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Part III:3.

“... in between are doors!”

***Porta caeli* in Italian medieval liturgical poetry.**

There are things that are known
and things that are unknown;
in between are doors.¹

These three lines form the American literary critic Wallace Fowlie's rendition of the text in Plate 14 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, one of the most famous poetic works written by the English mystic and visionary William Blake (1757-1827):

If the doors of perception were cleared
everything would appear to man as it is,
infinite.²

Like his modern "door-openers", the English novelist Aldous Huxley and the American singer and poet James D. Morrison,³ William Blake takes his evident position in the long line of metaphysical writers, in whose works the door appears as the central and significant metaphor. In their description of mystical and religious experiences, the opening of a door marks the very moment when you mature to enter into a larger room or ascend to a higher level of perception.

¹ FOWLIE 1994 p. 84

² BLAKE 1793, plate 14.

³ Aldous HUXLEY wrote the novels *The Doors of Perception* (London 1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (London 1957). In 1966 Jim Morrison formulated the concept of the American West coast rockgroup The Doors with a Blakean touch: "There are things known, and things unknown, and in between are the Doors".

In the Christian tradition, it is God who through his very first creative words *Fiat lux* opened the door from the darkness of oblivion to the perception of light and of time and space. With these two words God created not only time and space but also history, since the evening and the morning of the first day glides into the second day and then into the third etc. etc.: as a consequence the door may be opened to all the creatures to discover and perceive still new dimensions of God's creation.

According to this point of view, all the books of the Bible and the subsequent Christian literary tradition might be considered as one persistent and ongoing attempt to open and to clear doors to the true perception of God. Regarding poetic style and metaphors the Christian writers and poets were, to a certain degree, naturally influenced by the classical Greek and Roman literary tradition, and since man in the Mediterranean mythology and culture is believed to live in the middle of a tripartite world consisting of heaven, earth and underworld, expressions such as *porta caeli* and *porta inferi* appeared in pagan as well as in Christian Latin texts as metaphors describing the gates or doors to the unknown realms of Heaven above and of Hell below.⁴

In this paper it is my intention to focus on the imagery of *porta caeli* and to a lesser extent its contrast *porta inferi* in medieval liturgical poetry. Based on an analysis of the biblical occurrences and meanings, I want to investigate some of the contexts in which the two expressions were particularly applied in the Middle Ages and what implications the use of such metaphors seems to have had for the Christian faith and understanding in that period. However, in order to put a reasonable limit to such a large subject, the analysis will concentrate on a few examples of Italian liturgical poetry.

III:3.1. Biblical sources for *Porta caeli* and *Porta inferi*.

The noun *porta* is derived from the same root as the verb *portare* ("bring, carry, bear") according to the etymological explanations supplied by the two classical

⁴ *porta caeli*: e.g. Ennius, frg. var. 24 and *Annales* V.597, Vergil *Georgica* 3.261, cf. even Homer *Iliad* 5.749 and 8.393; *porta paradisi* e.g. Prudentius *Peristephanon* 1.29; *porta inferi* e.g. Tertullian *De Anima* 56.2; *porta regni mortis* e.g. Seneca *Hercules furens* 986.

Roman writers Cato (234-149 B.C.) and Varro (116-27 B.C.), the late-antique grammarian Servius (IV cent.) and the Christian archbishop St. Isidore of Seville (ca. 560-636). In his encyclopaedical work, *Etymologiae* 15.2.23, Isidore quotes Cato's definition of *porta* as explanation of the word:

Cato, "qui urbem", inquit, "novam condet, tauro et vacca aret; ubi araverit, murum faciat; ubi portam vult esse, aratrum sustollat et portet, et portam vocet".

(Cato says: Whoever is about to found a new city, shall plough with an ox and a cow; where he has ploughed, he shall make a wall; where he wants to have a gate, he shall lift the plough and carry it, and he shall call this "porta").⁵

In the Vulgate *porta* appears around 400 times which is twice as many as its three synonyms *ianua*, *forae*, *foris* and *ostium* taken together. In most cases this noun is applied in its basic, literal meaning "gate, city-gate"; but it occurs also in its transferred and metaphorical meaning "entrance, passage, door" as e.g. in *porta caeli* in *Gen* 28.17:

Pavensque, Quam terribilis est, inquit (Iacob), locus iste!
Non est hic aliud nisi domus Dei et porta caeli!,

(And trembling Jacob said: How terrible is this place!
This is no other but the house of God and the gate of Heaven!)⁶

and in *porta inferi* in *Is* 38.10, *Vadam ad portas inferi* ("I shall go to the gates of hell") and in Jesus' promise to Peter in *Mt* 16.18-19:

Et ego dico tibi, quia tu es Petrus, et super hanc petram aedificabo ecclesiam meam, et portae inferi non praevalent adversus eam. Et tibi dabo claves regni caelorum.

(And I say to thee: That thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven).

⁵ Cf. M. Porcius Cato, *Das Erste Buch der Origines*. Ausgabe und Erklärung der Fragmente von W. A. Schröder, Meisenheim am Glan, 1971, p. 40 (text) and pp. 171-176 (commentary).

⁶ This and the following translations of biblical texts are quoted from *The Holy Bible translated from the Latin Vulgate. The Douay Rheims version*, Baltimore, Maryland 1899, reprinted Rockford Illinois 1971.

and in *porta mortis* in *Iob* 38.17 and in *Ps* 9.14-15,

Miserere mei, Domine, vide humilitatem meam de inimicis meis,
qui exaltas me de portis mortis, ut annuntiem omnes laudationes tuas
in portis filiae Sion.

(Have mercy on me, O Lord: see my humiliation which I suffer from my enemies; Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death, that I declare all thy praises in the gates of the daughter of Sion).

In the last part of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus explained to his disciples the significance of and difference between the two gates (*Mt* 7.13-14):

Intrate per angustam portam! Quia lata est porta et spatiosa via est, quae ducit ad perditionem et multi sunt qui intrant per eam. Quam angusta porta et arcta via est, quae ducit ad vitam; et pauci sunt qui inveniunt eam!

(Enter ye in at the narrow gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are who go in thereat. How narrow is the gate, and strait is the way that leadeth to life: and few there are that find it).

In regard to our investigation, it is rather interesting to observe that in the Vulgate *porta* appears for the first time in God's far-reaching promise to Abraham in *Gen* 22.17: "thy seed shall possess the gates of their enemies" (*possidebit semen tuum portas inimicorum suorum*); and then significantly six chapters later the expression *porta caeli* occurs in the above-mentioned words spoken by Jacob as he awoke in Bethel, since God in his sleep had renewed and transferred to him the promise made to Abraham: "Indeed the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not ... How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of Heaven" (*Gen* 28.16-17). The stones, he had gathered to rest his head upon during his sleep, now became the foundation of the first *domus dei* to mark the uniqueness of this holy place; shortly afterwards, in another vision before meeting his brother Esau, Jacob wrestled with God and earned himself the name of Israel (*Gen* 32.23-28), a name which later became the collective name of the offspring of his 12 sons as the tribes of Israel.

The last and an almost repetitive use of *porta* in the Vulgate occurs in John's vivacious vision of the new Heaven and the new earth in chapter 21 of the Book of Revelation: "And I John saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband" (*Rev* 21.2); an angel shows him "the bride, the wife of the Lamb" (*Rev* 21.9), and he hears a loud voice defining the new Jerusalem as the *tabernaculum Dei* with its 12 *portae* in which the names of the 12 tribes of Israel were inscribed.

The two porta-visions seem to encircle the biblical narrative of God's inter-venetion in the history of his chosen people, the Israelites, and we observe how the image of the temple as the door or gate to Heaven pervades the Bible from the beginning to the very end. Moreover, the stories of Jacob the Patriarch and John the Revelator indicate and confirm the often observed religious phenomenon, that the vision is an essential instrument for reaching or gaining access to a higher level of perception, and imply that the one who is about to receive a vision has to open his doors.⁷ Vision is the capability of seeing the invisible!

III:3.2. The Church as *porta caeli*.

As Christian rituals and ceremonies had their origins and roots in the temple of Jerusalem, out of which its specific liturgical practice later developed, the Christian belief that the Church is a place of worship and the congregation is "the temple of the living God"⁸ was firmly based on the Jewish understanding of the temple in Jerusalem.⁹ This fact might probably explain why the awe-inspiring words spoken by Jacob after his vision in Bethel were adapted as the introit antiphon *Terribilis est locus iste* applied to the feast of the dedication of a church in the Western liturgical tradition:¹⁰

Terribilis est locus iste;
Hic domus Dei est et porta caeli,
Et vocabitur aula Dei.

⁷ Cf. F. D. Goodman's survey s.v. *Vision* in ELIADE 1987, vol. 15, pp. 282-288.

⁸ 2. *Cor* 6.16 "Vos enim estis templum Dei vivi".

⁹ Cf. JUNGSMANN 1959, p. 13-18.

¹⁰ Cf. HESBERT, *AMS*, no. 100

("Terrifying is this place; this is the house of God and the gate of Heaven, and it shall be called the temple of God").

Musically, the *Terribilis est locus* introit belongs to the somewhat solemn and serene mode two,¹¹ and although its psalm-verses may differ in the various regions of Western Europe, this introit seems, according to our numerous liturgical sources, to have been used in all the churches without exception in the celebration of the annual dedication feast, since each single church was considered to be a local example of the temple in the (heavenly) Jerusalem and thus also the local *porta caeli*..

As the introit repeats the words of Jacob and defines the church as *domus dei*, *porta caeli* and *aula dei*, the main contents of the few dedication tropes of Italian provenance are merely descriptions and explanations of these images.¹² As an illustrative example I have chosen the unique three element trope complex, *Hodie fratres haec aula*, transmitted in fol 250 in Pia 65,¹³ a trope which was most probably composed for the consecration of the city's new cathedral, which ceremony was probably performed by Pope Callixtus II on October 14, 1123.¹⁴

Hodie, fratres, haec aula colitur dicata.
Hodie angelorum effecta est patria,
sponsisque thalamum mitra sibi imposita
ingressa est sponsa;
unde gratanter canamus cum propheta:
TERRIBILIS EST LOCUS ISTE,
Venerandus et colendus,
in quo cum hominibus conversatur deus.
HIC DOMUS DEI EST ET PORTA CAELI,
Sancta et speciosa,
quae filios dei in sede polorum collocat beata,
ET VOCABITUR AULA DEI.

¹¹ PANZETTI 1996, I p. 64: "il I e II tono traducono un clima sonoro serio, raccolto e grave".

¹² Cf. *CT IX*. (forthcoming).

¹³ This liturgical Totum was begun in 1142 thanks to the generous donation of the Piacentinian canon Ribaldus. Cf. the arguments adduced in my commentary to the facsimile edition of Pia 65, *Liber Magistri nel Piacenza, Biblioteca Capitolare codex 65*, JENSEN 1997c, pp. 131-135.

¹⁴ Cf. the analysis in JENSEN 1996b, pp. 111-123 as well as the longer English version in JENSEN 1997a (= Part II:6).

(Today, brethren, this temple is celebrated as dedicated. Today it has been made the fatherland of the angels, and having adorned herself with the bridal crown the bride has entered the bridegroom's wedding chamber; let us therefore rejoice and sing with the prophet: TERRIFYING IS THIS PLACE, a venerable and adorable place, in which God converses with men. THIS IS THE HOUSE OF GOD AND THE GATE OF HEAVEN, holy and beautiful, which locates the sons of God in the blessed seat in Heaven, AND IT SHALL BE CALLED THE TEMPLE OF GOD.)

Hodie fratres haec aula is written in a structured prose with a significant use of rhymes in -a in the first and third element and rhymes in -us in the second. The first subject of the introductory element *haec aula* refers to the last subject of the composition *AULA DEI*, a stylistic structure which not only in the literal sense identifies *haec aula*, i.e. the actual cathedral in Piacenza, with the “temple of God” but also encloses the entire trope complex and gives impetus to this particular aspect.

In the extended introductory element the temporal adverb *hodie* states the liturgical *hic et nunc* of the present feast, which is further described as *haec aula colitur dicata* (i.e. *dedicata*), and finally, the element ends with the conventional exhortation to sing the introit of the feast (*gratanter canamus cum propheta TERRIBILIS...*).¹⁵ Emphasized by the anaphoric use of *hodie*, this element lists three successive stages in the comprehension of the dedication feast: 1) this particular church on earth is dedicated to God, 2) the dedicated church has become the home of the angels, and 3) the ritual act establishes the union between the two spheres which is expressed by means of the biblical wedding metaphor (*sponsique thalamum mitra sibi imposita ingressa est sponsa*).

The last and, according to stylistic conventions, longest part of this tripartite element remodels the contents of John the Revelator's above-mentioned vision of the Heavenly Jerusalem descending as a bride adorned for her bridegroom; although marriage and wedding metaphors appear frequently in biblical texts¹⁶ as well as in medieval hymns, sequences and tropes,¹⁷ the three words *mitra sibi im-*

¹⁵ Cf. BJÖRKVALL & HAUG 1993, especially pp.123-130.

¹⁶ In the Old Testament, the relation between God and his chosen people is often described in terms of wedding and marriage, e.g. Hos 1 - 3, Jer 2.2, Es 62.5, Ps 18.6 (cf. Augustine's *Ennaratio ad Psalmum* 18, PL 36:161). In the New Testament Christ becomes the bridegroom, e.g. Mk 2.19, Mt 22.1, 2.Cor 11.2. See also the examples mentioned in my study JENSEN 1995 (= Part III:1).

¹⁷ The examples are too many to list: Of interest for this dedication trope we might consider two examples in Pia 65, i.e. the hymn *Urbs beata Hierusalem*, which appears in the Divine Office (fol

posita in this elaboration of the metaphor add specific, ritual aspects to the picture: the white linen mitra is a kind of liturgical headdress and forms part of the ceremonial insignia of the bride as well as of the officiating bishop. As a symbol of purity the mitra associates the traditional conception of the dedication feast as the wedding of Christ and the dedicated church on earth with the ritual function of the bishop performing the actual consecration of the church. The source of this particular metaphor was probably a sermon by Petrus Chrysologus who as archbishop of Ravenna in V cent. had applied the expression in his sermon on the consecration of the bishop: *ecclesia mater sancta festiva ... sicut sponsa imposuit sibi mitram*.¹⁸

The two intercalated elements display a similar syntactic structure as each element begins with two adjectives, which describe the main noun of the preceding antiphon text, and continues with a relative clause. While the two gerundives *venerandus et colendus* signify what the community ought to do, since "God converses with men in this place", the last element's *sancta et speciosa* only add dignity to *DOMUS DEI ET PORTA CAELI*, "in which the sons of God are gathered". The two elements emphasize the two aspects of the church, united as the actual building on earth, which is a place to be "venerated and adored", and as the universal congregation of all the "sons of God".

In this trope the Church is also defined as the abode of the angels and of the saints (*filios Dei*), which seems to indicate an important aspect in the comprehension and explanation of every church's significant focus on the possession of relics. According to phenomenologists like Mircea Eliade and Peter Brown, the *praesentia* of relics in a church signified that the saint(s) in question had access to both spheres of the Church, i.e. the building on earth, owing to the physical relics, and the heavenly congregation of the faithful, as it is expressed in the Piacentinian dedication trope.¹⁹ Such a belief might explain why the translations of relics, which may be defined as movements of saints to people, seem to have been more

144), and the West-Frankish sequence *Clara chorus dulce pangat* for the feast of the consecration (fol 251). In the entire trope repertory, the wedding metaphor is less frequent and occurs primarily in a few tropes to the Dedication feast and to the Assumption.

¹⁸ Petrus Chrysologus, "Sermo 130. In consecratione episcopi", PL 52:556.

¹⁹ Cf. BROWN 1988, p. 88.

important in medieval piety than pilgrimages, which brought the faithful to the relics. When invoked, the saint(s) of the church could procure intercession and intervention on behalf of the celebrating congregation, which we might observe in the final couplet of the victorine sequence *Ascendamus ad honestum*, composed in Piacenza in the second half of the XII cent. to celebrate and beseech the city's patron saint Justina.

Cypriane, o diserte,
 O Iustina, vobis certe
 caeli portae sunt apertae,
 opem vestram nobis ferte
 iuncti cum Theognito.

O fluent-speaking Cyprianus,
 O Justina, to you certainly
 the doors of Heaven are open,
 bring us your help
 together with Theognitus

Justina suffered martyrdom as a Christian virgin in Nicomedia in Asia Minor around 300 together with Cyprianus, bishop of Antiochia, and Theognitus, and the relics of the three saints were brought to Rome shortly after. Then finally, in 1001 their relics were, as a gift from the (anti)pope John XVI Filigato, transferred to Piacenza by bishop Sigefred; later Justina and Cyprianus came to rest in the altar of the cathedral while Theognitus' relics were placed in the nearby church of San Giovanni in Duomo (see Part II:2). The division of their relics upon the arrival in Piacenza might explain why only Justina and Cyprianus are invoked in the final prayer in the last couplet of *Ascendamus ad honestum*, since their presence in the cathedral opens the doors particularly for their help to the supplicant community. In Heaven, however, the trio were united to provide their assistance.

III:3.3. Maria as *porta caeli*.

This Piacentinian cathedral was dedicated not only to the female patron Justina but also to *Sancta Maria Assumpta*, and according to another Piacentinian manuscript from the middle of the XII cent., the lectionary Piacenza, Bibl. Cap. c. 63, Solomon's *Song of Songs*, the canonical love poem which in the Jewish liturgy was read on the eighth day of the Passover, was assigned to be performed at the Assumption feast in the form of a dialogue between *vox ecclesiae* and *vox Christi*. The Piacentinian facts indicate and underline the connection between the Church

as *sponsa*, the bride of Christ, as well as *mater ecclesia*, mother of the faithful, and Maria as the mother of God, who after her assumption was crowned by her Son in Heaven. As depicted in medieval miniatures and mosaics, e.g. the two XII cent. large figurations in the Roman churches, S. Maria Maggiore and S. Maria in Trastevere, this coronation scene often resembles a wedding ceremony.

Such a Maria-Church relation might be traced even further back in time, as e.g. the language in the above-mentioned sermon by Petrus Chrysologus indicates: In describing the jubilant Church as a caring and loving mother who "opens her bosom, extends her embrace, lifts her voice and praises the divine in her songs, that she may summon all, gather all and include all in her bosom of love to rejoice with her",²⁰ Chrysologus was obviously applying the later on traditional Marian vocabulary.

Similar observations might be made in the X cent. Beneventan-Cassinese Assumption hymn, *Gaude visceribus mater*,²¹ which opens with an apostrophe of the Church addressed as *mater felix ecclesia*. The following description of the important events in Maria's life in stanzas 2-3 seems to form the transition into the peculiar stanza 4 with its four nominatives, presenting her as *felix puerpera*, *regis porta sui clausa*, *stella mundi* and *floris virgula*, and the direct invocations of Maria in stanzas 5 and 6. The equivalent apostrophes of the Church and Maria as well as the vocatives addressed to Maria in stanza 5, *sancta theotocos regis perpetui sponsaque*, underline the above-mentioned relation and connection between the two: in this Assumption hymn Maria and the Church are both called "mother", and the Marian vocative *regis sponsa* corresponds to the Piacentinian trope's description of the Church as "the bride entering the bridegroom's wedding chamber adorned with the bridal crown".

1. Gaude visceribus, mater, in intimis,
Felix ecclesia, quae sacra replicas
Sanctae festa Mariae;

2. Cuius magnifica est generatio,
Cuius vita sacris claruit actibus,
Cuius finis honorem

²⁰ "Haec tam pia mater dum unius germinis sui hodie natalitia festa celebrat, sinus aperit, extendit amplexus, emittit vocem, divinis cantat in canticis, ut omnes advocet, omnes capiat, omnes ad congaudendum sibi gremio charitatis includat" (PL 52, col 557).

²¹ AH 51.144-146.

Plaudant astra, solum, mare.

Summum fine tenet sine.

3. Quae virgo peperit virgoque permanet,
Lactavit propriis uberibus Deum
Portantemque gerebat
Ulnis prona trementibus.
4. Felix multiplici laude puerpera,
Regis porta sui clausa perenniter,
Mundi stella fluentis,
Floris virgula regia.
5. Te nunc suppliciter, sancta theotocos
Regis perpetui sponsaque, poscimus,
Ut nos semper ubique
Miti munere protegas,
6. Sanctis obtineas, virgo, precatibus
Pacis praesidium dulce divitinae
Nobis atque beati
Regni dona praemia.
7. Praesta, summe pater patris et unice,
Amborumque simul spiritus adnue,
Qui regnas Deus unus
Omni tempore saeculi.

(Rejoice in your heart of hearts, o fortunate Mother Church, who unfold the sacred feast of the blessed Maria; stars, earth and sea approve. Her begetting is magnificent, her life renowned for its sacred deeds, her end holds the highest honour without ending. She gave birth as a virgin and remains a virgin; with her own breasts she suckled God and in her trembling arms she easily carried the one who carries. Fortunate birthgiving mother praised in manifold ways, door of her King forever closed, star of the float-ing world, twig of the royal flower! To thee we now humbly pray, o blessed mother of God and bride of the perpetual King, that you may always and everywhere protect us with your gentle offer, and with your sacred payers, o Virgin, obtain the sweet protection of the divine peace for us and the gifts of the blessed kingdom as rewards. Vouchsafe us this, o highest Father and the Father's only Son, and give your approval, o Spirit of Both, who reign as One God throughout all eternity).

While the medieval conception of the Church as *porta caeli* was founded on its biblical application, the image of Maria as *porta caeli* seems to have been developed in connection with the increasing Marian devotion during the Middle Ages. According to our sources, this specific epithet was applied to her for the first time in the widely spread hymn, *Ave maris stella*, which was probably composed in the VIII cent. to the feast of the Annuntiation on March 25 and transmitted in a large number of manuscripts from the IX cent. all over Western Europe. But the road leading to the popular Marian image of *porta caeli* may have been paved with expressions such as *fenestra caeli*, *ianua regis alti* and *porta lucis fulgida*, appearing in the last two stanzas of the early, well-known Marian hymn, *Quem terra pontus*

aethera, which is usually ascribed to Venantius Fortunatus (ca. 530-610), the Italian-born poet and bishop of Poitiers.²²

- | | |
|--|---|
| 7. Quod Eva tristis abstulit,
Tu reddis almo germine,
Intrent ut astra flebiles;
Caeli fenestra facta es. | 8. Tu regis alti ianua
Et porta lucis fulgida;
Vitam datam per virginem,
Gentes redemptae, plaudite! |
|--|---|

(What Eve sadly took away, you brought back with your propitious offspring so the weeping may enter the stars; you became Heaven's window. You are the door of the mighty King and the flashing gate of light; applaud the life given to you though the Virgin, o you redeemed nations!).

Returning to *Ave maris stella*, the authorship of this hymn has been the topic of many studies in the past centuries: it has been discussed whether it originally was an Italian or an East- or West-Frankish composition, and poets such as Venantius Fortunatus, Ambrosius Autpertus (VIII cent.), Paulus Diaconus (ca. 720-800), King Robert II of France (996-1031) and even St. Bernard of Clairvaux have been suggested as the author of this text.²³ However, modern editors such as Karl Langosch, G.G. Meersseman, F.J.E. Raby, and Jan Öberg consider the hymn to be a work of the well-known poet Anonymus.²⁴

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Ave, maris stella,
Dei mater alma
Atque semper virgo,
Felix caeli porta. | 2. Sumens illud Ave
Gabrielis ore
Funda nos in pace
Mutans nomen Evae. |
| 3. Solve vincla reis,
Profer lumen caecis,
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce! | 4. Monstra te esse matrem,
Sumat per te precem
Mala nostra pelle,
Bona cuncta posce! |
| 5. Virgo singularis,
Inter omnes mitis,
Nos culpīs solutos
Mites fac et castos! | 6. Vitam praesta puram,
Iter para tutum
Nos culpīs solutos
Mites fac et castos! |

²² AH 50.87

²³ Cf. AH 51.141-142, ZOTTO 1951, pp. 494-503; WEBER 1978, pp. 159-162.

²⁴ AH 51.140-142; MEERSSEMAN 1958-1960, I p. 148; RABY 1970, pp. 74-75; LANGOSCH 1975, pp. 24-25; ÖBERG 1987, pp. 170-173.

7. Sit laus Deo patri,
Summo Christo decus,
Spiritu sancto
Honor, tribus unus!

(Hail thee, star of the sea, gracious mother of God and eternal virgin, the blessed door to Heaven! Having heard the Ave from Gabriel's mouth, confirm us in peace as you transform the name of Eva. Loosen the chains of the accused, grant light to the blind, drive away our sins, pray for all good for us. Show us you are His mother, that He through you may accept our prayer, he who for our sake chose to be born as your son. Incomparable virgin, most forgiving of all, make us, delivered from our sins, forgiving and pious. Vouchsafe us a pure life, prepare us a safe road, that we may see Jesus and rejoice forever. Praised be God the Father, the highest glory to Christ, honoured be the Holy Spirit, the One in three!)

The hymn opens with a repetition of the very first word in Gabriel's salute to Maria, *Ave gratia plena; Dominus tecum, benedicta tu in mulieribus* in Luke 1.28. The worshippers' respectful *Ave* associates to Gabriel's salute as well as to the Ave Maria prayer, and the following four vocatives enlarge the biblical description of Maria as new qualities are conferred to her such as "the star of the sea", "the mother of God", "the everlasting virgin" and as the culmination "the blessed door to Heaven", *felix caeli porta!*

By virtue of the latter quality, Maria's acceptance of the archangel's words enables her to act as the imperatives in the next five stanzas demand and especially to set right the wrongs caused by Eve, since the poet with an elegant and untranslatable word-play opposes Gabriel's *Ave* to the name of *Eva* and let Maria abolish her sins. Thereby the contrast between Maria's lifegiving obedience and Eve's sad disobedience, prominent also in the above-mentioned hymn ascribed to Venantius Fortunatus, is placed as the main theme in *Ave maris stella*. If we take the texts of the two hymns at face value and interpret the contraposition of Maria and Eve as a poetic comment to Jesus' remarks on the two gates in his Sermon on the Mount (*Mt* 7.13-14), their theological contents even imply that since Maria is called *fenestra caeli* and *porta caeli* and thus indicates "the gate ... that leadeth to life", then Eve and disobedience must, consequently, be interpreted to denote *porta inferi* and "the gate ... that leadeth to destruction".

The impact of this Eve-Maria-typology is also important in the Italian Purification sequence *Qui purgat animas* which contains yet another example of the

Marian image of *porta caeli*. According to the dates and provenances of the ten oldest manuscripts transmitting this sequence, it seems to have been composed somewhere in the neighbourhood of Milano (in Pavia, Monza or Vercelli) in the first half of the XI cent.; a collation of the various manuscripts reveals, however, both a northern and a southern version of the composition.²⁵ The present text is transmitted in the troper-sequentiary of Pia 65, fol 233v-234:

1	Qui purgat animas et corpora sancta,	
2a	Hodie sine macularum contagio	2b Legem per se datam conservans hic Mariam
3a	Genetricem suam ad templum cum hostiarum munere	3b Venire voluit bis geminum deferentem alitem.
4a	Per quos edocemur cognoscere mysticam virtutem:	4b Turtur castitatem nam columba pretendit mutuum
5a	Dilectionem, quibus plenam exitisse credimus beatam genetricem ipsam, fieri pro quo hospes meruit	5b Altitonantis unici, qui clausam ingrediens clausam liquit per Ezechielem predictam portam gloriosam.
6a	In cuius obsequio senex anus gratulabundo prophetant occursu 'Gloria[m] deo'.	6b O porta celi, per Aaron et prefigurata virga consumens flore serpentis iura,
7a	Nos tibi cum voto cordis parere studentes adsumus, unicus tuus nostra relaxet, ut facinorum crimina per primam virginem data[m],	7b Quo purgatis mentibus et nos tui consortes effecti mereamur percipere ipsum in mentis archana per evum mundata atque purgata.
8a	O trinitas perfecta, in qua sola manet laus gloriosa, nostra	8b Cum ipsius adiunge peccamina quo nostra per eius sint grata.

²⁵ Cf. BRUNNER, "Catalogo ...", p. 286. The "northern version" appears in Ivrea, Bibl. Cap. 60, Modena, Bibl. Cap. I.7, Monza, Bibl. Cap. c. 13/76, Oxford, Bodleian Libr. Douce 222, Torino, Bibl. Naz. F.IV.18, Vercelli, Bibl. Cap. 162, and the "southern version" in Pia 65, Benevento, Bibl. Cap. VI 34, Benevento, Bibl. Cap. VI 35, Monte Cassino, Archivio dell'Abazia 546.

9a Gloria deo ingenito,
gloria unigenito,

9b Una cum sancto spiritu
gloria sit utrique

10 Per cuncta secula seculorum. Amen.²⁶

(The one who purifies the souls and bodies sacred, keeping the law given through himself, he wanted that today Maria his mother, who is without contaminating stains, should go to the temple with sacrificial offerings and bring the twin birds. Through them we learn to know the mystic virtue, as the turtle signifies chastity and the dove mutual affection, of which we believe his blessed mother to be full, because of which she merited to be the hostess of the Loud-roaring's only Son, who entered her closed and left her closed through the glorious gate predicted by Ezechiel. In obedience of this, the old man and the old woman rejoicingly prophesy "Glory to God" at the meeting. O you gate of Heaven and you through Aron prefigured sprout, consuming the rights of the serpent with your flower, we are here, eager to obey you with the vows of our hearts that your only Son may ease our faults and sins conferred through the first virgin, that we with cleansed minds may become your brothers and sisters and merit to receive him into the most secret parts of our souls, cleansed and purified through eternity. O perfect Trinity, in which the glorious praise alone remains, unite our prayers with his (praise) that our prayers may be accepted through hers. Glory to God the unborn; Glory to the only born; Glory to both, together with the Holy Ghost through all eternity. Amen.)

The direct invocation of Maria addressed in *O porta caeli* and the connotative description of her as the *virgo /virga prefigurata per Aaron* in couplet 6a change the character of the sequence since Maria now is addressed in the 2nd sing., while she in the first part is described as *genetrix dei* and referred to in the 3rd sing. The position of the invocation *porta caeli* between the two Old Testament prefigurations seems to illustrate Maria's ongoing function as the true mediatrix: the only begotten son entered the *porta clausa* of Ezechiel's prefiguration, the *virgo/virga* of Aron's prefiguration bloomed, and serving as Heaven's gate for God Maria bore her son into this world, and as Heaven's gate for us she makes us want to equal her obedience in order to be purified and thus able to receive Christ into our souls as stated in couplets 7a-7b.²⁷

The two prefigurations contribute different aspects to our study on the Marian image of *porta caeli*: the application of Aron's rod extends the well-known Eva-Maria-typology with connotations to the blooming of Aron's staff as the token

²⁶ Cf. the edition in AH 10.21 based on Oxford, Bodleian Libr. Douce 222; an edition of the "northern version" appeared in BANNISTER 1903, pp. 69-76. Cf. the more detailed interpretation in my study of the Marian texts in Pia 65, JENSEN 1996a, pp. 152-154.

²⁷ The word *virga* also associates to *Is* 11.1: *Egredietur virga de radice Iesse.*

and proof of his priestly dignity (*Num* 17:6-11) and to the transformation of his rod into a snake which devoured all the snakes of the Egyptian magicians when Moses and Aron went to meet with Pharaoh in *Exodus* 7.8-12. Besides this connotation, the words attributed to the prefigured *virga, consumens serpentis iura* in couplet 6b, even associate to Eve's conversation with the snake, the subsequent fall and the punishment, God passed on the snake in the Garden of Eden (*Gen* 3:16).

The prefiguration of Maria as *porta clausa* in couplet 5b identifies her with the closed gate in Ezechiel's prophecy: "And the Lord said to me: This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall pass through it: because the Lord the God of Israel hath entered in by it, and it shall be shut for the prince. The prince himself shall sit in it, to eat bread before the Lord: he shall enter in by the way of the porch of the gate, and shall go out by the same way" (*Ez* 44:2-3).²⁸

The application of the equally popular *porta clausa* image to Maria might have been introduced in Christian literature in the Marian hymn *Ut virginem fetam loquar*, written by Ennodius (473-521), bishop of Pavia.²⁹ In his attempts to explain the Marian paradox of the birth-giving virgin, Ennodius links the two expressions *porta clausa* and *porta patens*:

<p>1. Ut virginem fetam loquar, Quid laude dignum Mariae? Det partus ornet exigat: Quod clausa porta, quod patens</p>	<p>2. Exposcit, ipsa suggerat. Sint verba ceu miraculum Quid, mens, requiras ordinem? Natura totum perdidit:</p>
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(That I may speak of a birth-giving virgin, what is worthy the praise of Maria? That she should give birth, prepare and endure it? That the closed gate itself supplied what the open (gate) required? Be it the words or the miracle, why do you, o mind, require a regular order? Nature made away with all this:)

²⁸ "Dixit dominus ad me: Porta haec clausa erit; non aperietur, et vir non transibit per eam, quoniam Dominus Deus Israel ingressus est per eam; eritque clausa principi. Princeps ipse sedebit in ea, ut comedat panem coram Domino; per viam portae vestibuli ingredietur, et per viam eius egredietur".

²⁹ Ennodius, *Carminum liber* I, XVIII 4-5, CSEL 6, pp. 552-3.

Although the *porta clausa* image later seems to have been used mainly in Frankish liturgical poetry,³⁰ the Ennodian juxtaposition of the two porta-metaphors also appeared in Italian sequences such as the above-mentioned *Qui purgat animas* and the unique XII cent. Beneventan sequence for the Natale Mariae, *Haec est vere laudanda*, in Benevento, Bibl. Capit. 39, fols 150v-151, concisely compressed in couplets 4a-5a:

- | | | | |
|----|---|----|--|
| 4a | Haec nunc est
sacrae aedis ianua | 4b | Quam clausam
tunc propheta memorat, |
| 5a | Nulli patens unquam soli nisi Domino,
manens clausa per saecula. | | |

(She is now the door to the sacred house, then mentioned as closed by the prophet, opening to no one but the Lord alone, remaining closed throughout eternity).

In relation to the investigation of the Marian *porta caeli* image, the difference between the two porta-images in the Purification sequence *Qui purgat animas*, and to a certain degree also in *Haec est vere laudanda*, reflects and enlarges the significance of the Ennodian distinction between *porta clausa* and *porta patens* with regard to Maria's role and function as mediatrix. With our liturgical invocations and prayers in the church we may address Maria and ask for her intervention, because we, believing her to be *porta caeli*, that is *porta patens* in the Ennodian sense, may entreat her to act as our mediatrix and to open the doors of Heaven to us. With regard to *porta caeli* in the sense of *porta clausa*, Maria might be compared to Jacob the Patriarch and John the Revelator as she opened herself to God and thus as his mediatrix gave birth to the only begotten son. By virtue of her obedience, Maria opened herself to God's word, and through her affirmative answer to Gabriel's greetings, the only one who could enter the *porta clausa* of Ezechiel's prophecy, was made visible to us in order to show us the way to his Father in Heaven.

³⁰ E.g. in Notker Balbulus' Purification sequence *Concentu parili*, st. 6 of which says: "Tu porta iugiter serata, quam Ezechielis vox testatur". Cf. also the examples in ELFVING 1962, pp. 137, 234.

In addition, such a reading of the two aspects of the Marian *porta caeli* image emphasizes Jesus Christ as the true saviour and implicitly to the similar function of the church and his mother Maria in the salvation mystery. Being the true Christian hope which lies open to the faithful believer, Christ is to be trusted in contrast to the Greek hope which, being changeable and illusory, might deceive man, because it lies forever hidden to mankind in Pandora's box.

III:3.4. Concluding remarks.

Letting this christological interpretation of the *porta caeli* images form a provisional conclusion to this minor investigation of a most fascinating imagery in medieval Italian liturgical poetry, I want to end the present study with a late Ravennese sequence from the XVI cent., *Ave virgo regia*. This strictly rhymed and rhythmic sequence appears to have been written to the melody of *Veni sancte spiritus* and is textually formed as one ongoing apostrophe of Maria:

1a	Ave, virgo regia, Regis regum filia Laus regalis regiae.	1b	Ave, viri nescia, Ave, plena gratia Septiformis gratiae.
2a	Veni, vena veniae, Mater regis gloriae, Nostra spes et gloria.	2b	Cara, carens carie, Porta caeli patriae, Per quam patet patria.
3a	Ave, clavis caelica, Pia parens unica Piae prolis unicae.	3b	Verus, o pacifica, Sol ex te, mirifica, processit mirifice.
4a	Laetabaris prospere Illustrata sidere, Quod illustrat sidera.	4b	Casto fluens ubere, natum tenens tenere membra fovens tenera.
5a	Ave, prudentissima, Dignarum dignissima Vocaris dignissime.	5b	Luna lucidissima, Sicut es piissima, Iuva nos piissime. ³¹

(Hail thee, o royal Virgin, daughter of the King of Kings, praise of the royal court! Hail thee, who knows of no man, hail thee, full of the grace of the sevenfolded grace. Come, o vein of mercy,

³¹ AH 42.96-97.

mother of royal glory, our hope and glory. O you beloved, who is without decay, the gate of the heavenly fatherland, through whom the fatherland lies open. Hail thee, o heavenly key, the sole pious parent of a sole pious child. O you peacemaker, the true sun proceeds marvellously from you, o marvellous. You will rejoice prosperously illuminated by the star, which illuminates stars. Nourishing your tender child with your chaste breast, you hold him and warm his tender limbs. Hail thee, most prudent, you shall most worthily be called the most worthy of the worthy. O you most splendid moon, help us piously as you are most pious).

In addition to its massive accumulation of traditional Marian attributes, the *Ave virgo regia* sequence also includes new elements such as *clavis caelica*, which associates and relates to "the keys of the kingdom of heaven" given to the apostle Peter in Matt 16.19, thus presenting another aspect of the analyzed *porta caeli* relation between Maria and the Church. Such significant features even indicate that the poet of this late medieval Ravennese text not only applied the traditional Marian imagery but also, by adding new attributes to her, contributed to the continuing development of the Marian devotion in the later Middle Ages. Such an analysis might, however, appear the subject of another study.³²

The two faces of the liturgical term analyzed in this study are reflected in the following story, which has been told by an Italian monk: "Once Jesus took St. Peter on an inspection round in Paradise. Suddenly, he noticed a group of rascals who were standing in a corner, and he looked in some dismay at Heaven's key-holder. Feeling the criticizing eyes of Jesus, St. Peter immediately defended himself by saying: 'I am not the one to blame for this; it's your mother, because each time I turn my back to her she opens *porta caeli*."

³² A preliminary version was presented at the 4th Nordic Workshop on Liturgy and the Arts in the Middle Ages, "The Door to the Sacred", in Sigtuna (Sweden) October 26, 1996. In profound gratitude for his general encouragement and specific comments on the present subject during my stay at St. Anselmo in Rome in October 1996, I dedicate this study to the memory of P. Adrien Nocent, O.S.B.