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Hortus Conclusus: A Mariological Symbol in Some Quattrocento Annunciations, According to Church Fathers and Medieval Theologians

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Abstract: This paper seeks to interpret the biblical metaphor of the hortus conclusus (closed garden) according to a Mariological projection, as presented iconographically in various Quattrocento Annunciations. The author bases his interpretations on the exegesis developed by many Latin and Greek-Eastern Church Fathers and theologians, who considered this metaphorical expression of the *Song of Songs* to symbolize Mary's virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity. Their textual interpretations of this doctrine helps elucidate the Mariological meaning in six Quattrocento paintings that include a more or less explicit "closed garden." These six paintings present a closed garden as a visual metaphor illustrating the Mariological dogmas unveiled by the Church Fathers and theologians when explaining this biblical metaphor.

Keywords: Annunciation; hortus conclusus; divine motherhood; perpetual virginity; Mariology; Patrology



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1. Introduction

From the 2nd century of our era, and especially during the 3rd and 4th centuries, various heterodox movements arose within Christendom that, in one way or another, denied that Jesus Christ had two different natures, the divine and the human, substantially united in one person (ὁπόστασις). Led by Nestorius, one of these heterodoxies denied the divinity of Christ, granting him only the category of a human person. A second heresy, starring Eutyches, denied the humanity of Christ because, according to him, human nature was only an appearance in Christ since his only person/nature was the divine one. Both heresies implied refusing that the Virgin Mary was the true Mother of God (Θεοτόκος) when denying that Christ was a true God and a true man. For this reason, the Nestorians considered Mary a simple Christotókos (Χριστοτόκος) or anthropotókos (ἄνθρωποτόκος) after maintaining that the man Christ, born of her, was not a true God.

In this context of heterodox deviations, many influential Church Fathers were forced to develop an intense apologetic campaign in defense of the fundamental canonical dogmas. The first, defending the Christological dogmas, was centered on the firm conviction that Christ, the Son of God incarnated as man, has two natures, divine and human, united in the one person of Christ, true God, and true man. The second, as a necessary consequence, was defending the Mariological dogmas: Mary is the virginal Mother of God (Mary's virginal divine motherhood), and she also remained perpetually virgin, virgin before childbirth, virgin in childbirth, and virgin after childbirth (Mary's perpetual virginity). Only as a derivation and indirect reflection of these two dogmatic meanings could patristic and theological interpretations of the hortus conclusus be linked to some extent with the devotional or spiritual role (for example, in the life of virgins or nuns) played by the image of this metaphor in the *Song of Songs*.

To explain and justify these two essential Mariological dogmas, from the 2nd century onwards, the Church Fathers investigated the Old Testament in search of some expressions that could be interpreted as Mary's prophecies or metaphorical prefigurations consistent

with these two privileges: her virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity. Thus, they soon brought to light several Old Testament sentences that, in their view, foreshadowed Mary as the virginal mother of God. In this sense, they saw her prefigured as “the rod that blossomed in Jesse’s root”, “the flowered dry rod of Aaron”, the soaked fleece of Gideon, “the ark of the covenant”, “the vessel of manna”, “the enclosed garden and the sealed fountain”, “the temple of God”, “the thalamus of divinity”, “the house (or the thronus) of Wisdom”, “the palace of the King”, “the royal hall”, and many other symbolic figures drawn from various Old Testament passages.

Now, leaving out all the other prefigurations of the Virgin Mary in the Old Testament, the author will analyze in this article the one that, according to the Eastern and Western Church Fathers and theologians, alludes to Mary in the *Song of Songs* as an “enclosed garden” (*hortus conclusus*). Accordingly, many Eastern and Western Church Fathers and medieval theologians interpreted the *hortus conclusus* metaphor as an eloquent symbol of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity, as can be seen throughout this paper. Furthermore, based on these multiple Mariological interpretations of the Church Fathers and theologians, throughout the Middle Ages, many hymnographers composed countless liturgical hymns in which Mary is extolled in her virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity through this metaphorical expression, as the author has highlighted in another article (Salvador-González 2023, pp. 1–25).

For greater clarity, I analyze the topic from two complementary perspectives: that of various Greek and Latin Church Fathers who interpret this metaphor with the above double Mariological projection and through several paintings of the Annunciation of the Italian Quattrocento that incorporate, as a symptomatic element, a fence, a wall, or a barrier enclosing a garden, a courtyard, or an open domestic space. To conclude, I consider relationships between these patristic and theological texts and the pictorial Annunciations commented on here. In other words, the purpose is to interpret iconographically, based on patristic and theological sources, several shapes of “closed garden” that stand in some Italian *Annunciations* from the 15th century.

The author has focused his attention on the Annunciations of the Italian Quattrocento because, in this country and in that century, the symbol of the *hortus conclusus* appears in the most precise and most reiterated way.

On the other hand, the author’s iconographic interpretations of this Marian symbol achieve particular relevance due to two adverse facts. First, the Marian symbol of the *hortus conclusus* has been ignored by many iconographers and experts in Christian symbology (Bréhier 1928; Trens 1947; Réau 1957, pp. 86–87;¹ Toscano 1960; Champeaux and Sterckx 1966; Cirlot 1969; Urech 1972; Chevalier and Gheerbrant 1973; Grabar 1979; Schiller 1980). Second—and even more regrettable—the few authors who, as far as the author knows, have considered this specific and precise Marian symbol (Ferguson 1956, p. 48; Biedermann [1989] 1993, p. 248; Becker 2008, p. 216) have “explained” it incorrectly and without any documentary justification. For example, George Ferguson states about the *hortus conclusus*:

“*Garden*. The closed garden symbolizes the Virgin Mary’s Immaculate Conception, in the sense expressed by the *Song of Songs*: ‘You are a closed garden, my sister wife, a closed garden, a sealed fountain.’ (4,12).” (Ferguson 1956, p. 48).

Hans Biedermann, for his part, expresses in this regard:

“*Garden* [. . .] In Christian iconography, the enclosed garden is a symbol of virginity in general and the Virgin Mary’s in particular (‘Mary in the Forest of Roses’).” (Biedermann [1989] 1993, p. 248).

Finally, Udo Becker says the following at his own risk:

“Closed Garden, *Hortus conclusus*, image from the *Song of Songs* that became part of Marian symbolism; Mary is represented sitting in such a garden, with the unicorn in her lap. It is an emblem of the Immaculate Conception.” (Becker 2008, p. 216).

As will be seen throughout this article, the hortus conclusus is, according to the Church Fathers and theologians, a symbol of Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity. So this symbol has no essential relationship with Mary's Immaculate Conception, as Ferguson and Becker erroneously claim, nor with virginity in general or, even less, the unicorn, as Biedermann pretends.

Before exposing the interpretations of the Church Fathers and theologians on the metaphor above, it is convenient to transcribe the corresponding biblical text. In one of the many passages in the *Song of Songs* in which the Bridegroom or Husband and the Bride or Wife exchange compliments, the Bridegroom says to the Bride: "*Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa. Hortus conclusus, fons signatus*" (Cant 4:12. *Biblia Sacra* 2005, p. 616)./"You are an enclosed garden, my sister, wife, an enclosed garden, a sealed source."

2. The Hortus Conclusus in the Exegeses of Some Church Fathers and Theologians

Many Fathers and theologians of the Eastern and Western Churches established a formal parallelism/identification between the hortus conclusus and Mary's perpetual virginity and her virginal divine motherhood.

Among the Fathers of the Greek-Eastern Churches who interpreted the hortus conclusus metaphor of the Song of Songs as a symbol of the Mariological dogma of Mary's virginal divine motherhood, the author can especially mention the following: Saint Epiphanius of Salamis (c. 310–403), Saint John Chrysostom (398–404), Hesychius of Jerusalem († c. 450s), Chrysippus of Jerusalem (ante 409–479), Saint Germanus of Constantinople (635–732), Saint John Damascene (675–749), and John the Geometer (c. 935–c. 1000).

Among the Fathers and theologians of the Latin Church who interpreted this hortus conclusus metaphor as a Mariological symbol of Mary's virginal divine motherhood, the author can mention, above all, the following: Saint Ambrose of Milan (339/40–397), Saint Jerome of Strido (c. 374–420), Saint Ildefonsus of Toledo (607–667), Saint Paschasius Radbertus (c. 792–865), Saint Peter Damian (1007–1072), Saint Bruno of Cologne (or Bruno the Carthusian, 1030–1101), Saint Anselm of Canterbury (1033–1109), Rupert of Deutz (Rupertus Tuitiensis, c. 1075/80–c. 1129), Honorius of Regensburg (1080–1151), Hugo of St Victor (1096–1141), St. Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), Peter of Celle (Petrus Cellensis, c. 1115–1183), Peter of Blois (Petrus Blesensis, c. 1135–c. 1212), Alain of Lille (Alanus de Insulis, 1115–1202), Adam of Perseigne (Adamus Perseniae Abbas, 1145–c. 1221), Helinand of Froidmont (Helinandus Frigidimontis, 1160–1229), Richard of Saint Laurent (Richardus a Sancto Laurentio, † c. 1250), Saint Anthony of Padua (Antonius Patavinus, 1195–1231), Saint Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (1172/21–1274), Saint Albert the Great (1193/1206–1280), Saint Bernardino of Siena (1380–1444), and Dionysius the Carthusian (Denys van Leeuwen or Denis de Rickel, 1402–1471).

So, since the number of Eastern and Western Fathers and theologians who interpreted Mariologically the hortus conclusus metaphor is so large, it is impossible to present them all in this short article. Therefore, the author will now analyze only some representative examples of such exegeses in the Greek-Eastern and Latin-Western backgrounds.

Beginning with the Greek-Eastern Church,² already in the first half of the 5th century Proclus († 446), Archbishop of Constantinople, praises the Virgin Mary, saying that she is the flowery and unfading garden in which the tree of life planted freely gives everyone the fruit of immortality.³

At about the same time, Hesychius of Jerusalem († post 450), in a sermon in honor of the Virgin Mary, begins stating that with an undoubted right all languages greet the Virgin and Mother of God with gratitude, imitating the greeting that Gabriel, the prince of the archangels, gave her; because he greeted her with the expression "God save you, the Lord comes from you (*ex te*)", since the Lord, incarnating in her, would appear to humankind.⁴ Then, Hesychius points out that for this reason, the prophets and exegetes designated the Virgin Mother of God with multiple metaphorical figures, such as "mother of light", "Star of life", "Throne of God", "Temple greater than heaven", "Chair not inferior to that of

the cherubs”, “Garden not sown, fertile and uncultivated”, and various other analogous metaphors.⁵ Shortly afterward, Hesychius insists on similar ideas by stating:

«Another [prophet] called you a closed door to the east [. . .]. Another called you an enclosed garden; and a sealed fountain, the same thing the husband born to you predicted in the Song of Songs. Enclosed garden, because the sickle of corruption or the grape harvest did not touch you, but the flower of Jesse’s root that manifests itself in a pure form to the human race is cultivated for you by the Holy Spirit.»⁶

Toward the first half of the 8th century, John Damascene (675–749), in a sermon in honor of the Virgin Mary’s Nativity, dedicates the following praise to her: “God save you, enclosed garden, fertility never opened preserving the virginity, whose smell is like the open field, which the Lord, who was born of you, blessed.”⁷ That way, the Damascene condenses in this brief praise the statement of Mary’s perpetual virginity and her virginal divine motherhood.

In parallel, and undoubtedly with even greater insistence than in the Greek-Eastern Church, the Latin Church Fathers and theologians expanded on these exegetical interpretations of the hortus conclusus (Song 4:12) with the two Mariological projections already expressed. Thus, in the second half of the 4th century, Ambrose (330–397), Bishop of Milan, in a treatise on Mary’s perpetual virginity, affirms that the biblical expressions “closed door”, “enclosed garden”, and “sealed fountain” are metaphors or symbols of Mary’s virginity, for which he advises virgins to close their doors (of their bodies) to prevent profaners from entering and urging them to preserve their virginity’s seal intact.⁸ A couple of paragraphs later, Ambrose parallels Mary’s virginity with that of the other virgins, who must imitate their supernatural model, Mary, by advising them:

«You are a closed orchard, virgin, preserve your fruits: may the thorns [of sin] not rise to you, but may your grapes bloom. [. . .]. You are a paradise, virgin; beware of Eve. You are a sealed fountain, virgin, let no one dirty your water, let no one muddy it; so that you always see your image [reflected] in your source.»⁹

In this way, Ambrose of Milan is, according to what the author knows, the first Church Father who complements the primary Mariological interpretation of the hortus conclusus with its secondary devotional or mystical interpretation by proposing the absolute virginity of Mary as an example of chastity for the other virgins.

Some years later, Jerome of Strido (c. 347–420) assures in an apologetic epistle to Pammachius that Christ is a virgin and that his Mother, Mary, is a virgin and mother, a perpetual virgin, for which she can be designated with the *Song of Songs* as “an enclosed garden, a sealed fountain” since she is a virgin after childbirth and a mother without having intercourse with any husband; so, we say that Christ is virgin and Mary is also virgin.¹⁰

Toward the middle of the 6th century, Just, Bishop of Urgell, after taking up the expression above with which the Bridegroom praises the Bride in the *Song of Songs*, asserts that this Bride, who is enclosed like a garden by the grace of Christ, is surrounded by an indissoluble matter.¹¹ Just of Urgell adds that the same Mary, Holy Mother of God, can be considered as the enclosed garden and the sealed fountain because, since she conceives while remaining a virgin and gives birth while remaining a virgin, she manifested in herself the immaculate virtue of the enclosed garden and the sealed fountain.¹²

Toward the end of the 6th or early 7th century, the polygraph Isidore (c. 556–636), Archbishop of Seville, praises Mary—which, according to him, means Lady or Illuminator—as “clear lineage of David, Stem of Jesse, Enclosed Garden, Sealed Fountain, Mother of the Lord, Temple of God, Tabernacle of the Holy Spirit”, for being “a holy Virgin, a fertilized Virgin, a virgin before childbirth, a virgin after childbirth, who received the greeting of the angel and knew the mystery of [Jesus’] conception.”

Some decades later, Ildefonsus (607–667), Archbishop of Toledo, asserts in a book on Mary’s perpetual virginity that a new prodigy was performed on Earth when God’s Word became flesh with the name of Emmanuel, which means “God with us.” With even

greater precision, Ildefonsus adds that this certainly alludes to this enclosed garden and the sealed fountain of the *Song of Songs*: Mary is an enclosed garden since, when God entered her, he found her uncorrupted; but she is also a fountain that remained sealed, because Christ, God, and man, when he was born from her, did not violate either the source of virginity or the integrity of the blood (her body).¹³ Thus, in his interpretation of the hortus conclusus biblical metaphor, Ildefonsus of Toledo underlines at the same time the dogma of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary with that of her perpetual virginity.

Analogously, the unknown author of the Fourth Sermon on the Assumption—formerly attributed to Ildefonsus and today considered not of his authorship—affirms that the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus Christ according to the flesh, born of Abraham’s seed of Judah’s tribe, is the stem of Jesse’s root, the gate of heaven, the honor of women, the queen of virgins, the enclosed garden, the sealed fountain, and the well of living waters.¹⁴

Almost two centuries later, the Benedictine Paschasius Radbertus (c. 792–865), Abbot of the Corbie monastery, interprets the phrase from the *Song of Songs* “*Hortus conclusus, soror mea; hortus conclusus, fons signatus*”, in the following Mariological sense: Scripture says “hortus conclusus” because the Virgin Mary’s womb was intact and uncorrupted;¹⁵ it also called her “garden” because in her all the delights of Paradise flourished, and the sealed fountain is her virginal womb, from which our redemption (Christ) sprang and “sealed”, because out of it came unpolluted and uncorrupted blood (Christ).¹⁶ Paschasius concludes his explanation by saying that Mary was the sealed fountain because she was sealed with virginity’s seal so that her husband Joseph found her pregnant via the Holy Spirit’s work, the primary witness of her perfect chastity.¹⁷

Approximately a century and a half later, the Benedictine Peter Damian (1007–1072), Cardinal Bishop of Ostia, states in a sermon that the Blessed Virgin Mary was impregnated and became pregnant without male semen through the Holy Spirit’s work and grace so that she obtained the dignity of being the Mother of God without losing her virginity.¹⁸ The author adds that Mary remained a Virgin when she conceived Jesus and did not suffer pain when giving birth to him since He, being born from her in an ineffable way, did not corrupt the cloister of her virginity.¹⁹ Peter Damian concludes by saying that the Son of God entered into Mary who was a Virgin, and, when he was born, he left her, leaving her a virgin since she is the hortus conclusus and the fons signatus mentioned in the *Song of Songs*, which produced the fruit of fertility (Christ) without diminishing the merit of her virginity.²⁰ In this way, Peter Damian also subscribes to the double Mariological interpretation of the hortus conclusus biblical metaphor, by simultaneously affirming the two complementary dogmas of the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity.

Moreover, in one of his poems, Peter Damian proclaims the Virgin Mary in these lyrical verses:

«Garden of delights
The smell of softness;
You are that whole field,
whom God blessed.»²¹

Approximately seven decades later, the German theologian and Canon Hugh of Saint-Victor (1096–1141), conspicuous leader of the Victorine School, in a rare book on beasts and other things, says that the blessed Virgin Mary was humble, obedient, quiet, the connubial bed of the Bridegroom (Christ), the temple of Solomon, the rod of Aaron, the enclosed garden, the sealed fountain, the triclinium of the Trinity.²²

Perhaps around the same years, the German monk and theologian Honorius of Regensburg (1080–c. 1153), in an exegetical book on the *Song of Songs* with Mariological projection, says that the Virgin Mary, the incorrupt mother of God, was the enclosed garden, to which the Bridegroom Christ descended when he entered the Virgin’s closed womb.²³ Several pages later in this book Honorius, after repeating the well-known sentence of the *Song of Songs*, “*Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa*”, goes on to say that Mary was the orchard of herbs or aromas, meaning that she is full of virtues and was closed in childbirth precisely by

the Holy Spirit's seal.²⁴ The author insists on calling Mary "hortus conclusus" because she kept the seal of virginity after childbirth and continues to call her "fons signatus" because she was also the source and the first example of virginity.²⁵ With his interpretation of the biblical hortus conclusus, Honorius of Regensburg complements its two primary Mariological projections—the virginal divine motherhood of Mary and her perpetual virginity—with the secondary mystical or devotional projection, in the sense that Mary's virginity is a perfect example of virginity for the other virgins.

Almost while Honorius of Regensburg expressed these ideas, the prestigious Saint Bernard (1090–1153), Abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Clairvaux, did so in similar terms. Thus, in a sermon on the *Song of Songs*, Bernard says that Mary preserves her virginity as in a garden to which modesty, recollection, and discipline are familiar, which is why this garden encloses the garden flower that is exhibited in the field and spreads into the nuptial bedchamber.²⁶ The Abbot of Clairvaux completes his speech by saying that this explains the expression of the *Song of Songs*, Hortus conclusus, fons signatus" because God certainly seals in the Virgin the cloister of modesty, and the guard of sanctity inviolate, being holy in body and spirit.²⁷ In this sense, just as Ambrose of Milan and Honorius of Regensburg did before, Bernard of Clairvaux, when interpreting the hortus conclusus metaphor of the *Song of Songs*, perfects its two primordial Mariological meanings—Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity—with the derived devotional meaning, by raising the sublime virtues of Mary, especially her chastity and modesty, as a role model for other virgins, in particular, and for Christians in general.

Half a century later, the French diplomat and poet Peter of Blois (1135–1203) asserts in a sermon for the Virgin's Nativity that, thanks to the integrity of her virginity, Mary deserves the titles of "hortus conclusus, fons signatus", closed door (of the temple, according to Ezekiel's prophecy); in addition, because of her holiness, she deserves the titles of the temple of God, the door of the sanctuary, the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit, and for her glory, Mary deserves the titles of the king's throne hall, the storehouse of fragrances, the *fountain of gardens*, and the paradise of delights.²⁸

Seven or eight decades later, the influential master Bonaventure of Bagnoregio (c. 1221–1274), General of the Franciscan Order, and Cardinal Bishop of Albano, applied on several occasions to interpret Mariologically the metaphors being analyzed. Thus, in a sermon on the Annunciation, he says that when the Bridegroom names the Virgin Mary in the *Song of Songs* with the expressions "Enclosed garden, my sister, wife; enclosed garden, sealed fountain; your emanations are Paradise", he alludes to an enclosure three times, to show that she is an incorrupt virgin when she conceived, a virgin in childbirth, and a virgin after delivery, against the heretics, who said that, after Jesus was born, Mary had intercourse with a man. Furthermore, Bonaventure says that in this lies the huge wonder of Mary, who, even being closed (being a virgin), has been fruitful with extreme fruitfulness.²⁹

Moreover, in another sermon for Mary's Assumption, Bonaventure goes on to say that the Blessed Virgin Mary is compared to a sealed fountain through the integrity of her modesty. That is why the *Song of Songs* expresses it by saying: "Enclosed Garden, my sister, my wife, enclosed garden, a sealed fountain. Your exhalations are Paradise."³⁰ Bonaventure proceeds by saying that the garden's enclosing and the fountain's sealing go hand in hand because whoever wants to have the modesty of chastity must have the beauty of modesty. This chastity and modesty enclose the blessed Virgin Mary's garden: she was fruitful, but she was a virgin; she is an "enclosed garden" because she was intact, unpolluted, and uncontaminated; and she was "sealed fountain" because she was closed (virgin).³¹ Bonaventure concludes his dissertation by insisting that the Scripture says "enclosed garden" because Mary was of a very rigid discipline and the most beautiful modesty because, if someone is modest, he do not boast in the filth of lustful pleasure.³²

As can be seen from the comparative analysis of the patristic and theological texts exposed here, their complete doctrinal concordance is evident throughout all the centuries and in the two Eastern and Western christian milieus: all those Fathers and theologians of the Greek-Eastern and Latin Churches coincide in interpreting the biblical metaphor

hortus conclusus as a poetic symbol for Mary in her double supernatural privilege as God's virginal mother and perpetual virgin.

Now, Mary's virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity have an essential and indissoluble relationship with the Annunciation. In this event, the heavenly messenger Gabriel communicates to Mary to have been chosen by God the Father to conceive and give birth to God the Son supernaturally incarnated as man preserving her virginity. Let us see, therefore, if these Church Fathers and theologians' exegetical texts are reflected in some way in the Renaissance iconography of the Annunciation.

3. Iconographic Interpretation of Seven Quattrocento Annunciations

Just as a few texts can be studied to illustrate the doctrine of Mary's perpetual virginity, so six Quattrocento paintings can be examined as illustrating the theme of the hortus conclusus. This does not mean that the Italian artists of that period are the "inventors" of this iconographic subject: in fact, this iconographic topic was already well known in the Byzantine sphere as early as the 11th century, as Helena Papastavrou (2007, pp. 255–58) has convincingly demonstrated in her excellent monograph on the Byzantine and European Annunciations from the 11th to the 15th century.

In *The Annunciation (Montecarlo Altarpiece)*, c. 1432, an altarpiece of the Basilica di Santa Maria delle Grazie in San Giovanni Valdarno (Figure 1), Fra Angelico stages this meaningful Marian event in a house shaped as a little loggia, widely open to a flowery garden. Through the wide openings in the front—at the top of which, in a medallion, the figure of a prophet carries a phylactery to signify the prophecies about Messiah's birth—can be seen in the background, in the intermediate plane to the right, the simple room of the Virgin, lacking a door.

In this *Montecarlo Altarpiece*, the angel Gabriel and the Virgin Mary exchange with gestures of modesty their decisive dialogue: he, as the celestial herald, respectfully communicates the Most High's message to the Virgin; she humbly accepts the divine design as a submissive "slave of the Lord (*ancilla Domini*)."³³ This is a bodily expressiveness similar to that depicted by Fra Angelico in other *Annunciations*, such as those in the Prado Museum, Cortona, Convento di San Marco in Florence, and Armadio degli Argenti.

Fra Angelico wanted to emphasize in this San Giovanni Valdarno's altarpiece the garden, in which can be perceived a little wooden fence that closes the house's garden. This is an eloquent detail to highlight the profound Mariological meanings of the hortus conclusus, according to the well-known exegeses of Eastern and Western Church Fathers and theologians about the two Mariological meanings already explained: Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity.

In this sense, it is necessary to emphasize that, as a cultured Dominican friar and Prior of the convent of San Domenico in Fiesole, Fra Angelico knew perfectly well all the crucial Mariological meanings underlying the hortus conclusus biblical metaphor. Therefore, he wanted to make those dogmatic meanings explicit by including an enclosed garden in this *Annunciation* of the *Montecarlo Altarpiece*, as he did in his other three versions of the *Annunciation* above (except for the one in the Prado Museum).

In this sense, it is a pity that the commentators the author knows of this *Montecarlo Altarpiece* (Pope-Hennessy 1952, p. 168;³³ Bartz 1998, p. 53;³⁴ Refice 2009, p. 168; Zuccari 2009, p. 33) do not document with patristic and theological arguments the dogmatic meanings of this hortus conclusus.

Fra Filippo Lippi (1406–1489) structures with great originality *The Martelli Annunciation*, c. 1440, from the Martelli Chapel in the Basilica of San Lorenzo in Florence (Figure 2). From the outset, Lippi stages the event in an ostentatious and complex Renaissance palace, with an enlarged perspective. In addition, he surprisingly adds two other angels as companions of the archangel Gabriel, filling the left half of the composition, while in the right half, he places Gabriel and Mary.



Figure 1. Fra Angelico, *The Annunciation (Montecarlo Altarpiece)*, c. 1432. Museo della Basilica di Santa Maria delle Grazie, San Giovanni Valdarno.



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

The author is interested in emphasizing the very significant meanings of the closed garden (*hortus conclusus*), which can be seen in the intermediate planes: as he has repeatedly stated, this closed garden symbolizes Mary's virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity. It is necessary, in fact, to remember that Fra Filippo Lippi was a learned Carmelite priest and friar, who, as such, knew very well all the essential Mariological meanings deciphered by the Church Fathers, theologians, and medieval hymnographers in the *hortus conclusus* biblical metaphor. That is why he wanted to illustrate these dogmatic meanings through an enclosed garden that he included in the background of the scene of this *Martelli Annunciation*.

Therefore, it is surprising that the commentators the author knows on this *Martelli Annunciation* (Marchini 1979, p. 203; Ruda 1993, pp. 115–33, 399; Holmes 1999, pp. 122–25;³⁵ Christiansen 2005, pp. 51–55; Fossi and Princi 2011, pp. 19–21) have forgotten to mention the *hortus conclusus*, or, when someone does mention it (Holmes 1999, pp. 123–24), she does not justify with documentary arguments its deep Mariological symbolisms.

Benedetto Bonfigli prefers to stage this *Annunciation*, c. 1445, from the Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum in Madrid (Figure 3), in a courtyard or open-air space neighboring a luxurious palace, against the background of a fanciful landscape of city, sea, and mountains. In that open space, Gabriel, on his knees with a lily stem in his left hand, blesses the Virgin with his right while she kneels with her hands joined in prayer. From the upper left angle, God the Father, surrounded by a nimbus of cherubim, sends towards Mary the fertilizing ray of light (symbol of God the Son), preceded by the flying dove of the Holy Spirit. What is most interesting to highlight here is the high, luxurious wall of carved marble that fully encloses the courtyard (a substitute for a garden) where the Virgin remains and with which she identifies herself. This walled courtyard is an imaginative way of signifying the traditional *hortus conclusus*,³⁶ with its inherent deep dogmatic meanings.

When trying to explain the motifs of why Benedetto Bonfigli included an enclosure of the domestic space in this *Annunciation* from the Thyssen-Bornemisza in Madrid, it is not necessary to imagine that the painter had sufficient theological culture to know the dogmatic meanings of the biblical metaphor *hortus conclusus*. As possible explanations for this inclusion, these two hypotheses stand out: either Bonfigli had at his side some ecclesiastic or humanist fellow who indicated to him the need to include this symbolic enclosure in his *Annunciation* and, eventually, instructed him about its Mariological meanings; or Bonfigli limited himself to “copying”, paraphrasing it, the compositional detail of some “closed garden” or domestic enclosure that he had seen in other *Annunciations* of some leading painters, although he did not know its true Mariological symbolisms.

Fra Carnevale (1420–1484) stages *The Annunciation*, c. 1445–1450, at the Alte Pinakothek in Munich (Figure 4), inside a splendid Renaissance palace, luxuriously furnished, opening onto an opulent garden. The archangel Gabriel begins kneeling before the Virgin, while pointing towards her with his right index finger to signify that the Most High has chosen her to be the Mother of God the Son when incarnating as a man. Standing before a precious prie-dieu/lectern, on which she keeps her prayer book open, Mary—towards whom the dove of the Holy Spirit descends flying—lowers her head and eyes with modesty and compliance, ready to accept the divine design as a humble “slave of the Lord”. Behind her, the Virgin's nuptial room stands, through whose open door one can see the red bed, with its partially closed protective curtains. It is clear that in this painting, Fra Carnevale wants to give the bed and the nuptial room (*thalamus*) an explicit, significant function as an eloquent symbol of the Mariological and Christological dogmas already explained.

It is necessary, in this regard, to specify that Fra Carnevale was a cultured Dominican priest and friar, who, due to such a status, knew well all the core Mariological meanings with which the Church Fathers, theologians, and medieval hymnographers interpreted the biblical metaphor of the *hortus conclusus*. Therefore, Fra Carnevale wanted to make these dogmatic meanings perceptible by including an enclosed orchard in the background of this *Annunciation* in the National Gallery in London.



Figure 3. Benedetto Bonfigli, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445. Thyssen-Bornemisza Museum, Madrid.



Figure 4. Fra Carnevale, *The Annunciation*, c. 1445–1450. The National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC.

It is, therefore, bizarre that the relevant meanings of this symbolic bed go unnoticed by many commentators on this painting. As far as the author knows, only Keith Christiansen has considered this Marian symbol when, commenting this Fra Carnevale's *Annunciation*,

asserts, “Beyond this sanctified area is a deep, colonnaded portico, at the end of which is a door surmounted by an escutcheon supported by two winged putti that leads to an arbor and a closed gate (commonly referring to Mary’s virginity; Ezekiel 44:1–2). The walled garden (the hortus conclusus of the Song of Songs 4:12) to the left of the colonnade is surrounded by the arbor and contains Cyprus trees (symbols of the Virgin), a well (the fons hortorum of the Song of Songs (4:15), a thatched structure of some sort, and peacocks (symbol of immortality).” (Christiansen 2005, p. 182).

In his *Annunciation*, c. 1452–1466, a fresco in the main choir chapel of the Basilica of San Francesco in Arezzo (Figure 5), Piero della Francesca (c. 1415–1492), depicts Mary with a gesture of surprise at the unexpected arrival of the angel Gabriel. He begins to kneel before the Virgin while raising her right hand in the double gesture of blessing her and indicating, pointing towards heaven, the divine origin of his message. In the upper-left quadrant, God the Father sends the ray of light (symbol of God the Son) towards Mary’s head that will fertilize her womb.



Figure 5. Piero della Francesca, *The Annunciation*, c. 1452–1466. Basilica di San Francesco, Arezzo.

In the courtyard adjacent to the portico where the Virgin stands, Piero highlights with special emphasis on the back wall a closed door, a compositional and conceptual link between the angel and Mary, which represents the idea of Ezekiel’s *porta clausa*. The closed door included in this painting symbolizes the five Mariological and Christological meanings highlighted for more than a millennium by the Latin and Greek-Eastern Church Fathers and theologians when interpreting the textual metaphor of Ezekiel’s sentence above. According to these Christian doctrine’s masters, Ezekiel’s *porta clausa* is, in its Mariological implication, a triple symbol of Mary, namely, her virginal divine motherhood—in its two essential moments, when conceiving and giving birth to the incarnate Son of God without needing male participation—and her perpetual virginity, by always remaining a virgin before childbirth, during childbirth, and after childbirth. Furthermore, the Church Fathers and theologians interpret Ezekiel’s closed door in its Christological dimension as a double symbol of the virginal conception/incarnation and the supernatural birth of God the Son made man in Mary’s inviolate womb. Therefore, it is disappointing that none of the commentators the author knows of this painting by Piero della Francesca (Clark 1951, pp. 93–96; Busignani 1967, pp. 97–99; Hendy 1968, pp. 85–86, 90; Longhi 1989, p. 79; Venturi 1990; Centauro 1990, pp. 225, 275, 284; Angelini 1991, p. 41; Roettgen 1996, pp. 230–33)

have mentioned its closed door. Only Frederick Hartt (1987) and Daniel Arasse (1999) mention and partially explain it.

Apart from—and as a complement to—this obvious *porta clausa*, the author believes it is plausible to interpret in this fresco by Piero the solid wall that closes the courtyard (an enclosure of an intimate residential space) as a subtle suggestion of the *hortus conclusus*. Thus, the painter would allude to the various explained Mariological meanings of the enclosed garden, which agree with the Mariological and Christological meanings of Ezekiel's *porta clausa*. In any case, none of the above commentators on this painting, not even Hartt or Arasse, has considered the high wall included in this fresco as a possible allusion to the *hortus conclusus*.

Now, the possibility that Piero della Francesca wanted to include this high wall enclosing the domestic space as a clear allusion to the biblical *hortus conclusus* could be explained by two complementary motifs: first, because Piero himself was a man of great humanistic and Christian culture, which is why he most likely knew the Mariological meanings of the biblical metaphor *hortus conclusus*; second, because this Annunciation was destined for the important Basilica of San Francisco in Arezzo, it is almost certain that some Franciscan theologian would induce the painter to include in this *Annunciation* an allusion to the *hortus conclusus* from the *Song on Songs* after having already made clear the reference to the other biblical metaphor of Ezekiel's *porta clausa*.

In the famous *Cestello Annunciation*, 1489–1490, originally painted for the church of the Florentine monastery of Cestello, now at the Galleria degli Uffizi in Florence (Figure 6), Sandro Botticelli displays a series of novel compositional and narrative features, especially concerning the bodily expressiveness of both protagonists with their dynamic gestures and attitudes. The author will not dwell now on those aspects, which several commentators have analyzed well. On the contrary, he wants to highlight the austere garden enclosed by a low white wall that can be glimpsed through the intermediate planes' door before the extensive panoramic view of a river and city landscape.



Figure 6. Sandro Botticelli, *The Cestello Annunciation*, 1489–1490. Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence.

Now, the possibility that Botticelli wanted to include in this Cestello Annunciation a closed garden in allusion to the biblical hortus conclusus could be explained in two ways: first, because Botticelli had a great humanistic and religious culture, so he probably knew the Mariological meanings of the hortus conclusus metaphor of the *Song of Songs*; second, because, since this painting was intended for the church of the Florentine monastery of Cestello, it cannot be ruled out that some theologian or ecclesiastic may have induced Botticelli to include that closed garden in this Annunciation as a direct reference to the biblical hortus conclusus metaphor. In any case, Botticelli seems to offer another exquisite example of hortus conclusus, with its dogmatic meanings already explained.

That is why it is surprising that none of the commentators the author knows of this work (Mandel 1967; Lightbown 1978, vol. I, p. 101, vol. II, pp. 69–71; Horne 1980, pp. 164–67; Horne 1986, pp. 165–70; Meltzoff 1987; Grömling and Lingesleben 2000, pp. 74–77; Galizzi Kroegel 2003, pp. 67–68; Magaluzzi 2003; Cecchi 2005, pp. 254–60) have highlighted this hortus conclusus or, above all, have justified its true Mariological meanings from primary sources of Christian doctrine.

A partial exception to this silence is Ronald Lightbown, who, when analyzing this *Cestello Annunciation* in his last monograph on Botticelli (Lightbown 1989), only mentions the topic with the following comment: “The setting of the Annunciation [Cestello] is a room or vestibule paved with a perspective floor of red tiles in a white framework. Its receding lines lead the eye through a doorway in the gray wall to a white-walled garden plot and the high horizon of a river landscape”. (Lightbown 1989, pp. 194–97).

4. Conclusions

At the end of this research tour, three main conclusions seem to matter:

- (1) Throughout more than a millennium, many Fathers and theologians of the Greek and Latin Churches interpreted the expression hortus conclusus (and its analogous fons signatus) from the *Song of Songs* (4:12) as a clear metaphor for Mary in her double privilege of virginal mother of God and perpetual virgin. This millenary exegetical concordance justifies the solid Christian doctrinal tradition, which defends against heretics and infidels the two essential Mariological dogmas of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood and perpetual virginity.
- (2) The analysis of six pictorial Annunciations from the Italian Quattrocento—in a situation like many other Annunciations from other times and countries—shows that many artists include in the representation of this Marian event a garden or domestic space enclosed by a fence or a wall. This symptomatic narrative-compositional coincidence between different artists interested in highlighting this enclosed garden allows us to suppose that the same idea or significant metaphorical figure inspires all of them: that of visualizing the symbolism of the two crucial Mariological dogmas of Mary’s virginal divine motherhood and her perpetual virginity.
- (3) In the end, from the textual-iconic comparative analysis between those interpretations of Christian thinkers on the biblical expression under study and the pictorial images of the Annunciation analyzed here, this last conclusion seems to be inferred in complete logic: the masterminds of these paintings included in the scene a garden or space enclosed by a wall or fence as a *visual metaphor* capable of illustrating at all times the *textual metaphor* of the hortus conclusus, according to the two Mariological meanings deciphered by the Eastern and Western Fathers and theologians for more than a millennium. It is necessary, in fact, to remember that the six Italian painters whose *Annunciations* have been analyzed here were in favorable conditions to know the Mariological meanings of the biblical metaphor hortus conclusus. Three of them, Fra Angelico, Fra Filippo Lippi, and Fra Carnevale, being priests and friars, knew these dogmatic symbolisms perfectly. Regarding the other three, Piero della Francesca and Botticelli were people of great humanistic and religious culture, to a lesser extent, it seems, than Benedetto Bonfigli. But in those last three cases, a theologian or ecclesiastic fellow could have served as an iconographic mentor who induced them to include

a closed garden or an analogous enclosure of domestic space in their corresponding *Annunciations*, especially in those that, like those of Piero della Francesca and Botticelli, were destined for important churches.

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Notes

- ¹ In his renowned collection on iconography of Christian art, Louis Réau asserts that there are seven Old Testament prefigurations of Mary's virginal motherhood: (1) the unconsumed burning bush; (2) Aaron's flowering rod; (3) Gideon's fleece; (4) the closed door revealed to Ezekiel; (5) the sealed stone from Daniel's lions' den; (6) the rolling stone in Nebuchadnezzar's dream explained by Daniel; (7) the three young Hebrews in the oven (Réau 1957, pp. 86–87). Unfortunately, Réau forgot to mention the hortus conclusus as a biblical prefiguration of Mary's virginal motherhood.
- ² To facilitate the transcription of the texts of these Greek-Eastern Fathers, we will quote them according to the Latin translation brought by Jacques-Paul Migne in his *Patrologiae Cursus Completus. Series graeca*, 166 vols.
- ³ "Ipsa [Mary], floridus ac immarcescibilis hortus, in qua lignum vitae plantatum universis libere fructum immortalitatis praebet." (Proclus, *Oratio VI*, 758).
- ⁴ "Ture proculdubio omnis grati animi lingua salutatur Virginem et Deiparam, ac pro viribus Gabrielem angelorum principem imitatur. Itaque hic quidem dicit ei, Ave, ille vero acclamat, Dominus ex te, eo quod Dominus aditus assumpta carne apparuerit humano generi." (Hesychius, *Sermo V*, 1460 A–1461A).
- ⁵ Hesychius, *Sermo V*, 1460 A–1461A.
- ⁶ "Alius te appellavit portam clausam in oriente sitam [. . .]. Vocavit te hortum conclusum; et fontem signatum, is qui ex te ortus est sponsus, praedixit in Canticis. Hortum conclusum, ob id quod falx corruptionis, aut vindemia te non attingit; florem autem qui ex radici lesse hominum generi pure exhibetur, excultus tibi a puro et intemerato Spiritu. Fontem conclusum, quia flumen vitae ex te prodiens replevit terram; alioqui ramus nuptialis fontem tuum nequaquam exhaustit." (Hesychius, *Sermo V*, 1465A–B). The translation is mine.
- ⁷ "Ave, hortus conclusus, virginitatis compendium nunquam aperta fertilitas, cujus odor est sicut agri pleni, cui benedixit, qui ex te prodiit, Dominus." (Iohannes Damascenus. *Homilia II in Nativitatem B.V. Mariae*. PG 96, 691).
- ⁸ "Porta ergo clausa virginitas est: et hortus clausus virginitas: et fons signatus virginitas. Audi, virgo, diligentius apertis auribus, et clauso pudore, aperi manus, ut te pauper agnoscat: claude ostium, ne temerator irreat: aperi mentem, serva signaculum." (Ambrosius, *De Institutione Virginis*, 321).
- ⁹ "60. Hortus clausus es, virgo, serva fructus tuos: non ascendant in te spinae, sed uvae tuae florent. [. . .]. Paradisus es, virgo, Evam cave. 61. Fons signatus es, virgo, nemo aquam tuam polluat, nemo conturbet; ut imaginem tuam in fonte tuo semper attendas." (Ambrosius, *De Institutione Virginis*, 335–336). The English translation is mine.
- ¹⁰ "Christus virgo, Mater virginis nostri Virgo perpetua, mater, et virgo. [. . .] Hortus conclusus, fons signatus (*Cant.* 4, 12) [. . .]. Virgo post partum, mater ante quam nupta. Igitur, ut dicere coeperamus, Christus virgo, virgo Maria, utrique sexui virginitatis dedicavere principia." (Hieronymus, *Epistola XLVIII*, 21, 510).
- ¹¹ "*Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa*. Huic sponsae, quae velut hortus concluditur, id est Christi gratia, tam indissolubili materia circumdatur, ut de ea Isaias propheta dixerit: *Non adiiciet ut pertranseat per te omnis incircumcisis et immundus (Isa. LII)*". Potest etiam hortus conclusus et fons signatus, ipsa mater Domini S. Maria intelligi; quae virgo concipiens virgoque generans, conclusi horti et signati fontis intemeratum in se decus exhibuit." (Justus Urgellensis, *In Cantica*, 91, 978).
- ¹² "*Hortus conclusus soror mea sponsa*. Huic sponsae, quae velut hortus concluditur, id est Christi gratia, tam indissolubili materia circumdatur, ut de ea Isaias propheta dixerit: *Non adiiciet ut pertranseat per te omnis incircumcisis et immundus (Isa. LII)*". Potest etiam hortus conclusus et fons signatus, ipsa mater Domini S. Maria intelligi; quae virgo concipiens virgoque generans, conclusi horti et signati fontis intemeratum in se decus exhibuit." (Justus Urgellensis, *In Cantica*, 91, 978).
- ¹³ "Hic est itaque hortus ille conclusus in Canticis, fons signatus (*Cant.* IV, 12): hortus siquidem conclusus, quia quando Deus ingressus est ad eam, incorruptam invenit; sed fons signatus permansit, quando Deus et homo natus est ex ea, nec tamen fontem pudoris aut sanguinis integritatem violavit." (Justus Urgellensis, *In Cantica*, 91, 978).
- ¹⁴ "Est igitur sancta et venerabilis Virgo Maria, mater Domini nostri Jesu Christi secundum carnem, ex semine Abrahae orta ex tribu Juda, virga de radice Jesse, clara ex stirpe David, filia Jerasalem, stella maris, ancilla Dei, regina gentium, domina regum, sponsa

Domini, mater Christi, Conditoris templum, Spiritus sancti sacrarium, velut columba speciosa, pulchra ut luna, electa ut sol (*Cant*, IV), signaculum dei, reparatio Evae, introitus vitae, jauua coeli, decus mulierum, caput virginum, hortus conclusus, fons signatus, puteus aquarum viventium.” (Anonymus, *Sermo IV. De Assumptione*, 258).

15 “Nimirum quia, quidquid in ea speciali narratur affamine, totum expressius monstratum signatur in genere. Ait enim Sponsus ita: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea; hortus conclusus, fons signatus* (*Cant*, iv, 12). *Itaque hortus conclusus*, quia uterus Virginis modis omnibus integer atque incorruptus fuit.” (Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Mattheum*, 106).

16 “Hortus autem ideo est appellatus, quia universas delicias paradisi in eo effloruerunt, et signatus est venter pudoris, ubi fons emicuit nostrae redemptionis. Signatus, inquam, quia incontaminatus atque incorruptus exstitit sanguis, ex quo manavit unda liquoris.” (Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Mattheum*, 106).

17 “Ergo quia signatus fuit sigillo pudoris, inventa est a sponso habens in utero, non aliunde quam de Spiritu sancto, ut idem investigator mysterii, etiam testis fieret castitatis.” (Paschasius Radbertus, *Expositio in Mattheum*, 106).

18 “beatissima Virgo nullo viri semine gravida, sola sancti Spiritus gratia fecundatur. Quae et dignitatem Genitricis obtinuit, et virginalem pudicitiam non amisit. Quae et dignitatem Genitricis obtinuit, et virginalem pudicitiam non amisit.” (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI*, 760–761).

19 “Quae enim Virgo permansit concipiendo, dolorem sentire non potuit patiando. Ille quippe, qui ex ea ineffabiliter prodiit, claustrum virginalis pudicitiae non corrupit.” (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI*, 760–761).

20 “Virginem denique veniens, introivit, Virginem nihilominus exiens, dereliquit. Haec est enim hortus conclusus, fons signatus (*Cant*. IV), quae et fructum fecunditatis edidit, et virginitatis meritum non imminuit.” (Petrus Damianus, *Sermo XLVI*, 760–761).

21 “Ortus deliciarum/Odor suavitatum;/Tu ager ille plenus,/Cui benedixit Deus.” (Petrus Damianus, *Rythmus*, 938). The translation is mine.

22 “Beata Virgo Maria fuit, humilis, obediens, quieta [. . .] thalamus sponsi, templum Salomonis, virga Aaron [. . .] hortus conclusus, fons signatus, triclinium Trinitatis [. . .]”. (Hugo de S. Victore, *De Bestiis*, 138–139).

23 “Hortus conclusus fuit virgo Maria, mater Dei incorrupta, in quem hortum sponsus Christus descendit quando in clausum Virginis uterum venit.” (Honorius, *Sigillum*, 492).

24 “*Hortus conclusus, soror mea, sponsa*. Ipsa erat herbarum vel aromatum hortus, id est plena virtutibus; quae erat in partu conclusus, scilicet signaculo sancti Spiritus.” (Honorius, *Sigillum*, 507).

25 “*Hortus conclusus* iterum, quia post partum non est reclusum virginitatis signaculum. *Fons signatus*. Ipsa etiam erat fons, id est primum exemplum virginitatis.” (Honorius, *Sigillum*, 507).

26 “Et bene in horto virginitas, cui familiaris verecundia est, fugitans publici, latibulis gaudens, patiens disciplinae. Denique in horto flos clauditur, qui in campo exponitur spargiturque in thalamo.” (Bernardus, *Sermón* 47, 3–5, 619).

27 “Et habes: *Hortus conclusus, fons signatus*. Quod utique claustrum pudoris signat in virgine, et inviolatae custodiam sanctitatis, si tamen talis fuerit, quae sit sancta corpore et spiritu.” (Bernardus, *Sermón* 47, 3–5, 619).

28 “propter virginitatis integritatem *hortus conclusus, fons signatus*, porta clausa, *Libanus non invictus*, propetr sanctitatem templum Dei, porta sanctuarii, cara Dei, sacrarium Spiritus sancti; propter gloriam aula regis, cella aromatum, *fons hortorum*, paradisus deliciarum.” (Petrus Blesensis. *Sermo XXXVIII*, 673).

29 “Unde Sponsus Virginem Mariam alloquens Canticorum quarto dicit: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa; hortus conclusus, fons signatus; emissiones tuae paradisus*.—Ter dicit clausionem ipsius, ut ostendat, quod incorrupta fuit in conceptu, in partu et in progressu, contra haereticos, qui dixerunt, postea ipsam a viro fuisse cognitam. Et in hoc est tamen valde mirabile, quod sit clausa, et tamen fecunda erat fecunditate summa”. (Bonaventura, *De Annunciatione. Sermo II*, 2, 597).

30 “Tertio comparatur beata Virgo fonti signato propter pudicitiae integritatem; unde in Canticis: *Hortus conclusus, soror mea sponsa, hortus conclusus, fons signatus. Emissiones tuae paradisus*.” (Bonaventura, *De Assumptione. Sermo IV*, 718).

31 “Clausio horti et signatio fontis coniuncta sunt, quia qui vult habere pudicitiam castitatis, oportet, quod habeat et venustatem verecundiae. Ista claudunt hortum beatae Virginis; fecunda fuit, sed tamen virgo fuit; *hortus conclusus*, quia intacta, impolluta et incontaminata fuit; fuit *fons signatus*, quia clausus.” (Bonaventura, *De Assumptione. Sermo IV*, 718).

32 “Dicit his: *hortus conclusus*, quia fuit rigidissimae disciplinae et venustissimae verecundiae, quia, si aliquis est verecundus, non libenter diffundit se in turpitudinem libidinis.” (Bonaventura, *De Assumptione. Sermo IV*, 718).

33 Pope-Hennessy (1952, p. 168) attributes this Annunciation to Zanobi Strozzi.

34 Commenting on the counterpart Annunciation by Fra Angelico in the Diocesan Museum of Cortona, Gabriele Bartz (1998, p. 50) states, “As a Marian symbol, a garden of the *hortus conclusus* type (closed orchard) appears on the left: it is a meadow full of rose bushes, with palm trees and fruit trees.” Regrettably, Bartz has ignored the Mariological meanings of that *hortus conclusus*.

35 In her documented monograph on Fra Filippo Lippi, Megan Holmes is a partial exception to the usual omission or insufficiency of the analyzed topic, when asserting, “The courtyard is the Enclosed Garden, a standard but usually plainer symbol of Mary’s virginity”. (Holmes 1999, p. 123). In another paragraph, Holmes goes on to say, “Behind this shallow space representing the Virgin’s chamber, Fra Filippo Lippi depicted a deep *hortus conclusus* (enclosed garden) that extends back along the steeply receding orthogonals of the neo-classical buildings on either side.” (Holmes 1999, p. 124).

- ³⁶ Commenting this painting Andrea De Marchi asserts, “Bonfigli was certainly very familiar with the cloistered and discrete settings in Fra Angelico’s paintings of the Annunciation—sited between a monastic cell and a walled garden (hortus conclusus)—but he includes instead the view of a city set against a wide horizon”. (De Marchi 2005, pp. 212–14).

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