

PORTAL

Western Portico: Central Tympanum

The central tympanum of the western portico of Saint Mary's Cathedral depicts a sequence of Marian exaltation. It is therefore not surprising that a beautiful image of the Virgin and Child, the foundation of divine motherhood, presides over the pier to announce the thematic development of the tympanum. The lintel is dedicated to the main scenes of this final mystery. It begins with the Annunciation, when the Virgin conceives the Son of God through the work of the Holy Spirit and the angel announces his reign. This is followed by the Visitation of Mary to Saint Elizabeth, the Birth of Christ, with Mary lying in bed with her son, accompanied by Saint Joseph, the mule and the ox. The narrative continues with the Annunciation of the angel to the shepherds watching over their flock and the Adoration of the Magi with the crowned Virgin, as in other nearby 14th-century portals. This is followed by the Presentation of the Child Christ in the temple, when Simeon recognises him as the Messiah, and it concludes with the Slaughter of the Innocents, when Herod orders the King of the Jews to be put to death. As can be seen, the cycle focuses on the divine maternity of the Virgin Mary .

The tympanum aims to present the glorification of Mary through her Annunciation and Coronation. The Ascension and Pentecost, scenes that refer to Christ's victory over sin, can be found at the end of the first frieze. To the left of the Pentecost is the arrival of the Apostles on a cloud to attend the death of Mary, in this case only eight are included and not all of them can be identified. Beside them, as is logical, is the Dormition, or death of the Virgin, with Mary lying on her bed accompanied by the twelve Apostles. The following register narrates the exceptional bodily Assumption of the Virgin, unprecedented in 14th-century Hispanic monumental sculpture. Christ leads his Mother to heaven, depicted as an adult woman, and places his hand on her womb in reference to her maternity. They are surrounded by clouds and angels with censers and musical instruments, as Mary hands the belt of her tunic to Saint Thomas kneeling at her feet. The side scenes present two prostrate groups, the religious hierarchy on one side and the profane on the other, all devotees of Mary. The programme culminates with the Coronation of the Virgin by her Son, which refers to her final triumph and also that of the Church. It is all completed by angels, patriarchs, prophets and kings of the celestial world occupying the archivolt as well as images on the jambs.

Basic bibliography:

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Author: Anonymous

Date: Second third of the 14th century

Technique: Polychrome stone carving

Place: Saint Mary's Cathedral (Vitoria-Gasteiz)



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A Living Treasure

Texts: Fernando R. Bartolomé García

Photographs: Quintas Fotógrafos

Project funded by:

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Direction and coordination:

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