

# The Narrative Cycle of the Life of the Virgin in Byzantine East and Latin West: The Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere in Rome and Daphni Monastery at Athens

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## Introduction

The Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere is located in Rome's Trastevere district. The mosaic in the apse that depicts the Virgin and Christ on the throne, the apostles and bishops standing together, and a row of lambs, was produced during the reign of Pope Innocent II in the first half of the twelfth century **[Fig.1]**. The mosaic in the lower part of the apse was executed by Pietro Cavallini (c. 1240–1330) around the end of the thirteenth century. Cavallini's mosaic comprises six scenes, beginning with the Birth of the Virgin and concluding with the Koimesis (the Dormition of the Virgin). Between these are placed four scenes involving the infant Christ (the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Presentation of Jesus), giving the impression that the life of Christ is contained within that of the Virgin. The narrative cycle that depicts the life of Christ is called the Christological cycle, and given that the Virgin appears in all six scenes, Cavallini's mosaic may be regarded as a Mariological cycle rather than as Christological cycle, as appropriate to a basilica dedicated to the Virgin.

In this paper, I shall examine Cavallini's mosaic in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere in comparative perspective with a mosaic in Greece's Daphni Monastery that was executed at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century and that is one of the earliest surviving examples of the narrative cycle of the life of the Virgin in Byzantium. The Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere is a Catholic Church, while Daphni Monastery is Orthodox, and the doctrine concerning the Virgin differs significantly between the Catholic and the Orthodox traditions. The ground plans are also different: the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere has a rectangular nave with aisles, while Daphni Monastery is a cross-in-square form. The disposition of the scenes also differs across the two sites: Cavallini's scenes are arranged in a band below the apse, while those of Daphni are spread over the nave and the narthex.



Fig. 1: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Apse

In light of these differences and the considerable gap in the mosaics' production dates, one might dispute the notion that fruitful conclusions could be drawn from a comparison between the two. However, Cavallini's mosaic undoubtedly reflects Byzantine iconography while it is also clear that Cavallini made alterations in several respects. As such, I shall explore the unique iconography that Cavallini created while imitating Byzantine iconography. The aim of this paper is to highlight the essential differences in the programme of mosaic decorations in the Eastern Orthodox and Western Catholic Churches.

## The Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere<sup>(1)</sup>

The Trastevere district had already been a Christian quarter in Rome around the first and the second centuries. The present church's predecessor is known to have already been in existence at the site by around the mid-fourth century.<sup>(2)</sup> It was rebuilt during the twelfth century by Pope Innocent II, during which period the apse mosaic depicting Christ and the Virgin enthroned was also produced. At the time of Innocent II's death, the mosaics in the lower part of the apse were unfinished.<sup>(3)</sup>

The land around the Basilica was under the jurisdiction of the Stefaneschi family for several hundred years. Bertoldo Stefaneschi planned to install his own tomb in the Basilica and ordered the mosaic for the lower part of the apse (c. 1290). Cavallini, who at that time led one of the most highly regarded Roman workshops, was recruited to perform the work.

Pope Boniface VIII's designation of 1300 as the Holy Year prompted the renovation of several of Rome's churches in preparation for the large numbers of pilgrims anticipated. They visited the city's key churches dedicated to Saints Peter and Paul and among their destinations was the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere.

## Daphni Monastery<sup>(4)</sup>

Daphni Monastery is located on the road to Eleusis, approximately ten kilometres from Athens. Emperor Basileios II's visit to Athens in the early eleventh century led to the construction of several new churches in the city

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- (1) The main previous studies are D. Kinney, "S. Maria in Trastevere from its Founding to 1215," (PhD dissertation, New York University, 1975) and V. Tiberia, *I mosaici del XII secolo e di Pietro Cavallini in Santa Maria in Trastevere: restauri e nuove ipotesi* (Todi, Perugia, 1996). Kinney has published several papers since completing her PhD thesis: D. Kinney, "Spolia from the Baths of Caracalla in S. Maria in Trastevere," *ArtB* 68 (1986), 379–97; D. Kinney, "The Apse Mosaic of Santa Maria in Trastevere," in: E. Sears and T. K. Thomas, eds., *Reading Medieval Images. The Art Historian and the Object* (Ann Arbor, 2002), 19–26; D. Kinney, "Rome in the Twelfth Century: Urbs fracta and renovatio," *Gesta* 45, no. 2 (2006), 199–220; D. Kinney, "The Praesepe in Santa Maria in Trastevere and Santa Maria Maggiore," in: O. Brandt and P. Pergola, eds., *Marmoribus vestita. Miscellanea in onore di Federico Guidobaldi*, vol. 2 (Rome, 2011), 777–795; D. Kinney, "Romanità a Roma: Le basiliche del XII secolo fra tradizioni e innovazioni," in: L. Creti, ed., *La Cattedrale cosmatesca di Civita Castellana. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi (Civita Castellana, 18–19 settembre 2010)* (Rome, 2012), 53–75; D. Kinney, "A Building's Images: Santa Maria in Trastevere," *California Italian Studies*, vol. 6, issue 1 (2016), 1–35; D. Kinney, "Patronage of Art and Architecture," in: J. Doran and D. J. Smith, eds., *Pope Innocent II (1130–43): The World vs. the City* (London and New York, 2016), 352–388; D. Kinney, "Communication in a Visual Mode: Papal Apse Mosaics," *JMedHist* 44, 3 (2018), 311–332. For other previous studies, see P. Hetherington, "The Mosaics of Pietro Cavallini in Santa Maria in Trastevere," *JWarb*, vol. 33 (1970), 84–106; H. Henkels, "Remarks on the Late 13th-Century Apse Decoration in S. Maria Maggiore," *Simiolus: Netherlands Quarterly for the History of Art*, vol. 4, No. 3 (1971), 128–149; W. Tronzo, "Apse Decoration, the Liturgy and the Perception of Art in Medieval Rome: S. Maria in Trastevere and S. Maria Maggiore," in *Italian Church Decoration of the Middle Ages and Early Renaissance* (Bologna, 1989), 167–193; L. Pestilli, "'Ficus Latine a Fecunditate Vocatur': On a Unique Iconographic Detail in Cavallini's 'Annunciation' in Santa Maria in Trastevere," *Source: Notes in the History of Art*, vol. 20, no. 3 (2001), 5–14.
- (2) For the history of the Basilica, see M. A. Lavin, "'Avant-Garde' in the Late Medieval Apse of Santa Maria in Trastevere," *Artibus et Historiae*, vol. 37, no. 73 (2016), 9–54. For the architecture of the Basilica from the Early Christian period to the early Middle Ages, see S. Coccia, A. G. Fabiani, F. Prezioso, and F. Scoppola, "Santa Maria in Trastevere: nuovi elementi sulla basilica paleocristiana e altomedievale," *Mededelingen van het Nederlands Instituut te Rome* 59 (2000), 161–174. For the reconstruction of the Basilica by Innocentius II in the twelfth century and by Pius IX in the nineteenth century, see D. Kinney, "A Building's Images: Santa Maria in Trastevere," *California Italian Studies*, vol. 6, issue 1 (2016), 1–35.
- (3) For the mosaic iconography of the pre-Cavallini apse, see J. M. Salvador-González, "The Iconography of The Coronation of the Virgin in Late Medieval Italian Painting. A Case Study," *Eikón / Imago*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2013), 1–48.

and its environs. Subsequently, a cross-in-square church was built in Daphni at the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century. It is generally accepted that the mosaic was produced between 1080 and 1100 on the basis of its style. This coincides with the period during which the Christological cycle, which was based on the Twelve Great Feasts, was formalised and began to adorn church interiors.<sup>(5)</sup> Daphni Monastery, among other sites, exemplifies post-iconoclastic Byzantine church decoration, and its mosaic technique is considered to be the work of the most skilled craftsmen of the time.

The central dome, apse, squinches, transepts, and narthex are adorned with mosaics depicting the lives of Christ and the Virgin. Brubaker emphasises the importance of the Virgin in Daphni, noting that it is among the oldest surviving churches to include a depiction of the life of the Virgin and that it is the earliest example of the disposition of the Koimesis on the west wall of the nave, an arrangement that would later become canonical in Byzantine churches.

Brubaker further remarks on the established theory among Byzantine art historians that from the Middle Ages onwards, the disposition of the Christological cycle in Byzantine churches was in accordance with the systematic rules of church decoration and with little new added to the iconography. However, she concludes that the deliberate manipulation of the disposition of scenes at Daphni imbued the iconography with new meaning and thus conferred uniqueness on the entire decorative programme. In the following, however, I shall attempt to highlight the features of the mosaic programme adopting a perspective that differs from that of Brubaker.

**[Fig.2]** provides an overview of the arrangement of the mosaics in Daphni Monastery. Stepping into the nave and looking up, one sees the dome with its large depiction of ②the Christ Pantocrator **[Fig.3]**. The four squinches that support the dome contain, clockwise from the north-east, ②the Annunciation **[Fig.4]**, ③the Nativity **[Fig.5]**, ⑥the Baptism **[Fig.6]** and ⑦the Transfiguration **[Fig.7]**. The apse contains a seated Madonna and Child, though the upper half of the mosaic is detached (②③).

The light that emanates from the Christ Pantocrator floods the scenes in each squinch at the four corners of the

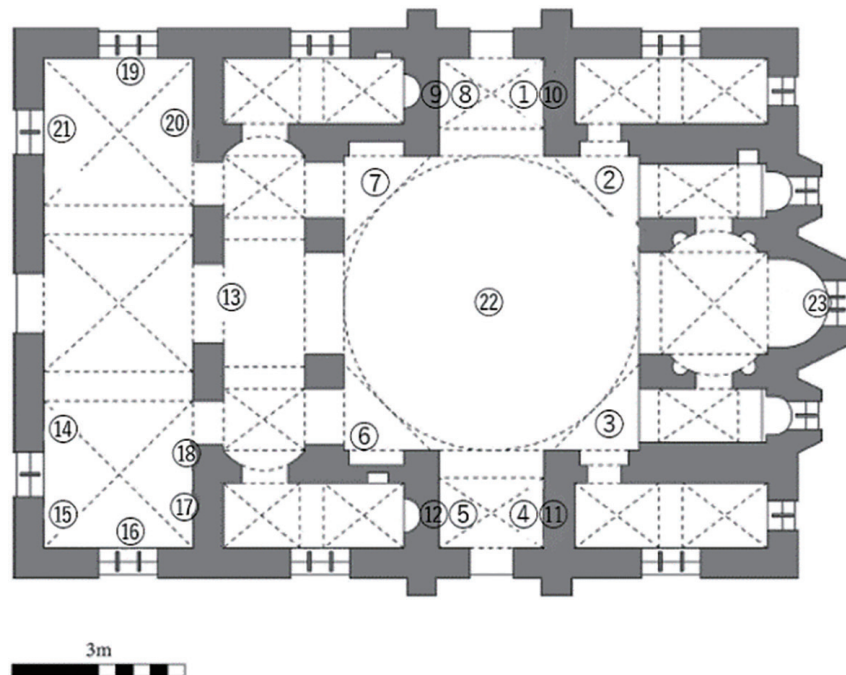


Fig. 2: Daphni Monastery, Ground plan

(4) L. Brubaker, "The Virgin at Daphni," in: T. Arentzen and M. B. Cunningham, eds., *The Reception of the Virgin in Byzantium: Marian Narratives in Texts and Images* (Cambridge, 2019), 120–148. Brubaker provides a useful summary of previous research on Daphni.

(5) The iconography of the Twelve Great Feasts represents the twelve most important feasts in the ecclesiastical calendar of the Orthodox Church: the Annunciation, the Nativity, the Presentation to the Temple, the Baptism, the Transfiguration, the Resurrection of Lazarus, the Entry into Jerusalem, the Crucifixion, the Descent into the Hades, the Ascension, the Pentecost, and the Koimesis (the Dormition of the Virgin). Daphni Monastery does not include The Ascension and the Pentecost.



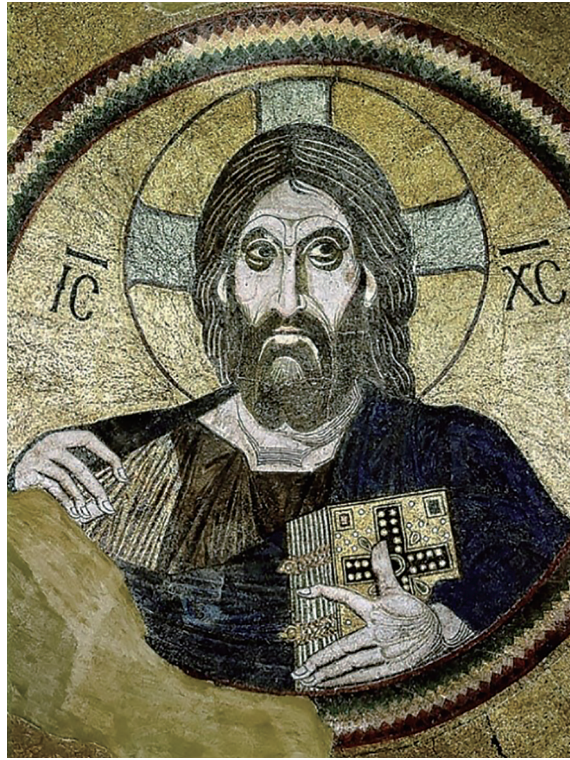


Fig. 3: Daphni Monastery, Dome, Christ Pantocrator



Fig. 4: Daphni Monastery, Naos, Annunciation

dome [Figs.8, 9]. While the Annunciation scene does not include a depiction of the dove that represents the Holy Spirit, the gold light that accumulates in the concave of the squinch may nonetheless evoke the Holy Spirit [Fig.4]. The rays of light pour over the infant in the manger in the Nativity [Fig.5], while the Holy Spirit descends to Christ's nimbus in the Baptism [Fig.6]. While the streaks of light in the Transfiguration are emanating from the mandorla surrounding Christ [Fig.7], it simultaneously appears as though the light is pouring from the dome.

In the nave, all scenes are arranged in a regular sequence and proceed clockwise in chronological order [Fig.2].<sup>(6)</sup> The life of Christ begins with ②the Annunciation in the northeastern squinch, followed by the ③Nativity

(6) Although some scenes no longer exist, it is possible to make assumptions which scenes once existed based on the order of the Twelve Great Feasts.





Fig. 5: Daphni Monastery, Naos, Nativity of Christ



Fig. 6: Daphni Monastery, Naos, Baptism of Christ

in the southeastern squinch and ④the Adoration of the Magi on the eastern wall of the south transept. Thereafter, it proceeds to ⑤the Presentation of Christ (not extant) on the opposite wall, followed by ⑥the Baptism on the south-western squinch and ⑦the Transfiguration on the northwestern squinch. The Transfiguration is followed by ⑧the Resurrection of Lazarus (not extant) on the upper side of the west wall of the north transept and ⑨the Entry into Jerusalem on the lower side of the same wall. The cycle then reaches ⑩the Crucifixion on the opposite wall, at which point the viewer has completed the first circulation in the nave. However, the cycle does not end here and the second round begins. Returning now to the south transept, the cycle continues with ⑪the Descent into Hades, followed by ⑫the Doubting of Thomas (not extant) on the opposite wall and ⑬the Koimesis (the Dormition of the





Fig. 7: Daphni Monastery, Naos, Transfiguration of Christ

Virgin) at the centre of the west wall. The viewer thus completes the entire cycle by walking a full lap and a half of the nave. In other words, the scenes of the Christological cycle are arranged in such a way that they can be followed clockwise around the nave.

The south side of the narthex depicts the scenes leading up to Mary's birth and her childhood: ⑭the Prayer of Anna, ⑮the Annunciation to Joachim, ⑯the Priest Blessing the Infant Mary, ⑰the Presentation of the Virgin in the Temple, and ⑱the Angel Feeding the Virgin in the Temple. On the north side of the narthex, the Passion of Christ is depicted: ⑲the Washing of the Feet, ⑳the Last Supper, and ㉑the Betrayal of Judas.

Within the Christological cycle in the nave, which is arranged in a straightforward chronological order, the Birth of the Virgin appears to float strangely in the upper part of the east wall of the northern transept [Fig.10]. It is odd that only the Birth of the Virgin is in the nave, separated from the other Mariological scenes in the narthex (⑭–⑱). Considering that the narthex contains an independent cycle of the life of the Virgin, one would also expect the Birth of the Virgin to be located there. However, a careful look at the programme as a whole reveals that this disposition was deliberate. The cycle in the nave, which at first glance appears to begin with ②the Annunciation [Fig.4], may, in fact, be seen as starting with ①the Birth of the Virgin in the northern transept [Fig.10]. The Birth of the Virgin is placed at the starting point of the cycle as the event that precedes the Annunciation, and from there, the narrative begins to proceed clockwise.

Why, then, did the mosaic maker shift the starting point to the Birth of the Virgin, rather than the Annunciation in accordance with convention? Originally, the scene that commenced the Twelve Great Feasts cycle was the Annunciation, while the Koimesis—the death of the Virgin—concluded it. With the alteration of the starting point only, it is possible to place the Virgin's birth at the beginning of the cycle and her death at the end. It may thus be an intentional manipulation designed to interpose the entirety of Christ's life between that of the Virgin.

We now return to the church's entrance [Fig.11]. Standing at point A, the Virgin and Child depicted in the apse (㉓) are visible directly in front of us, though the mosaic's upper half has become detached. Proceeding further into the narthex and arriving point B, one can see the two Virgins of the north and south squinches (②the Annunciation and ③the Nativity), though only the two Virgins are visible from here, and the entire squinches are not yet in view.

Upon first seeing these squinches, I wondered why the Virgin in the Annunciation does not turn towards the Archangel Gabriel but rather sits facing frontally [Fig.4]. Moreover, in the Nativity, the Virgin turns her back towards the infant Jesus and gazes straight ahead [Fig.5]. Standing in the centre of the narthex at point B and looking at the Virgin as she appears in the two squinches, I was moved to wonder why the artist wished to depict her in that way. The artist's likely intention here was to create a juxtaposition of the three Virgins in the apse and the



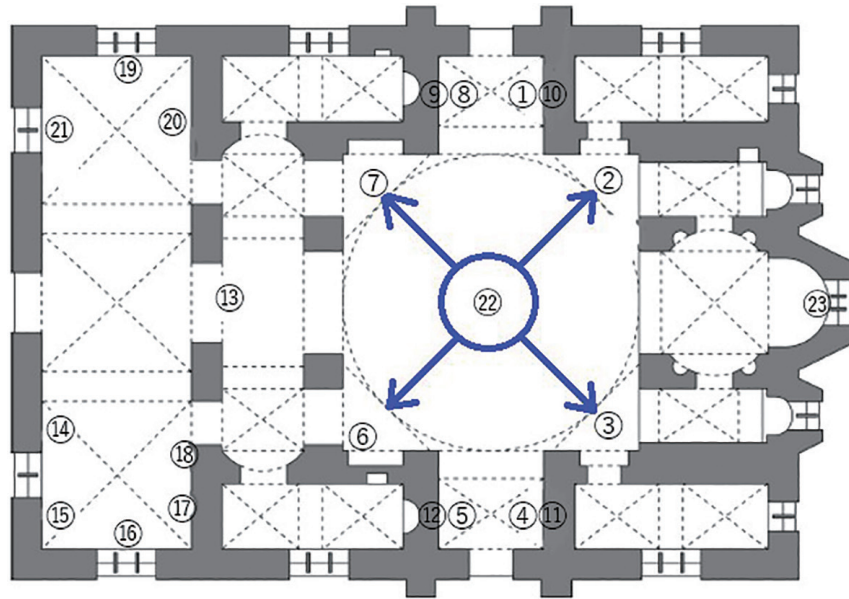


Fig. 8: Daphni Monastery, Ground plan



Fig. 9: Daphni Monastery, Dome and Squinches

squinches on either side of it (②, ②③, ③). It appears intentional that the Virgin in the squinches did not turn her face towards Gabriel or the infant Jesus but was painted facing frontally to repeat the frontal view of the Virgin in the apse. The result is that the Virgins in the apse and squinches create a juxtaposition of the three Marys.

Proceeding from point B to C, the view widens further, and the walls of the north and the south transepts come into view. As the Virgin also appears in ⑩the Crucifixion **[Fig.12]** and ④the Adoration of the Magi **[Fig.13]** in the transepts, the row of the Virgin on the north-south axis is pushed further from the squinches to the transepts. Thus,

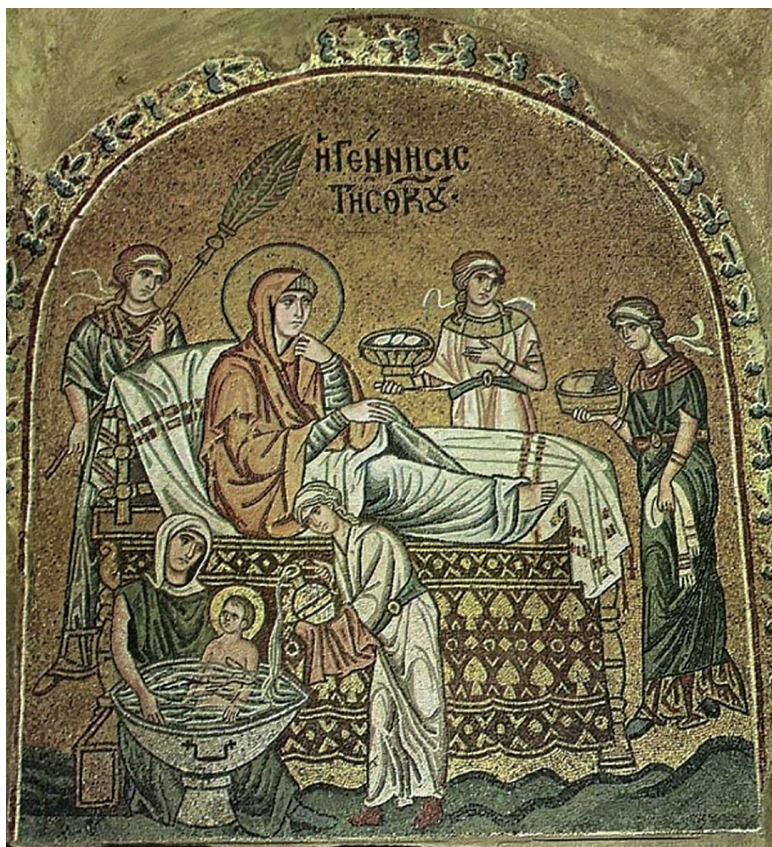


Fig. 10: Daphni Monastery, Transept, Birth of the Virgin

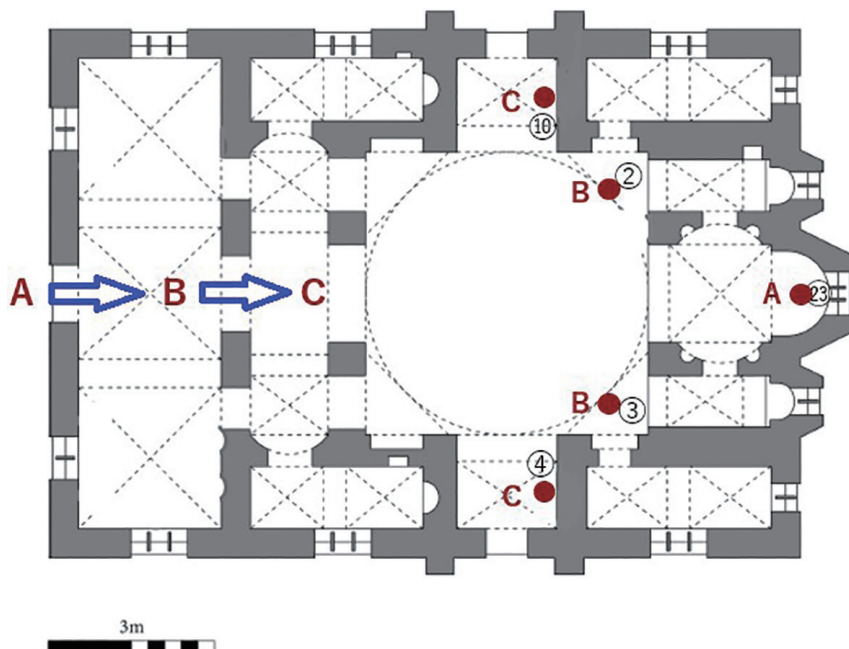


Fig. 11: Daphni Monastery, Ground plan

in a total of five scenes, the Virgin is repeatedly lined up in a row [Fig.14].

The above observations indicate that the mosaics in Daphni Monastery were clearly intended to emphasise the Virgin—first, in the attempt to place the life of the Virgin at the start and end points of the Christological cycle, thereby encapsulating the life of Christ within that of the Virgin, and second, in the juxtaposition of the Virgin across the five scenes in the apse, squinches, and transepts. Such a mosaic programme would have been wholly fitting for a





Fig. 12: Daphni Monastery, Transept, Crucifixion



Fig. 13: Daphni Monastery, Transept, Adoration of the Magi

Fig. 14: Daphni Monastery, Naos and Transepts,  
①Crucifixion ②Annunciation ③Nativity ④Adoration of the Magi

church dedicated to the Virgin.

## Santa Maria in Trastevere

Turning now to the Virgin's life as depicted by Cavallini in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, I shall consider in what respects Cavallini, who drew heavily on Byzantine iconography, made alterations and why he might have done so.

Cavallini's cycle has the same starting point as that at Daphni: the Birth of the Virgin [Fig.15]. The scene at Daphni had a gold background and included no motifs other than a bed to suggest the interior of the room [Fig.10]; however, Cavallini included polygonal columns, lintels, and hanging cloths.

The most significant difference coheres around the question of whether or not Mary's mother Anna, having given birth, looks towards the newborn Mary [Figs.10, 15]. In Daphni, Anna looks straight ahead in the direction in which the narrative proceeds, clearly indicating that the Birth of the Virgin marks the starting point of the cycle prior to the Annunciation. Meanwhile, Cavallini executed a gentle line from Anna's head to the infant Mary whom Anna's gaze follows. Anna tilts her head towards the infant Mary on the midwife's lap, exhibiting a maternal emotion that is





Fig. 15: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere,  
Apsidal Arch, Birth of the Virgin

not evident at Daphni. Moreover, the depiction of the naked infant at the mother's feet suggests that she was born between her mother's legs.

The servant who pours hot water into a tub is shorter than the others in the scene and, at Daphni, looks like a child. Were she the same height as the others, she would block Anna's figure. Meanwhile, the servant pouring hot water in Cavallini's depiction is only slightly smaller than the other figures present in the scene and thus looks more natural.

The colours of the angel's wings and robe in Cavallini's Annunciation are similar to those found at Daphni [Figs.4, 16]. Similarities may also be observed in the extended right hand and the left foot, which steps forward. At Daphni, however, Gabriel's wings are held in a position that repeats the arc of the halo, while in Cavallini's iteration, one of the wings points upwards, and the right arm extended towards the Virgin is more prominent. The fingertips are positioned orthogonally to the line of the dove of the Holy Spirit, which descends in a straight line towards the Virgin's abdomen, enhancing the momentum of Gabriel's simultaneous step with the Holy Spirit towards the Virgin.

A peculiarity in Cavallini's Annunciation is the depiction of the face of God as a source of the Holy Spirit. Daphni's Annunciation in the squinch does not include a face of God like Cavallini's [Fig.4], but rather, the dome above the squinch contains a large depiction of the Christ Pantocrator [Fig.3]. In the Annunciation at Daphni, the gold light pooling in the dent of the squinch indirectly alludes to the Holy Spirit, which appears to emanate from Christ in the dome. However, the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere has no dome, and the face of God may have been added to the scene as a substitution of it.

Cavallini's Annunciation includes decorative built-in furniture reminiscent of an exedra [Fig.16]. The rocky ground on which Gabriel stands and the exedra of the Virgin's throne are represented next to one another, so that at first glance, the boundary between the exterior and interior is ambiguous. However, the exedra (literally, 'a seat out of doors' in Greek) in the Roman period was typically placed facing outdoors. In this light, it appears fitting that the exedra is placed in a scene that might be regarded as taking place both outdoors and indoors.

The main difference in the Nativities of Daphni and Cavallini is the direction in which the Virgin's feet face





Fig. 16: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Apse, Annunciation

**[Figs.5, 17]**. At Daphni, the Virgin's feet are placed in parallel with those of the infant. Cavallini's Nativity, meanwhile, arranges the Virgin and the infant in the shape of a  $\Delta$ , leaving more space below the Virgin's feet. It is likely that the space was intentionally left empty to depict a building and an inscription, the Taberna Meritoria, with flowing oil and water.<sup>(7)</sup>

These motives represent the episode in which oil flowed on the ground of the Taberna Meritoria, a hospice for retired soldiers in Trastevere, which took place approximately 40 years prior to the birth of Christ. The Jews who lived nearby at the time interpreted it as a sign of the Messiah's advent. The word 'Messiah' originates from the Hebrew word meaning 'anointed one', and therefore, the flowing oil and the coming of the Messiah were linked.

At Daphni, three white lines of light are poured onto the infant Jesus to draw the viewer's eye. Cavallini also depicts rays of light emanating from the star. Here, the rays go in two directions—one towards the scroll that contains the angel's announcement and the other towards the Virgin's halo. Extending the latter, it passes through the Virgin's face to reach the face of the infant. Were another line to be drawn symmetrically with the first, the two lines would form an isosceles triangle at the centre of the picture. The building and the inscription of the Taberna Meritoria is positioned in the lower centre of this triangle **[Fig.18]**.

At Daphni, Joseph sits by the river in the lower right of the scene with his back turned towards the Virgin and Child **[Fig.5]**. Cavallini moved Joseph and the sheep that drink water from the river to the opposite—that is, to the left-hand side **[Fig.17]**. Thus, the river in the right-hand corner at Daphni is merged with the flow of oil from the Taberna Meritoria. Cavallini's mosaic represents the Nativity scene in Bethlehem, but at the same time, in the depiction of the Taberna Meritoria, the ancient incident of Trastevere is interwoven. Hence, the sheep in Cavallini's Nativity are drinking water from the Tiber in Rome rather than a river in Bethlehem.

With the addition of the Taberna Meritoria, Cavallini's mosaic relates that just as the Old Testament prophets once prophesied the birth of Christ, the same was also prophesied here. In other words, the mosaic suggests that Trastevere is another holy land in which the Nativity should be celebrated.

The topography of Rome includes a high plateau called the Janiculum Hill to the west of the Tiber **[Fig.19]**. The name Janiculum derives from Janus, the two-faced deity who is the patron god of doorways. The two faces, one at the front and one at the back, can simultaneously see in and out of the door. If the Cave of the Nativity that rises

(7) For previous studies relating to the inscription 'Taberna Meritoria' in Cavallini's mosaic, see B. Schimmelpfennig, "Jesus, Maria und Augustus. Ein Text zur Weihe von S. Maria in Trastevere (1215) und zur Geschichte Trasteveres in Antike und Mittelalter," in: L. Kéry, D. Lohrmann, and H. Müller, eds., *Licet preter solitum. Ludwig Falkenstein zum 65. Geburtstag* (Aachen, 1998), 119–141; S. E. Mullins, "Myroblytes: Miraculous Oil in Medieval Europe," (PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2016). The mosaic inscription is TABERNA MERITORIA, while the Latin document reads *taberna emeritoria*: *taberna* means hovel and *emeritus* means veteran.





Fig. 17: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere,  
Apse, Nativity of Christ



Fig. 18: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere,  
Apse, Nativity of Christ

behind the river (presumably the Tiber) were to overlap with the actual topography of Rome and be interpreted as an allusion to the Janiculum Hill behind the Tiber, this would be the doorway on the very border between heaven and earth, the door through which Christ came. By incorporating the motif of the Taberna Meritoria into the conventional iconography of the Nativity, Cavallini added a completely new meaning—the Janiculum Hill as the threshold between heaven and earth—to the rock cave of the Nativity. Such innovation was not seen in Byzantine art.



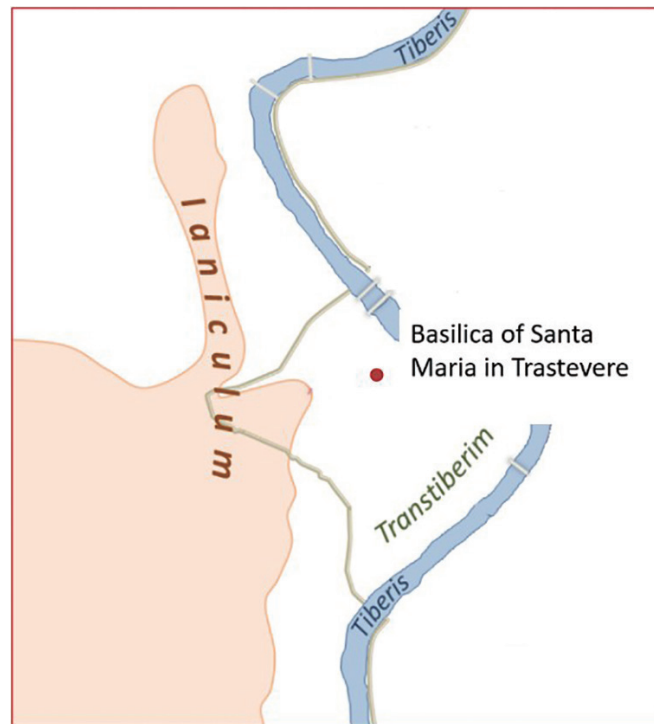


Fig. 19 Map of the Trastevere area

The main difference in the Adoration of the Magi of Daphni and Cavallini is the presence or absence of an angel **[Figs.13, 20]**. In place of the angel, Cavallini added a church-like building on the hill and a wall surrounding it. Although the building is not inscribed, as is seen in the Nativity, it may also represent the Taberna Meritoria, as the oil flows out of its doorway, joining the water of the river halfway down the hill.

Regarding the colours of the mosaic, the golden oil meandering from the blue-green knoll appears to echo the golden robe of Jesus in the arms of the blue-robed Mary. In light of Catholic doctrine of the time, which regarded the Virgin as a symbol of the Church, we may assume that the church on the hill alludes to the Virgin, while the oil that flows from it signifies Christ, the anointed one.

The endpoint of Cavallini's cycle of the life of the Virgin is identical to that at Daphni **[Fig.21]**. Cavallini paired the position of the deathbed with that of the birthbed **[Fig.15]**. At the centre of the Koimesis, Christ holds in his arms an infant that represents the Virgin's soul **[Fig.21]**, forming a contrast with the baby held by the midwife in the Birth of the Virgin **[Fig.15]**.

The Virgin lies with her hands crossed and her eyes closed and appears straight and rigid **[Fig.21]**, whereas the supine Virgin in the Nativity has her upper body raised in a gentle arc **[Fig.17]**. On either side of Christ stand two angels with their wings spread wide open in a V-shape **[Fig.21]**. By contrast, the grotto of the Nativity forms a Λ-shape **[Fig.17]**, and the darkness within the grotto contrasts starkly with the gold-lit heaven that is opened by the V-shape of the angels' wings.

It is worth noting that the colour of the mandorla that surrounds Christ's body resembles the sun **[Fig.21]**. According to the fourth- and fifth-century historian Orosius, on the day of Augustus' triumphal entrance as the first emperor of the Roman Empire, two signs—one from heaven and one from earth—appeared in Trastevere to foreshadow the Nativity of Christ.<sup>(8)</sup> The sign from heaven was an incident wherein a rainbow-like circle of light surrounded the sun, and the sign from earth was the incident of the oil stream. Cavallini's Koimesis **[Fig.21]** does not contain the Taberna Meritoria motif as in the Nativity **[Fig.17]** and the Adoration of the Magi **[Fig.20]**, but the red mandorla that surrounds Christ recalls of the circle of light surrounding the sun. As such, the Trastevere legend is woven through the scenes of Cavallini's mosaic.

(8) S. E. Mullins, "Myroblytes: Miraculous Oil in Medieval Europe," (PhD Dissertation, Georgetown University, 2016).



Fig. 20: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere,  
Apse, Adoration of the Magi



Fig. 21: Rome, Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere,  
Apsidal Arch, Koimesis

The motif of the oil stream and the river may recall the Sacrament of Baptism, one of the seven sacraments of the Catholic Church. In the baptism rite, the novice is baptised by water and anointed with oil as a symbolic representation of rebirth. In the Sacrament of the Final Anointing, another sacrament of the Catholic Church, the faithful on the deathbed receives the remission of their sins by means of the anointing oil.



Examining Cavallini's mosaic again with this in mind, the oil flowing from the ground of the Taberna Meritoria appears to suggest the forgiveness of sins and rebirth by means of anointing oil. As mentioned above, Pope Boniface VIII designated 1300 as the Holy Year, during which the faithful who visited Rome were granted a great indulgence. The multitudes who undertook the pilgrimage to Rome in 1300 in search of forgiveness for their sins may have interpreted the oil motif in Cavallini's mosaic as a sign of absolution.

The Catholic definition of the Holy Year is based on Leviticus 25 in the Old Testament: While gazing at Cavallini's depiction of a shepherd blowing a horn in the Nativity **[Fig.17]**, the faithful might have recalled Leviticus (25:9), which states that the sound of the trumpet shall be heard across the entire earth on the day of atonement—that means, the occasion of forgiveness in the Holy Year.

## Conclusion

In comparing the cycle of the life of the Virgin in the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere with the mosaic in Daphni Monastery, this paper has examined how Cavallini created new images while drawing on Byzantine iconography.

Cavallini's mosaic, which interweaves the Trastevere legend of the outpouring of oil into the Mariological scenes, suggests the forgiveness of sins for the faithful. In other words, Cavallini's mosaic was conceived as the most appropriate programme for decorating the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere on the occasion of the Holy Year in 1300. Conversely, this programme cannot be applied to any other location. Naturally, iconography linked to a specific place cannot be compatible with universality. For the Orthodox Church, which aims for the 'universality' of the Christian Church, the Trastevere mosaic and its depiction of the 'particular' is a significant departure from that norm. The Catholic Church, which diverged from the Orthodox tradition following the east–west schism of the Roman Empire and the subsequent east–west schism in the Church, thus gradually moved away from the imitation of the Orthodox and forged its own path in the visual arts.

## List of illustrations

Fig.1:

[https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/zgothic/mosaics/2trastev/index.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/zgothic/mosaics/2trastev/index.html)

Figs.2, 8, 11:

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/reception-of-the-virgin-in-byzantium/virgin-at-daphni/DB3F388F50997C82423C21DC52AF159C>

Additions were made by the author.

Figs.3, 5, 6:

<https://www.pallasweb.com/deesis/25-images-from-the-daphni-monastery-church.html>

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Figs.4, 7, 9, 12, 13

<https://gr.pravoslavie.ru/123715.html>

Fig.10:

[https://www.icon-art.info/masterpiece.php?lng=en&mst\\_id=2494](https://www.icon-art.info/masterpiece.php?lng=en&mst_id=2494)

Fig.14: Trimmed from Figs 4, 5, 12 and 13.

Figs.15-18, 20-21:

[https://www.wga.hu/html\\_m/c/cavallin/mosaic/index.html](https://www.wga.hu/html_m/c/cavallin/mosaic/index.html)

Fig.19

The map of the Trastevere area was produced by modifying the Wikipedia map.

[https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sette\\_colli\\_di\\_Roma#/media/File:Topo\\_planrome2.png](https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sette_colli_di_Roma#/media/File:Topo_planrome2.png)