priest and his power to consecrate the Host are inherently male, thus rendering the recipients of the Eucharist – the laity – as female. From the 12th to the 15th centuries, the gendered structure of the clergy dictated the division between the male celebrant and the female recipient, regardless of the actual gender structure of the congregation. Bynum cites the facts that three-quarters of lay saints from the later Middle Ages were female, and that almost all medieval miracles concerning reception of the Eucharist are said to have occurred to women, as further evidence supporting the connection between the lay sphere and the feminine. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast,* 236-37, 278-79.

[443] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 77.

devotional images.[444] The use of small-scale figures in both environments appears strikingly similar, particularly in terms of the accoutrements added to many of them. The Nuremberg parishioners' figures of Saints Cunegund, Elizabeth of Thuringia, and Mary Magdalene were all dressed in crowns and veils, and had wooden attributes placed in their hands – a church with two towers, a pitcher, and an ointment jar respectively. This practice clearly mirrors the well-documented monastic custom of crafting vestments for images and the ritual surrounding the changing of the statues' clothing. Both laywomen and nuns also assembled personal altar-like settings within church spaces – in cabinets affixed to pews and in choir stalls respectively.[445]

This suggests a high degree of similarity between the parish and the monastic context, and that the Christ Child dolls, alongside their cradles and vestments, could have been used in a similar manner in a communal setting, to reassert the Christological focus of larger images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb by drawing out the figure of the infant Christ from a larger image of the Visitation. The use of small-scale figurines closely resembling elements of larger works could have bridged what Jung refers to as "tensions between visual and tactile perception" experienced by female monastic population at large, due to the literal physical distance between the women and the Eucharist outlined in the preceding chapter.[446] The visual similarities between Christ Child dolls and depictions of infants in Visitation imagery featuring the occupied womb thus helped negotiate the physical distance between the beholder and the larger devotional images, such as Visitation altarpieces or stained glass windows, condensing the more elaborate narrative and theology of the Visitation scene in a small-scale figurine which can be not only viewed, but also touched, kissed, and dressed, to facilitate a multisensory devotional experience.

While female monastic communities can be, to an extent, defined by the rejection of childbearing and motherhood, the very structure of a convent accounted for a variety of life experiences and mutual relationships that allowed women close identification with imagery of the occupied womb. Medieval

[444] R. W. Scribner, *Popular Culture and Popular Movements in Reformation Germany* (London: Hambledon Press, 1987), 25.

[445] Schleif, "St Hedwig's Personal Ivory Madonna," 390.

[446] Jung, "The Tactile and the Visionary," 210.

women infused the Augustinian metaphor of birthing Christ in the soul of a devout Christian, as discussed in Chapter 2, with a new set of concepts and practices. Unlike the spiritual motherhood of the early Middle Ages, centred on the themes of parents teaching, correcting, and healing their children, the later medieval phenomenon incorporated an appreciation of social and biological motherhood, grounded in physical realities of pregnancy and birth.[447] The significance of everyday relationships of mutual care and guidance, which informed the reception of devotional images, was further reinforced by the negotiation between private and public devotion, which marked what Newman has referred to as a "radical democratization of grace."[448] The daily lives of the community thus became a catalyst for devotional practices and engagement with devotional objects, both in private and public, creating a framework for interpretation of religious imagery through daily participation in a cross-generational familial structure, united as a kin group both through their earthly concerns, activities and mutual care, as well as spiritual achievements of outstanding individuals and their surrounding community.

[447] Atkinson, *The Oldest Vocation,* 163.

[448] Newman, "The Visionary Texts and Visual Worlds of Religious Women," 163.

Epilogue

An oil painting from the early eighteenth century **(Fig. 107)** which depicts the Virgin Mary with a rectangular opening in her abdomen, through which a standing figure of the nude infant Christ can be seen, is one of the few known examples of post-medieval representations of the occupied womb. The small-scale image, painted on canvas and mounted on a wooden board, likely to be carried in a procession, is not an original depiction. Rather, it is a reproduction of a reproduction – it is based on a slightly earlier engraving of the miracle-working statue of the Bogenberg Madonna **(Fig. 108).** The sandstone statue, which has not received any sustained scholarly attention, dates from between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. To this day, it occupies the central space of the high altar of the pilgrimage church of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary in Bogenberg, Bavaria. According to a local legend, the statue swam against the currents of the River Danube, and was found by a local lord, Graf Aswin von Bogen in 1104, who first displayed it in his castle chapel. In 1112-1115 a Marian altar was dedicated in the church of the Assumption in Bogenberg, which formed a part of the Benedictine abbey of Oberalteich; it is most likely then that the legendary statue was moved to the church, soon rendering Bogenberg the most popular pilgrimage site in Bavaria.

While the account of the origins of the miraculous statue is hardly plausible, in particular considering that the image currently displayed on the altar would have been made a century or two after the alleged discovery of the original, it is the power of the image that matters here. Although the eighteenth-century copy reverses the colours of Mary's robes and fashions her with flowing, long hair better suiting the aesthetic of its time, the key features of the statue are faithfully retained. The Virgin is positioned frontally, gazing at the faithful with her hands resting tenderly on her stomach, above a rectangular opening containing her *in utero* child. The modest golden frame surrounding the glass covering of the niche within the medieval statue received substantial elaboration in the painting, with the artist turning the gilded studs into bright yellow rays of sunlight, further emphasising Mary's pregnancy.

The painting of the Bogenberg Madonna serves as a testament to the lasting power of imagery of the occupied womb, which began to disappear from artistic production of Central Europe in the middle of the sixteenth century, only to reappear on a small scale as a part of the Catholic revival during the period of the baroque. The era of the Protestant Reformation marked the final days of the monastic *milieu* in German-speaking areas of the late Middle Ages, the key tenets of the reform going against the imaginative, idiosyncratic, gendered piety in which depictions of the occupied womb actively participated. The reform developed a strong critique of monasticism and argued that monastic control over resources was unjustified, the economic side of the argument resonating with those who perhaps were not convinced by the spiritual tenants of the new religious movement. Following the circulation of Martin Luther's 95 theses in 1517, the density of monasteries declined across Germany. In towns whose territorial lords adopted reformist principles and faith, there was a sharp decline in the number of monasteries during the Reformation: a reduction of over two-thirds by 1600. In towns whose lords remained Roman Catholic, the decline was smaller, but it occurred nevertheless.[449] The anti-monastic sentiment of the Reformation was accelerated by the outbreak of the Great Peasants' Revolt in 1524, which reinforced the economic aspect of reformist rhetoric, arguing that there are simply too many monasteries, all of which are dedicated to amassing wealth, despite their claims of existing "outside the word." Attacks on monasteries and clergy – both through rhetoric and actual physical violence - were the dominant feature of the peasant uprisings in the Rhenish and Franconian parts of the diocese of Mainz, the sees of Eichstätt and Speyer, and the abbey of Fulda.[450]

Female monastic communities were, however, deeply involved in reform movements which preceded the Lutheran period of the Reformation. The fifteenth century in general was an age of division within the church, with infighting in the wake of the Western Schism beginning to reach crisis levels. The ecumenical church councils such as the Council of Constance (1414-18) and

[449] Davide Cantoni, Jeremiah Dittmar, and Noam Yuchtman, "Religious Competition and Reallocation: The Political Economy of Secularization in the Protestant Reformation," *The Quarterly Journal of Economics* 133, no. 4 (2018): 2053.

[450] Henry J. Cohn, "Anticlericalism in the German Peasants' War 1525," *Past and Present* 83, no. 1 (1979): 28.

Council of Basel, Ferrara, and Florence (1431-45) sought ways to overcome those issues, calling for religious change through a top-down reform, finding dissatisfaction with the lack of noticeable impact of local, lower-level reform initiatives. The Observant reform, which began locally as early as the 1330s within the ranks of the Italian Franciscans, sought a return to the strict piety practiced by the founders of monastic orders, and a development of lay spirituality similar to the Netherlandish *devotio moderna*. The reform gained institutional autonomy at the Council of Constance, where the reformed houses were granted their own superiors, who were relatively free from the control of the conventual provincials.[451] The Observant movement reached south Germany by the turn of the fourteenth century, and by the early sixteenth century it possessed a firm hold over the key Dominican province of Saxony, where Martin Luther, himself an Observant, was the leader of the reformed faction of the Augustinians.[452]

Amongst Dominicans, approximately equal numbers of men's and women's houses had joined the Observant movement by the 1480s. However, that does not mean that women universally accepted a reform which sought to impose strict claustration and appropriate their material wealth. While a small group of women actively supported and enacted the reform, many opposed it, frequently leaving Observant houses and joining communities which rejected reform.[453] Although the convents discussed in this thesis appear unified in their insistence on deeply idiosyncratic and inventive religious practices, creation of rich visual and textual cultures, and egalitarian approaches to community life, all of which appear to transcend the division into the many individual orders, reactions to reform varied vastly between the various houses. While the Observant Reform was only formally introduced in the Dominican convent of Katharinental in 1521, the nuns were largely open to the ideals of the reform movement, acting as ambassadors of the reform at other convents already in the early fourteenth century.[454] The sisters even received written praise for their heightened piety and stricter adherence to rules of monastic life in spite of their continuing

[451] Paul L. Nyhus, "The Observant Reform Movement in Southern Germany," *Franciscan Studies* 32 (1972): 155.

[452] Euan Cameron, *The European Reformation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 42.

[453] Winston-Allen, *Convent Chronicles*, 7.

[454] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary*, 427

practice of mystical devotion and visionary experiences, which the reforming clergymen generally held in contempt.[455] Meanwhile, any and all influence of the Observants was fully rejected by the Dominican sisters of Klingental in Basel, who even successfully managed to collect damages from the Dominican clergy who had sought to reform them.[456] Similarly, the Augustinian Canonesses of Stift Inzigkofen resisted the reform even when it was implemented in their neighbouring communities. The convent chronicle (Fürstlich Hohenzollernsche Hofbibliothek, Sigmaringen, Hs. 68) provides clear evidence of the sisters' discontent with the Observant ideals, accusing the Lutheran movement of spreading false teachings, primarily regarding the rejection of the cult of the saints and abolishing of practice of commemorative prayer for the dead.[457]

The change in the makeup of monastic communities which occurred as a result of the Observant reform is reflected within textual accounts produced by reformed monastic houses during that period. The reform drastically altered the social composition of many monastic communities, with the influx of new members from the gentry classes lowering the median age of the convents' inhabitants. The new, younger generations of nuns originating from patrician families, rather than the older regional nobility, frequently supported reforming efforts and quickly ascended to high monastic offices.[458] *Vitae* of female mystics began to disappear from monastic writing, the genres of the convent chronicle and the sister-book becoming yet another tool of reform, shifting their focus away from exemplars of heroic ascetism or spiritual vision, and turning towards stories of subservience to reform ideals. Moreover, male authors such as the Dominican reformer Johannes Meyer, who sought to implement the reform in the convent of Schönensteinbach in Alsace, effectively erased any and all references to the use of images in the convents' devotion from their writing. In opposition

[455] "There are truly enough examples [in the vitae] that are childish and other visions that are not trustworthy […] But nonetheless, my dear sisters, I trust that you know to pluck the flowers from amid the coarse straw […] for many good examples are written down in [the Katharinental Sister-Book] to which you may well turn for spiritual use." Johannes Meyer, *Das Buch der Reformacio Predigerordens*, II: ll. 23–25, 29–33 (1454), cited and translated in Ayanna, "Bodies of Crystal, Houses of Glass," 30-31.

[456] Klingental Nr. 2437. "Das Kloster Klingental quittiert die Prediger über den Empfang von 11500 fl., 1487.10.5." Regesten Klingental, 1241.11.21-1750.9.22 (Serie). State Archives Basel-Stadt.

[457] Karl Werner Steim and Edwin Ernst Weber, eds. *Chronik des Augustinerchorfrauenstifts Inzigkofen 1354/1525–1813*, vol. 1 (Constance; Eggingen: Isele, 2009).

[458] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 18-19.

to the earlier Dominican insistence on the use of images as instruments of edification, artworks began to be described in increasingly negative terms, appearing as objects of indifference at best.[459]

While Observant reformers did not reject artworks *per se*, they denounced private possession of goods, including devotional artworks. The male reformers who did not seek to fully eradicate the use of images attempted to redirect their function from spiritual contemplation to cultivation of moral virtue and adherence to Observant piety.[460] According to reformers, cults that coalesced around images breached the boundaries of ecclesiastical control and needed to be curbed, the use of images having the potential to disrupt pious monastic existence. In fifteenth-century Nuremberg, efforts to reform the community of the Poor Clares began in 1410 with the petition of the provincial prior, Johannes Leonis, who saw images as the source of the community's corruption. The reformers requested the city council to remove from the nuns' church all ornaments (*gezierd*) associated with the cults of Mary Magdalen, Clare of Assisi, and the two Saint Johns, including images and altars of the saints, altar cloths and implements, chalices, books, vestments and monstrances, which were to be confiscated and impounded, "for these things are truly and without any doubt their [the nuns'] idols (*abgoter*)."[461]

The conflict between the proponents and adversaries of the reform began to disrupt the social networks of women's monastic houses, in particular in terms of exchange of gifts and copying of visionary accounts and *vitae*. The loss of material possessions appeared as a particularly significant source of strife to cloistered women, not only reducing the communities' cultural and material capital, but also causing a spiritual and psychological disruption through its interference with established devotional practices, both private and communal. For instance, the nuns of the Cistercian nunnery of Wienhausen accused the abbess of Derneburg, who assisted in the reformation of the community, of gathering the nuns' personal and communal objects "like a thief" and having

[459] Hamburger, *The Visual and the Visionary,* 389-90.

[460] Mecham, *Sacred Communities, Shared Devotions,* 169.

[461] Johannes Kist, *Das Klarissenkloster in Nürnberg bis zum Beginn des 16. Jahrhunderts* (Nuremberg: Sebaldus-Verlag, 1929), 158-59.

them sold at reduced prices.[462] The grief caused by the removal of those items found its reflection in the text of the nuns' chronicle, which speaks of ghosts and demons plaguing the previously prosperous monastic house following the reform.[463] Moreover, in their insistence on claustration, the Observants frequently severed the ties between the convents and their surrounding lay communities. In Nuremberg, for instance, a dispute arose over the burial of lay benefactors of monastic communities in conventual crypts. Several attempts were made by reformers to remove the family shields displayed near the burial place.[464] Although this particular dispute was eventually resolved by the pope in favour of the noble families, in many cases such interventions by reformers did manage to destroy the centuries-old mutual relationships fostered between monastic houses and their surrounding lay communities, leading to disruption in patterns of patronage and gift-giving, as well as interaction between monastic and lay piety, both of which greatly contributed to the shaping of late medieval nuns' devotional practices and spirituality.

Simultaneously, distrust of devotions focused on motherhood and childbearing grew throughout the fifteenth century apart from the reform context. Perhaps the most well-known of those critiques is Jean Gerson's (d. 1429) rejection of the sculptural type of Shrine Madonna **(Fig. 65)**, which he characterised as abhorrent and erroneous. In a 1402 sermon on the Nativity, Gerson expressed dismay at the sight of a Trinitarian Shrine Madonna he encountered in a Parisian Carmelite monastery, which had "the Trinity within its womb, as if the entire Trinity took flesh in the Virgin Mary." Such a statue, he argued, has "neither beauty nor pious sentiment, and can be a cause of error and lack of devotion."[465] Gerson's opposition to the Shrine Madonna was further elaborated on by the Flemish theologian Johannes Molanus (d. 1585), whose *De Picturis et Imaginabus Sacris* ("Treatise on Paintings and Sacred Images") developed detailed instructions in representing religious subjects derived from the short and

[462] "Solche und dergleichen Sachen hat die Domina von Derneburg diebischerweise ("in the manner of a thief") zu sich genommen und [...] um geringen Preiss verkauffenlassen." Horst Appuhn, ed. *Chronik und Totenbuch der Kloster Wienhausen* (Celle: Schweiger & Pick, 1986), 22.

[463] Ibid., 53.

[464] Nyhus, "The Observant Reform Movement," 166-67.

[465] Jean Gerson, "*Sermo de nativitate Domini*," in *Opera Omnia*, vol. 3, col. 947, ed. Louis Ellis Du Pin (Antwerp: George Olms Verlag, 1987), translated in Gertsman, *Worlds Within*, 1, 57, 148.

inexplicit decrees on the subject of sacred images produced by the Council of Trent (1563).[466] Molanus demonstrates particular reprehension towards iconographic “aberrations” related to Marian subjects and scenes from the Infancy of Christ, such as the nude infant Christ, the Virgin’s swoon, the Holy Kinship, and the Virgin and John the Baptist as supplicants to Christ on behalf of humankind in Last Judgement scenes – all of which figure prominently in images produced for cloistered women. Molanus also dedicates a lengthy passage to a critique of depictions of the Nativity:

> “The Virgin is shown pale with pains, the midwives prepare a small drought for the childbirth. Why this? Is it because the Virgin Mary would have held back from any pain of childbirth, when in fact she brought forth her divine son without pain? And what pertains to the midwives who are mentioned in the apocryphal Book of the Infancy? Jerome says: There was no midwife! No obtrusiveness of women intervened! She, the Virgin, was both mother and midwife! I saw in not a few places the picture of the blessed Virgin lying on a bed, depicting childbirth, and she was suffering pains from this birth, but that is not true. How stupid! Those artists ought to be laughed at who paint Mary in the very act of childbirth pains, accompanied with pain, midwife, bed, little knives [for cutting the umbilical cord], with hot compresses, and many other appurtenances.”[467]

The depictions which seem to have particularly angered Molanus appear similar to ones which have been discussed in this thesis, including scenes of holy births (of Mary, John the Baptist, and Christ) **(Fig. 18, 19, 98)** where the saintly mothers appear surrounded by a community of women, the apparent sanitisation of their pregnancy and childbirth countered by depiction of the various tools and items realistically related to the actual process of childbirth. The fact that the presence of other women and those items in the scene would have facilitated women’s *imitatio Mariae* is not insignificant – indeed, it points towards the reason Newman has suggested for the rejection of those types of images. Despite the overwhelming contemporary rhetoric against such representations being their role in the spread of theological errors, Newman argues that there

[466] Originally written in 1570, posthumously reworked and published as *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum,* “On the History of Sacred Images and Paintings,” in 1594. Johannes Molanus, *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum*, book 11, chapter 42: “*In picturis cavendum esse quidquid ad libidinem provocat*,” translated in David Freedberg, “Johannes Molanus on Provocative Paintings: *De Historia Sanctarum Imaginum et Picturarum,*” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes,* 34 (1971): 229-45.

[467] Johannes Molanus, *De Picturis et Imaginabus Sacris,* cited and tranlated in Jerome H. Neyrey, “Mary, Maid and Mother in Art and Literature,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 20 (1990): 74.

might be another reason for their existence being a concern to male theologians – namely, the fact that through those images women could claim spiritual authority.[468] While the Church never produced definitive legislature on what precisely was or was not allowed in to be shown in representations of Mary's pregnancy and birthing, restrictions on such imagery began to be imposed locally, triggering destruction of older images which no longer fit with what was permitted.

The *in utero* infants from the Visitation panel **(Fig. 84)** from the nuns' choir of the convent church of the Augustinian house at Inzigkofen had been painted over, as had been the genitals of the infant Christ in a circumcision panel from the same Life of Mary altarpiece (Gemäldegalerie, Berlin, 2063). The precise date of these alterations is unknown, but it is likely that they were carried out around the time when the Observant reform was introduced in the Dominican nunnery Kloster Hedingen (incorporated into Inzigkofen's landholdings by 1597), leading to the passing of new statutes intended to strengthen spiritual discipline and enforce a firm order of cloistered life for the unreformed Augustinian nuns. The overpainting was only removed in 1987. Similar alteration can also be found within an altarpiece of *Maria gravida* from the Franciscan monastery of Güssing, Austria. The altarpiece, made in 1409, depicted the Virgin with the infant Christ *in utero,* enclosed in a double *mandorla* positioned above Mary's pregnant belly, Joseph peeking out from behind Mary's throne, likely resembling the doubting figure depicted in the Erfurt panel of the *Madonna with a distaff* **(Fig. 42).** In the seventeenth century the panel had been partially cut and the infant Christ and Joseph's head were overpainted, and are only known nowadays from x-ray photography.[469] A pair of now-destroyed freestanding sculptures of Mary and Elizabeth of unknown provenance **(Fig. 109)**, made of poplar wood c. 1350 and each measuring 1.66 meters in height - the only documented monumental representation of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb besides the sculptural group from the Benedictine convent of Niedernburg in Passau **(Fig. 6)** and the relief on the doors of the Church of the Assumption in Irrsdorf **(Fig. 61)** –

[468] Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry, and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 283-84.

[469] Giedrė Mickūnaitė, “Words for Images. On Perceptions of ‘Greek Manner’ in Lithuania and Poland,” in *The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth: History, Memory, Legacy,* ed. Andrzej Chwalba and Krzysztof Zamorski (New York: Routledge, 2020).

appear to have had the niche-like cavities of their wombs either filled with wood or painted over at some later date.

Within this landscape of monastic women's piety becoming highly regulated and increasingly subject to the control of male authority, images of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb began to vanish. As the rich material culture related to female monastic devotion started to wane towards the very end of the medieval period, so did the use of gendered imagery deeply connected to the practices of visionary mysticism. Although it would be an overstatement to assume that reform movements caused a total disappearance of images from the devotional practice of cloistered women, they did manage to shift the focus of the imagery itself, moving away from objects conceived in order to induce a category of mystical experience such as *Mutterschaftsmystik,* and encouraging the use of artworks in communal devotional practices focused directly on the Passion and suffering of Christ. However, before their virtual disappearance until a modest resurgence alongside the Counter-Reformation revival of the baroque, imagery of the occupied womb played a key role in the devotional practices and social lives of cloistered women of medieval Germany.

Conclusion

Images of the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to Saint Elizabeth in which the *in utero* children are depicted as visible within or outside their mothers' wombs appeared in devotional artworks produced for and in nunneries in German-speaking areas from the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries onwards.[470] This thesis discussed thirteen examples of representations of the occupied womb which can be definitively linked to women's monastic houses, including ten scenes of the Visitation, three depictions of *Maria gravida*, and one Annunciation scene **(see Appendix 1)**. The late medieval period marks the beginning of the transformation of the predominantly Christological context of Visitation, in tandem with the Annunciation, into one increasingly affording additional significance to the Marian dogma, rendering the depictions particularly attractive to cloistered women who employed *imitatio Mariae* in their devotional practices. From its very emergence in the Dominican convents of the thirteenth century, the imagery of the occupied womb displayed chief characteristics which remained its distinct feature until the decline of this mode of representation during the early years of the Reformation; namely, its connection to the gender-specific spirituality focused on direct interaction with the divine mediated through personal and communal femininity, and to the wide range of artistic production, devotional practices, and visionary experience intimately connected to the female monastic environment.

The images build on a complex network of patristic, Byzantine, and medieval meanings derived from Christian theology, devotional practices, and visual and written sources, beginning with the Gospel of Luke itself. Rather than provide a literal illustration of the Gospel episode, depictions of the occupied womb produced for cloistered women in late medieval Germany responded to the devotional and social concerns of this particular audience. As discussed in

[470] Several objects of unknown provenance discussed in this thesis are known to have been produced in areas with prominent monastic foundations, suggesting that the actual number of representations of the occupied womb owned by monastic houses might be greater than what is known presently. Although a detailed enquiry into object provenance lies outwith the scope of this thesis, in addressing a large number of objects of uncertain provenance, this thesis aims to establish possible lines of a further enquiry, which could be pursued if substantial new findings concerning object provenance were to surface. As museum catalogues provide only fragmentary information concerning the provenance of many of the objects discussed in this thesis, in-depth archival research in a number of case studies would be required in order to purse this line of enquiry.

Chapter 2, the literary analysis of the Gospel of Luke and the relevant commentaries revealed that there is no single, unified interpretation of the account of the Visitation. The visual language of artworks concerned with the Visitation and associated motherhood narratives was shaped by a wide range of patristic and medieval texts, which foregrounded the relationship of mutual care between the holy women and the significance of the episode within the broader narrative of salvation history. The *expositio* of Ambrose of Milan – the single most authoritative exegesis of the Gospel – foregrounds the significance of respect, mutual assistance, and communality between women, providing a framework for reception of Visitation imagery in the context of the cross-generational kin group of a nunnery.

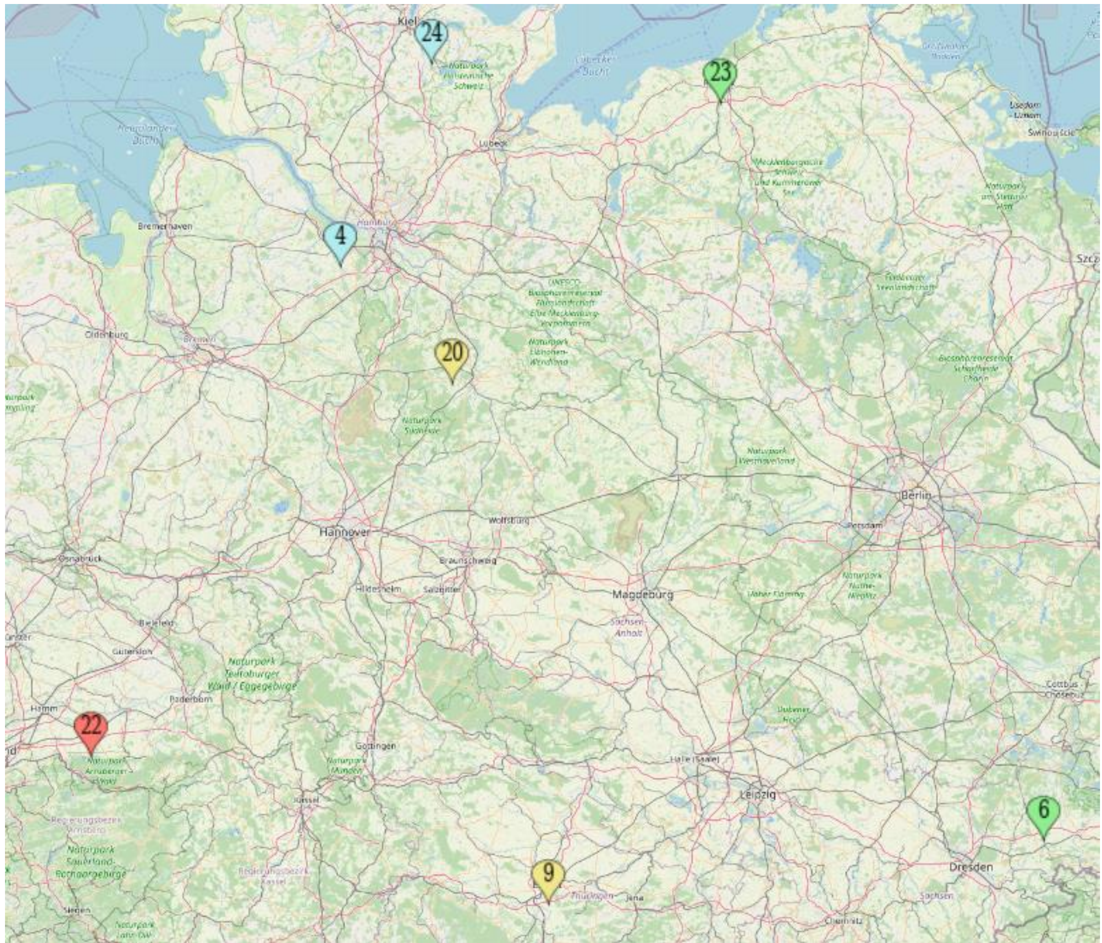
Depictions of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb would have thus served a dual role within female monastic communities. Firstly, as observed in Chapters 3 and 4, their emphasis on the physicality of the Christ Child as made *by* and *of* his mother's flesh serves to unite Marian and Eucharistic devotion into an interconnected set of beliefs and practices foregrounding the role of Mary as the conduit for the Incarnation, rendering her pregnancy as the very beginning of Christological history. Images of the occupied womb, which recall the stamped wafers of the Eucharist, and by extension depictions of the Eucharistic Christ Child and the suffering infant *Schmerzenskind;* make visible the idea of correspondence between the original body of Christ born from the virgin womb and the Eucharistic body reborn at mass, underscoring the continuity of the salvation narrative not only through Christ, but also his mother. As a Gospel episode which does not appear to be concerned with Christ's death and sacrifice, the Visitation was visually reinterpreted to respond to the devotional needs of women's communities, who due to the absence of Mass celebrants within their ranks received communion on average no more than fifteen times a year. In this context, mirroring figure of Saint Elizabeth, which in the majority of visual representations explicitly parallels Mary's dress, pose, and pregnancy, would serve as a guide and intermediary between those complex theological meanings and the female monastic audience, facilitating an understanding of miraculous events as mediated through the first witness to the conception of Christ. The presence of Elizabeth within representations of the occupied womb would thus act as a safeguard from voyeuristic transgression, her mirroring of

the figure of Mary displaying appropriate behaviour in the presence of a living miracle and decreasing the distance between Mary and the viewer, her own occupied womb normalising the encounter and forbidding any unsanctioned curiosity.

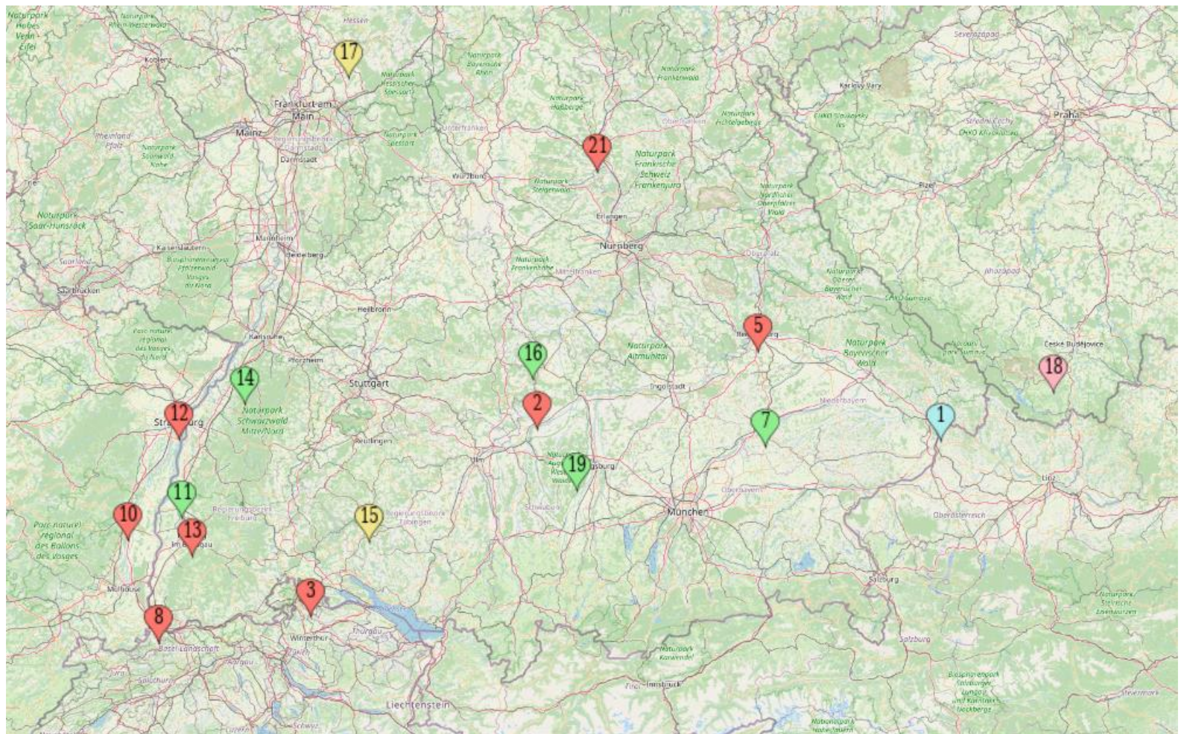
Secondly, imagery of the Visitation featuring the occupied womb responded directly to social concerns stemming from the realities of life in a homosocial community modelled on a kin group. As discussed in Chapter 5, while church legislature concerned with virginity and enclosure of nuns sought to define women's monastic communities by the rejection of motherhood, the very structure of a convent itself accounted for a variety of life experiences and mutual relationships that allowed women close identification with imagery of the occupied womb. Unlike the spiritual motherhood of the early Middle Ages, centred on the themes of parents teaching and correcting their children, the later medieval phenomenon incorporated an appreciation of social and biological motherhood, grounded in physical realities of pregnancy and birth. References to monastic "mothers" and "children" appear in some of the earliest monastic rules, and practices of mothering seem to have endured in the monastic realm over the course of centuries, rendering images which deal with stories of holy motherhood particularly relevant to cloistered audiences. The significance of the Visitation as a model for performing the virtues of charity, humility and servitude was further underscored by medieval theologians and appreciated in the daily lives of the nuns, demonstrating that social realities of the cloister corresponded directly to the exegetical significance of the Visitation. Women of varied age and status retained their individuality within the community, and yet were included on nearly equal terms in everything from sleeping arrangements to chronicle accounts, allowing for a close identification with the role models of Mary and Elizabeth – two women experiencing miracles together.

Appendix 1. Map of original locations of objects discussed in this thesis associated with women's monastic houses in Germany, Switzerland, and Bohemia

Blue markers - Benedictines
Red markers - Dominicans
Green markers - Cistercians
Yellow markers - Premonstratensians/Augustinian Canonesses
Pink markers - Franciscans (Poor Clares)



Original locations of objects discussed in this thesis associated with women's monastic houses – detail – Northern and Central Germany



Original locations of objects discussed in this thesis associated with women's monastic houses – detail – Southern Germany, Switzerland, and Bohemia

1 Kloster Niedernburg, Passau – Benedictines (founded c. 730, secularised and dissolved 1806, re-established as convent and school of the Congregation of Jesus 1836). Fig. 6 & 7 Visitation group. Lower Bavaria, Passau, c. 1420.

2 Kloster Maria Medingen, Dillingen – Dominicans (founded 1246, secularised and dissolved 1802, re-established as a Franciscan convent 1846). Fig. 9 Christ Child doll of Margaretha Ebener (?). Austria, c. 1320; **Fig. 93** Spiritual mother and daughter, from *Gespräch einer geistlichen Mutter und Tochter über 17 theologische Fragen*, fol. 8v/9. Swabia, possibly Medingen bei Dillingen/Donau, late 15th century.

3 Kloster St. Katharinental, Diessenhofen – Dominicans (founded 1242, secularised and dissolved 1869). Fig. 8 Attributed to Master Heinrich of Constance - The Visitation. Constance, c. 1310-20; **Fig. 45** Attributed to Master Heinrich of Constance – Christ and Saint John group. Constance, c. 1280-90; **Fig. 46 - 49** Katharinental Gradual. Sankt Katharinental, c. 1312.

4 Kloster Buxtehude (Alte Kloster), Buxtehude – Benedictines (founded 1197, dissolved during the Swedish occupation of Bremen during the Thirty Years' War c. 1650). Fig. 41 Meister Bertram of Minden – Madonna Knitting the Seamless Tunic (panel from the interior right wing of the Buxtehude altar of the Life of Mary and Life of Christ). Hamburg, c. 1390-1415.

5 Kloster zum Heiligen Kreuz, Regensburg – Dominicans (founded 1233, operates to this day). Fig. 43 Historiated initial 'U' with the Annunciation, from the Regensburg Lectionary, fol. 64v. Regensburg, c. 1267 – 76; **Fig. 44** *Maria gravida*. Regensburg, c. 1300-10.

6 Kloster Sankt Marienstern, Panschwitz-Kuckau – Cistercians (founded 1248, operates to this day). Fig. 50 *Maria gravida*. Bohemia or Silesia, after 1450; **Fig. 51** Initial 'R' with *Maria gravida*, from a Marienstern missal, fol. 163v. Sankt Marienstern, c. 1325-50; **Fig. 97** Johannes Beyer - *Oblatio* of a novice, from a processional of Kloster St Marienstern, fol. 59v. Sankt Marienstern, 1519.

7 Kloster Seligenthal, Landshut – Cistercians (founded 1232, secularised and dissolved 1803, re-established 1836). Fig. 52 Historiated initial 'A' with the Visitation, from *Antiphonarium cum notis musicis et cum 5 picturis (*Seligenthal Antiphonary), fol. 1r. South Germany, late 14th century.

8 Kloster Maria Magdalena zu den Steinen am Steinenberg (founded c. 1230, dissolved in late 16th century) or Kloster Klingental in Kleinbasel, Basel – Dominicans (founded 1274, dissolved 1557). Fig. 57 & 58 Konrad Witz – Altarpiece of The Counsel of Redemption. Basel, c. 1445-50.

9 Stift Neuwerk, Erfurt – Augustinian Canonesses (founded in the late 12th century, secularised and dissolved 1819). Fig. 68 Mystical Mill, from a gradual of the Augustinian Canonesses of Stift Neuwerk in Erfurt, fol. 9r. Erfurt, 14th century.

10 Kloster Unterlinden, Colmar - Dominicans (founded 1232, secularised and dissolved 1792). Fig. 73 Historiated initial with John the Baptist and Dominican nuns, from an Unterlinden gradual, fol. 165v. France, 14th century.

11 Kloster Wonnental, Kenzingen – Cistercians (founded 1242, secularised and dissolved 1806). Fig. 74 Historiated initial 'D' with the Visitation, from the Wonnental Gradual, fol. 176v. Breisgau, c. 1340-50.

12 Kloster St Nikolaus in Undis (?), Strasbourg – Dominicans (founded 1246, dissolved 1529). Fig. 76 Holy Kinship antependium with a Dominican supplicant. Strasbourg, c. 1490-1500.

13 Kloster Mariä Verkündigung (Adelhausen), Freiburg im Breisgau – Dominicans (founded 1234, fused with three other Freiburg convents into the Neukloster in 1786, secularised and dissolved 1867). Fig. 79 & 80 The Visitation, from an antependium with scenes from the Life of the Virgin. Freiburg im Breisgau, c. 1400.

14 Kloster Lichtenthal, Baden-Baden – Cistercians (founded 1245, operates to this day). Fig. 81 Master of the Lichtenthal Altar Wings – Death of Mary and the Visitation (panel from the high altar of the Life of Mary). Baden-Württemberg, 1489.

15 Stift Inzigkofen, Sigmaringen – Augustinian Canonesses (founded 1354, secularised and dissolved 1803). Fig. 84 Jakob and/or Hans Strüb – The Visitation, from a fourteen-panel Life of Mary altarpiece. Sigmaringen, Swabia, c. 1505.

16 Kloster Mariä Himmelfahrt, Kirchheim am Ries – Cistercians (founded 1270, secularised and dissolved 1802). Fig. 85 Master of Kirchheim – wings of the Holy Kinship altar. Nördlingen (?), c. 1500-02.

17 Kloster Konradsdorf bei Ortenberg – Premonstratensians (founded 1191, dissolved 1581). Fig. 86 The Holy Kinship, central panel from the Ortenberger Altar. Mainz, c. 1430.

18 Convent of the Poor Clares, Český Krumlov (?) – Franciscans (founded 1361, dissolved 1782). Fig. 90 Švamberk Visitation. South Bohemia, after 1450.

19 Kloster Oberschönenfeld, Gessertshausen – Cistercians (founded 1242, secularised and dissolved 1803, re-established as a priory 1836). Fig. 92 Visitation panel from an altar of the Life of Mary. Upper Swabia or Augsburg, c. 1410-30.

20 Kloster Ebstorf, Ebstorf – Benedictines (founded 1160, reformed 1529, operates as a Lutheran convent to this day). Fig. 94 Nun instructing a girl, from *Expositio hymnorum. Hymnar. Grammaticalia. Musicalia*, fol. 200v. Kloster Ebstorf, c. 1480.

21 Kloster Heilig Grab, Bamberg – Dominicans (founded 1365, secularised and dissolved 1803, re-established 1926). Fig. 95 & 96 Tapestry with scenes of the Passion, based on a design by Paul Lautensack (?). Kloster Heilig Grab in Bamberg, c. 1495.

22 Kloster Paradies, Soest – Dominicans (founded 1251, secularised and dissolved 1808). Fig. 100 Nativity of John the Baptist, from an antiphonary (summer part). Rhineland, 14th century.

23 Kloster zum Heiligen Kreuz, Rostock – Cistercians (founded 1270, reformed into a Lutheran convent 1584, dissolved 1920). Fig. 102 Infant Christ. Mechelen, Flanders, c. 1500; **Fig. 104** Relic shrine containing a figure of the infant Christ. Lost in WWII.

24 Kloster Preetz, Preetz – Benedictines (founded 1211, reformed in 1542, operates as a Lutheran convent to this day). Fig. 103 Christ Child doll. Belgian, 15th century; **Fig. 105** Christ Child doll and bedding from a Nativity group. Unknown, 15th century; **Fig. 106** Nativity scene with removable Christ Child and bedding. Unknown, 15th century.

Appendix 2. Transcription of the Office of the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary from the Seligenthal Antiphonary (BSB Clm 23046 fol. 1 – 40)[471]

1. Accedunt laudes virginis admirande indaginis noviter promulgate en visitat elizabet maria mater ipsamet celica probitate.[472] Divo repletur munere Mar-
2. ia sine murmure cum filium concepit surrexit ab oraculo statim in montis calculo abiit et perfecit. Accendit ardor spiritus mariam tangens celitus de nazareth migrando mox ad montana transtulit ubi tumultu
3. caruit superna degustando. Monstrans culmen dulcedinis maria sui sanguinis elizabeth salutat stantem in domo proximi propinqua templo

[471] According to the Cantus Index, which catalogues 155 medieval sources containing chant texts and melodies for Office and Mass, the chants most frequently appearing in Office for the Feast of the Visitation are the responsory *O praeclara stella maris* (13 instances), the hymn *In Mariam vitae viam matrem* (13 instances), and the antiphon *In Mariae virginis utero parata* (11 instances). *In Marian vitae viam matrem* is one of the two main hymns included in the Visitation Office in BSB Clm 23046 (lines 33-35), which largely follows Adam Easton's office *Accedunt laudes virginis,* and it would have been sung at Vespers. From the manuscript sources included in the Cantus Index, the most complete accounts of the Office of the Feast of the Visitation can be found in a 1372 antiphoner written in the collegiate church of Kielce, Poland, which includes 104 unique chants for the feast (Biblioteka Kapituły Katedralnej, Kielce, Ms. 1); a late sixteenth-century antiphoner copied for the Augsburg Cathedral – 86 chants (Det Kongelige Bibliotek Slotsholmen, Copenhage, Gl. Kgl. S. 3449, 80 [09] IX); and an antiphoner from the second half of the 13th century, likely created for the collegiate church of St Mary in Aachen – 84 chants (Domarchiv, Aachen, G 20). BSB Clm 23046 contains 68 unique chants for the Office of the Feast of the Visitation (82 chants total), including twenty-six unique antiphons, twelve responsories, eleven responsory verses, two versicles, two hymns (8 chants each), and one invitatory antiphon. From the manuscripts catalogued in the Cantus Index, the manuscript containing an office of the Visitation most similar to BSB Clm 23046 appears to be a 12th century antiphoner from the church of St Mary in Utrecht with 13th, 14th, and 15th century additions (77 chants for the office of the Feast of the Visitation) (Universiteitsbibliotheek, Utrecht, Ms. 406 shelfmark 3 J 7), which contains 49 unique chants which also appear in BSB Clm 23046. University of Waterloo, *Cantus Database*. https://cantus.uwaterloo.ca/.

[472] Adam Easton's office *Accedunt laudes virginis* was composed following the papal rejection of Jan of Jenštejn's office *Exurgens autem Maria,* which received stylistic criticism for failing to follow consistent metric and rhyme schemes, and its general lack of sophistication. While Jan of Jenštejn's office relies almost entirely on quotation of passages from the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:39-70) and the Psalms (18, 44, 111, 117, 131) in order to reinforce the biblical authority of the Feast of the Visitation, Easton's office is much more inventive, employing an exegetical technique which seeks to explain the significance of the Visitation both within the Biblical narrative, as well as in the lives of the faithful celebrating the feast. Unlike Jan of Jenštejn, whose only references to Elizabeth are the ones derived directly from the Gospel, Easton emphasises Elizabeth's pregnancy and her role as a prophetess, emphasising her significance within the narrative and presenting her as a valid devotional model for the faithful. Elizabeth's recognition of the Virgin Mary as the mother of Christ, her steadfast faith and joy at the meeting, and her praise of the Virgin are consistently underlined in the chants of the office, presenting Elizabeth as an example of a devout Christian praising the mother of God.

domini devote subministrat.[473] Surgens maria [Surgens Maria gravida migravit per cacumina in civitatem Judaeae intravit domum propere Zachariae cum opere salutis consobrinae].[474] Speciosa [Speciosa facta es et suavis in deliciis tuis sancta dei genetrix quam videntes filiae Syon vernantem in floribus rosarum et liliis convalium Beatissimam praedicaverunt et regine laudaverunt eam].[475]

4. Acceleratur ratio in puero nondum nato instinctu sacri pneumatis divinitus sibi dato novit presentem dominum in virgine clam latentem adoravit cum iubilo ad servulum venientem[476] Reginam
5. celi mariam concorditer adoremus. Quae visitans elizabeth spem contulit ut laudemus venite.[477] De celo velut radius descendens sacer spiritus elizabeth intravit mox benedictam virginem sanctitatis propaginem prophetice clamavit.[478]

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[473] "Showing the summit of her sweetness Mary greets Elizabeth, her own blood, who stays in the house of a neighbour, close to the temple of the Lord she devotedly gives [her] aid." This antiphon from Easton's office underscores the relationship of mutual aid between the two women, stressing their familial relationship and the virtue of humility which exegesis frequently related to the Visitation. For a full critical edition of Easton's office and translations of chants see Rhianydd Hallas, "Two Rhymed Offices Composed for the Feast of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary: Comparative Study and Critical Edition" (Doctor of Philosophy, Bangor University, 2021).

[474] Brackets have been used to provide text of chants which appear as incipits only in the manuscript. Reference to first instance of appearance has been given where chants are repeated.

[475] "You are beautiful and sweet in the delights of virginity. When the daughters of Zion saw the holy mother of God blossoming with flowers of roses and lily of the valley, they proclaimed her most blessed Queen and praised her." Versicle used for a variety of Marian feasts including the Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, Conception, and Birth of the Virgin. Employs a feminine metaphor of the faithful as the "daughters of Zion," and refers to the connection between Mary and flowers, expressed visually through iconography of the *hortus conclusus*. Text of hymn which speaks of women seeing and praising the Virgin appears particularly relevant to a female monastic context.

[476] "Reason is hastened on the boy not yet born, by the instigation of the Holy Spirit divinely given to him, he has recognised the present Lord in the virgin secretly hidden, he has worshipped with a joyful cry the coming servant-lad." The text of this antiphon supports the discussion of the supernatural qualities of the *in utero* John, who is granted the gifts of wisdom and recognition of Christ already in the womb. The phrase "*clam latentem*" appears particularly evocative of depictions of the occupied womb created in small scale, utilizing physical coverings, or rendering the infants in the same colour as the wombs or their mothers' garments, necessitating a close, attentive viewing or manipulation in order to reveal what is "secretly hidden."

[477] "Let us worship harmoniously Mary, the Queen of Heaven, who, visiting Elizabeth, brought hope, so that we might praise." Throughout the office, Elizabeth's response is to rejoice, praise Mary and God, and to recognise the wondrous nature of Mary's conception, as exemplified by this invitatory antiphon for Matins. As discussed in Chapter 4, Section 2.1. Elizabeth is thus framed as a model of response to a miraculous event, providing the appropriate reaction and mode of veneration, including acknowledgment and praise.

[478] "As if a ray of light descending from heaven the Holy Spirit entered Elizabeth, soon to the blessed virgin and the child of holiness she called prophetically." The language of this invitatory antiphon for Matins evokes depictions of the Christ Child descending into the Marian womb or

6. Inter turmas femineas et sanctarum excubias maria collaudatur propter fructum qui queritur quo iure mundus emitur et plene visitatur.[479] Vocat hanc matrem nomine domini primo famine elizabeth vi superna quod
7. fuit clausum aliis in velatis misteriis notitia in eterna.[480] Non fuit cristus oneri nec gravis moles pueri visceribus matris digne sed ignara de pondere cum corporali robore transiliit benigne.
8. Transivit in itinere maria multum prospere monticulos scandendo evitavit lasciviam propter morum constanciam colloquia spernendo. Longam viam pertransiit maria montes circuit hilaris
9. laborando honores mundi respuit devotionem tenuit celica meditando. Surgens maria gravida migravit per cacumina in civitatem iudee intravit domum propere
10. zacharie cum opere salutis consobrine. Ut audivit elizabeth salutes mox de nazareth exclamat mirative. Intra dixit verba prophetica elizabeth celicola de virgine maria beata est que credidit
11. In hac fient que didicit a domino mente pia.[481] Venit ex te sanctissimus vocatus dei filius sicut predixit angelus suee matri in via. Benedicta et

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ear as a ray of light or dove of the Holy Spirit, evoking the "sunbeam through glass" *topos* discussed in Chapter 3. Extension of this imagery to Elizabeth provides a parallelism between the two miraculous pregnancies, echoing the manner in which Elizabeth's occupied womb is usually visually rendered as identical to Mary's.

[479] "Among the companies of women and the guard of the saintly ones, Mary is praised because of the fruit who is sought by which law the world is bought and fully visited." This invitatory antiphon for Matins appears particularly relevant to a monastic audience. In a direct sense, it can refer to Mary being praised by Elizabeth, her apocryphal servants and companions, or in visual terms, by the female saints who frequently accompany her in depictions of the Holy Kinship or *virgo intre virgines.* More broadly however, it can apply to Mary being worshipped by communities of women such as nuns and lay religious women.

[480] "At her first word, Elizabeth calls this mother in the name of the Lord – through heavenly power, for it was closed to others in veiled mysteries in eternal knowledge." Elizabeth's gift of prophecy is mentioned frequently by Easton, for instance in the third antiphon for Matins. Elizabeth's role as prophetess, which was emphasises by some patristic and medieval commentaries, and denied by others, as discussed in Chapter 2, is firmly reaffirmed here, since Elizabeth is described as knowing what is hidden to others only through heavenly power and inner knowledge.

[481] "Prophetic words says Elizabeth, worshipper of heaven, about the Virgin Mary: blessed is she, who has believed, in her have been made those things that she has learned from the Lord with a pious mind." This Matins responsory refers to Elizabeth saying the words of prophecy as soon as she heard Mary's greeting, which has been emphasized by patristic and medieval exegesis as seen in Chapter 2. While the liturgy largely follows the Biblical account, it is worth noting that references to prophesy do not appear in the Gospel itself, and the liturgy frames Elizabeth's words as a direct reaction to Mary's greeting, rather than being mediated through John sharing the prophecy with his mother.

venerabilis es [Benedicta et venerabilis virgo Maria cujus viscera meruerunt portare dominum cristum].[482]

12. Elizabeth congratulans profunde se humilians in adventum messie. Unde ait condeceat quod mater dei veniat ad me cum plausu vie.[483] En felix salutatio duplata exultatio dabantur vi sophie.[484] Unde ait.
13. Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto unde ait. Tunc ad sermonem virginis dabatur donum flaminis matri simul et proli hic gaudebat in utero hec providit de puero et de regina poli.
14. Adest mira credulitas at virginis fecunditas per exemplum monstratum concepit prius sterilis que vox est impossibilis nisi per verbum datum. Fit nature propinquius quod sterili fit filius quam virgo fiat pregnans
15. sed nichil impossibile deo nec infactibile per verbum suum dictans.[485] Beatam me dicent omnes generationes quia ancillam humilem respexit deus.[486] Ex quo facta est vox salutacionis tue in auribus meis exultavit in gaudio infans

[482] "Blessed is the virgin whose womb was worthy to bear the Lord, Christ." Responsory used for the Feasts of Purification, Annunciation, Assumption, Conception, and Birth of the Virgin and the Nativity of Christ, containing a direct reference to the Marian womb. While Easton's office for the Feast of the Visitation does not include any such specific references to female anatomy, the word "*viscera*" is used twice in the office of Jan of Jenštejn, to describe both Mary's (*"Cuius sacrata viscera Dei invisit gratia"* – "Whose sacred womb grace has visited," from *Assunt festa iubilea,* hymn for Vespers), and Elizabeth's ("*Anus etate marcida prolis gestat solatia tument ad partum gelida grandeve matris viscera*." – "The old woman withered by age bears the comforts of offspring, for the birth they swell the ice-cold organs of the aged mother," from *En miranda prodigia*, hymn for Lauds) wombs.

[483] "Rejoicing Elizabeth, deeply humbling herself at the arrival of the Messiah, 'How', she says, 'might it be fitting that the mother of God should come to me by the striking of the road?'" This responsory verse, as well as Easton's office in general, describes emotion and actions from Elizabeth's point of view. While the ideas expressed are broadly similar to the narrative of the Gospel, the relative 'silencing' of the Marian point of view develops the role of Elizabeth at the meeting and allows the audience to identify more strongly with Elizabeth as she perceives and reacts to the Virgin and her son.

[484] "Behold, blessed salutation and double exultation were given by the power of wisdom. The third and final aspect is the knowing of hidden truths by Elizabeth and John the Baptist." Matins responsory; once again, Elizabeth's gift of prophecy and material qualities of the infant being concealed in the virgin's womb which correspond to artistic depictions of the occupied womb, are emphasised.

[485] "It is made closer to nature, for a son is made by the barren one, as a virgin might be made pregnant, but nothing is impossible for God, nor unmakeable through his commanding word." This matins responsory draws an explicit parallel between Mary's and Elizabeth's pregnancy, assuring that a virgin becoming pregnant and a sterile woman bearing a child are both a result of divine intervention which alters nature, thus underscoring the similarities, rather than differences between both women.

[486] "All generations shall call me blessed, because God has regarded the humble handmaiden." Antiphon derived from the Marian song of *Magnificat* (Luke 1:46-55), sang daily at Vespers. The antiphon was also used for the feasts of the Annunciation and the Monday of the third week of the advent, following the *Gaudete* Sunday – a day focused on rejoicing in Christ, with the readings focusing on the mission of John the Baptist and his connection with Advent. The

16. in utero meo alleluia. Beata es maria que credidisti perficientur in te que dicta sunt tibi a domino alleluia.[487] Benedicta tu [Benedicta tu in mulieribus et benedictus fructus ventris tui].[488] Felix namque [Felix namque es sacra virgo maria et omni laude dignissima quia ex te ortus est sol justitie cristus deus noster].[489] Maria parens filios plangens querit depositos in scelere mortali.
17. Clamans clamat ut relevet manus ponit ut sublevet ne pena ruant mali. Elizabeth quesierat iohannem doctum noverat de vita supernali. Rosa de spinis prodiit virga de yesse floruit
18. maria visitavit. Vis odoris diffunditur tota domus perficitur gracia cum intravit.[490] Miranda salutatio fit plebi gratulatio que fructum expectavit. Vis odor [Vis odoris diffunditur tota domus perficitur gracia cum intravit]. Stella sub nube tegitur maria mundo premitur
19. rutilans in splendore. Elizabeth perducitur ad solamen lux spargitur robarans in vigore. Luna soli coniungitur elizabeth devolvitur estuans in amore. Eliza. Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Eliz.

Marian epithet of *ancilla Dei* (“handmaid of the Lord”) was often employed in women’s *imitatio Mariae* focused on service and domestic piety.

[487] “Blessed are you Mary, who did believe the Lord; what the Lord said to you shall be fulfilled in you. Alleluia.” Explicit reference to Luke 1:45, and Mary being blessed due to her belief and adherence to the word of God, rather than simply due to her being the mother of Christ, which serves as a foundation for *imitatio Mariae* for non-virginal women. Antiphon used frequently for the Feast of Annunciation of the Virgin Mary and the second Sunday of the Advent.

[488] “Blessed are you among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb.” Direct quotation from the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:42). This versicle, used predominantly for Feasts of Conception, Birth, Purification, Annunciation and Assumption of the Virgin Mary and as a memorial chant for Mary during the Advent, directly quotes Elizabeth’s greeting to Mary in the scene of the Visitation. Its inclusion in the Office of the Feast of the Visitation serves a similar purpose to the speech scrolls found in depictions of the scene – it provides a model response for the faithful, allowing them identification with Elizabeth and imitation of her behavior in the presence of the divine.

[489] “You are happy, holy Virgin Mary, and worthy of all praise, for out of you has risen the Sun of Justice, alleluia.” Responsory used predominantly for the Feast of Nativity of the Virgin Mary, as well as All Saints’ Day, and less frequently for the Assumption, Purification, and the Votive Office for Mary. Description of Christ as Sun of Justice draws visual parallels between depictions of the pregnant Mary and the Apocalyptic Woman Clothed in the Sun where gilding or an image of the sun is used to denote the woman’s womb (Fig. 53). Frequent employment of language of light and transparency provides further justification and exegetical explanation for the use of gilding and the shape of the *mandorla* in images of the occupied womb.

[490] “The rose has appeared from the thorns, the rod of Jesse has flourished, Mary has visited, the power of the perfume is diffused, the whole house is bathed in grace as she entered.” This matins responsory introduces common Marian tropes into the liturgy, including floral symbolism, such as the Marian title of the *rosa mystica* (Song of Songs 2:1) and the *hortus conclusus,* the genealogical association with the Tree of Jesse (Isaiah 11:1-2). In the German-speaking realm, the hymn “Es ist ein Ros entsprungen,” (“A rose has sprung up”) which describes Mary as a rose sprouting from the stem of the Tree of Jesse and symbolically outlines the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaiah foretelling the birth of Jesus has been used since at least the 15th century.

20. Karissima sancti spiritus diffudit se divinitus in puerum cum sensit conceptum salutiferum marie sibi obvium elizabeth consensit. Cristi virgo dilectissima virtutum
21. operatrix opem fer miseris subveni domina clamantibus ad te iugiter. Quoniam peccatorum mole premimur sanctissima deprecamur.[491]
22. Occasum virgo nesciit velud lux mundi profluit de summis fundens lumen. Elizabeth applicuit devotas sibi attrahit de celo pandens numen. Spiritus rapit simbola celestibus con-
23. formia tamquam aquarum flumen. Elizabeth. Thronum lucis prospexerat qui ut aurora fulserat sole mane splendente. Elizabeth ubi vidit verbaque palam protulit speculo suadente
24. In marie presencia plura patent latencia elizabeth dicente.[492] Eliza. Elizabeth ex opere signorum dat pro pignore mariam invocare. Quam gracia contraxerat et pie-
25. tas commoverat vetulam visitare. Nullus diffidat hodie ad mariam confluere sibique supplicare. Quam. Gloria patri et filio et spiritui sancto. Quam. Sacra dedit eloquia ma-
26. ria responsoria elizabeth laudanti clamavit deo canticum magnificando dominum de sursum bona danti. Ave maria. Speciosa [Speciosa facta es – l. 3]. Adiutrix visitatio et requens ministratio eliza-
27. beth oblata mariam dat propiciam ad impetrandam gratiam cum fuerit vocata nam mater est ecclesie fluctuantis navicule subditos gubernando promptos suo regimini dirigentique flamini devios visitan-
28. do.[493] Tunc exsultavit animus cum ipsius sit filius angelo nuntiante ancilla dei credidit confestim verbum genuit maria supplicante. Vera humilitatio fuit cristi conceptio deo respiciente

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[491] "Because we are oppressed by the weight of our sins, we pray to the most holy." Responsory used almost exclusively for the Feast of the Annunciation.

[492] "In the presence of Mary, more hidden things are exposed by Elizabeth's words." As noted above, language of hiding, secrecy, and mystery is a key element of Easton's office, making it particularly relevant to an audience familiar with revelatory mystical experiences and artworks employing complex dynamics of concealment and revelation, such as depictions of the occupied womb.

[493] "May the helper, the visitation and the constant assistance offered to Elizabeth deliver gracious Mary to grace's gain because she has been called. For she is the mother, of the wave-tossed ship of the Church, steering her subjects, those eager for her guidance and to the guiding spirit who visits the erroneous." This antiphon for the *Benedictus* in Lauds reveals Easton's awareness of the function of the feast as a means of bringing reconciliation to the divided Church. Although it is not included in BSB Clm 23046, Easton composed another hymn which clearly refers to the Papal Schism. Its first verse reads: "*O Christi mater celica fons vivus fluens*

29. ex hoc laudabunt singuli mariam matrem seculi ipsamet sic dicente. Magna perfecit dominus in marie virtutibus deum concipiendo fit mater plena gracie et impetratrix venie
30. omnibus miserand. Maria tribus mensibus quasi stetit laboribus elizabeth subdendo conferebat de angelo et verborum misterio que protulit salutando mutum audivit eloqui et prophecias do-
31. minii de cristo declarando plura vidit de puero mirabili ab utero precursorem vocando facta post reverencia reversa est ad propria maria contemplando.[494]
32. Ihesu redemptor optime ad mariam nos imprime ut mundi advocata pari forma nos visitet sicut fecit elizabeth per summam pietatem mores et actus dirigat et ad celos alliciat per gratiam collatam.
33. In mariam vite viam matrem veram viventium pie venit qui redemit peccata delinquentium. Gressum cepit cum concepit maria multum properans visitavit confortavit elizabeth compatiens. Salutatur inflammatur elizabeth et fi-
34. lius inaudita fiunt ita de dono sancti spiritus. Impregnata gravidata fit mater olim sterilis infans datus nondum natus exultat cristo iubilis. Servit maior gaudet minor maria fert solatium visitatis preparatis ad spiritum propheticum[495]
35. Precursorem et doctorem maria manu indicat qui rectorem purgatorem digito mundi nunciat.[496] Leva gregem duc ad regem maria cunctos visitans

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gracia lux pellens cuncta scismata maria deo proxima" (O heavenly mother of Christ living spring flowing with grace light that banishes all schisms, Mary, closest to God.)

[494] "Mary for almost three months remained in her labours tending to Elizabeth, she bore from the angel and the mystery of his words those things it had brought forth by his greeting; she has heard the mute one speak and the prophecies of the Lord revealed in Christ, she has seen more things about the wondrous boy, who from the womb calls upon the precursor; after these reverent deeds to her own people Mary returned, contemplating." This antiphon for Lauds references the Gospel text describing Mary remaining with Elizabeth until the birth of John the Baptist. However, the reference to "labours" of tending to Elizabeth and her "deeds" to her people seem to refer more to the apocryphal accounts which describe Mary as "serving" Elizabeth, such as the *Golden Legend,* as discussed in Chapter 2.

[495] "The greater serves, the lesser rejoices, Mary brings solace to those she visits, those prepared for the prophetic spirit." Vespers hymn; once again a possible reference to apocryphal texts describing Mary as serving Elizabeth during her pregnancy, as well as patristic exegesis stressing the virtues of humility and charity – see Chapter 2.

[496] "Mary indicates with her hand the precursor and teacher, who announces with his finger the teacher and cleanser of the world." Continuation of the vespers hymn provides a visual reference to the mirroring of the figures of the Virgin Mary and Elizabeth, and Jesus and John, and their reciprocal gestures and poses in depictions of the Visitation.

ut salvetor et letetur cum tu sis mater nos medians. Summe deus potentie tibi sit laus et

36. gloria da post cursus missie mariam sic nos visere amen. De sacro tabernaculo virtutum flos egreditur in montis divertículo odor marie spargitur.[497] Ex caritatis germine elizabeth appropiat et pietatis culmine ipsam devote visitat
37. Salutat servam domina hec matrem cristi nominat confertur ingens gratia matrem et prolem satiat. En cristi incarnatio panditur [ommission corrected in the margin: per nondum natum] hunc adorat cum gaudio qui ventre matris clauditur. Clamat senex in iubilo videns marie glo-
38. riam beata credens angelo fuisti rem veridicam. Hic stupet rerum regula nature mutans ordinem ubi fiunt miracula per solum celi principem. Presta virgo piissima sufficiens auxilium cum sis mater largissima nos visites in seculum.
39. Hoc parte patri alme o fili marie unite cum spiritu paraclito i sempiterna secula amen. Transivit [Transivit in itinere – l. 8]. Longam viam [Longam viam pertransiit – l. 9]. Tunc ad sermonem Ave maria. Que est ista. Visitatio tua dei genitrix virgo gaudium annuntiavit universo mundo. Dei gen.
40. Adest mira [Adest mira credulitas – l. 14]. Fit nature [Fit nature propinquius – l. 14-15]. Beatam [Beatam me dicent omnes – l. 15]. Ex quo facta est [Ex quo facta est vox – l. 15-16].[498] Beata es [Beata es maria que credidisti - l. 16]. Carisma. Alleluia. Non Fuit [Non fuit Christus – l. 7].

[497] Conventionally, instead of *De sacro tabernaculo* Easton's office would contain the hymn *In Mariam vite viam.* For discussion of *De sacro tabernaculo, see* Chapter 4, section 4.1, p. 145.

[498] "For behold, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy." Antiphon related directly to words spoken by Elizabeth in the Gospel of Luke (Lk 1:44), used for both the Feast of Annunciation and the Visitation directly connecting the two episodes. Also used for the Sunday and Friday of the third week of the Advent and the Sunday of the fourth week. Like other direct citations from the Gospel, it encourages the participants of the liturgy to take on Elizabeth as a model for Marian devotion and to mimic her emotion and behavior when faced with the miracle of the Incarnation.

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