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***Aeiparthenos*. Metaphors and Symbols of Virginité in Italian, Dutch and Byzantine Representations of the Annunciation around 1400**

In a seminal article from 1945 Millard Meiss discussed the use of light in the art of Flemish masters. According to the author, the way light was used in representations of the *Annunciation* reflects a well-known metaphor from the Medieval Nativity hymn, *Dies est laetitiae*, which compares Mary's *hymen* with the glass of a window.

The central issue of this article is this glass-symbolism. In previous studies the rays has usually been seen as directed toward Mary's ear, visualizing the so-called *conceptio per aurem doctrine*, according to which Mary conceived and became pregnant through her ear, by listening to the Word of God. In my view, however, the rays are usually directed toward Mary's forehead, not her ear.

Determining the direction of light is important because if it strikes the forehead it means that Mary is seen at the moment when she receives one of the stars or crosses that can be found on Mary's *maphorion* in Eastern Orthodox art as well as in that of the Italo-Byzantine tradition. The three stars are symbols of Mary's perpetual virginité, which was defined at the Lateran Council of AD 649 as consisting of the three phases before, during, and after the birth of Christ (*ante partum, in partum et post partum*). In my view, it is no coincidence that the words that follow immediately after the hymn's description of Mary's *hymen* as like glass (*Ut vitrum non laeditur, sole penetrante*) follow the words *Sic illaesa creditur, virgo post partum et ante*.

This article examines the differences and similarities between Eastern and Western representations of the *Annunciation*. In addition it highlights one painting that may be considered as a synthesis between the various iconographies with regard to this particular topic.