

# A Marian Altarpiece by Hans von Kulmbach: A Reconstruction

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DURING THE SECOND DECADE of the sixteenth century, Hans Süss von Kulmbach executed a number of altarpieces representing the Virgin and the Holy Kinship. These works, however, have not survived intact but as isolated paintings scattered among many museums.<sup>1</sup> As a group they have been the subject of various attempts at reconstruction. The conventional composition of the altarpieces, their nearly uniform dimensions, and their related subject matter—scenes from the Life of the Virgin—permit a number of conceivable combinations. Nevertheless, a full reconstruction of a complete Marian altarpiece has never been achieved.

In 1921 the Metropolitan Museum acquired a small panel painting showing the Ascension of Christ (Figure 13). This work by Hans von Kulmbach is closely related stylistically and thematically to three other small panel paintings: an *Annunciation* in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, a *Nativity* in the Staatsgalerie und Städtisches Museum in Bamberg, and an *Adoration of the Magi* in the Art Museum of Allentown, Pennsylvania (Figures 9–11). My intention here is to demonstrate that these four paintings by Hans von Kulmbach were originally intended and executed as wings for a single altarpiece.

I believe, furthermore, that written evidence of the provenance of this now dismembered altarpiece has survived. In 1778 the Nuremberg historian and art historiographer Christoph Gottlieb von Murr (1735–1811) published a description of the Walburgis Chapel,

which is located within the portion of the Nuremberg fortress complex that originally belonged to the Burggraf. The following passage appears as part of the description of the chapel interior:

On the right altar, when one goes from the choir into the church [i.e., the nave], is a *Coronation of the Holy Virgin* in very old, finely gilt sculpture. On the right wing Mary embraces her friend Elizabeth, on the left saints ascend a stairway, above under a doorway a person stands holding a book. What the meaning is, is not known to me. From the fifteenth century. Below is the Holy Virgin, superbly painted by Hanns Kulmbach in 1513. She gives up the ghost. Many saints stand around her, one of whom holds in his hand a sprinkler for holy water. This appears in most paintings of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup>

1. Four panels from a Marian altarpiece are conserved in the Staatsgalerie und Städtische Gemäldesammlungen in Bamberg. They bear representations of the Visitation, the Nativity, the Flight into Egypt, and the Death of the Virgin. The Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig also has four panels; these depict the Birth of the Virgin, the Visitation, the Appearance of Christ to His Mother, and Pentecost. Several panels from the wings of small altarpieces are to be found in the sacristy of the church of St. Lawrence in Nuremberg (attributed to the school of Hans von Kulmbach), in the Barnes Collection in Merion, Pa., and in the City Art Museum of St. Louis. Here, too, the representations belong to altarpieces presenting the Life of the Virgin or the Holy Kinship.

2. Christoph Gottlieb von Murr, *Beschreibung der vornehmsten Merkwürdigkeiten in des H. R. Reichs freyen Stadt Nürnberg* (Nuremberg, 1778) p. 32; 2nd ed. (1801) p. 57.

From Murr's description it can be assumed with some certainty that a tabernacle containing sculpted figures was complemented by a predella. Murr states at the outset that the representation of the Coronation of the Virgin stood on the altar, and then indicates toward the end that the painting of the Death of the Virgin was located "below." In addition, the text shows that the altarpiece had wings and that the painted narrative scenes followed the Life of the Virgin. Murr's *Coronation of the Holy Virgin* "in very old, finely gilt sculpture" is, I believe, still to be found in the city of Nuremberg.

## THE TABERNACLE

The Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg has in its collections an altar tabernacle with a carved representation of the Coronation of the Virgin (Figure 1). The tabernacle is of pine, the sculpted relief, with its original polychrome still intact, of lindenwood. This work has always been identified with an epitaph for Ursula Horn unter der Vesten, which is documented for the former Dominican church in Nuremberg.

In the relief Mary faces the viewer in a frontal position. She kneels between God the Father and Christ, who, enthroned, together hold a crown over her head. A wall, originally covered with a gold damask pattern, reaches from the level of the crown to the floor. Two angels with extended wings emerge from the space behind the wall. The scene is framed by a pair of very slender turned columns which appear to support a trefoil of applied carved tracery formed by three slender contoured ribs. The lobes of the trefoil and the spandrels above are filled with a pattern of tendrils bearing leaves and blooms. The tabernacle itself is framed by gilt contoured moldings. The floor and the ceiling of the tabernacle are pentagonal. The tabernacle juts out toward the viewer, forming a wide angle at the front edge and providing additional space for the voluminous central figure of the Virgin.

The Virgin kneels calmly between God the Father and Christ. Her folded hands point to the crown over her head. She wears a blue and gold gown adorned with a border of pearls at the neckline. This gown is nearly covered by a heavy gilt cloak which flows down from her shoulders and spreads out to fill the lower edge of the tabernacle, from the base of the column

1. Pupil of Veit Stoss, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, tabernacle relief, 1513. Lindenwood, 100 × 84 cm.; tabernacle, pine, 130 × 90.5 cm. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum)

on the right to the pluvial worn by God the Father at the left. The Virgin's cloak is drawn together under her right arm, falling in parallel folds which end in a swirl of richly varied motifs as the drapery collects on the floor to her right. To her left the contour of the robe forms an elegant, wide-flung stairway of folds as the long drapery descends and its surplus settles on the floor next to the kneeling figure. The face of the Virgin is framed with long curls which extend in pairs, falling down over her shoulders to rest at the sides on her upper arms and at the front on her cloak. Over her hair, which is parted in the middle, she wears a coronet adorned with pearls of various sizes. The figure achieves stability through the wide spread of the cloak on the floor to either side. The hieratic form of an isosceles triangle which underlies the composition contributes a sense of monumentality. One arm of each of the flanking figures parallels, from the elbow, one of the two long sides of the triangle, thus accenting the two figures themselves while leading the viewer's attention to the Virgin and the actual act of crowning. Christ supports the base of the crown with the middle and index fingers of his right hand, simultaneously giving the benediction and exhibiting the nail prints in his palm. Likewise the wounds of his left hand, his side, and his left foot—which emerges from beneath his robe—are also visible. He sits on a lustered-green cushion which rests on the seat of a throne. A gilt robe hangs over his bare torso and falls in wide folds over his arms and thighs. From beneath one of the wide folds, a gilt waistcloth is visible. The drape on the right reaches over a socle upon which his throne rests and touches the robe of the Virgin. Christ's long locks of hair fall down to rest on his shoulders. His face is also framed by a full beard composed of fine curls. The inside of his cloak is silver and at the hem it is ornamented with pearls and jewels. In his left hand he originally held a scepter. His large crown is adorned at the base with pearls and rosettes and culminates in broad, three-pointed, foliate crenations.

God the Father sits on a lustered-green cushion



which, like the one upon which Christ sits, is decorated with a tassel in the same green, fastened by a gilt knot. He grasps the crown with the thumb and index and middle fingers of his left hand. His face is framed by a long curly beard and hair which reaches to his shoulders. Like Christ he wears a crown with leafy crenations. The right shoe of the Father extends over the socle that supports the throne. He is clothed in a silver garment with long wide sleeves, which is trimmed with brocade. Over this robe he wears a pluvial with a wide border adorned with rosettes, jewels, and pearls made of wood. The pluvial ends with a red and green fringe at the hem, and on the right is draped around the Father's protruding left knee. In his right hand the Father holds a golden orb as an attribute of his sovereignty. It was originally topped with a cloverleaf cross.

Two angels crowned with red and green braided bands emerge from behind the thrones. Their faces are turned inward with their gaze directed toward the Virgin. The green and silver wings of the angels are held high, their silhouettes thus encircling the angels' heads. The left angel wears a crossed stole; his folded hands are slanted upward. The right angel holds his arms crossed over his chest. The alb worn by the left angel is a lustered green and his stole is red. The alb of the pendant angel is red and his superhumeral is a lustered green. The vestments of the angels are executed in red and green, and the visible portions of the robes of the main figures are also partially carried out in the same complementary colors.

In the catalogue for the Veit Stoss exhibition that took place in 1933, these relief figures are associated with the Horn Epitaph, which is known from several eighteenth-century descriptions.<sup>3</sup> A note published in *Nürnbergisches Zion* in 1733 describes the epitaph for Ursula Horn as follows:

When one goes from the choir into the church, so on the left side at the first column a panel is to be seen, on which the Virgin Mary is painted. Above stand the words "Anno Domini MCCCC and in the LXXXXth year, on the next Monday after the New Year the honorable Frau Ursula Franz Hornin unter der Vesten died. May God grant her grace."<sup>4</sup>

Here the author speaks explicitly of a painted panel.

A similar entry published four years later in an inventory compiled by Johann Jakob Schwarz clearly substantiates the fact that the memorial for Ursula

Horn was one of the many painted epitaphs that were hung on the columns of the Dominican church:

On the first column from the choir toward the pulpit is a memorial panel, upon which the Mother of God is in the middle; to the right is God the Son, and to the left God the Father; they hold a crown over Mary's head. Yet above the crown is the Holy Ghost. This inscription is to be read on the Monument: "Anno Domini MCCCC and in the LXXXIIInd year on the first Monday after the New Year, the honorable Ursula Franz Hornyn unter der Vesten died. May God grant her grace." Underneath is Herr Horn with three sons, his wife, née von Plauen, with five daughters kneeling.<sup>5</sup>

Yet further corroboration is to be found in Murr's *Merkwürdigkeiten*, where the Horn memorial donation is counted among the painted epitaphs in the Dominican church.<sup>6</sup> Thus it was that a painted epitaph for Ursula Horn depicting the Coronation of the Virgin became confused with the relief representation of the Coronation of the Virgin in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.

Already in 1910, however, Walter Josephi suggested that the tabernacle with the carved *Coronation* relief was identical with the altar that Murr described as having stood in the Walburgis Chapel at the end of the eighteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately his proposal received little notice in the subsequent literature.

Careful examination of the tabernacle and the reliefs shows that the tabernacle originally stood on a predella and was complemented with movable wings. This is evidenced by five peg holes in the floor of the tabernacle and by the marks left by the hinges, including circular openings at the top and bottom on the outside of the tabernacle. The sculpted relief shows no traces of having been attached to the floor of the tabernacle. It must have been fastened to the back wall by means of nails. Two holes in the ceiling of the tab-

3. *Katalog der Veit Stoss-Ausstellung im Germanischen Museum*, exh. cat. (Nuremberg, 1933) no. 48.

4. [Johann Jakob Carbach], *Nürnbergisches Zion, d.i. wahrhafte Beschreibung aller Kirchen und Schulen in . . . Nürnberg* (Nuremberg, 1733) p. 118.

5. Johann Jakob Schwarz, *Beschreibung und Abzeichnung aller in der Dominikanerkirche befindlichen Dokumente* (Nuremberg, 1737) pp. 17–18; Stadtbibliothek Nürnberg, Hs. Will II, 1395 fol.

6. Murr, *Merkwürdigkeiten*, 2nd ed., p. 78.

7. Walter Josephi, *Die Werke plastischer Kunst*, Catalogues of the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (Nuremberg, 1910) no. 269.



ernacle probably served to secure a decorative superstructure.

In sum, we can determine that the tabernacle with the relief of the Coronation of the Virgin was originally part of an altarpiece with a predella, movable wings, and a decorative superstructure—the typical components of a late medieval altarpiece. Murr's description of the relief representation in the altarpiece he saw in the Walburgis Chapel as "a crowning of the Holy Virgin in very old, finely gilt sculpture" could as well apply today to the richly gilt *Coronation* relief in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. Thus it seems reasonably certain that the tabernacle was originally located in the Walburgis Chapel.

After removal of the wings and predella, the tabernacle with the *Coronation* relief was moved into the Imperial Chapel of the Nuremberg fortress. There, in 1843, the director of the Berlin Gemädegalerie Gustav Friedrich Waagen saw and described it. He speculated that it had originated either in the church of St. Catherine or in the Dominican church in Nuremberg.<sup>8</sup> According to him, it was already at that time overpainted with a neutral color. Friedrich Mayer observed it in the same year and recorded its exact location in the two-level Kaiserkapelle as "turned toward the altars" in the right niche of the lower chapel.<sup>9</sup> After 1863 the work was exhibited in the Städtische Sammlungen in the Nuremberg City Hall. In 1875 it

was transferred to the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, where it remains today on loan from the city of Nuremberg.

## THE PREDELLA

In his *Merkwürdigkeiten*, Murr associated the *Death of the Virgin* on the predella with the painter Hans von Kulmbach. The fact that he mentioned the name Kulmbach and the year 1513 indicates that the predella was in all likelihood signed and dated by the artist—probably on the now missing frame. It is known that Kulmbach had his own workshop in Nuremberg by the year 1511. It is further known that he fashioned many altarpieces in collaboration with sculptors. Altars that bear witness to these workshop affiliations are still in situ in the church of St. Lawrence in Nuremberg, the parish church of Limbach near Pommersfelden, and the parish church of Wendelstein near Schwabach.

A predella attributed to Kulmbach and today on permanent loan in the Staatsgalerie und Städtische Gemäldesammlungen in Bamberg (Figure 2) seems to be the one described by Murr. This panel appeared on the art market in 1937 and was bought by the Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen in Munich.

The scene represented takes place in an undefined

2. Hans von Kulmbach (ca. 1480–1522), *Death of the Virgin*, 1513. Panel, 39.5 × 98 cm. Bamberg, Staatsgalerie und Städtische Gemäldesammlungen (photo: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich)

8. Gustav Friedrich Waagen, *Kunstwerke und Künstler im Erzgebirge und in Franken* (Leipzig, 1843) pp. 155–156.

9. Friedrich Mayer, *Nürnberg im 19. Jahrhundert mit stetem Rückblick auf seine Vergangenheit* (Nuremberg, 1843) p. 186.



room. To the left of the central axis the Virgin kneels, dying. Each of the apostles is engaged in a different activity. John supports the torso of the Virgin. Peter kneels before her attempting to press a candle into her limp hands. Another apostle approaches from the right; he carries a vessel containing holy water in his left hand, and with his right is passing an aspergil to the apostle standing behind Peter (perhaps Paul?). Yet another apostle holds a branch of pussy willow. An apostle holding a censer joins the group from the left. In the background still another apostle can be seen, his hands folded in prayer. At the left edge of the panel two apostles are represented, one of them sitting on a bench, the other kneeling beside him. They appear to read the Office of the Dead. To the right, three other apostles—two kneeling—peer into an open missal.

3. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, 1514. Panel, 117 × 79 cm. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum (photo: Kunsthistorisches Museum)



The panel was perhaps part of a casket-shaped predella with curved sides. In his definitive study on Hans von Kulmbach, published in 1936, Franz Stadler pointed out the possible connections between this predella panel, then in Munich, and the one Murr described in the Walburgis Chapel. Nevertheless, with little confidence in Murr's information and no knowledge of the whereabouts of the altar tabernacle, Stadler finally associated the predella panel with Kulmbach's Marian altarpiece in Cracow.<sup>10</sup>

In the catalogue of the exhibition "Meister um Albrecht Dürer," which took place in 1961, the panel with the *Death of the Virgin* was associated with four wing panels in the Museum der Bildenden Künste in Leipzig.<sup>11</sup> Already in 1928, however, Ernst Buchner recognized it as belonging to a Marian altarpiece, the four wing panels of which were in the museums in Nuremberg, Munich, Allentown, and New York.<sup>12</sup>

In 1977 Colin Eisler rejected Buchner's hypothesis and agreed instead with Stadler's, namely that the four panels cited by Buchner were stylistically more advanced than the predella panel, and that it consequently must be earlier in date.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, Eisler did not completely accept the reconstruction proposed by Stadler, who had postulated that these four

10. Franz Stadler, *Hans von Kulmbach* (Vienna, 1936) pp. 16, 111, no. 34. In 1923 Hans Bermann had already proposed a reconstruction in which he also brought together Hans von Kulmbach's *Annunciation* in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum and the Marian altar in Cracow from the year 1511. He believed that the panel was originally the size of the other Cracow panels and that it had been subsequently cut down. This must be discounted, however, since the panel in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum bears no signs of having been altered. The substantial stylistic differences between the *Annunciation* and the other, no longer extant, panels that Bermann postulated belonged together also argue against his hypothesis (Hans Bermann, "Hans Süss von Kulmbach," Ph.D. diss. [Leipzig, 1923] pp. 37, 45).

11. Peter Strieder, in *Meister um Albrecht Dürer*, exh. cat., Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums 1960–61 (Nuremberg, 1961) nos. 156, 157.

12. Ernst Buchner, "Kulmbach, Hans Suess von," in Ulrich Thieme and Felix Becker, eds., *Lexikon der bildenden Künstler von der Antike bis zur Gegenwart* XXII (Leipzig, 1928) pp. 92–95, esp. p. 93.

13. "The subjects of the eight panels which, including the Kress *Adoration*, were grouped by Stadler as the wings of a complete Marian triptych do not work out convincingly. There may have been a more complex wing organization for the altarpiece, allowing for the addition of further subjects. K1594 and the other seven panels may have belonged with a now unknown central painting rather than the Vienna *Coronation*. The predella of the

panels as well as the four in Leipzig served as wings for a central painted panel showing the Coronation of the Virgin dated 1514 and now in Vienna (Figure 3). Stadler contended:

Nonetheless, even the [wing] panels, which now number eight, still do not result in an acceptable sequence for the wings of an altar. The three scenes from the Life of the Virgin before the birth of her son require a fourth in order to complete the representational cycle. Two scenes from the Infancy of Christ cannot be satisfactorily combined with three representations of miracles which took place after the death of the Lord. It is therefore to a certain degree probable that we have before us the remains of a large altarpiece with movable wings. For such an altarpiece four panels are still missing: one showing a scene from the childhood of the Virgin (*Presentation of the Virgin?*), two representations from her youth (*Presentation in the Temple* and the *Flight into Egypt?*), and a scene from her life after the Crucifixion and Resurrection (*Death of the Virgin* or *Coronation*). A representation of the Assumption and Reception by the Trinity or of the Coronation could just as well have provided the central piece for the entire altarpiece.<sup>14</sup>

Stadler suggested at the time that the eight representations from the birth and childhood of Christ formed the outsides of the wings; the four last scenes of the Marian legend, the insides; and the *Coronation of the Virgin*, today in Vienna, the central panel within the tabernacle. Eisler, however, contended that the eight panels belonged to another central panel, not the one in Vienna.<sup>15</sup>

## TABERNACLE WINGS: EXTERIOR

In 1961 Peter Strieder, disagreeing with Stadler's reconstruction, pointed out stylistic discrepancies between the four paintings in Leipzig (Figures 4–7) and the four wing panels today in Nuremberg, Bamberg, Allentown, and New York.<sup>16</sup> He agreed, however, that the four wing panels with their closely corresponding dimensions—the *Annunciation* (Figure 9) in Nuremberg measures 61 by 39 centimeters; the *Nativity* (Figure 10) in Bamberg, 59.5 by 38 centimeters; the *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 11) in Allentown, 61 by 38 centimeters; and the *Ascension* (Figure 13) in New York, 61.6 by 38.1 centimeters—originally belonged together and adorned the exterior wings of a Marian altarpiece. Strieder considered the paintings stylistically more developed than the paintings with Marian

themes in Leipzig. He judged they were executed approximately at the same time as Kulmbach's Tucher Epitaph in the church of St. Sebald in Nuremberg and therefore dated the four panels to 1512–13.<sup>17</sup>

An *Annunciation* and a *Nativity* are mentioned by Ralf von Rettberg in 1846 as being located in Nuremberg in the gallery of the Landauer Brüderhaus. Thus a Nuremberg provenance can be assumed for these Marian panels.<sup>18</sup> When the *Annunciation* panel was examined by conservators in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, it was discovered that it had at one time been split, apparently in order to separate it from another painting on the reverse side. This lends further credibility to the supposition that the painting originally formed one side of a movable wing.

The close correspondence in the dimensions of the four panels and the correlation of the subject matter indicate that the panels once constituted a Marian cycle for an altarpiece. The correspondence of their dimensions with the dimensions of the Nuremberg tabernacle (Figure 1) suggests that these works originally belonged together. Since Murr described the altarpiece in the Walburgis Chapel only in its open state, the four panels must have covered the outsides of the wings, which were not visible to him. The *Annunciation* would have occupied the upper portion of the left wing; the *Nativity*, the upper portion of the right wing; the *Adoration*, the lower portion of the left wing; and the *Ascension*, the lower portion of the right wing (see Figure 19).

Whereas the Leipzig panels represent an earlier stage in Kulmbach's development, as Strieder pointed out,<sup>19</sup> the other four stand in close stylistic proximity

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*Death of the Virgin* which appeared at the Stallforth Sale together with K1594 and the Metropolitan *Ascension* seems, as pointed out by Stadler, to be earlier in style than the Kress panel and to belong to some other project, contrary to Buchner's view" (Colin Eisler, *Paintings from the Samuel H. Kress Collection: European Schools Excluding Italian* [Oxford, 1977] p. 31). See also Harry B. Wehle and Margaretta Salinger, *The Metropolitan Museum of Art: A Catalogue of Early Flemish, Dutch and German Paintings* (New York, 1947) pp. 189–190.

14. Stadler, *Hans von Kulmbach*, pp. 19–20.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 20; Eisler, *Paintings from the Kress Collection*, p. 31.

16. Strieder, in *Meister um Albrecht Dürer*, no. 156.

17. *Ibid.*, no. 161.

18. Ralf von Rettberg, *Nürnberger Briefe* (Hanover, 1846) p. 167.

19. Strieder, in *Meister um Albrecht Dürer*, nos. 156, 161.



4. *Birth of the Virgin*



5. *The Visitation*



6. *Christ's Appearance to His Mother*



7. *Pentecost*

4–7. Hans von Kulmbach, *Scenes from the Life of the Virgin*, ca. 1510–11. Panel, max. 60.7 × 38.1 cm. Leipzig, Museum der Bildenden Künste (photos: Museum der Bildenden Künste)

to the *Death of the Virgin* on the predella (Figure 2). A clearly ordered composition distinguishes the *Death of the Virgin*. The arrangement of the figures is stabilized at the left by two praying apostles and at the right by three apostles similarly meditating. The two benches parallel to the picture plane strengthen the configuration on the pictorial surface. Peter's action of handing the candle to the dying Virgin forms the focal point of the narrative and is placed at the central axis of the pictorial field. The impression of space is achieved solely through the loose organization of the figures and the voluminosity of each figure. The apostles surround the Virgin in a loose semicircle. The disciples holding the censer and the aspergill serve as a compositional link with the praying apostles at the edges of the scene. A spatial progression is observable, beginning at the left foreground and receding to the right edge of the painting. Nonetheless, the space remains largely undefined except for the tile floor. The physical form of each apostle is rendered together with his robe as a unit. Corporality is primarily described through great quantities of drapery—drapery which often appears separated from the body and which surrounds the core of the figure as a shell around space. Drapery folds and the hems of the garments are swept around the figures and often swing out into space. Deep *Schüßelfalten* characterize the cloak of the disciple who stands behind the apostle carrying the censer. The figures' eyes are either directed toward the central activity or gaze into the undetermined distance. The apostle with the branch of pussy willow establishes eye contact with the viewer. Each apostle is physiognomically individualized and imbued with personal character. The disciples appear correctly proportioned and stronger than, for example, the figures in Kulmbach's Peter and Paul Altarpiece in the Uffizi in Florence. In this earlier work, Kulmbach shows a less developed feeling for corporality. The arrangement of the figures in the *Death of the Virgin* is also looser and less strained than in the wing panels of the retable in the Uffizi, where the figures are lined up parallel to the picture plane (Figure 8).

The *Annunciation* in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum (Figure 9) also exhibits a simple compositional structure. The archangel Gabriel appears to the left; the Virgin kneels to the right behind a stone prayer bench set upon a socle. The prayer bench is covered with a red tapestry. A book lies open before the Virgin. She is not depicted reading, however, but rather with her eyelids lowered and her head slightly turned in the direction of the divine messenger. Her arms are crossed over her breast as a sign of humility and acceptance of the angel's message. Her countenance reflects no fear at the appearance of the heavenly intruder. The dove of the Holy Spirit encircled

8. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Seizing of Peter and Paul*, wing panel of the Peter and Paul Altarpiece, 1508–10. Panel, 132 × 96 cm. Florence, Galleria degli Uffizi (photo: Alinari)







9. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Annunciation*, 1513. Panel, 61 × 39 cm. Nuremberg, Germanisches Nationalmuseum (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum)

by a colorful gloriole descends through a rectangular window opening and hovers over the Virgin's head. In the background a sketchily painted mountain landscape can be observed. The suddenness of the arrival of the archangel is evidenced in the agitation of his robe, in his erect wings, and in the banderole twisted around his staff with the initials of his heavenly greeting: A G P D (*Ave, gratia plena, Dominus tecum*). The dynamics of the heavenly appearance are also reflected in the billowing-out of the Virgin's cloak to the right. As in the *Death of the Virgin*, the painter has



10. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Nativity*, 1513. Panel, 59.5 × 38 cm. Bamberg, Staatsgalerie und Städtische Gemäldesammlungen (photo: Bayerische Staatsgemäldesammlungen, Munich)

reduced all spatial information to a minimum and has rendered furniture and architectural elements parallel to the picture plane. Again, the impression of space is imparted through the arrangement of the drapery, which is defined in strong three-dimensional terms. Loops of drapery are swept around the figures. The spatial extension of the angel's wings, of his belt, and of the banderole attached to his fleur-de-lis-tipped staff reinforces the three-dimensional effect. The left side of Mary's robe falls in deep, wide, concave folds.

Hans von Kulmbach rendered the drapery folds in





11. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1513. Panel, 61 × 38 cm. Allentown Art Museum, The Samuel H. Kress Collection (photo: Allentown Art Museum)

the *Death of the Virgin* in a similar manner. For example, the angular bunch of folds on the thigh of the angel is similar to that on the thigh of the dying Virgin. Further, the upward-turning portions of the drapery in the gown of the Annunciate are comparable to those of the robe of the apostle standing behind Peter. Likewise, in both representations one is confronted with agitated hems of garments spread out upon the floor. Formations of folds composed of small parts are avoided; sweeping, turbulent hems of garments and spatially extended portions of the robes

characterize the drapery in both representations.

The *Nativity* scene (Figure 10) is enclosed from the rear by a wall of stone masonry, the upper portions of which are crumbling. A wooden gate standing at a slight angle is built into the wall. Mary kneels with folded hands in front of the Christ Child, who lies on the portion of her robe she has spread out over a pile of hay. The Child is represented as if in movement. The figure of Mary is placed at a slight angle to the picture plane. Her torso is bent forward toward her son. Joseph stands behind the infant, grasping a lighted taper in his left hand and holding his right hand over the flame. An ox emerges from the left and gazes at the Child. Two shepherds approach at the right from behind the wooden gate in order to join the Virgin in the adoration of Christ. The younger of the two bends his head over the gate and points to the Child with his right index finger. A landscape with mountains at the horizon extends into the distance behind the shepherds.

In this scene as well, the drapery is spatially differentiated. Hems of garments and loops of drapery are swept around bodies, which thus appear as three-dimensional entities in space. As in the *Death of the Virgin*, the turbulent hems of the robes break into angular contours. The anatomical proportions are correct, and the bodies themselves appear to be composed of stereometric volumes which displace space so that they are to a degree monumentalized. This impression is supported by the gradual intensification of color in the robes.

In the *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 11) a wall of large ashlar stone, interrupted only by a double window opening, encloses the scene to the rear. The Virgin sits on a stone block in the left foreground. She holds the Christ Child on her lap. The Child leans forward and reaches with his right hand into a box of gold coins which the oldest of the Magi offers while kneeling before him. The light in the picture is concentrated on the figure of the Virgin, who is seated below the window. The eyes of the kneeling figure are focused on her, and she returns the gaze with a smile. The other Magi stand in the background, holding golden vessels—gifts for the Child. Very sparse architectural information is provided. Only a semicircular composition and the three-dimensional rendering of the figures evoke a sense of space.

In 1511 Kulmbach had executed another *Adoration of the Magi*, which is today in the Gemäldegalerie of

the Museum Dahlem in Berlin (formerly Staatliche Museen, Berlin) (Figure 12). When one compares the two representations, it is apparent that the Allentown painting presents a different psychological reaction in the persons depicted. The interaction among the mother and the child and the old king kneeling before them appears livelier and more appropriate to the situation. In the Berlin painting a comparatively melancholy mood reigns. Instead of joy at the appearance of God in the world, it reflects sadness over Christ's impending passion.

The formation of the drapery folds in the Allentown *Adoration* is again closely akin to that in the *Death of the Virgin*. Swept turbulently around the figures, they describe the bodies beneath as round, three-dimensional forms. Crumpled areas within the drapery folds are to be found in both paintings. Especially revealing is a comparison of the kneeling figure of

12. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Adoration of the Magi*, 1511. Panel, 153 × 110 cm. Berlin, Museum Dahlem (formerly Staatliche Museen), Gemäldegalerie (photo: Museum Dahlem)



Peter in the *Death of the Virgin* with the kneeling Wise Man in the *Adoration of the Magi*. Both exhibit a similar treatment of the robe in the portion that falls behind the thighs. In fact, the conception of both figures is the same.

In the *Ascension* (Figure 13) the apostles are represented as a tight mass of figures. Their semicircular arrangement is completed by the kneeling figures of Peter and the Virgin; Peter is seen from the back, the Virgin in profile. The faces of the participants are turned toward the ascending Christ; his feet, a portion of his legs, and the agitated hem of his robe are still visible. The sense of upward movement is strikingly expressed—Peter and Mary lead the viewer's gaze up and into the receding space of the painting so that the distance from Christ, who is slowly vanishing into the heavens, is experienced directly. The two apostles standing erect at the edges of the painting and the heads of the other disciples, which are thrown sharply back, accentuate the feeling of distance and movement, further heightened by turbulence in the clouds.

Here the treatment of the drapery functions together with the compositional arrangement of the figures to achieve a sense of spatiality. The thrown-back heads of the apostles are each rendered with the foreshortening required by a consistent perspectival system. The robes extend out into space as they are swept around the figures. As in the *Death of the Virgin* on the predella, here also the robe of the Virgin, spread horizontally on the ground away from the figure, has a stabilizing effect. There is also a corresponding organization of the drapery in the figure of Peter in both scenes.

The subtly modulating colors—red, green, blue, yellow, and brown—are characteristic of the four panels and of the predella, as is the same fine, transparent brush technique. Further, the stylistic characteristics of all five point clearly to a later date than that of the panels in Leipzig; in general, the figures are better proportioned, their garments have more voluminosity, and they therefore appear stronger. In sum, the proportions of the figures and their arrangement in the enveloping space are more developed. In the Leipzig paintings the figures are either squat and stocky or elongated, and the drapery is rendered in a softer and simpler manner. Additionally, the emotional tone in Leipzig is less intense and less compellingly indicated.



13. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Ascension*, 1513. Panel, 61.6 × 38.1 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 21.84

The Leipzig panels are, in all probability, to be dated 1510–11, shortly after the St. Anne Altarpiece that Kulmbach painted for the church of St. Lawrence in Nuremberg.<sup>20</sup> The figures adhere more strictly to the two-dimensional surface and the modeling of the faces is less three-dimensional than in the other five panels. Furthermore, the robes are more closely fitted to the body frame so that the effect is also less three-dimensional. In addition, the Leipzig panels do not exhibit the richly colorful palette of the four now in Nuremberg, Bamberg, Allentown, and New York. It

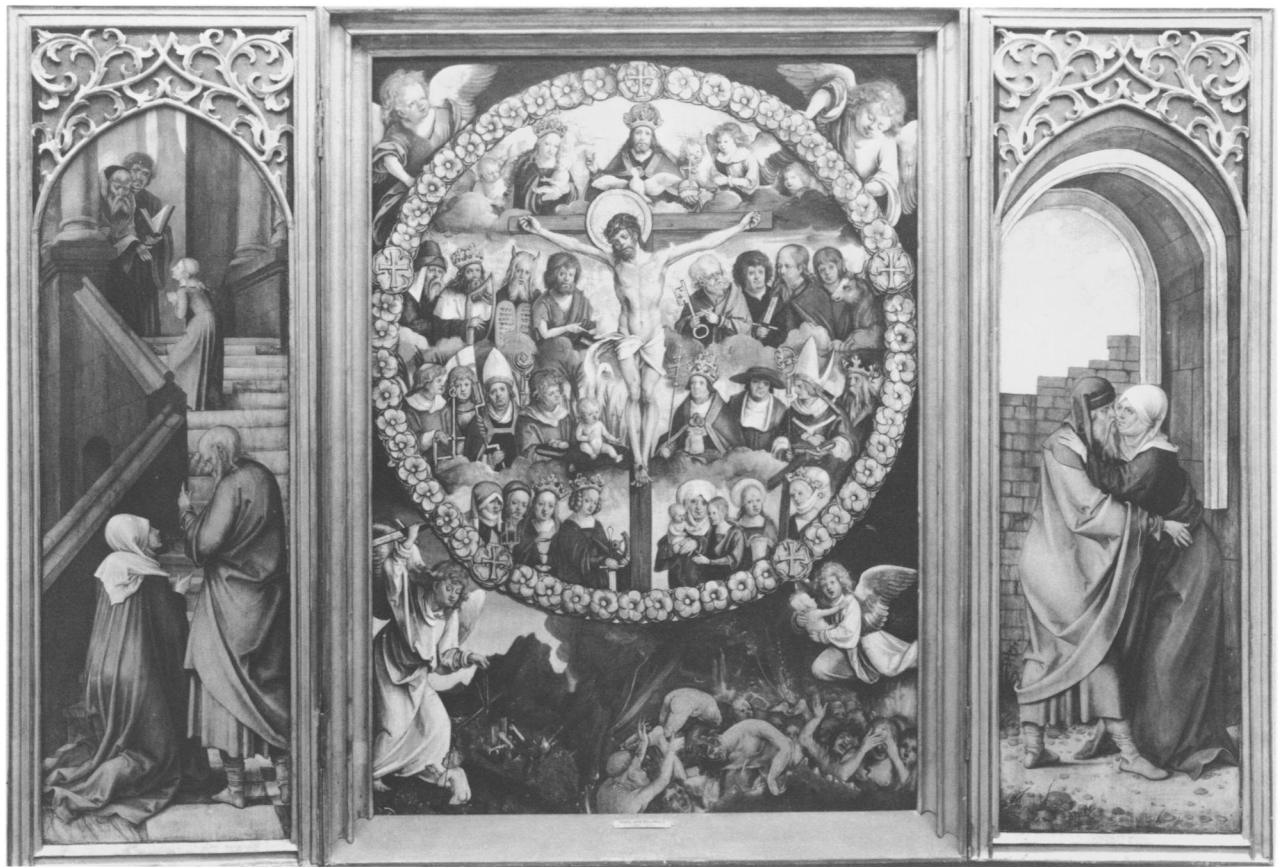
is largely their palette that associates these four panels with Kulmbach's Tucher Epitaph in the church of St. Sebald, which is dated 1513.

#### TABERNACLE WINGS: INTERIOR

Murr identified the scene he described as on the right wing of the tabernacle as a *Visitation*. He was, however, unfamiliar with the scene he described as on the left wing. This was the *Presentation of the Virgin*—derived from the Apocrypha. Since Murr usually described objects according to the order of heraldry, it can be assumed that the representation he identified as the *Visitation* was to the left of the viewer and the *Presentation of the Virgin* to the right. This arrangement contradicts the chronology of the Life of the Virgin and is not in keeping with iconographic convention. The *Presentation of the Virgin* is usually shown together with the *Meeting of Joachim and Anna* at the Golden Gate. In all likelihood Murr confused a representation of this meeting with the meeting of Mary and Elizabeth at the *Visitation*—the two representations usually following a similar formal composition. The *Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate*, also a scene from the Apocrypha, is a more appropriate pendant to the *Presentation of the Virgin*. Murr's dating of the paintings in the fifteenth century can be attributed to the fact that he was unacquainted with both the subject matter and the stylistic method. Further, it must be remembered that the paintings were darkened by the accumulation of soot from burning candles and that Murr viewed the unfamiliar scenes in the dim light of the Walburgis Chapel. It is evident that he was unaware of medieval workshop practice in regard to the production of altarpieces, since he described only the signed predella as Kulmbach's work.

Murr does not indicate whether the insides of the wings were painted or sculpted. The possibility of carved representations can be discounted, however, since the execution of the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* as a relief with a vertical format would have been difficult. Moreover, the relief within the tabernacle would have left little room for reliefs on the interior of the

20. Ibid., no. 156.



14. Hans von Kulmbach, altarpiece with *The Rosary*, ca. 1510, and two wings. Panel, *Rosary*: 117.2 × 84.3 cm. Castagnola, Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza (photo: Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza)

wings when the tabernacle was closed. The *argumentum ex silentio* also speaks in favor of painted wings, since Murr normally adds the phrase “finely gilt sculpture” when describing works carved in wood.

From Murr’s account it can nevertheless be safely assumed that the interior sides of the wings of the altarpiece bore representations of the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate and the Presentation of the Virgin. Two surviving panels with these scenes can be considered. Today they, together with a representation of the Rosary, form an altarpiece in the Thyssen collection in Castagnola-Lugano (Figure 14). Although Friedrich Winkler counted this among the Kulmbach altarpieces that are still intact and complete,<sup>21</sup> the originality of the construction is to be doubted. Already in 1936 Stadler expressed misgivings: “The naturalness of these events [in the

wing panels] can hardly be harmonized with the symbolical representation in the central panel; the necessity of at least a formal congruity of the narrative representations with the symbolical central portion was in no way understood as a problem by Kulmbach.”<sup>22</sup>

The wing panels—123/123.1 centimeters high and 38.5/38.8 centimeters wide—were in the possession of Prince Thurn und Taxis in Regensburg until 1931 when they became a part of the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection. In 1928 Buchner mentioned the altarpiece as it stood in the residence of Thurn und Taxis in Regensburg. Interestingly, however, he described the *Presentation of the Virgin* (Figure 16) as attached to the left of the *Rosary* panel and the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* (Figure 15) as attached to the right.<sup>23</sup> This unconventional arrangement also lends support to the

21. Friedrich Winkler, *Hans von Kulmbach*, Die Plassenburg: Schriften für Heimatforschung und Kulturpflege in Ostfranken XIV (Kulmbach, 1959) p. 69.

22. Stadler, *Hans von Kulmbach*, pp. 7–8.

23. Buchner, Thieme-Becker, XXII, p. 94.

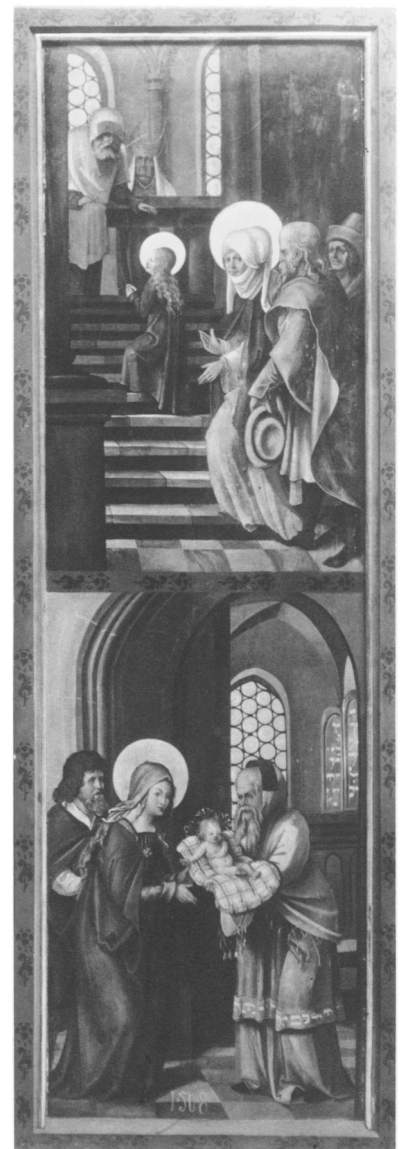
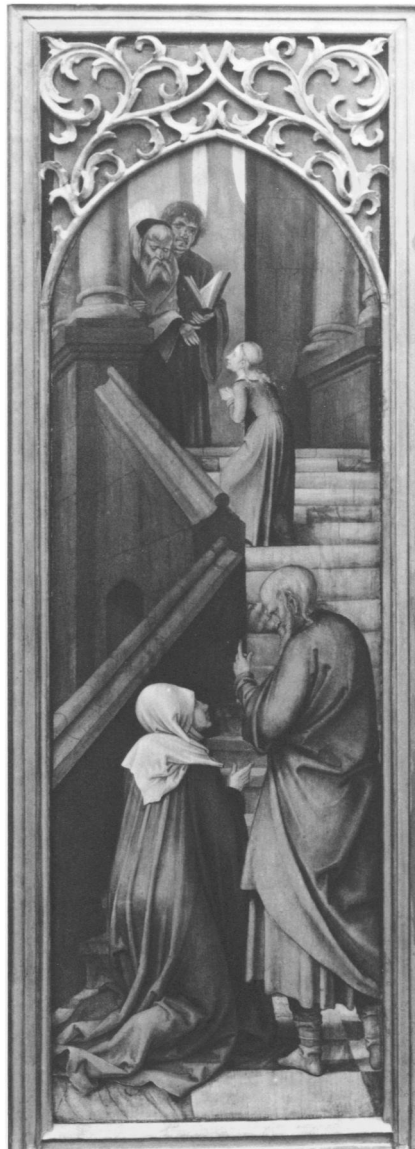
assumption that the *Rosary* and the wing panels did not come to Regensburg together as a complete altarpiece. According to Stadler, the carved Gothic ornamentation on the upper portion of the wings is the product of a restoration.<sup>24</sup> Nonetheless, the ornamentation is fashioned in exactly the same manner as the tendril decoration that forms a baldachin over the relief of the *Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 1). The

24. Stadler, *Hans von Kulmbach*, p. 107, no. 16.

15. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Meeting at the Golden Gate*, 1513, detail of Figure 14. Panel, 123 × 38.8 cm. Castagnola, Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza (photo: Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza)
16. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Presentation of the Virgin*, 1513, detail of Figure 14. Panel, 123.1 × 38.5 cm. Castagnola, Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza (photo: Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza)

iconographic combination of the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* and the *Presentation of the Virgin* together with a *Rosary* panel is unusual. One would expect scenes showing the joyful, sorrowful, or glorious mysteries of the Rosary. Neither the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* nor the *Presentation of the Virgin* belongs to these sequences. Furthermore, the wings are a little too narrow for the central panel. It must be assumed, therefore, that the wing panels in Lugano belonged to some other altarpiece—one with a Marian cycle. In Murr's description the images on the wings of the retable in the Walburgis Chapel agree essentially with those of the paintings in the Thyssen collection, so that it is reasonable to conclude that they are indeed the works

17. Hans von Kulmbach, *The Presentation of the Virgin and The Presentation of Christ*, wing of a Marian altarpiece, 1508. Panel, 206 × 69.5 cm. Formerly Cadolzburg, near Nuremberg, Parish Church (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg)





he is discussing. In the scene of the *Presentation of the Virgin*, Murr refers to a figure standing above under a doorway and holding a book. This figure, the high priest's companion—a character iconographically unusual for this narrative scene—is indeed present in the Thyssen panel.

Stylistic characteristics in the four paintings for the exterior of the wings and in the painting on the predella can also be discerned in the *Meeting at the Golden Gate* and the *Presentation of the Virgin*. Powerful extremities show themselves through the voluminous and richly differentiated drapery. The impression of space is intensified through the perspectival rendering of the architecture. The advances which the painter had made with respect to the visualization of fictive space and the existence of the figures in that space are especially evident when one compares the *Presentation of the Virgin* with Kulmbach's earlier rendering of the scene, formerly in Cadolzburg, near Nuremberg (Figure 17). Moreover, the kneeling figure of St. Anne in the *Presentation* bears a remarkable resemblance to the kneeling figure of the Virgin in the *Ascension*. All the representations are composed according to a clear structure. The awkward overlapping of figures which occurs, for example, in the Leipzig panels is avoided. The robes of the figures end exactly at the edges of the panels. Further, the emotions of the characters are indicated less superficially than in the Leipzig panels. The faces are simpler and more fully formed. Colors are applied in a finer manner and with more vitality.

Finally, some physical data support our reconstruction. The *Ascension* panel in the Metropolitan Museum has a knothole on the back, and one also appears on the back of the *Presentation* panel in Castagnola. Measurements indicate that they would fit together if the *Ascension* panel were placed against the lower back of the *Presentation* panel.<sup>25</sup>

## THE ICONOGRAPHIC PROGRAM

The Coronation of the Virgin is one of the most popular themes of late medieval art. In the twelfth century Bernard of Clairvaux had reflected on the soteriological position of the Virgin, introducing a new image of God and a new image of the human being. The salvation of mankind was thus meaningfully expressed in the picture of the Coronation. The fruits

of Christ's redemptive work are manifested in the Virgin—the prototype of the redeemed in that she was “predestinate to be conformed to the image” of Christ (Romans 8:29). In art this concept of Mary as Queen of Heaven and intercessor for the faithful who address their petitions to her came to supersede earlier representations of the Last Judgment with Christ as the judge of the world.

The *Coronation of the Virgin* relief expresses quite paradigmatically these theological implications. God the Father and Christ together carry out the elevation of the Handmaiden of the Lord, who accepted the offer of salvation at the Annunciation. Christ's naked torso, with the wound in his side, and the visible nail prints remind the viewer of his death on the cross. The luxurious pluvial and the crown signify the sovereignty of Christ, which was bestowed upon him through God the Father after the Resurrection. The scene assumes an air of ceremony through the sumptuous vestments, the balanced hieratic composition with the frontal position of the Virgin, her hands folded in the gesture of intercession, and the presence of the angels as representatives of the heavenly host. God the Father holds an orb as a sign of his role as creator, and Christ holds—or held—a scepter. With his right hand Christ supports the crown, blesses his mother, and bestows upon her the grace of his redemption.

The Coronation motif is derived from thirteenth-century representations of the enthronement of the Bride of Christ. The placement of the figure of Christ, which is unusual in this representation, may also be based on a thirteenth-century prototype. Usually the figure of Christ appears on the left side, in keeping with the biblical reference that Christ sits to the right of God the Father. A contemporary example of this more common figural arrangement is to be seen in Adam Kraft's epitaph for Hans Rebeck, which is to-

25. I am indebted for this information to Katharine Baetjer, Curator of the Department of European Paintings in the Metropolitan Museum, and to Gertrude Borghero, Conservator of the Collection Thyssen-Bornemisza. The reconstruction of the exterior wings now proposed (see above and Figure 19) varies in the arrangement of the panels from that published earlier (Rainer Brandl, “Marienkrönungsaltaar,” *Veit Stof in Nürnberg: Werke des Meisters und seiner Schule in Nürnberg und Umgebung*, exh. cat. [Nuremberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum/Munich, 1983] pp. 132–142, esp. pp. 137–139, fig. 93).



day in the Frauenkirche in Nuremberg. In this stone relief, the agitated lower portions of Mary's robe are a visual reference to the Assumption of the Virgin, which took place immediately before her Coronation.<sup>26</sup> A progressive development can be observed in the iconographic history of the Coronation of the Virgin as a motif. The Mother of God assumes an increasingly important position within the composition, so that her role as intercessor for the community of the faithful becomes steadily accentuated. The arrangement of the figures, the direction of their gaze, and especially the variations in the degrees of relief with which each is executed are the artistic means for expressing a sequence of theological concepts. God the Father directs his attention toward Christ, Christ focuses his gaze downward toward the Virgin, who in turn addresses the viewer. Thus the chain of intercession is made visible. The differentiations in the three-dimensionality of the figures serve the same purpose. The Father figure is executed in a flat, almost linear manner; the figure of the Son is rendered in higher relief; and the Virgin is fashioned as an almost freestanding, fully three-dimensional form. The direct connection between the elevation of the Virgin and the redemptive work of Christ is expressed in the formal association of the figures of Christ and Mary. As Christ turns toward the Virgin, the pattern of drapery folds in his robe is reiterated in the folds of her gown. Originally the sculpture may have included the relief representation of a dove above the crown. Thus, with the added presence of the Holy Spirit, the entire Trinity would have participated in the Coronation.

The narrative scenes from the Life of the Virgin painted on the movable wings and the predella thematically complemented this *Coronation* relief. The paintings showed miraculous events from the Life of the Virgin, her gracious selection, and especially her position in the history of salvation. The predella panel showing the Death of the Virgin established an immediate relationship to the scene of the Coronation above (Figure 18). The scenes of the Meeting at the Golden Gate and the Presentation of the Virgin signified the selection of the Virgin through the God of the Old Covenant, her Immaculate Conception, and her God-dedicated chastity. The four images on the wings that were visible when the altarpiece was closed showed important christological mysteries—the Annunciation, the Incarnation, the Adoration of the new

king by the kings of the world, and the elevation of Christ after his Resurrection in the presence of the apostles and his mother (Figure 19). All of these narrative scenes are inseparably bound to the Life of the Virgin.

Thus this small Marian altarpiece presented the viewer with a complete cycle of Christian soteriology. The choice of scenes to be represented was not designed to provide a continuous chronological report of the biblical events in the history of salvation. Rather, it was intended to accentuate the special role of Mary in this history. Open, the altar revealed the splendor of the New Order. Mary appears as the *Regina Coelorum*, who through the merits of Christ could take part in salvation. As *advocata nostra* she turns her attention toward the faithful and intercedes for them before her son. In his chapter on the Assumption of the Virgin, Jacobus de Voragine tells of a sinful human who is brought in a dream before God's judgment. In the struggle for the soul of the accused, Mary appears as intercessor. Jacobus paints a word picture in which Mary places her hand on the scale in order to add weight to the few good works in the scale. Although the devil tugs mightily on the other side of the scale, the Mother of Mercy is victorious and the sinner is saved.<sup>27</sup> Thus it can be seen that the scenes from the Life of the Virgin together with the representation of the Coronation of the Virgin constitute a meaningful Marian cycle.

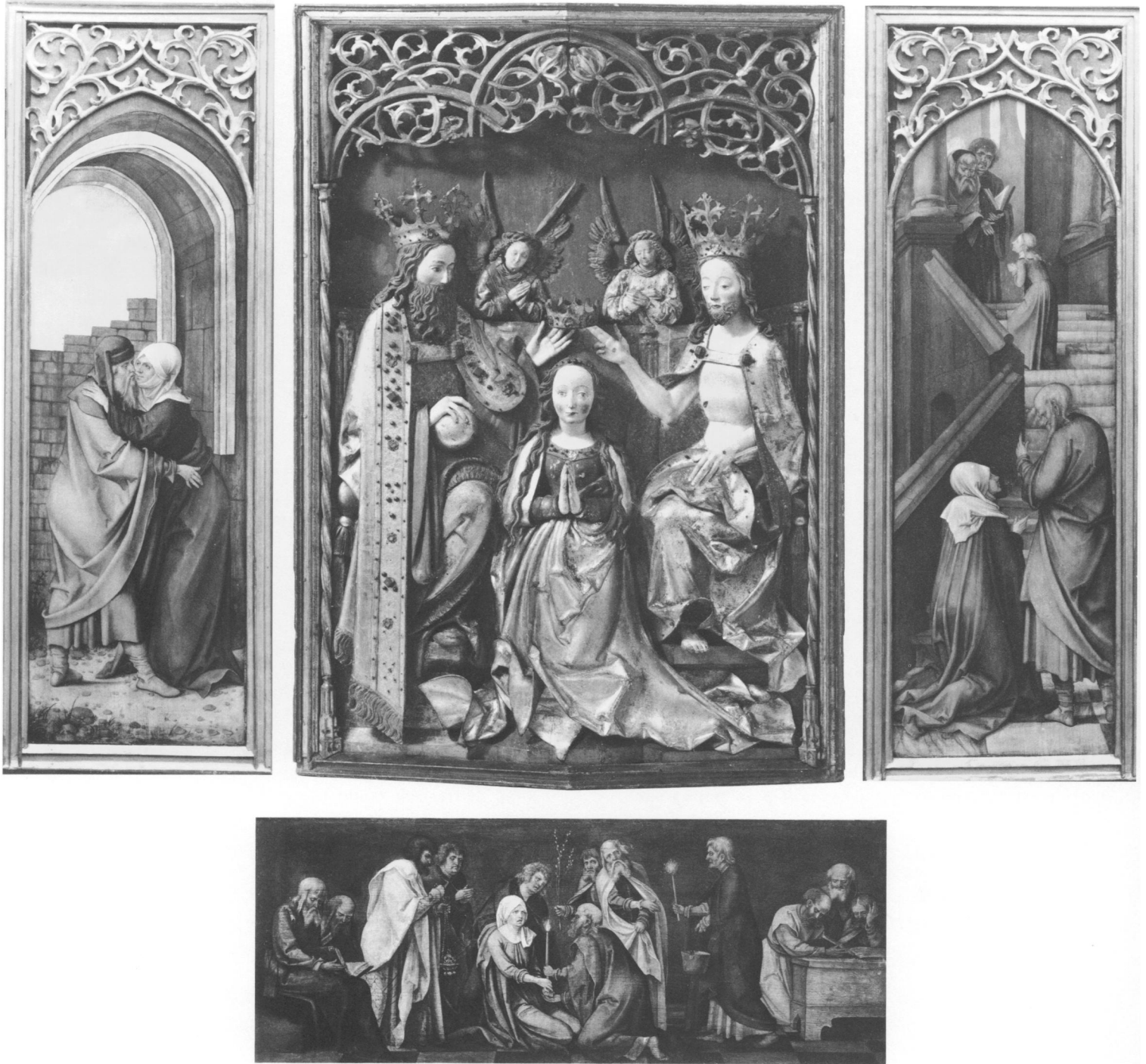
This unified iconographic program lends further support to the reconstruction of an altarpiece consisting of the relief and the seven panels discussed. Moreover, it is clear that this is in fact the altarpiece seen by Murr in the Walburgis Chapel.

## THE RELIEF: STYLE AND ATTRIBUTION

Murr's description of the relief in 1778 is the first discussion of it in its original location in the Walburgis Chapel. Murr focused his primary interest on the painted panels, while summarily characterizing the relief within the tabernacle as "in very old, finely gilt

26. Illustrated in Wilhelm Schwemmer, *Adam Kraft* (Nuremberg, 1958) no. 49.

27. *Die Legenda aurea des Jacobus de Voragine*, German trans. by Richard Benz, 8th ed. (Heidelberg, 1975) p. 596.



18. Reconstruction of Marian altarpiece with wings open. Tabernacle: *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 1). Wings: *The Meeting at the Golden Gate* (Figure 15); *The Presentation of the Virgin* (Figure 16). Predella: *Death of the Virgin* (Figure 2)



19. Reconstruction of Marian altarpiece with wings closed. On the left: *The Annunciation* (Figure 9) and *The Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 11). On the right: *The Nativity* (Figure 10) and *The Ascension* (Figure 13). Predella: *Death of the Virgin* (Figure 2)

sculpture.” Even in the second revised edition of his *Merkwürdigkeiten* published in 1801, he added nothing to the description of the sculpture within the tabernacle.<sup>28</sup>

A quarter century later, however, in the *Sammler für Kunst und Alterthum in Nürnberg* the relief received special attention. Already by then it had been separated from the paintings and taken to the Imperial Chapel of the Nuremberg fortress complex. Its original location was apparently no longer known, since the author speculates as to whether it could have originated in the church of St. Catherine or in the Dominican church of Nuremberg.<sup>29</sup> The author judges the work to be from the hand of Veit Stoss, whose style he claims to recognize in the stiff, angular, and dry manner in which the drapery is rendered.<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Mayer described the relief in glowing words but had doubts about its attribution to Veit Stoss.<sup>31</sup> Gustav Friedrich Waagen likewise expressed substantial reservations about its belonging within the oeuvre of Veit Stoss. He mentioned the “diligent formation” (“fleißige Durchbildung”) of the relief as reminiscent of Stoss but at the same time pointed to the arbitrary organization of the folds as evidence against such an

attribution, finally coming to the conclusion that the relief should be viewed as an early work in the oeuvre of the famous sculptor.<sup>32</sup> Rettberg compared the relief to the representations in the medallions in the so-called *Angel's Greeting*, which was completed in 1518 and still hangs in the choir of the church of St. Lawrence in Nuremberg. As sources for these scenes, the sculptor used engravings by Martin Schongauer. Rettberg observed what he believed to be substantial congruity in style and therefore considered the *Coronation* relief to be a work by Veit Stoss dating from approximately the same time as the *Angel's Greeting*.<sup>33</sup> Wilhelm Bode conjectured that Veit Stoss probably executed the relief according to a design or drawing by Michael Wolgemut or Adam Kraft. Berthold Daun also placed this representation within the oeuvre of Veit Stoss: “The lean figures . . . manifest a Stossian manner, which is derived from the lean realism of Schongauer.”<sup>34</sup> Daun later stressed the similarities between the *Coronation of the Virgin* and two Madonnas—one of wood<sup>35</sup> and the other of stone<sup>36</sup>—both of which were originally on the facades of houses in Nuremberg and are today in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.<sup>37</sup> Walter Josephi decided against a Veit

28. Murr, *Merkwürdigkeiten*, 1st ed., p. 32; 2nd ed., p. 57.

29. *Der Sammler für Kunst und Alterthum in Nürnberg III* (Nuremberg, 1826) pp. 49–54. “In früherer Zeit war sie entweder in der nun ausgeleerten, aber einst an alterthümlichen Bildwerken, Gemälden und Holzschnitzereien so überfüllten Katharinenkirche, aufgehangen, oder in der abgetragenen Dominikanerkirche. Wenigstens befand sich in dem Kreuzgang der letzteren Kirche eine Wiederholung der nemlichen Darstellung in Stein gehauen, welche von ihrem früheren Standort weggenommen bei der Einrichtung der Frauenkirche für die katholische Gemeinde in derselben angewendet und der Kanzel gegenüber aufgestellt wurde” (ibid., p. 50).

30. Ibid., p. 51.

31. “Gegen die Altäre gewendet, sieht man zur Rechten in der Wand zwei Marmorreliefs: die Auferstehung Christi; die Krönung Marias; in der Nische: Johannes der Täufer predigt vor dem Volke (Relief); die Krönung der Jungfrau Maria, ein Holzrelief, angeblich von Veit Stoß, das sich den besten Skulpturarbeiten dieser Art an die Seite setzen darf” (Mayer, *Nürnberg im 19. Jahrhundert*, p. 186).

32. “Eine Krönung Mariä durch Gott Vater und Christus, vordem wahrscheinlich in der Katharinen- oder in der Dominikanerkirche, ist ein Hautrelief, welches sich durch Styl, Adel der Gesichter und fleißige Durchbildung sehr vortheilhaft auszeichnet. In dem Sammler, wo eine Abbildung gegeben, gilt es für ein Werk des Veit Stoß, wovon ich mich indeß nach den weniger ausgeladenen und rundlichen Formen, wie nach den zwar scharfbrüchigen, aber doch weniger willkürlichen Falten der Gewänder, als die unbezweifelten Werke dieses unter so

starkem Einfluß von Dürer stehenden Meisters zeigen, nicht überzeugen kann. Jedenfalls müßte es der früheren Periode desselben angehören” (Waagen, *Kunstwerke und Künstler*, p. 155).

33. “Es ist offenbar die Nachbildung eines Kupferstiches von Schongauer, dessen Einfluß überhaupt für die fränkische Schule von großer Bedeutung war, und stellt hoch erhoben die Krönung Mariens dar durch Gott Vater und Christus mit zwei betenden Engeln im Hintergrunde. Das Werk zeichnet sich außer seinem hohen Adel durch den liebevollsten Fleiß in der Schnitzarbeit aus, und ist nach dem Obengesagten dem Veit Stoß vielleicht mit mehr Sicherheit zuzuschreiben, als so manches Werk, dem man seinen Namen zu geben beliebt” (Rettberg, *Nürnberger Briefe*, pp. 116–117).

34. Wilhelm Bode, *Geschichte der deutschen Kunst: II. Geschichte der deutschen Plastik* (Berlin, 1885) p. 125; Berthold Daun, *Veit Stoß und seine Schule in Deutschland, Polen und Ungarn*, Beiträge zur Stoß-Forschung (Leipzig, 1903) p. 67.

35. See Leonie von Wilckens, “Hausmadonna von der Wunderburggasse,” *Veit Stoß in Nürnberg*, pp. 158–162.

36. See Leonie von Wilckens, “Hausmadonna von der Unteren Thalgasse,” *Veit Stoß in Nürnberg*, pp. 117–119; Jörg Rasmussen, “Beiträge zu einem Veit Stoß-Lapidarium,” *Jahrbuch des Museums für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg* 1 (1982) pp. 9–22, esp. pp. 15–17.

37. Berthold Daun, *Veit Stoß, Künstler-Monographien*, ed. Hermann Knackfuss, LXXXI (Bielefeld/Leipzig, 1906) pp. 54–55. Idem, *Veit Stoß und seine Schule in Deutschland, Polen, Ungarn und Siebenbürgen*, Kunstgeschichtliche Monographien XVII, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1916) pp. 124–125.

Stoss attribution. Instead, he proposed that the *Coronation* relief was carved by the same sculptor as that of the small wooden figure of Christ riding a donkey, used in Palm Sunday processions,<sup>38</sup> that is also today conserved in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum.<sup>39</sup> Max Lossnitzer also argued against Veit Stoss (or his workshop) as the originator of the work: "Very little appears Stossian in the stiff organization of the *Coronation of the Virgin* in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum. All of the drapery is reminiscent of chased metal; even the faces are dead and expressionless; skin and musculature are flattened. One must compare the Virgin with high-quality works from the Stoss workshop, for example with the *Angel's Greeting*, in order to observe the tremendous difference."<sup>40</sup> In the catalogue of the Veit Stoss exhibition of 1933, the *Coronation* relief was described as a piece influenced by the early work of Veit Stoss and to be dated after 1482 or 1492.<sup>41</sup> Lossnitzer had already argued against such an early dating and for, instead, a date "before the end of the second decade" of the sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> Elisabeth Zachmeier proposed a date close to that of the Schwabach Altarpiece, in which the motif of the stiff, vertically falling border of the pluvial—here worn by Christ—also appears (Figure 20). She wrote:

It is much more probable that the suggestion [for the motif] came from this altarpiece, which is so close geographically, than that the idea came from Veit Stoss himself. Thus the previously accepted dates of the commission—1482 or 1492—must be reconsidered. These dates are based on conjecture and are not commensurate with stylistic observations. At the earliest the work should not be dated before Veit Stoss's return from Cracow. It would be even better to place it in the period around 1510, shortly after the Schwabach Altarpiece.<sup>43</sup>

It is, however, not only the obviously stiff and heavy border of the pluvial worn by the Nuremberg God the Father (see Figure 1) that links the relief to the Schwabach Altarpiece (Figure 21). The concept of the figures upon which the entire work is based, the interplay of anatomy and drapery, and especially the arrangement of the figures within the frame, all bear a striking similarity to the altarpiece in Schwabach. Moreover, in both works the figures maintain their corporality primarily through the manner in which portions of drapery extend out into space. Forms of the body appear as large, rounded shapes that are only partially apparent beneath the drapery. Organic re-

lationships of the body are often hidden by a veil of drapery, which the figures hold before them as if it were a rigid shield (Figure 22). The drapery style in both altarpieces is characterized by deep valleys in the folds as well as stiff stairways of drapery together with formations composed of tiny, brittle folds.<sup>44</sup> It must of course be remembered that the Schwabach Altarpiece is composed of freestanding, monumental figures, while the *Coronation* consists of small figures executed in high relief. As in the Schwabach Altarpiece so also in the *Coronation* relief, widely curved and extensively protruding contours of drapery are swept over arms and thighs. But even in these agitated drapery motifs there is always an impression of stiffness and affectation. The garments appear as if they were hard shells that could be removed from the figures at will. The lack of organic motivation in the fashioning of the drapery makes it appear to stand in front of the figures (Figure 23). It seems to follow its own internal laws because it is applied without respect to anatomical relationships. Further conformity in the two works can be seen in the organization of the garments. For example, rigid nests of folds have been carved into the portions of drapery which are spread out upon the floor. These motifs gave Lossnitzer the impression of "chased metal." The ends of drapery, often drawn together forming sharp angles—as is the case especially in the two figures of the Virgin (Figures 24, 25)—overlap on the surface of the floor. Moreover, the sitting, standing, and kneeling

38. See Rainer Brandl, "Christus auf dem Palmesel," *Veit Stoß in Nürnberg*, pp. 119–122. The sculpture almost certainly comes from the church of St. Catherine in Nuremberg.

39. Josephi, *Die Werke plastischer Kunst*, no. 269.

40. Max Lossnitzer, *Veit Stoß: Die Herkunft seiner Kunst, seine Werke und sein Leben* (Leipzig, 1912) p. 152.

41. *Katalog der Veit Stoß-Ausstellung*, no. 48.

42. Lossnitzer, *Veit Stoß*, p. 152.

43. Elisabeth Zachmeier, "Studien zur nürnbergischen Holzplastik der Spätgotik," Ph.D. diss. (Erlangen, 1956) p. 85.

44. See Alfred Schädler, "Stilkritische Bemerkungen zu den Skulpturen des Schwabacher Choraltars," *Der Schwabacher Hochaltar*, Bayerisches Landesamt für Denkmalpflege, Arbeitsheft 11 (Munich, 1982) pp. 92–101; Heinz Stafski, "Die Skulptur des Schwabacher Altars und ihr Stilbezug zum Werk des Veit Stoß," *Der Schwabacher Hochaltar*, pp. 102–108; Herbert Schindler, *Der Schnitzaltar: Meisterwerke und Meister in Süddeutschland, Österreich und Südtirol* (Regensburg, 1978) pp. 158–169. See also Rainer Kahsnitz, "Veit Stoß in Nürnberg: Eine Nachlese zum Katalog und zur Ausstellung," *Anzeiger des Germanischen Nationalmuseums* (1984) p. 42, no. 7.



20. Pupil of Veit Stoss, *The Coronation of the Virgin*, tabernacle relief (detail) from the Schwabach Altarpiece, 1507–08. Lindenwood, 347.7 × 314.8 cm. Schwabach, Parish Church of St. John the Baptist and St. Martin (photo: Eike Oellermann, Heroldsberg)

21–24. Figures from *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 20) (photos: 21–23. Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg; 24. Eike Oellermann, Heroldsberg)

21. *Christ*. H. 197.4 cm.

22. *St. Martin*. H. 181.8 cm.; with socle: 220.8 cm.

23. *St. John the Baptist*. H. 180.4 cm.; with socle: 220.8 cm.

24. *The Virgin*. H. 203.6 cm.





positions of the figures do not appear spatially plausible. Thus, a brief stylistic analysis suggests that the master of the Schwabach Altarpiece was also responsible for the *Coronation of the Virgin* relief.

In 1910 an oil overpainting dating from the first half of the nineteenth century was removed from the work, revealing an inscription on the back wall of the tabernacle behind the relief: the words *Hanns Heberlin von Augspurg* were painted upside down in red, late Gothic lettering (Figure 26). Presumably this is the signature of a sculptor or *Faßmaler* (craftsman commissioned to apply paint to a sculpture) who is listed in the Augsburg *Handwerksbücher* in the years 1514 and 1518. In 1521 he is listed as a citizen who has left the city of Augsburg.<sup>45</sup> Until now further identification of Heberlin has not been possible. Josephi suggested that the inscription was that of a *Faßmaler* or assistant in the workshop of the sculptor.<sup>46</sup> In the Veit Stoss catalogue of 1933 it was maintained that the signature was that of an early restorer.<sup>47</sup> This, how-

ever, must be rejected since conservators who have examined the work have not discovered an early layer of polychrome subsequent to the original.<sup>48</sup> Although it is unusual for an artist to sign a work on the back wall of the tabernacle, it cannot be ruled out that Hanns Heberlin was indeed the name of the sculptor.

In his book *Künstler und Werkstatt der Spätgotik*, Hans Huth warns that one must be cautious with signatures behind groups of relief figures. He distinguishes two categories of signatures: those found in "open" places and those in hidden ones. The predella or the frames of wing panels were the most

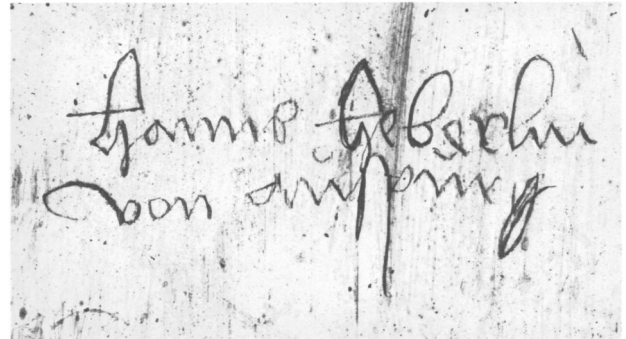
45. Hans Vollmer, "Heberlein, Hans," Thieme-Becker, XVI (Leipzig, 1923) p. 195.

46. Josephi, *Die Werke plastischer Kunst*, no. 269.

47. *Katalog der Veit Stoss-Ausstellung*, no. 48.

48. I wish to thank Joseph Pröll, Conservator at the Germanisches Nationalmuseum, for his examination of the tabernacle.

25. Pupil of Veit Stoss, *The Coronation of the Virgin* (Figure 1), detail: the Virgin and Christ (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg)



26. Signature on the back wall of the *Coronation of the Virgin* tabernacle relief (Figure 1): *Hanns Heberlin von Augspurg* (photo: Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nuremberg)

common “open” places. The surface which was behind the sculpture and therefore free of color was often used for hidden inscriptions.<sup>49</sup>

The inscriptions found in this place are usually quickly written with paint or chalk and contain no more information than the name and the year. They are to be associated with the person who applied the polychrome to the altarpiece, or the person who organized the execution of the work—thus, as we have seen, in the second half of the fifteenth century—primarily painters.<sup>50</sup>

Hans von Kulmbach left his signature and the date 1513 on the predella. This can be assumed on the basis of Murr’s description. Kulmbach’s signature on the predella pertained to all the paintings in the altarpiece. Therefore, the supposition that the signature *Hanns Heberlin von Augspurg* was that of the sculptor of the *Coronation* relief cannot be discounted. Stylistic observations suggest that Hanns Heberlin was a pupil of Veit Stoss, and that he was also responsible for the sculptures of the Schwabach Altarpiece.

## SUMMARY

The point of departure for the reconstruction was Murr’s description of an altarpiece in a side chapel of the Walburgis Chapel in Nuremberg. The altarpiece, first described by the Nuremberg historian in 1778, bore a representation of the Coronation of the Virgin. The tabernacle of this small altarpiece, today in the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, had been identified with an epitaph for Ursula Horn which according to surviving inventories hung in the former Dominican church in Nuremberg and was dated 1492. Examinations of the tabernacle have shown that wings and a predella were originally attached. Murr also included a predella in his description. This predella bore a representation of the Death of the Virgin as well as the signature of Hans von Kulmbach and the date 1513. Iconographic considerations point to the wing panels by Hans von Kulmbach that are today attached to a central *Rosary* panel in the Thyssen-Bornemisza collection in Castagnola, Switzerland, as the probable paintings which origi-

nally formed the interiors of the wings. These panels bear narrative representations showing the Meeting of Joachim and Anna at the Golden Gate and the Presentation of the Virgin. These scenes are described by Murr but he does not recognize their iconographic content. The four panel paintings which adorned the exterior of the wings must have also borne representations in keeping with the Marian program of the altarpiece. Four paintings today conserved respectively in the Art Museum in Allentown, the Staatsgalerie und Städtisches Museum in Bamberg, the Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg, and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York not only illustrate such Marian themes but also match the style of the paintings in Switzerland. In all of the representations the figure of the Virgin is accented compositionally and her importance in the history of salvation is stressed through the portrayal of carefully selected events. A complete, continuous narrative of the Life of the Virgin is not to be found in this small altarpiece; instead there is a Marian cycle which manifests all the most important mariological doctrines within their essential christological framework. The unique position of the Virgin, already recognized as “God Bearer” in the early Christian Church and thus accorded hyperdulia, or veneration above all other saints, resulted in especially picturesque accounts in the Apocrypha, which offered artists a rich treasury of images. In his depictions of the Meeting at the Golden Gate, the Presentation of the Virgin, and the Death of the Virgin, Hans von Kulmbach expressed the traditional images of faith. The sculptor, who is very probably to be identified from the signature behind the relief, completed the painted program in a similar vein with a carved representation of the Coronation of the Virgin, in which the theological concept of Christ as intermediary has been tellingly associated with the special role of Mary.

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49. Hans Huth, *Künstler und Werkstatt der Spätgotik*, 4th ed. (Darmstadt, 1981) pp. 68, 100 n. 127.

50. Ibid., p. 68.