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# THE ANNUNCIATION IN BYZANTINE ART

## PATTERNS OF REPRESENTATION

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### **Abstract**

The event of the Annunciation has received special attention from Christian artists. A mural painting dating as far back as the first half of the third century has been preserved in one of the most impressive Roman catacombs (the Catacomb of Priscilla), already providing an initial version of the pattern of representation of this biblical episode. The pattern was taken over by artists (painters, sculptors, mosaicists, miniaturists), enriched with details/symbols and diversified to capture the theological message conveyed by the biblical text, the apocryphal text and patristic tradition. The present study aims to observe the evolution of the artistic pattern of the Annunciation in Byzantine art. It starts with a chronological overview of the way the pattern was developed in the first Christian millennium, irrespective of the medium employed by the artistic representations. After that, the two Byzantine patterns of representation (the Annunciation indoors and the Annunciation in the garden by the spring) are presented, divided into categories (fresco, mosaic, icon on wood, and miniature), within a time interval that marks the most prolific period of Byzantine art (10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> century). The present research will provide the reader with the opportunity to ascertain the appearance, observe the evolution and understand the theological rationale that determined the current choice of a certain Byzantine pattern of representation of the event of the Annunciation.

*Keywords:* Byzantine art, print, Annunciation, angel, Virgin Mary

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### **1. Introduction**

Due to its theological significance, the event of the Annunciation has been represented artistically ever since the first Christian centuries. The message of the Apostles, and later, of Christian missionaries preaching the good tidings of the incarnation of the Son of God was pictured on the walls of the first Christian places of prayer. Thus, testimony by word was supported and promoted by means of an art that, through its specific means, addresses sight, a revealing medium superior to revelation by hearing. Given this perspective, artists wished to embed into their creations the theological message conveyed by the Holy Scriptures and promoted by Church Tradition. This led to a gradual increase in

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the theological signification in artistic representations, as the Church kept consolidating the teachings of the faith. For instance, after the third Ecumenical Council of Ephesus in 431, which established that the Mother of God is the Theotokos, the Virgin was frequently represented as an Empress [1]. Examples in that sense are the mosaics of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Italy, and the Basilica of Santa Maria Antiqua of Rome, dating back to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century and the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, respectively.

It is on such issues that the present research will insist, aiming to observe the evolution of the artistic pattern of the event of the Annunciation. In order to understand the manner in which this pattern has developed over time, it will be necessary to consult the text in the Gospel of Luke recounting the episode that took place in Nazareth (Luke 1.26-38), the apocryphal writing known as the *Protoevangelium of James* [2], and the writings of some Fathers of the Church which analyse this topic (Epiphanius the Monk and Priest [3], Saint Simeon Metaphrastes [4], and Saint Maximus the Confessor [5]). Wherever one of these writings appears to be used by artists as inspiration, the necessary specifications will be made to identify the underlying text. To carry out this endeavour and, implicitly, argue this study's point of view, several bibliographical sources from the literature that track the evolution of the pattern along certain periods of time or in different geographical areas will be invoked. The flagship authors are Henry Maguire [6], Ann van Dijk [7], Simon Altmann [8], Maria Lidova [9], and Catherine Gines Taylor [1].

This paper is divided into two sections. In the first one, the most representative artistic creations are mentioned chronologically, irrespective of the underlying medium they employ, highlighting their particularities and the way in which the artistic pattern is shaped. The second part focuses on the two patterns, with an emphasis on the way they are outlined in Byzantine/Byzantine-inspired frescoes, mosaics, icons and miniatures. The aim is to highlight the way in which the Byzantine pattern is expressed in the predominantly Orthodox environments (Greek/Athonite, Macedonian, Russian, Serbian, etc.), as well as in the Italian sphere, where the masterpieces of some great mosaicists from Byzantium are found (the Basilica of San Marco in Venice and the Palatine Chapel in Palermo, Sicily, etc.), from the 10<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In this context, the novelty element consists of the parallel presentation of the two patterns that developed in the Byzantine world.

## **2. The Annunciation in artistic representations of the first millennium**

One of the oldest frescoes depicting the event of the Annunciation is found in the Catacomb of Priscilla, one of the oldest and most extensive burial sites in Ancient Rome. The painting dates from the first half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The Virgin Mary is represented as sitting on a high-backed chair / an imperial throne. Her clothing is specific to the Roman world (she wears a tunic and a pallium). Before the Virgin stands the Archangel Gabriel wingless, in the guise of a young man wearing a tunic himself. It is worth noting that the Virgin does

not wear a veil, an item of clothing that is characteristic of the Christian East [9]. Having the Virgin sit on a throne emphasises her imperial dignity.

The bas-relief on one of the side walls of the famous Pignatta sarcophagus in Ravenna, Italy (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century) proposes a type of representation inspired by the apocryphal text of the Protoevangelium of James [2], which would be echoed by other representations in the following centuries. The Virgin Mary is depicted spinning wool from a vessel positioned near the chair that she is sitting on. The Virgin Mary can be seen in this same position on a wood bas-relief (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century, ca. 500) of Coptic origin, which is kept at the Louvre Museum in Paris, or on the cylindrical ivory vessels/boxes (5<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century) at the State Museum in Berlin and the Cleveland Museum of Art [9]. Note that the apocryphal writing and the patristic texts which took over the details in the Protoevangelium as to the preparation of royal-purple fabric and scarlet silk for the veil of the Temple of Jerusalem [5, p. 94] became a source of additional inspiration (aside from the Gospel text - Luke 1.26-38) for Christian artists.

Under the influence of the above-mentioned sources, another pattern of representation emerged: the Annunciation by the spring [1, p. 3-4]. According to the apocryphal writing, the first part of the event took place in the spring in the garden where the Virgin went to get water. That is where she heard the words of the angel who had not yet shown himself: "Rejoice, o, full of grace! The Lord is with you! Blessed art thou amongst women!" [2, p. 227]. Even though, according to the Gospel, the angel appeared to Mary only inside the house, where he continued to tell her about the conception of the Lord, iconography shows the angel in the garden as well, conversing with the Virgin [9]. The first depiction of this kind is found on the ivory-carved panels of an Evangeliary preserved at the Duomo di Milano, Italy, an artefact dating from the 5<sup>th</sup> century and most likely originating from Ravenna [10].

Given the development of the cult of the Mother of God [11], partly due to the decisions of the Ecumenical Councils, which attributed a special reverence to her and considered the Virgin Mary to be the Theotokos, artistic representations of the events in her life began to multiply visibly. One such representation using the mosaic technique is the Annunciation on the triumphal arch of the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, Italy (5<sup>th</sup> century, ca. 432-444). The Virgin Mary is sitting on a throne, spinning thread. Her feet are resting on a pedestal, which reveals her imperial dignity, as does her aristocratic attire of Roman tradition, impressive through its beauty and adornments [1, p. 214]. Whereas in the Catacomb of Priscilla and in the other representations, only one angel is present, in this case, there are three other angels alongside the Archangel Gabriel [9]. One also notes the presence in the scene of a pigeon flying down from the sky. It symbolises the Holy Spirit descending upon the Virgin, overshadowing her. The presence of the dove in the icons where the Holy Trinity is represented (the Baptism of the Lord, the Annunciation, etc.) became generalised after the First Ecumenical Council.

As a rule, in the iconography of the Annunciation, there is also an aedicula, which suggests that the Virgin Mary is the temple where the Son of God dwelt among men. This detail is present in the Basilica of Santa Maria

Maggiore, as well as in a mosaic belonging to the Church of Porec (Istra, Croatia) and dating from the 6<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 550). The Virgin is depicted at the entrance of the aedicula, sitting on a throne. The idea that she is the temple in which the Son of God dwelt is thus much more clearly suggested than in the mosaic of the Basilica of Santa Maria, where the temple is positioned somewhere to the side. It is worth pointing out that the Virgin is represented by spinning royal-purple thread. Her right hand held up to her face indicates her wonder upon hearing the words spoken by the angel.

The fresco of the Annunciation in the Basilica of Santa Maria Antiqua in Rome, dating from the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century, continues the Roman tradition of representation of the Catacomb of Priscilla, emphasising the dignity of the Virgin Mary. Thus, the Mother of God is represented as an Empress sitting on a throne. Her garments are specific to the Byzantine world [7]. It is worth noting that the Virgin is already holding the Son in her arms, Who is represented in a similar position to the one in the scene of the Adoration of the Magi. Jesus Christ is holding His gospel in His hands. To the left of the throne stands the wingless angel, bowing to the Theotokos.

The scene of the Annunciation was also engraved on a flat circular copper plate (probably a paten) 14 cm in diameter that was found in northern Mesopotamia and dates to the 6<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 550). The angel has a staff in his left hand, a symbol of authority, and the Virgin has a vessel next to her, which alludes to the spinning of royal-purple thread. One notes a new tendency emerging in the Christian East as to the manner of representing the Virgin Mary, namely standing, as opposed to sitting. This emphasises the humility, the willingness to engage in dialogue, as well as the nobility of her who stands to speak with the heavenly messenger at once. This pattern that captures an act of protocol of the Byzantine royal tradition would become generalised in Eastern iconography.

On the triumphal arch of the Church of Saints Nereo and Achilleo in Rome (8<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> century, ca. 800), the Annunciation is represented as two scenes: one before conception and another after the Virgin accepts the mission entrusted to her by God via the angel. The first representation fits into one of the previously mentioned patterns, with the Virgin standing before the angel in front of a throne. The other representation emphasises the conception of the Son of God in her womb. The Virgin is depicted here as a Mother holding her Son in the guise of an infant, in her arms. The angel who has brought her the good tidings is now by her side, as an eyewitness to the fulfilment of God's words. The two representations frame the event of the Transfiguration of the Lord on Mount Tabor, which reveals His divine nature. It may be that the artist wished to stress the fact that He who is incarnate in the womb of the Virgin is the true God.

### **3. The Byzantine patterns of the Annunciation**

From the 10<sup>th</sup> century onwards, Byzantine artists appear to have focused on the artistic pattern based on the scriptural text as its main source. In other words, most painters chose to represent the scene inside a house, as opposed to outdoors, by the water spring, where the apocryphal text and some of the Fathers of the Church suggest that the first part of the Annunciation event took place. In the case of the first manner of representation, there are two ways of portraying the Virgin: either standing before the angel or sitting on an imperial throne. The details that usually accompany such representations (the aedicula, the spinning of wool, etc.) are found in both versions. In what follows, the two patterns with their variations will be presented, in chronological order and based on the categories they belong to fresco, mosaic, icon, and miniature.

#### ***3.1. The Annunciation indoors***

##### ***3.1.1. The Virgin sitting on a throne***

The fresco in the Church of Saint George in Kurbinovo (Macedonia), dating back to 1191, depicts the Virgin in an unusual position. In general, the Theotokos sits on a chair/throne on the right side of the scene, facing the angel [8]. In this case, however, she is looking at the angel in wonder over her right shoulder, as she has her back partly turned to him. A sense of confusion as to what is happening is conveyed by her having dropped the spindle from her left hand. The chair she is sitting on is beautifully adorned, with carved ornaments, a cushion, and fabrics specific to imperial courts. Back when this scene framed the apse of the altar, being positioned on the walls in the upper part of the nave, or between the apses of certain columns in a place of worship, painters opted for majestic patterns with the Virgin sitting on a throne. The fresco at the Monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos, dating from the 16<sup>th</sup> century, follows this pattern. The perspective proposed by the artist is similar to the mural painting in the Church of Saint George in Kurbinovo (Macedonia) (12<sup>th</sup> century). The Mother of God is sitting on a chair, spinning thread and looking towards the angel over her left shoulder. The descent of the Holy Spirit is depicted according to the pattern promoted in the mosaics of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome (ca. 1291) and the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (c. 1295), where the third person of the Holy Trinity is represented as a dove, coming down on a ray of light. In this scene one can also see a young woman sitting by the Holy Virgin's chair, looking at the angel. She is most likely one of Joseph's daughters who had been entrusted to the Virgin, as mentioned by Epiphanius the Priest and Monk [3]. She is unlikely to be a maid, since there is information according which Joseph was not a wealthy man, but rather poor. Regardless of who she may be, the painter most likely wanted to introduce a character into the scene who could later certify what had happened or testify to these events.

The painter who created the fresco of the Church of Mileševa Monastery (Serbia, ca. 1337) records a detail also found in the mosaics of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome (ca. 1291) and in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (ca. 1295). It illustrates the way in which the Holy Spirit descends upon the Virgin sitting on the throne to fill her with grace through His overshadowing. The third person of the Holy Trinity is depicted in the guise of a dove inside a circle of light, integrated into a ray coming down from heaven. In this case, the Father is not represented at the top of the ray, as He is in the mosaics mentioned below. The detail regarding the ray of light that illustrates the mysterious intervention of the Trinity in the act of incarnation would become customary in the frescoes of the Annunciation in the Serbian and Macedonian regions. In the fresco of Visoki Dečani Church in Serbia (14<sup>th</sup> century), the ray that comes down from the sky and descends upon the Virgin no longer includes the Holy Spirit portrayed as a dove inside the circle of light. The circle is filled with light and several rays burst out from within it so that it resembles a star. In this case, the attitude of the Virgin is noteworthy, as her gestures visibly suggest her assumption of the mission of salvation that God entrusted to her.

In the Church dedicated to Saint George in the village of Staro Nagoričane, near Kumanovo (northern Macedonia), the fresco of the Annunciation (ca. 1317-1318) highlights the imperial status of the Virgin. The fact that she remains seated on the throne when receiving the tidings of the heavenly messenger stresses the Virgin's special status in relation to the angels.

The mosaic in the Dafni Monastery, near Athens (Greece), which dates to the same century (ca. 1090), visibly focuses on the dialogue between the two persons (Gabriel and the Virgin Mary), as, aside from the throne that the Theotokos is sitting on, no architectural or ornamental details are presented [12].

At the Monastery of Saint Catherine of Sinai, the icons of the Annunciation dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century broadly follow the pattern based on the scriptural text. In the Slavic region, be it the Bulgarian or the Russian part of it, icons of excellent quality have been preserved from as far back as the 14<sup>th</sup> century. One of the most representatives is the one in Ohrid, Bulgaria, which would prevail to a large extent in the Eastern region under Byzantine influence. The angel is depicted in a dynamic posture on a pedestal. The position of his wings, which are directed towards heaven and earth, indicates the messenger/intermediary status of these angelic beings who act as a link between God and man. In his left hand, the angel holds a staff, while his right hand is pointing at the Virgin, suggesting dialogue. The Virgin is sitting on an imperial throne, facing the angel, and holding in her left hand a piece of royal-purple fabric, which she is preparing for the veil of the Temple in Jerusalem. The presence of the Holy Spirit in the guise of the dove within the ray of light flowing from heaven indicates the moment of conception. Icons that fit into this pattern of representation are found in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow, at the Lavra of Saint Sergius (15<sup>th</sup> century), at the Cathedral of the Dormition of Kirillo-Belozersky Monastery (15<sup>th</sup> century) and at the Sudzal Monastery (16<sup>th</sup> century). The last icon introduces the scene of the young woman sitting at

the feet of the Virgin, an element also seen in the fresco of the Monastery of Dionysiou on Mount Athos.

The Byzantine miniature in the Trebizond Evangeliary of Constantinople (12<sup>th</sup> century), which is kept at the Walters Museum in Baltimore (USA), depicts the angel in conference with the Virgin, who is sitting on a chair while looking at the angel over her right shoulder and spinning royal-purple thread.

### *3.1.2. The Virgin standing*

The fresco in the pictorial ensemble of the church called Tokali Kilise in Turkish (Cappadocia, today's Turkey), dating from around 950, depicts the angel in a dynamic manner, suggesting both his arrival in flight and his haste to announce the divine plan for the salvation of humanity. The Virgin is portrayed standing, with her right hand stretched out towards the angel. In her left hand, she is holding two spindles, a detail which highlights the combination of the two written sources that underlie the representation of the scene. A similar composition is preserved on the walls of the Church of Cavusin, located in the same Cappadocian province (10<sup>th</sup> century). The fresco in the Church of Saint Sophia in Kyiv (ca. 1100), which broadly follows the same pattern, places visible emphasis on the beautifully ornamented aedicula. It is noteworthy that there is a curtain at the entrance to the room, which is intended to enhance the mystery of the Lord's incarnation. From this century onwards, painters stopped giving that much importance to the aedicula. Artists focused on the royal throne, which they adorned with beautiful ornaments. In the fresco of the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin Mary at the Gračanica Monastery (Serbia), dating from the 14<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1321), the moment of the Lord's incarnation in the womb of the Virgin is emphasised. The ray comes out of the sky, which is symbolised by a semicircle of light, no longer encompasses within it the luminous circle that was meant to indicate the presence of the Holy Spirit.

The iconographic patterns used in the Serbian and Macedonian regions are also found in the Greek world. Examples in that sense would be the fresco in the Church of Saint Nicholas in Korakiana, Corfu, dating from the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1450) and the Church of Galata, Cyprus, which dates to the 16<sup>th</sup> century. In the first case, it appears that the pattern that the artist had in mind is like the one used for icons. The details are minimal, the focus being on the two protagonists of the event. In the second case, the pattern employed preserves the element that symbolises the Virgin Mary's capacity as the 'temple of the Godhead' - the aedicula - and shows the climax of the encounter, highlighting the moment when the angel reveals to her the way in which the miracle of the incarnation of the Word will be carried out - the ray of light coming down from Heaven.

The mosaic in Saint Sophia Cathedral in Kyiv dates from the first half of the 11<sup>th</sup> century (c. 1037-1050) and consists of two parts located on either side of the walls flanking the apse of the altar. The angel is on the left-side wall, while the Mother of God is on the right-side one. The Virgin Mary is represented inside her home (as indicated by the carpet on the floor), standing (as a sign of

respect for the messenger), and spinning royal-purple thread for the veil on a spindle.

The scene of the Annunciation in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo (Sicily), dating from the 12<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1140-1150), is found on one of the arches at the base of the main tower [6]. The artist aimed to capture the moment when the Archangel reveals the mystery of the incarnation to the Virgin. In the middle of the arch, the sky is represented by the circular half-dome, its colours decreasing in intensity from black to white and light blue. A hand (of God the Father) comes out of the half-dome, blessing the Virgin. A dove is depicted on the ray of light flowing from God onto Mary, a symbol of the Holy Spirit, who comes from heaven to dwell upon her and who has been found worthy of grace. The other details (the throne, the spindle in her hand, etc.) are found in the other, previously mentioned representations, as well, which is why their symbolism will not be insisted on. The Sicilian pattern would be echoed by other mosaics in the Italian region, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The mosaics of the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome (ca. 1291) and the one in the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore, Rome (ca. 1295) capture the moment when the mysterious work of the Trinity is revealed in the act of the incarnation of the Son of God. Whereas in the Palatine Chapel, the presence of the Father was signalled by the blessing hand, here, the artist portrays God in anthropomorphic form, inside the half-dome that symbolises the sky. The Father is represented similarly to the Saviour. It is noteworthy that, in both mosaics, behind the throne on which the Virgin is sitting or before which she is standing, the aedicula is found. Furthermore, one notes that, in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, the Virgin has a book in her left hand, a detail which indicates her concern with knowing the law of God. Epiphanius the Priest and Saint Maximus the Confessor recorded this habit of hers [3, p. 11; 5, p. 87].

The oldest icons that have been preserved to this day date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Of these, the most famous is the icon of the Annunciation in Ustyug, which originates from the Church of the Saint George Monastery of Novgorod and is preserved in the Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow. Dating from the second half of the said century, the icon contains certain details that set it apart from the rest. Both the Virgin and the angel are represented by standing. The way the angel is depicted suggests the difference in nature between the two. The angel gives the impression of floating, of being immaterial, as he is portrayed in such a way that the tips of his feet barely touch the ground. The chromatics further reinforces this perspective, as the golden colours allude to the heavenly realm. In the upper part of the icon, one can perceive the heavens opening and the Word of God sitting on the throne of glory, surrounded by cherubim. This detail is to be correlated with the image that is suggestively depicted inside the Virgin. On her royal-purple garment is sketched the semblance of the Son of God as a baby. This representation is intended to convey a deep theological message: the very moment when the Virgin accepted the choice and mission entrusted to her by God through the angel, the Word begotten of the Father before all ages were conceived in her womb. The pattern



of the Ustyug icon in the Church of the Saint George Monastery of Novgorod (12<sup>th</sup> century) is largely the same as the one of a 14<sup>th</sup> century icon kept at the Museum of Novgorod. In addition to the elements specific to the Ustyug pattern (the angel and the Virgin Mary standing face to face), the Novgorod painter introduces a unique element. The sky, symbolised by a dark semicircle, opens and the Holy Spirit descends from it onto the earth in the guise of a dove on a ray of fire.

One of the most important miniatures relevant to iconography, not only for its early date but also for the artistic details it offers, was created on a Byzantine manuscript that includes the text of the New Testament and the Psalter. The miniature dates to the 12<sup>th</sup> century and is preserved in Washington, USA. The episode of the Annunciation is represented in two registers. At the top of the miniature, the moment when the angel and the Virgin Mary are standing facing each other is represented. The novelty element is found in the lower register, where the Mother of God is represented in an unusual position. The Theotokos is sitting on a throne with a cushion and a pedestal, holding in her hand an open book most likely containing an Old Testament text that foretells the birth of the Lord. It is highly probable that the fragment written in the book is from the prophecy of Isaiah about Immanuel being born of the Virgin (Isaiah 7.14). On the right side, next to the throne of the Virgin is the aedicula, which symbolises the temple of the Godhead. Given the circumstances, it is worth noting that the door of the aedicula is open, suggesting the conception of the Word in the womb of the Virgin. This image can be found in the prophecy of Ezekiel, who writes about the gate of the Temple through which the Lord enters, and which will remain closed after that (Ezekiel 44.1). This artistic approach is novel and apparently unique in Byzantine iconography. Its importance lies in the fact that, in addition to Old Testament allusions, this composition appeared at a time when the pattern of representation was mostly crystallised.

The Byzantine pattern which includes the aedicula in its internal structure can also be found in a miniature in the *Aprakos Evangelary*, which dates back to the second quarter of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. This study will not insist on the manner of representing the scene of the Annunciation, but rather on the elements related to this representation. The scene of the Annunciation is positioned at the top of the picture. The focus is not on the event but on Luke the Evangelist, who is depicted writing his Gospel. The placement of the scene of the Annunciation in this setting is not random but is intended by the artist to indicate an element specific to the Gospel of Luke. In other words, the miniaturist associated the Annunciation with the image and work of Saint Luke. Going back to the iconographic pattern, one can see that, in most miniatures, the above-mentioned pattern is opted for, in which the Virgin is standing before the messenger angel. Examples in that sense are two miniatures from the late Byzantine period, dating from the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The miniature preserved in one of the Athonite museums introduces the young woman at the feet of the Virgin into the scene. As previously mentioned, she is most probably one of Joseph's daughters, who, under the circumstances, plays the role of a witness of the event. The choice not to integrate her into the final pattern was most likely due to the desire to exclude

secondary elements and to focus the attention on the two protagonists of the biblical event.

### **3.2. *The Virgin Mary at the spring***

In the Serbian and Macedonian regions, flagship artistic representations depict the episode of the Annunciation according to the details provided by the Gospel of Luke. The only notable difference can be seen at the Decani Monastery (14<sup>th</sup> century), which, relying on the apocryphal text, places the event by the well in the garden, not inside the house. Therefore, after the pattern for depicting the Annunciation was established, painters focused their attention on details intended to add nuance to certain theological aspects of the event.

The 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries record, through two mosaics from places of worship renowned for their value, a significant change in the representation of the scene of the Annunciation. The mosaics in the Basilica of San Marco, Venice (Italy), dating from around 1210, and in the Church of Chora, Constantinople (14<sup>th</sup> century) render the pattern of the proclamation by the spring, which was first signalled in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. The dynamism of the scene is notable in both mosaics.

Byzantine miniatures take over the other moment of the Annunciation by the spring. One such example is a manuscript from the first half of the 12<sup>th</sup> century, which is preserved at the National Library of France - *The Homilies of Jacobus Kokkinibaphos* [6]. It starts by portraying the angel descending towards the Virgin, who is holding by a rope a pitcher immersed in a well. However, one's attention is drawn to the unusual elements, which are displayed in the subsequent picture. The miniaturist depicts the Virgin Mary carrying two pitchers into the house where she was working on the royal-purple fabric for the Temple of Jerusalem, in fulfilment of the request of the priests who wanted to change the veil [2, p. 227]. Whereas in most scenes, the Mother of God is holding in her hand objects specific to spinning - a spindle and silk thread, this representation shows a nearly completed piece of fabric in the place dedicated to work. This picture exhibits undeniable originality.

The final representations the present study is concerned with also come from the Athonite world, namely from the Ferapontov Monastery, and date back to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (ca. 1502). It is noteworthy that the painter aimed to update the two patterns of representation of the event (the one based on the apocryphal text and the one based on the biblical text). Thus, the initial moment of the Annunciation, when the Virgin Mary was in the garden by the fountain, is represented, followed by the one that took place inside the house. This certifies the fact that these two patterns of representation coexisted in the Byzantine world and could be painted either separately or together.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Byzantine art promoted two patterns of representation of the event of the Annunciation: one in which the Virgin and the angel are inside a house and another in the garden, next to a well. The former is based on the scriptural text, while the latter is based on an apocryphal text (the Protoevangelium of James) and on patristic tradition. According to these non-scriptural sources, the Annunciation, or at least the first part of the dialogue between the angel and the Virgin, took place in the garden; Mary had come out of the house to fetch water from the well. Byzantine art considers all categories of writings, promoting both versions in the frescoes, mosaics, miniatures, and icons made according to Eastern requirements.

The importance of Saint Luke's text would prevail in Byzantine art. In most flagship artistic representations, the event of the Annunciation is depicted as taking place inside a house. Artists developed this pattern along two different lines: one in which the Virgin is sitting on a chair/throne and another in which she is standing, like the heavenly messenger. Each manner of representation was based on a theological rationale and on well-defined symbolism. In the version where the Virgin is sitting on a chair/throne, the aim was to promote her imperial dignity. The other version was meant to depict an act of protocol from the Byzantine imperial milieu, which expressed respect for the person before whom one stood.

Despite two distinct patterns existing in the Byzantine world - or rather, two moments of the event of the Annunciation corresponding to the above-mentioned sources, the artists who opted for the version recorded by the Gospel did not show any reluctance to the information provided by the other sources. Consequently, in the pattern that shows the moment of the Annunciation indoors, there are a few elements specific to the apocryphal text and to patristic writings. The act of spinning, the wool, the royal purple, the fabric, the spindle, or other spinning instruments that refer to the task given to the Virgin by the priests are details recorded in the said writings.

Thus, artists have not treated these sources of inspiration differently. They used the Holy Scriptures as a reference but did not neglect the details recorded in the apocryphal text or in patristic writings. This approach, which regarded everything as a whole, enabled them to combine the information in such a way as to highlight the theological message of the event, especially through symbols.

Given that the present research has capitalised on representations employing various media, it would be desirable that a future study should be conducted to analyse the evolution of the Byzantine pattern on a specific medium (fresco, mosaic, miniature, and icon), instead of considering all the media together, as we have done now, for reasons that have been explained.

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