SCANDINAVIAN JOURNAL OF BYZANTINE AND MODERN GREEK STUDIES

No 9 & 10 • 2023–2024

Narratological Devices in Cappadocian Wall Paintings: The case of the infancy cycle at the El Nazar Kilise*

Elizabeth Zanghi

The story of Christ's infancy, an important exegetical narrative that underscores the Virgin's role in the incarnation and in the salvation of the world, became a common theme in Byzantine church decoration at least by the 9th century. Examining how the pictorial representations of the infancy overlap or diverge from textual accounts of the story shows that they are not simply visual representations or reconstitutions of the texts. Rather, they create unique narratives, borrowing, imitating, and drawing from various models, but also often changing and adding new narratological devices that are not present in

* This article is based on a presentation prepared for Ingela Nilsson's seminar on narratology at the University of Uppsala, and which was also presented during a seminar at the École pratique des hautes études conducted by Ioanna Rapti. I would like to thank both professors for allowing me to present my work during their seminars and for their invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank Lily Holzlhammer for aiding in the organization of my participation in the seminar at Uppsala as well as all of the other students and professors present during both seminars. The conversations and questions they offered were instrumental in realizing the final version of this article. I would also like to thank Béatrice Caseau, Milan Vukašinović, and Maria Chronopoulou whose multiple readings of the text were indispensable. Finally, thanks to Joseph A. Zanghi II, whose photos from our survey trip to Cappadocia have been very valuable to me, and to the *Collection chrétienne et byzantine dite Photothèque de Gabriel Millet* at the École *pratique des hautes études* for giving me permission to publish three photos from their collection (see fig. 11).

textual narratives. This article examines one 10th-century iconographical cycle of Christ's infancy in particular, at the El Nazar Kilise in Göreme, Cappadocia. Using a narratological lens, especially the concepts of order, speed, mode, and voice, it explores how the pictorial narrative transforms and is transformed by the ecclesiastical space in which it is told.

Introduction

The El Nazar Kilise in Göreme is a cruciform rock-cut church with a mostly intact iconographical program painted on its walls [fig. 1-2]. Around the church, over a dozen other edifices are cut into the strange, other-worldly rock formations, creating a somewhat cohesive group of monuments. As is the case with most Cappadocian rock-cut monuments from the Byzantine period, there exists no textual evidence of the founders or donors of any of these edifices.[1] Therefore, in order to understand the function of El Nazar Kilise, it is necessary to study the painted and sculpted decoration of the church as well as its archeological setting in relation to the other edifices throughout the site. For this reason, the current study is only a small part of a larger study of the church. It presents the cycle of the Infancy of Christ represented in the southern arm of the church, painted sometime during the 10th century, and proposes to use narratological methodologies in order to better understand the space in which the narrative is painted, concentrating on four aspects of its narration: order, speed, mode, and voice.

When studying narratology as art historians, the first problem comes from confronting the actual definition of narratology. Although recent studies have successfully shown the benefits of studying iconography from a narrative perspective,[2] for to Gérard Genette, a narrative must

[1] Only a few churches in the region possess dedicatory inscriptions which help to date the monuments precisely. See Thierry 1995, 419–455.

[2] The recent volume edited by Sulamith Brodbeck, Anne-Orange Poilpré and Ioanna Rapti, *Histoires Chrétiennes en images : Espace, temps et structure de la narration*, is a prime example (Brodbeck, Poilpré & Rapti 2022). Another pertinent example is a book chapter by Judith Soria in the volume *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological approaches to Byzantine texts and images* (Messis, Mullett & Nilsson 2018). In her contribution, Soria examines the iconographical programs of three churches in Mace-

be recounted by a narrator, orally or in writing. According to Gennette, theater, film, and other forms of visual art are simply, "representations" or "reconstitutions" of the story – in its narratological sense – while the narrative proper requires it to be represented by exclusively verbal discourse.[3] Since his argument is based mainly on the lack of a clear narrator in visual art forms, therefore, I will attempt to contradict the claim that visual narratives do not have a narrator, using El Nazar as a case study.[4] In fact, in addition to establishing possible functions for the particular part of the church where the cycle is presented, studying its narrative will help us evaluate the roles of the faithful – the viewers – in assigning meaning to the narrative and to the space, giving them agency as narrators themselves.

The story of the infancy is a particularly interesting case to study, because its textual tradition is spread out throughout multiple texts. Unlike scenes from the Passion of Christ, for example, which are relative-

donia and Serbia from the 13th and 14th centuries in order to understand the narrative structure of the cycles of Christ's Passion and to argue that the representations of the apostles allow those apostles to act as intermediaries who invite the viewer to enter into the narrative (very broadly speaking). Part of her argument for studying iconography through narratology is based on a definition of narration as being "a sequential representation of sequential events," which is how the scenes of the Passion tend to be painted in church naves. She continues by saying that an essential part of a narrative is action or changes in state between balance and unbalance, or, in other words, moments or situations that perturb a stable scene, which she is able to describe very effectively in the scenes of the Passion. Soria's source material, however, differs in some important ways from the scenes that the present article examines. Namely, the scenes from the Passion of Christ are relatively homogenous throughout the four canonical gospels. This has an effect on the way in which an artist chooses how to represent the scene, because he or she has a stable textual model. See Soria 2018, 177–197.

[3] Genette in Jost 2017, 267: "Si l'on envisage (définition large) toute espèce de "représentation" d'une histoire, il y a évidemment récit théâtral, récit filmique, récit par bandes dessinées, etc. Personnellement, je suis plutôt, et de plus en plus, pour une définition étroite de récit : haplè diègèsis, exposé des faits par un narrateur qui signifie les faits par voie verbale (orale ou écrite), et en ce sens il n'y a pas pour moi de récit théâtral ou filmique. Le théâtre ne raconte pas, il "reconstitue" une histoire sur scène, et le cinéma montre sur l'écran une histoire également "reconstituée" (en fait, bien sûr, constituée) sur le plateau."

[4] Studying non-traditional literary sources from a narratological perspective is no longer a controversial topic, and authors in many academic fields have been employing narratology to study various types of sources since at least the 1980's. See Ryan 2014.

ly homogenous throughout the four canonical Gospels, the infancy is only told in two of the four Gospels, Matthew and Luke, and these two Gospels tell it in differing ways.[5] Additionally, many details about the infancy of Christ are completely absent in the canonical Gospels, so that apocryphal texts become important sources, notably the Protoevangelium of James.[6] The early conceivers or designers of the infancy cycles, therefore, have the job of patching these different accounts of the story together. Secondly, because of the patchwork nature of the story and because there is no single textual model to which they can turn, the viewer has the task of piecing together the different scenes and engaging with them, perhaps mentally attaching words to make sense of the story.[7] In certain cases, they may even attach words to the story that are vocalized during the liturgy or the offices. That being said, since the formation of the textual tradition of the Infancy considerably predates its iconographic tradition, and since some narratological devices from the texts overlap with the iconographical cycles, it is advantageous to have an understanding of these texts, and we will refer to them throughout the article.[8]

[5] See *Gospel of Luke*, 1469–1474 (1:1–2:52); *Gospel of Matthew*, 1386–1387 (1:18–2:23).

[6] The Protoevangelium of James, so-called because the author claims to be Joseph's son James, is an apocryphal gospel that recounts the life of Mary and the infancy of Christ. One of its main purposes was to affirm the virginity of Mary. It was most likely composed originally in Greek sometime in the 2nd century, and it circulated widely throughout the Greek-speaking world. See Minmouni 2011, 343–345; Ehrman & Pleše 2011, 31–33. For a critical edition of the Greek text, following the most ancient version of the text, see *Protoevangelium of James*.

[7] The idea of "filling in the gaps" of a story by the viewers of a visual narrative was studied by S. Lewis in her contribution to the *Companion to Medieval Art. Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe*. She uses the example of Guda, a nun who is represented multiple times in ornate initial letters in a 12th-century Gothic manuscript. Lewis attests that Guda's convent sisters could fill in the gaps of Guda's story in between the different depictions of her. See Lewis 2019, 150–155.

[8] Regarding the apocryphal infancy Gospels, we will only refer to the Protoevangelium of James throughout this article for multiple reasons. We will not refer to the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, for example, because the text does not include the scenes from Christ's infancy that are depicted in the church. The Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, on the other hand, does include some of the scenes of the infancy that are missing in the Protoevangelium of James. It is a Latin text which probably used a Latin translation of the Protoevangelium of James as its model, but with many significant changes and

The Iconographical program at El Nazar

Although any information concerning the donation or foundation of El Nazar is lost, the majority of its 10th-century painted program is still intact.[9] In the central part of the church a large representation of Christ's Ascension fills the dome. He is surrounded by flying angels, Mary, and the twelve apostles. The apse is decorated by the Theotokos flanked by two archangels, a prophet, and a holy bishop. The narrative part of the program begins in the southern arm with the cycle of Christ's Infancy, which will be detailed below, and it continues in the western arm with depictions of Christ's Baptism and Transfiguration. The cycle is interrupted by a double portrait of Constantine and Helena (also in the western arm), then carries over into the northern arm with scenes from Christ's adult life and his Passion: the Journey into Jerusalem, the Resurrection of Lazarus, the Crucifixion, and the Anastasis. Underneath the image of the Anastasis, three as-of-yet unidentified saints are painted in a privileged space, directly above a funerary chapel.[10] The rest of the church is filled with portraits of other various saints (full-length and three-quarter portraits as well as busts within medallions) and non-figural decoration.

The story of Christ's Infancy at El Nazar starts with the scene of the Annunciation [fig. 3]. The scene is labeled Ο ΧΕΡΕΤΪΣΜΟΣ – literally

additions. The text circulated in Latin speaking spheres, most likely as a replacement for the Protoevangelium of James in the Latin West when the Protoevangelium was banned by Pope Gelasius towards the end of the 8th century. Therefore, it does not seem pertinent to add this text to the present study, which focuses on a Greek-speaking region in the Byzantine empire. For the Infancy Gospel of Thomas, see Elliott 2005, 68. For the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, see Gijsel 1997, 2–15; Mourad 2002, 207; Ehrman & Pleše 2011, 73–77.

[9] Here, we will only detail the 10th-century phase of decoration, but we should note that there is an earlier phase of decoration which was most likely painted sometime during the 9th century. A full description of both phases of decoration is included in my PhD dissertation currently under redaction. The Greek name of this church is lost. The name El Nazar signifies, in Turkish and in Arabic, the "evil eye" or "the view", and it was most likely attributed to this church because of the panoramic view of multiple plateaus and valleys around the church.

[10] Theories concerning the identification of these saints will be detailed in the aforementioned dissertation, along with possible identifications of other unidentified saints.

"the greeting" – which is a reference to the salutation spoken by the Angel Gabriel, χαῖρε or χαιρετισμός. This greeting is present in both the Protoevangelium of James and the Gospel of Luke, but also in the *kontakion* for the Annunciation written by Romanos the Melode. In the *kontakion*, the word is repeated throughout the hymn as a refrain that may have been sung by the congregation.[11] The iconographical scene recounts the moment when the angel, coming from the right, greets the Virgin and announces the news that she will be the receptacle of the Lord. She is wearing a blue-gray *maphorion* on top of a purple-crimson dress, and she stands up in front of a large cushion, which is supported by a highly ornate chair. Her placement in front of the chair evinces the upward motion she made when the angel arrived. She holds her right hand over her heart, while her left hand clings to a purple thread, denoting the activity leading up to this crucial moment and overlapping into it (before the angel arrives, Mary is said to be preparing the thread for a new curtain for the Temple). She is covered by a strange architectonic structure with curtains wrapped around its colonnettes, giving us an idea of the possibly indoor/outdoor setting. This scene is told in the Protoevangelium of James and in the Gospel of Luke, but the detail of the thread for the Temple is only present in the Protoevangelium.[12] The end of the scene is marked by the back of the angel, which separates this scene from the next, the Visitation.

A certain amount of time passes between the Annunciation and the Visitation. In the Protoevangelium, it is said that Mary first returns to preparing the purple thread before leaving to visit her cousin, but the scenes at El Nazar are only separated by a very small sliver of empty space in-between the back of the angel and the Visitation Virgin. She is wearing the same clothes as the previous scene, and she is facing in roughly the same direction, but this time, her attention is given to Elizabeth. The majority of this figure is destroyed,[13] but she is labeled above

[11] Romanos the Melode, *Hymns. New Testament*, 13–41.

[12] This detail is one of the elements used by the author of the text to explain Mary's holiness and her devotion to the Lord already before the angel's announcement. See Cunningham 2022, 229.

[13] A more complete image of the scene is visible in the early photograph by Guillaume de Jerphanion. See fig. 11b.

her head, as is the title of the scene, and one of her hands is still visible on Mary's right shoulder. The top of her halo is also visible, showing that she is at a lower level than Mary, and an unhaloed servant girl, labeled to the right, closes the scene under another architectonic structure with a roof similar to that of the previous scene. The servant is absent in all textual retellings of this scene; she may serve as a physical witness to the miraculous event,[14] or as a symbol of Elizabeth's affluence and her priestly family.[15] These two scenes take up one full register, on the upper half of the eastern vault in the southern arm of the church. Because they share this space, the viewer gets a sense that Mary has traveled to see her cousin, giving the viewer, again, a sense of the passage of time. Then, after the Visitation, a long series of events from the textual accounts of the story are skipped.

The next scene follows on the upper part of the flat southern wall of the same arm. It recounts the nativity of Christ, and it takes a full register with none of its iconographic elements surpassing the border of the register. The scene separates itself, therefore, in time and space from the other elements of the story, although it fits into the chronological sequence [fig. 4]. It also distinguishes itself in the way that the scene is staged compositionally; it is the only episode in the infancy cycle that is organized almost completely horizontally rather than vertically. The Virgin is stretched out, lying down on a long cushion. She takes up most of the composition, but she gazes towards the Christ child who is lying in an ornate manger.[16] The gaze is shared by two animals who separate the Virgin from the child. The viewer also perceives the great star at the top right of the scene, indicating the time that the scene is taking place.

[14] Jolivet-Lévy 2001, 189. Although the servant is absent in the textual accounts of the scene of the Visitation, it is perhaps notable that there is a servant present in the story of the conception of Mary (Judith, the servant of Anna) in the Protoevangelium of James, who is a kind of prophetess (ch. 2 and 3). See *Protoevangelium of James (English translation)*, 40–43; *Protoevangelium of James*, 68–75.

[15] We see this, for example, in many representations of Anna, the mother of Mary, wherein she is depicted with servants in order to stress her status as an aristocrat. See Panou 2018, 94–95.

[16] It is embellished in a very similar way to the chair in the scene of the Annunciation.

This scene is less dynamic than the previous ones. Even one of the characters who should be present in the scene, Joseph, is placed outside the composition [fig. 5]. He holds his hand to his cheek, indicating either disgruntlement or meditation, and he faces towards the scene of the Nativity, though he is clearly separated from it.[17] His back turned towards the characters in the next scene separates him even further. In fact, the register in which he is portrayed represents three distinct moments, creating a moving, chronological sequence, starting with Joseph, and then moving on to the next scenes [fig. 5]. Next to Joseph, two midwives perform the first bath of Christ. This scene is not present in any of the textual sources, although the midwives are introduced in the Protoevangelium before and immediately after the birth of Christ. Both midwives are named with an inscription. Salome, who pours water into the washing basin, is to the right of the scene. The other midwife, labeled "Mea", short for Emea, to the viewers' left, holds the Christ child upright.[18] She sits on a chair facing the basin, but her face is turned slightly forward towards the viewer. Neither of these two characters are haloed. Christ, who is haloed, sits in the basin with his arms and legs both crossed.

This scene then overlaps with the next episode, with the angel who will announce the news to the shepherds. The angel, flying completely horizontally above the head of the midwife Salome, moves from one scene to another, linking them in both time and space. The shepherds are present in both the Protoevangelium of James and the Gospel of Luke. One shepherd, aged with a long white beard and white hair, is visibly looking towards the approaching angel. He is holding a staff in his left hand and his right hand is raised. The middle figure holds up his right hand, and the final shepherd is sitting on a rock holding a flute, signaling that he is a musician.[19] Below the shepherds, there are multiple animals.

[17] A more in-depth look into the posture of Joseph is detailed below, in a section outlying the speed of the narrative.

[18] For more on the introduction of the midwives into iconographical scenes of the first bath of Christ, see Schiller 1971, 61.

[19] We see this detail a bit better in the photograph by Guillaume de Jerphanion. The mantle of the musician is decorated in a very similar way to the dress of the second midwife, Salome. See fig. 11e.

Two are anchored firmly to the ground, while one climbs up a tree and another seems to be in the midst of jumping in the air.

The text written directly to the right of the angel is difficult to decipher. Jerphanion transcribed it as follows:[20]

ΠΑΥCΥΑCΤΕ ΑΓΡΑΒΛΟΥΝΤΕC V ΤΟ////////////////// Υ ΠΥΜΕΝΕC.

We can make a connection between this text and a verse found in the *sticheron* for the nativity written by Romanos the Melode,[21] which says: "Come therefore, shepherds who tend your beasts…and cease playing the flute (Νέεσθε λοιπόν, οἱ φυλάσσοντες ποιμένες ... παύσασθε αὐλοῦντες...)."[22] There is, of course, a difference in spelling for the word "flute" (ἀγραβλοῦντες), but similar orthography is found in other churches in the region. We see it clearly at the Cistern Church (Avcılar 13), for example, which is found further south on the opposite side of the same valley as El Nazar [fig. 6].[23] This spelling may have been a popular regional spelling or pronunciation of the word.[24]

Next, jumping to the lower register of the flat southern wall, the narrative continues chronologically with the scenes of the Adoration of the Magi (which is told in both the Protoevangelium of James and the Gospel of Matthew) and the Flight into Egypt (which is only narrated in the Gospel of Matthew) [fig. 7]. The first scene shows the Christ child on the lap of his mother with Joseph at their backs and the three magi in

[20] Jerphanion 1925, vol. I, 185.

[21] A *sticheron*, similar to a *troparion*, is a refrain to the psalmody. *Stichera* differ from *kontakia*, for which Romanos is especially known, and which are full hymns including prologues, refrains, and multiple stanzas.

[22] The text continues: "...and, jumping with joy, admire how the Mother of God holds her son in her arms before the dawn." See Romanos the Melode, *Hymns. New Testament*, 150–151 (verse 18).

[23] The same spelling is also found at the Ayvalı Kilise à Güllüdere, one of the few churches in the region dated securely by inscription (913–920). See Thierry 1965, 107.

[24] Further, Jerphanion suggests that there may be a play on words, since the word ἀγραυλοῦντες signifies "spending the night in the fields." See Jerphanion 1925, vol. I, 185 n. 4.

front.[25] The magus who reaches for the holy family is almost completely destroyed, but it is clear that he is actively moving towards them. The second and third magi seem to be turned towards each other, each holding their gift up to their midsection, but they are still moving towards Christ and his family. This movement, therefore, is going from right to left, which is in contrast to the next scene, the Flight into Egypt. In this next scene, Christ, sitting again with his mother, is riding on a donkey being led by one of Joseph's sons, James, who is labeled above his head. Joseph is following from behind with his hand raised. We should note that James is not present in the only textual account of this scene, in the Gospel of Matthew, and that this is the only scene in which James is portrayed at El Nazar, though he takes an important amount of space in the composition.[26] He holds the reins of the donkey in his hand, and he leads the action forward, connecting this part of the scene with the next, as he looks towards the representation of the city of Egypt, depicted on the lower register of the western vault [fig. 8].

An important part of this next scene, the personification of the city of Egypt, is almost completely destroyed, but we read the first letters of ΕΓ[υπτος], above the damaged depiction of the female figure who holds a lit torch in her right hand.[27] To her left, [η] ΠΟΛΙC is visible above the representation of the city, with multiple busts of people looking through windows in a two-story architectural unit, complete with a parapet on top. Immediately next to this city scene, the Pursuit of Elizabeth and John the Baptist is portrayed [fig. 8], which is narrated only in the Protoevangelium of James and which is labeled at the top of the scene. This episode should take place at roughly the same time as the previous episode, but their settings are visibly very different. The pursuers are depicted in a sort of forest, in front of a mass of trees, moving in the direction of Elizabeth. Only one of these pursuers is still visible, but it is clear that he is turned away from Egypt and moves towards the

[25] Although they are now destroyed, the names of Mary and Joseph are still visible in Jerphanion's photograph of the scene. Of the three magi, only Balthasar's label is still visible, but they are labeled as a group to the right of the young magus in the middle.

[26] In the Protoevangelium, James is indeed present in other parts of the text. See note 53.

[27] The majority of the female personification was already destroyed at the time of Jerphanion.

main characters of this next scene. He is on a much smaller scale than Elizabeth and John, who are portrayed sitting in a cave,[28] both looking towards the pursuers. The cave and the top of Elizabeth's halo breach the border of the scene, perhaps inviting the viewer to refer back to the scene of the shepherds and the animals who were also favored by the Lord and chosen to be witnesses to the birth of Christ. Then, the scene closes with the back of John the Baptist, labeled as the Prodromos, creating a sort of frame at the extremity of the register.

To continue chronologically, then, it is necessary to move back to the lower register on the eastern vault, where the Presentation of Christ at the Temple is depicted [fig. 9]. In the textual retelling of this story, in the Gospel of Luke,[29] there are only five characters: Christ, Mary and Joseph, the priest Symeon, and a prophetess named Anna. At El Nazar, however, Joachim is added to the group. The main visual apex at El Nazar is found towards the center of the composition, slightly to the right, where Mary holds the Christ Child above an altar towards Symeon. The priest has his hands covered as is the custom, and he reaches out to take the child. Behind him, the depiction of the ciborium is badly damaged. On the other side of the composition, the Virgin seems to be at the front of a train of characters. She is followed by Joseph, Joachim, and Anna. Joseph lifts his hands, covered by his mantle. Typically, he would be holding two doves, as per the Jewish tradition.[30] At El Nazar, this part of the scene is somewhat damaged, but his hands seem to be free of any burden.

Behind Joseph, the two remaining characters raise their right hands. The first, Joachim, is not present in the textual retelling of the episode in the Gospel of Luke. We may read this addition as a possible mistake, due to confusion in the identity of Anna, who is depicted behind Joa-

[28] Technically, as it is described in the Protoevangelium (ch. 22.3), it is the miraculous opening of a mountain, and not a cave. *Protoevangelium of James (English translation)*, 66–67; *Protoevangelium of James*, 174–177.

[29] The Presentation is not narrated in the other canonical Gospels, nor is it narrated in the Protoevangelium of James. It is narrated in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew, but we have chosen not to examine this text, as discussed previously. See note 8.

[30] We see Joseph's doves clearly in other churches in Cappadocia, such as the Ayvalı Kilise in Güllüdere. For a photo see Thierry 1965, 110, fig. 9.

chim; if the artist assumed that Anna in the story was meant to be the mother of Mary instead of the prophetess at the Temple, it would not be strange to add Mary's father, Joachim, as well. However, it is also possible that the addition of Joachim and the superimposition of Mary's mother onto the character of the prophetess shows a conscious choice made by the designer of the image, possibly to stress Mary's importance in the scene.[31] In fact, in the Protoevangelium of James, Anna and Joachim are both important characters, and their own faith in God and the story of the conception of their child, Mary, serve as markers of Mary's holiness.[32] Therefore, it is possible that they play a similar role in this visual retelling of the story.[33]

It is also notable that, similarly to the scene of the Pursuit of Elizabeth, the halos of the Virgin, Christ, and Symeon surpass the border of the scene, creating a connection to the episodes depicted above, the Annunciation and the Visitation. The depiction of Symeon even seems to be a continuation of the depiction of Elizabeth directly above him. Both characters lean slightly forward, and they are both painted on the same axis. This episode is also remarkable because of its scale. It is only the second scene in the infancy of Christ to take an entire register, after the Nativity. This size may be owed to its connection to the living episode of the Celebration of the Eucharist which may have been performed directly below the iconographical representation. In fact, immediately below the scene, there is a small apsidiole with space for an altar [fig. 10].

[31] I thank Nicolas Varaine for this suggestion. I have not found another example of this iconography, but at the Bahattin Samanlığı kilisesi, there is an as-yet unidentified sixth character. It is possible this character could represent Joachim, especially since he appears outside of the architectural structure that frames the rest of the characters, perhaps showing that he is only symbolically part of this scene. For a drawing of the scene, see Thierry 1963, 165, fig. 40. Anna's importance in stressing the role of the Virgin in the Economy of Salvation is explored by Eirine Panou. See Panou 2018, 11–13.

[32] Cunningham 2011, 163–178; Cunningham 2022, 225–242.

[33] In fact, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple is categorized as a Marian Feast, emphasizing the importance of Mary, rather than Christ. Annemarie Carr explains this in her article, "The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai." She gives the example of the icon of the Kykkotissa at Sinai as well as a homily written by Neophytos of Paphos to illustrate how Byzantine authors and audiences viewed the feast in this way. See Carr 1994, 244–246.

This may have been a place for celebrating the Eucharist when multiple liturgies took place on the same day.[34] The iconography of the Presentation of Christ at the temple is a clear reference to the celebration of the Eucharist, with Christ being held up by his Mother in the way that his body is held up by the priest. This scene is the last episode in the cycle of the infancy in the church.

* * *

Through detailing the iconographical program in the church at El Nazar, it is clear that the infancy cycle incorporates elements from the three pertinent textual sources into the visual retelling of the story, making the cycle a kind of hyper-'text' relying on multiple hypotexts.[35] However, it is also evident that some of the narrative devices being used in the pictorial cycle distinguish it from the textual narratives that recount the story of Christ's infancy. In what follows, I will try to highlight these devices, and introduce some new ones, which will allow us to form some responses to the questions we laid out in the beginning of the article. Namely how can the narratological devices incorporated in the visual retelling of the story of Christ's infancy help us understand the space in which it is told and the role of the faithful within the space?

Narratological Devices used in the infancy cycle

To analyze the infancy cycle at El Nazar, four of the categories laid out by Gérard Genette are particularly useful: order, speed, mode, and voice.[36] It makes the most sense to start with the order of the scenes, because it is the aspect that is the most easily detectable at first glance,

[34] Gordana Babić explains the tradition of only performing one Eucharistic liturgy per day on a single altar. See Babić 1969, 9. She bases her arguments on F. J. Goar's 1647 *Euchologe*, which is based on the written tradition of the liturgy from as far back as the 8th–9th centuries, as well as a passage in Eusebius of Cesaraea's description of the Basilica of Tyr.

[35] For more on hypertextuality and imitation, see Nilsson 2010, 195–208.

[36] Certain categories are less useful in describing this particular iconographical narrative. I did not find Frequency, for instance, which is based mainly on the treatment of repetitive actions or the repetition of statements, to be very helpful in reading the narrative cycle of the infancy at El Nazar, which seems to be told using *singulative* narration throughout the cycle. See Genette 2007, 111–113.

and it is the first and most evident indication of its narrative time and any discrepancies it may have with the story's 'historical' time. As opposed to that of literary or oral narratives, the entirety of an iconographical cycle's order can be perceived simultaneously when the viewer looks at it from a certain distance, and the viewer even has the ability to change the order of the scenes and to read the story differently. Genette explains this characteristic of visual art by contrasting it with textual narratives.[37] He uses the example of film which can be watched backwards, image by image, as opposed to books, which are completely nonsensical if you read them backwards, word by word or sentence by sentence. This contrast is even more stark with iconographical narrative; not only can viewers interpret the scenes backwards, they can even mix up the order in any way they please by simply moving their eyes differently. That being said, it is clear that there *is* an established order, based on where each episode is placed spatially, even if a viewer could choose to disregard that order.

Order

At El Nazar, the different scenes unfold in a mostly chronological order. Moving from left to right and from top to bottom, first there is the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Nativity, Christ's first bath, and the Announcement to the Shepherds [fig. 7]. From there, the story skips forward to the presentation of Christ at the Temple, and then, it goes back in time to the feast of the Epiphany, or the Adoration of the Three Magi in Bethlehem. This scene is then followed by the Flight of the Holy Family into Egypt and the Pursuit of Elizabeth and John the Baptist during the Massacre of the Innocents. If the retelling of the story were strictly chronological, the Presentation would be depicted after the Pursuit of Elizabeth.[38] The Presentation of Christ at the Temple, therefore, can be

[37] Genette 2007, 21–22.

[38] According to the textual accounts and the Liturgical calendar, the Presentation of Christ (February 2nd) should take place after Christ's circumcision (January 1st). The Adoration of the Magi (January 6th), and the ensuing Massacre of the Innocents and the Pursuit of Elizabeth and John the Baptist, should take place before the Presentation. It should be noted that the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew follows the order that is

thought of as a prolepsis or anticipation that is placed in between two parts of the story like a sort of parenthesis. Prolepses can serve many different functions, but here, it may act as a sort of analogy. Rather than following the story in a strictly chronological order, it may establish the following order of sequences:

> Mary, while sewing a thread for the Temple, learned of her pregnancy from an Angel of the Lord [fig. 11a]. Soon thereafter, she visited her cousin Elizabeth, who prophetically recognized the presence and the importance of the child in Mary's womb [fig. 11b]. Then, the baby was born [fig. 11c, 11d], surrounded by animals and the stars, and even the lowly shepherds were graced with the good news [fig. 11e], because this was the savior of the world, who would save us from our sins through grace and through the Eucharist (which is analogized by the Presentation of the Christ at the Temple, above an actual Eucharistic altar) [fig. 11f]… Then, moving along, after the birth of the Child, he was visited by three wise men with gifts who were instructed to reveal the location of the Child to the jealous king Herod [fig. 11g]. But, when these men chose not to divulge his location, and the king instructed his soldiers to kill every child under the age of two, Mary and Joseph (and Joseph's son) fled to Egypt with the newborn child [fig. 11h], and Elizabeth fled to the mountains to hide with her infant son, John the Baptist [fig. 11i].

The analogy is between the scene of the Presentation of the Temple on the one hand and the celebration of the Eucharist and the Passion on the other.[39] Already, the iconography of this scene makes this connection, with Mary holding Christ over the altar, and the connection is made

depicted in the cycle at El Nazar, with the Presentation of Christ before the Adoration of the Magi. Helena Rochard cites this text when detailing the order of scenes in some Egyptian churches, but I have decided not to consider this pseudo Gospel as a possible model at El Nazar, as stated above, note 9. See Rochard 2022, 25–39.

[39] This connection is not uncommon in Cappadocian churches. For example, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy makes the connection between the Presentation of Christ and his Crucifixion at the Bahattin Samanlığı kilisesi at Belisırma where the Presentation is depicted above the depiction of his Crucifixion. A similar connection is made at the Saklı Kilise (Göreme 2a) where the Presentation is depicted directly below the Crucifixion. See Jolivet-Lévy 2009, 96.

even more clear by its placement above the Eucharistic altar in the small apsidiole below. Therefore, the placement of this scene can be seen simply as an architectural and liturgical necessity, but when it is read in the context of the narrative, it adds another layer to the interpretation of the story. It moves the story forward in time, adding an essential element, which is the analogy between the Christ child and the Eucharist. Liturgically, this analogy is present in Romanos' *sticheron* for the Hypapante which would have been chanted on the feast of the Presentation. In stanza 16, the character Symeon says, "Since you have come to be, through your goodness, the resurrection and the life for all, allow me to leave this life," to which the Christ child responds in stanza 17, saying, "Now, my friend, I let you leave this fleeting world for the eternal one…Soon, I will come find you there, setting free all of humanity, I, the only friend of man."[40] Finally, the *sticheron* concludes stanza 18 with the supplication, "Save the world, which is yours, save your flock, and save all of us, you who for us became man without undergoing any change, the only friend of man."[41]

This manipulation of the order of the narrative so as to create an analogical prolepsis is something that is not present in the main textual accounts of the story nor in the liturgical calendar which both move from the Annunciation and the Visitation (celebrated on March 25th),[42] to the scenes from the Nativity (celebrated from December 24th–26th), and finally to the Circumcision of the Lord (celebrated on January 1st).[43] The Feast of the Presentation is celebrated more than one month later, on February 2nd. In the iconographical cycle at El Nazar, the Pres-

[40] Romanos the Melode, *Hymns. New Testament*, 194–197: "Πάντων ζωὴ καὶ ἀνάστασις παραγέγονας διὰ σὴν ἀγαθότητα • τῆς οὖν ζωῆς με ἀπόλυσον ταύτης…" and "Νῦν σε ἀπολύω τῶν προσκαίρων, ὦ φίλε μου, πρὸς χωρία αἰώνια … ταχέως δὲ φθάνω σε λυτρούμενος ἅπαντας, ὁ μόνος φιλάνθρωπος."

[41] Romanos the Melode 196–197: "Σῶσον σου τὸν κόσμον, σῶσον σου τὴν ποίμνην, καὶ πάντας περιποίησαι, ὁ δι' ἡμᾶς ἄνθρωπος ἀτρέπτως γενόμενος, ὁ μόνος φιλάνθρωπος."

[42] The order of the readings for this day is a bit complicated, because it falls during the moveable cycle. See for example *Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis (mar.-aug., moveable)*, 30–81.

[43] The passage from Luke is read on January 1st as the Gospel reading. See *Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis (sept.-feb.)*, 383–389.

entation of Christ at the Temple is mixed in with the various parts of the Nativity, offering a new order for the retelling of the story. In that way, instead of being a reflexion of the linear order of the text and the yearly celebrations of the events, the order of the iconographical cycle is used to establish an exegetical analogy and to connect the episode to the ecclesiastical space and to the hymnody which would be heard or even sung by the people engaging in the visual narrative.

There exist other instances where the order is slightly interrupted in the retelling of the visual narrative in order to add to the interpretation of the scenes. This happens, notably, at places where the iconography of a scene breaches its border. For example, on the lower register of the western side of the vault, the mandorla-shaped cave in which Elizabeth hides with John the Baptist crosses into the upper register and touches the scene of the Announcement to the Shepherds, inviting the viewer to consider the divine revelation given to the shepherds in relation to the divine aid accorded to Elizabeth and John the Baptist. Similarly, on the other side of the vault, Symeon's halo in the depiction of the Presentation of Christ passes into the scene of the Visitation, touching the feet of Elizabeth, creating a link between two episodes in which characters are chosen by God in their old age to be witnesses to the divine incarnation. In both instances, the order of the narrative is slightly interrupted so that the viewer can move forward or backwards in the historical time of the narrative in order to make exegetical connections.

Speed

Next, the speed, or tempo, of a narrative is another way an author or an artist can manipulate the story time in their formulation of narrative discourse. At El Nazar, the speed or pace of the story of Christ's infancy is not at all constant. There are clear elements of acceleration or ellipses, time standing still, and even the collapsing of time. We see acceleration, for instance, in the portrayal of the Annunciation and the Visitation. The two panels depict two distinct episodes, one happening after the other, with certain plot elements happening in between (namely the vocation of the purple thread). However, the time that passes between the two

episodes is accelerated in the visual retelling of the events. It is almost as if Mary, after having stood up in astonishment following the appearance of the angel with the news of her pregnancy, never sat back down to finish the purple thread, but instead left her post and moved immediately to meet her cousin. The characters in the two scenes are painted on the same scale, and Mary shows almost the exact same posture in both scenes. The legend labeling Mary in the scene of the Visitation is even painted within the scene of the Annunciation, above the left wing of the archangel. The connections and the overlapping of these two episodes accelerate the time between them. However, we see something different with the next episode, the Nativity of Christ. It is painted on a different register at a different angle, and with a somewhat large amount of essentially empty space at the leftern-most part of the scene, creating a sort of frame around the episode.

In that way, the artist creates a sort of pause in the narrative, giving a greater amount of detail and apportioning a great amount of wall space for a scene that does not necessarily take more historical time than the others. Often in Cappadocian mural painting, the scene of the birth of Christ and his first bath are painted in the same panel, like we see at the Tokalı Kilise [fig. 12]. In other cases, such as at the Karabaş Kilise in Soganlı [fig. 13], the shepherds can also be included in the scene. This technique saves space and allows the artist to represent a more considerable amount of historical time within a smaller space in the narrative. It also introduces chronological depth to the image, allowing the viewer to experience the passing of time within one single panel. At the Tokalı Kilise, for example, Christ in the basin with the midwives is depicted at the base of the panel's triangular composition, he is larger than Christ in the manger, and he is placed in the front of the pictorial plane. The spatial relationship between the two depictions of Christ, within the same panel, prompts the viewer to move their gaze from the scene of the First Bath to the scene of the Birth of Christ, therefore inviting them to move back in time while at the same time allowing them to make a connection

between the two episodes.[44] On the contrary, at El Nazar, one entire register is devoted to Christ and his mother, alone with the animals and the night sky. It helps the viewer appreciate this particular moment in time, which underlines the importance of Mary in the scene. Additionally, its placement in this particular space, on the flat wall of the southern arm, allows the viewer to ignore the rest of the story if desired. Then, on the next register, Joseph, the First Bath of Christ, and the Annunciation to the Shepherds are given a full register – in contrast to many of the scenes of the Nativity in which they are superimposed to the moment of his birth – elongating even further the time allotted to the Nativity at El Nazar.

This idea of a pause in the narrative is strengthened when the viewer finally does move on to the next register. Here, Joseph is sitting in the corner, separated from Mary and Jesus, but he is looking and leaning towards them. This part of the story is customarily described as the "dream" of Joseph, and it refers typically to the dream during which Joseph is forewarned by the Lord of Herod's murderous plan. In this passage from the canonical Gospel of Matthew (Mt 2:13–15), the dream takes place after the appearance of the shepherds following the birth of Christ. However, when looking at the narrative in El Nazar, it is perhaps pertinent to refer back to a very curious passage in the Protoevangelium of James in which Joseph experiences a moment when time stands still before the birth of Christ.[45] Joseph claims that he was both "walking" and "not walking,"

[44] A similar spatial relationship between scenes is explored by Irina Bräden in her doctoral dissertation. She looks at different compositions of the miracle of the three men on the rock in the sea who were saved by Saint Nicholas. See Bränden 2018, 214–217.

[45] *The Protoevangelium of James (English translation)*, 60–61 (18:1–2): "[Joseph] found a cave there and took her into it. Then he gave his sons to her and went out to find a Hebrew midwife in the region of Bethlehem. But I, Joseph, was walking, and I was not walking. I looked up to the vault of the sky, and I saw it standing still, and into the air, and I saw that it was greatly disturbed, and the birds of the sky were at rest. I looked down to the earth and saw a bowl laid out for some workers who were reclining to eat. Their hands were in the bowl, but those who were chewing were not chewing; and those who were taking something from the bowl were not lifting it up; and those who were bringing their hands to their mouths were not bringing them to their mouths. Everyone was looking up. I saw a flock of sheep being herded, but they were standing still. The shepherd raised his hand to strike them, but his hand remained in the air. I looked down at the torrential stream, and I saw some goats whose mouths

and that the sky and the birds in it were standing still, as were the workers in the fields and the shepherds and the sheep, until suddenly "everything returned to its normal course," and he went to look for a midwife.

If we concede the possibility that the image of Joseph has a relationship to this passage, it may be a sign that the artist is playing with narrative time. Not only is the scene of the birth of Christ depicted on its own, with the first bath and the shepherds represented outside of the frame, it is separated from other scenes by a character who literally witnesses time standing still. The cycle's designer may have also shown time standing still visually in the way that the animals and the shepherds are portrayed in the scene, in particular the animal who seems to be in a strange, upright position. We may also link the passage to the shepherd who holds his hand in the air, possibly evoking the moment in the Protoevangelium when the shepherds are said to raise their hands to hit the sheep, without their hands ever lowering down to hit them. As explained in what follows, this manipulation of time helps us understand the function of the space.

Mode

Genette admits that there can be confusion between the voice and mode of a narrative, and he explains that whereas *mode* can describe the perspective from which a story is told, *voice* is concerned with the actual voice of the narrator. To study the mode of the story, then, Genette differentiates three kinds of focalization that can be used by an author: zero, internal, or external focalization.[46] However, as Silke Horstkotte and Nancy Pedri convincingly argue, Genette's definition assumes that the focalization is in direct relationship to *who* the narrator is, and he is mostly concerned with whether or not the *narrator* is an internal or external character.[47] Adhering to Manfred Jahn's conception of "windows

were over the water, but they were not drinking. Then suddenly everything returned to its normal course." For the Greek text, see *Protoevangelium of James*, 146–151.

[46] Genette 1991, 11–12.

[47] Horstkotte & Pedri 2011, 332.

of focalization,"[48] Horstkotte and Pedri conclude that it is more useful, especially when studying visual narrative, to view focalization in terms of the cognitive experience of the *reader* or, in this case, the viewer of the narrative. It is more pertinent to ask, therefore, how the viewer perceives different aspects of the narrative; are they influenced by the internal characters (with an internal understanding of the events) or by an external narrator – the viewer him or herself – who has more authority and foresight in understanding how the events work together globally?

At El Nazar, there is a significant shift in the focalization within the narrative. In the first few scenes (the Annunciation, the Visitation, and even the Nativity), Mary is the focalizing figure. She is framed in the Annunciation by an architectural structure, she is the largest figure in the scene of the Visitation,[49] and she takes up almost the entire panel of the Nativity, lying down almost horizontally. Even more significantly, in addition to her importance within these compositions, most of what the viewer sees is framed by what *she* sees. This is most evident in the Nativity: her eyes attract the viewer's attention, as they are painted at the apex of the composition, but her gaze leads the viewer to look at the Christ child, who, of course, is an essential part of the story as well.

The mode of perception is similar in the scene of the Presentation of Christ, on the lower register of the eastern vault: Mary, depicted in the center of the composition, holds Christ slightly above her, her arms and her gaze again guiding the viewers. Then, Mary and Jesus act together as the objects of perception in the next scene, the Adoration of the Magi. Here, Mary is presented as the Theotokos, but rather than looking frontally, she looks forward towards the Magi, moving the narrative along. Finally, in the Flight into Egypt, she drives the narrative along with Jesus through their movement on the donkey. We can understand these portions of the narrative as having a narratorial focalization, since it invites the viewer to make connections to future events (i.e. the Death and Resurrection of Christ) of which Mary, the focalizing figure, is unaware. Because of this foreshadowing, perception is discerned by an

[48] Jahn 1996, 241–267.

[49] Elizabeth is not much smaller, but she is depicted lower than the Virgin, and the servant is on a completely different scale.

external narrator, the viewer, who has more information than the focalizing figure–the Virgin.

However, on the western vault of the southern arm, it is as if Mary cedes the focus to other characters, first to Joseph, the midwives and the shepherds on the upper register, and then to Elizabeth and John the Baptist on the lower register. Indeed, Mary is completely absent in these scenes. This change in the objects of perception on the western side of the vault reveals a switch from narratorial to internal focalization. The narrative is no longer focused on dogmatic foreshadowing, but instead on characters who are depicted as models for the faithful. Joseph, the midwives, the shepherds, Elizabeth, and John the Baptist are all examples for how to receive the lord, and they act as characters to whom the viewer may relate: Joseph, who had to make a decision on how to react to the pregnancy of his betrothed, the midwives who doubted the purity of Mary but then believed, the shepherds who were chosen by God to be witnesses to the birth of Christ even though they were outcasts, Elizabeth and John the Baptist (the Prodromus), who were the first people after Mary to be blessed with knowledge of the coming of the Lord. In this way, this part of the narrative is perceived by the viewer based on the choices and emotional experiences of the internal characters. Importantly, then, the shift in the mode of focalization from narratorial (or external) to internal, highlights the shift from the narrative through the *instruments* of the incarnation to the models for the *reception* of the incarnation.

The change in the mode of perception works with the ecclesiastical space to make this distinction even more evident, allowing the viewer to read the story with a clearer interpretation of the scenes. Christ and the Virgin are on parallel or adjacent planes to the place reserved for the miracle of the Eucharist (the apsidiole and its Eucharistic altar), whereas the actors of reception face the altar, so that they may witness the miracle. The spatial configuration of the scenes and the shifting modes that place the viewers on similar grounds as the New Testament models adds to the idea of the liturgical self that Derek Krueger identified in his book, *Liturgical Subjects*.[50] According to Krueger, throughout the

[50] Krueger 2014. I thank Milan Vukašinović for this suggestion.

Liturgy, through the chanting of hymns and reciting of prayers (often written in first-person), the faithful could compare themselves to Old and New Testament sinners who were saved through faith and repentance. The inward contemplation was then augmented through the scripture and Eucharistic prayers that they heard throughout services. In a similar way, as the faithful at El Nazar prepared themselves to receive the Eucharist, they could place themselves on the same spatial plane as the New Testament characters who act as examples for the reception of Christ.

Voice

Next, to study the voice of the narrative it is necessary to actually identify *who* the narrator is. In most textual cases, the narrator, and therefore the voice, is distinct from the author.[51] This is the case in the textual examples of the infancy. The distinction between narrator and author is particularly clear in the Protoevangelium of James, in which the author tells the story from the perspective of two distinct narrators. First, there is James, the supposed son of Joseph.[52] He is the narrator for the majority of the story, but for a moment, the narrator changes, and Joseph tells the story in first person:

> Καὶ εὗρεν ἐκεῖ σπήλαιον καὶ εἰσήγαγεν αὐτὴν καὶ παρέστησεν αὐτῇ τοὺς υἱοὺς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξῆλθεν ζητῆσαι μαῖαν Ἑβραίαν ἐν χώρᾳ Βηθλεέμ. Ἐγὼ δὲ Ἰωσὴφ περιεπάτουν καὶ οὐ περιεπάτουν. Καὶ ἀνέβλεψα εἰς τὸν πόλον τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ εἶδον αὐτὸν ἑστῶτα, καὶ εἰς τὸν ἀέρα καὶ εἶδον αὐτὸν ἔκθαμβον καὶ τὰ πετεινὰ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ ἠρεμοῦντα…[53]

[51] This is the case mostly in fictional settings. Here, we will not get into questions concerning the fictionality or historicity of the infancy of Christ. For the importance of the distinction between author and narrator, see Nilsson 2021, 278.

[52] Of course, it is very unlikely that the author is the supposed James, half-brother of Jesus, but this version of the story, with the final epilogue naming James, can be attested as early as the 2nd century thanks to writings by theologians like Origen, and in manuscripts ranging from the 4th to the 16th centuries. See Ehrman & Pleše 2011, 35.

[53] *Protoevangelium of James*, 146–151 (ch. 18). For the English translation, see above note 45.

This is not only a change in perspective, but also in voice. The narrator changes from an external character, James, who relates the story externally with an almost omniscient understanding of the events,[54] to an internal character, that is Joseph, while he recounts his own mystical experience as time stands still, allowing the reader to perceive Joseph's inner voice.

In the visual narrative of the infancy at El Nazar, however, there is no such change. The voice does not change, because the artist does not create a distinct voice to tell the story in the first place. However, this does not mean that there is no narrator or no voice. The designer and/or artist unveils certain elements of the story on the walls of the church, taking on the role of the author, so that the viewer can string together the story themselves, giving the viewer the role of the narrator. Mieke Bal introduces the idea of the spectator/narrator in the *Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, when she describes an image that shows a cat imitating a yoga master, Arjuna [fig. 14]. In the image, the artist illustrates three groups of characters: Arjuna, the cat, and the mice. It is the viewer's responsibility, since he or she has an understanding of the whole scene, to add narration to the scene: Arjuna is meditating, the cat sees Arjuna meditating and imitates him, and the mice laugh at the cat. Then, as Bal writes: "The spectator sees more. She sees the mice, the cat, and the wise man. She laughs at the cat, and she laughs sympathetically with the mice, whose pleasure is comparable to that felt by a successful scoundrel."[55]

In other words, the viewers witness the perspective of the author/artist as well as that of the characters in the story, but they perceive those perspectives with their own voices. In order to study the narrative voice, therefore, it would be necessary to study the audience: the Byzantine viewers who would have added their own voices to the story. This, of course, is problematic for several reasons. For one thing, it is not clear who the audience at El Nazar was.[56] However, it is possible to

[54] Even though James does make an appearance in the story, he is mostly recounting moments from the story during which he is absent.

[55] Bal 2017, 34.

[56] This is a problem I am investigating in my doctoral thesis.

make some pertinent observations based on what is known about Byzantine liturgy and offices. First, it should be noted that the sequence of Christ's infancy never appears uninterrupted in the liturgy or in liturgical readings. The chronological order of events presented in the iconographical program at El Nazar and other churches is spaced out throughout the liturgical year, as we briefly noted earlier.[57] The Annunciation is celebrated on March 25th, and the Visitation is told on the same day. The various parts of the nativity are recounted from the 24th to the 26th of December, though not in the same order as the iconographical cycle. Finally, the Presentation of Christ at the Temple is read on February 2nd, almost a full month after the Feast of the Circumcision of the Lord, which is on January 1st, and many events from the adult life of Christ are celebrated in between. Furthermore, these events are never read in order during the Offices of the hours, nor when certain events are alluded to through the reciting of psalms.[58]

It is possible, therefore, that the cycle of Christ's infancy as depicted in the southern arm of El Nazar was the only example of an uninterrupted chronological depiction of Christ's infancy available to the audience.[59] In this way, even though there was a kind of author giving a certain

[57] See notes 43–44.

[58] We can partially track which psalms allude to which events through marginalia in illuminated manuscripts, especially in psalters, such as the Khludov, the Bristol, and the Theodore psalters. See Parpulov 2017, 302.

[59] Even if the audience did possess a textual copy of the infancy of Christ (the Protoevangelium of James, for example), certain elements, such as the Flight into Egypt and the Presentation would be absent. To that point, we are lucky to have an idea of the books that a Cappadocian church or monastery may have had at its disposal, thanks to the Testament of Eustathios Boïlas. In his will, he notes a number of books that he wishes to leave to his monastery in Cappadocia, but the Protoevangelium is not listed. Although it is possible that a copy of the Protoevangelium was not mentioned by name (since the will includes certain "other books"), it is clear that the majority of the books were for liturgical use – a Gospel book, a Gospel Lectionary, a synaxarion, a psalter book – or commentaries by church fathers, though not including Origen or Clement of Alexandria, two of the most well-known authors to comment on the Protoevangelium of James. Boïlas mentions a ὁμοίως καὶ ἕτερον Εὐαγγέλιον μέμβρινον as well as Τετραβάγγελον μικρὸν λαιφανᾶτον πτωχὸν (translated by Parani, Pitarakis, and Spieser as "de même, un autre Évangile de parchemin; un petit Tétraévangile avec une reliure de tissu simple"). The two different words (Εὐαγγέλιον and Τετραβάγγελον) show that there was already a distinction between the Gospel books and Lectionary

perspective to the story – the artist or designer of the iconographical program – it was the role of the viewer to piece together the different scenes in the story him or herself and to act, therefore, as narrator.[60] Additionally, as mentioned briefly above, some of the episodes are labeled with text that may refer to certain hymns that would be chanted during the liturgy or the offices, notably the words that seem to be spoken by the angel in the scene of the Annunciation to the Virgin and the angel in the scene of the Annunciation to the Shepherds. In that way, the legends serve as kinds of paratext which prompt the viewers to literally lend their own voices to the narrative[61].

* * *

Concluding remarks: Narratology and the ecclesiastical space

Now that we have underlined the different visual narratological devices used in the infancy cycle, I would like to conclude this article by outlining some ways that these devices help us understand the space in which the story is told. First, I have demonstrated that the prolepsis of the Presentation of Christ in the narrative clarifies the function of the small apsidiole in the eastern side of the southern arm. The Eucharist could be performed in this place on days when there was more than one liturgy to celebrate, and it is possible that the iconography is connected to the special feasts that would be celebrated there. As Gordana Babić explains in her volume on subsidiary chapels in Byzantium, spaces con-

books. For more on this, see Jordan 2009, 2–3. For the Testament of Eustathios Boïlas, see Lemerle 1977, 13–63; Parani, Pitarakis & Spieser 2003, 143–165.

[60] I should note, here, that I do not wish to emphasize the individual experiences of individual viewers, but rather the fact that the viewers of the iconographic program are given the role of the narrator, due to the fact that piecing together the different parts of the narrative is something that is not done for them. In other words, stringing the scenes together, putting them in order, adding any details, and, more generally, giving words to the pictures that they are seeing, is something that they must do themselves, since no single text exists that does this for this particular combination of scenes.

[61] The idea of legends acting as prompts for viewers who could use their voices during the liturgy is explored by Catherine Jolivet-Lévy in her contribution to the volume *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésiale*. See Jolivet-Lévy 2019, 391–392.

tiguous to a church's sanctuary, where secondary liturgies could take place, could be decorated with hagiographical imagery in relation to a particular saint's cult, probably a cult that was special to the founder of the church or the donor of the painted program.[62] We see this trend in Cappadocia at Balkan Deresi Kilisesi 4, for example, where the southern arm is decorated with scenes from the life of Saint Basil,[63] attesting to a particular devotion to the saint by the church's community, or at least its donor. It is possible to read the iconography in the southern arm at El Nazar in a similar way. Through analyzing the mode of perception of the cycle, we saw that Mary, who is not the focus of the canonical accounts of the narrative, is clearly the driving force in the narrative at El Nazar for a majority of the cycle. The choice to make Mary, as opposed to Christ, the focus of the narrative (or, the mode through which the story is told), may indicate that the space had some sort of connection to the cult of the Virgin.

To make this point more clear, we can compare this arm with the lateral arm on the northern side. At the same time that an *arcosolium* was added at the entrance to the church and the 10th-century decoration was realized, a chapel was added to the eastern wall of the northern arm. In this part of the church, the iconographical program is focused on Christ – his Passion and Resurrection [fig. 15]. With the exception of a large triple-portrait of a military saint and two lay martyrs directly above the chapel, Christ is the driving force of each iconographical scene. Since this part of the church is also attached to the chapel, we can read its decorative program as a reflection of the funerary or commemorative function of the chapel. In contrast, the southern arm, where Mary is the focalizing figure for a majority of the narrative, is a space devoted to Mary – her holiness, purity, and her role in the incarnation.

The speed of the narrative as a way of manipulating the historical time of the story may also be helpful in understanding the function of the space. I have shown, for example, that there is a considerable amount of wall-space devoted to the Nativity of Christ. The narrative pauses at the

[62] Babić 1969, 82–90.

[63] For a description of the scenes, see Walter 1978, 245–247. For a description of the architecture of the church, see Wallace 1991, vol. II, 119–126.

episode of his birth, and the moments directly following his Birth (notably his first bath and the annunciation to the shepherds) are stretched out in their own register. The emphasis on the episodes directly related to the moment of the incarnation of Christ through the slowing down of time may intensify the emphasis on the role of the Virgin in the economy of salvation, adding to the hypothesis that this part of the church was devoted to the cult of the Virgin. Finally, then, the identification of the voice, or the narrator, is also instructive. The author (or the designer of the visual narrative) has done the job of bringing all of these elements together, giving the spectator the perspective he or she needs to actually read the pictorial story, allowing him or her to become the narrator of the story in his or her own imagination, sometimes even prompting the viewer to vocalize parts of the story. The changing mode through which the story is told, with models for the reception of Christ on the western vault facing the altar, adds to the idea of superimposing the viewers into the narrative as the narrators of the story. In this way, we understand that the faithful are meant to engage with the story and the space in which it is depicted.

To conclude, it is clear that the pictorial infancy cycle is not simply a visual "representation" or "reconstitution" of the textual accounts of Christ's infancy. Rather, it is its own narrative, borrowing, imitating, and drawing from various models, but also often changing and adding to the narratological devices that are present in the textual models. Since the accounts of Christ's infancy first started in textual or oral forms, it is necessary to understand the textual accounts that recount the story, but these texts were not the only methods of spreading the story and adding to its exegetical function. Visual representations of the infancy of Christ offer insight into how the story could be linked to the ecclesiastical spaces in which it was depicted, and, perhaps more importantly, the visual representations help us understand the roles that viewers could have in the retelling of the story.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Gospel of Luke. Ed. M. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version*. 5th ed. Oxford 2010.

Gospel of Matthew. Ed. M. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible. New Revised Standard Version*. 5th ed. Oxford 2010.

Protoevangelium of James. Ed. E. Strycker, *La forme la plus ancienne du Protévangile de Jacques. Recherches sur le papyrus Bodmer 5 avec une édition critique du texte grec et une traduction annotée*. Brussels 1961.

Protoevangelium of James (English translation). Eds. B. Ehrman & Z. Pleše, *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*. Oxford 2011.

Romanos the Melode, *Hymns. New Testament*. Ed. J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes: Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes, Tome II: Nouveau Testament (IX-XX)*. Paris 1965.

Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis (mar.-aug., moveable). Ed. R. Jordan, *The Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis: March to August, The Movable Cycle*. Belfast 2005.

Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis (sept.-feb.). Ed. R. Jordan, *The Synaxarion of the monastery of the Theotokos Evergetis: September to February*. Belfast 2000.

Secondary Sources

Babić, G. 1969. *Les chapelles annexes des églises byzantines: Fonction Liturgique et Programmes Iconographiques.* Paris.

Bal, M. 2017. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 4th ed. Toronto.

Bränden, I. 2018. *Bilder och berättelser om Sankt Nikolaus. Några vitaikoner stuerade mot bakgrund av text och liturgi*. Uppsala.

Brodbeck, S. & A.-O. Poilpré (eds) 2019. *Visibilité et présence de l'image dans l'espace ecclésial.* Paris.

Brodbeck, S., A.-O. Poilpré & I. Rapti (eds) 2022. *Histoires Chrétiennes en images : Espace, temps et structure de la narration.* Paris.

Brubaker, L. & M. B. Cunningham (eds) 2011. *The Cult of the Mother of God in Byzantium: Texts and Images.* Farnham.

Carr, A. 1994. “The Presentation of an Icon at Mount Sinai” *Δελτίον της Χριστιανικής Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας* 17, 239–248.
Cunningham, M. 2011. “The Use of the *Protoevangelion of James* in Eighth-Century Homilies on the Mother of God”, in Brubaker & Cunningham (eds) 2011, 163–178.
— 2022. “The Portrayal of Joachim and Anna in Byzantine Texts and Images: An Intersection of Historical and Liturgical Time”, in Brodbeck, Poilpré & Rapti (eds) 2022, 225–242.
Ehrman, B. & Z. Pleše 2011. *The Apocryphal Gospels: Texts and Translations*. Oxford.
Elliott, J. 2005. *The Apocryphal New Testament: A Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation*. Oxford.
Genette, G. 1991. “Récit fictionnel, récit factuel” *Protée* 19, 9–18.
— 2007. *Discours du récit: essai de méthode*. Paris.
Gijsel, J. 1997. *Libri de Nativitate Mariae, Psevdo-Matthaei Evangelivm Textvs et Commentarivs*. Turnhout.
Horstkotte, S. & N. Pedri 2011. “Focalization in Graphic Narrative” *Narrative* 19, 330–357.
Hühn, P. et al. (eds) 2014. *The living handbook of narratology.* Hamburg
Hourihane, C. (ed.) 2009. *Byzantine Art : Recent Studies. Essays in honor of Lois Drewer* (Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 378 - Arizona Studies in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance 33). Princeton Univ. & Brepols.
Jahn, M. 1996. “Windows of Focalization: Deconstructing and Reconstructing a Narratological Concept” *Style* 30, 241–267.
Jerphanion, G. de 1925. *Une nouvelle province de l’art byzantin: Les églises rupestres de Cappadoce*. Paris.
Jolivet-Lévy, C. 2001. *La Cappadoce médiévale. Images et spiritualité*. Paris.
— 2009. “The Bahattın Samanliği Kilisesi at Belisırma (Cappadocia) Revisited”, in Hourihane (ed.) 2009, 81–110.
— 2019. “Inscriptions et images dans les églises byzantines de Cappadoce”, in Brodbeck & Poilpré (eds) 2019, 379–408.

Jordan, C. R. D. 2009. *The Textual Tradition of the Gospel of John in Greek Gospel Lectionaries from the Middle Byzantine Period (8th–11th Century)*. PhD dissertation, The University of Birmingham.

Jost, F. 2017. "À quelles conditions est-il possible de faire une narratologie comparée ?" *Humanités numériques, corpus et sens* 31, 265–278.

Krueger, D. 2014. *Liturgical Subjects: Christian Ritual, Biblical Narrative, and the Formation of the Self in Byzantium*. Philadelphia.

Lemerle, P. 1977. *Cinq études sur le XIe siècle byzantin*. Paris.

Lewis, S. 2019. "Narrative, Narratology, and Meaning", in Rudolph (ed.) 2019, 147–169.

Messis, C., M. Mullett & I. Nilsson (eds) 2018. *Storytelling in Byzantium: Narratological approaches to Byzantine texts and images.* Uppsala.

Minmouni, S. 2011. *Les Traditions Anciennes Sur la Dormition et l'Assomption de Marie : Études Littéraires, Historiques et Doctrinales*. Leiden.

Mourad, S. 2002. "From Hellenism to Christianity and Islam: The Origin of the Palm tree Story concerning Mary and Jesus in the Gospel of Pseudo-Matthew and the Qur'ān" *Oriens Christianus* 86, 206–216.

Nilsson, I. 2010. "The Same Story, But Another, A Reappraisal of Literary Imitation in Byzantium", in Rhoby & Schiffer (eds) 2010, 195–208.

— 2021. "Narrative: Theory and Practice" in Papaioannou (ed) 2021, 273–293.

Panou, E. 2018, *The Cult of St Anna in Byzantium*. London/New York.

Papaioannou, S. (ed.) 2021. *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Literature.* Oxford.

Parani, M., B. Pitarakis & J.-M. Spieser 2003. "Un exemple d'inventaire d'objets liturgiques : le testament d'Eustathios Boïlas (avril 1059)" *Revue des études byzantines* 61, 143–165.

Parpulov, G. 2017. "Psalters and Books of Hours (*Horologia*)", in Tsamakda (ed.) 2017, 300–309.

Rhoby, A. & E. Schiffer (eds) 2010. *Imitatio – aemulatio – variatio.* Vienna.

Rochard, H. 2022. "Le cycle de l'Enfance du Christ en Égypte byzantine: structure et enjeux de la narration picturale", in Brodbeck, Poilpré & Rapti (eds) 2022, 25–39.

Rudolph, C. 2019. *A Companion to Medieval Art: Romanesque and Gothic in Northern Europe.* Oxford.

Ryan, M-.L. 2014. “Narration in Various Media”, in Hühn (ed.) 2014, https://www-archiv.fdm.uni-hamburg.de/lhn/node/49.html [view date: 7 May 2024].

Schiller, G. 1971. *Iconography of Christian Art*. Vol. I. Greenwhich.

Soria, J. 2018. “Structure et tension narrative dans les cycles pariétaux de la Passion du Christ à l’époque tardo byzantine: le rôle des apôtres”, in Messis, Mullet & Nilsson (eds) 2018, 177–197.

Thierry, N. 1963. *Nouvelles églises rupestres de Cappadoce. Région du Hasan Dağı*. Paris.

— 1995. “De la datation des églises de Cappadoce” *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 88, 419–455.

Thierry, N. & M. Thierry 1965. “Ayvalı Kilise ou pigeonnier de Güllu Dere. Église inédite de Cappadoce” *Cahiers archéologiques* 15, 97–154.

Tsamakda, V. (ed.) 2017. *A Companion to Byzantine Illustrated Manuscripts* (Brill’s Companions 2). Leiden.

Wallace, S.-A. 1991. *Byzantine Cappadocia: the planning and function of its ecclesiastical structures*. PhD thesis, The Australian National University.

Walter, C. 1978. “Biographical scenes of the Three Hierarchs” *Revue des études byzantines* 36, 233–260.

Photo Captions and credits :

Fig 1: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, floor plan and central dome. Plan and photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

Fig. 2: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, view towards the southern arm of the church. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

Fig. 3: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, eastern vault of the southern arm. The Annunciation and the Visitation. Photo credit: J. Zanghi.*

Fig. 4: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, southern wall of the southern arm. The Nativity of Christ. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

Fig. 5: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, western vault of the southern arm. Joseph, the First Bath of Christ, and the Annunciation to the Shepherds. Photo credit: J. Zanghi.*

Fig. 6: *The Cistern Church (Avcılar 13), southern vault. The Nativity of Christ. Photo credit: J. Zanghi.*

Fig. 7: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, southern wall of the southern arm. The Nativity of Christ (top), the Adoration of the Magi (bottom left), the Flight into Egypt (bottom right). Photo credit: J. Zanghi.*

Fig. 8: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, western vault of the southern arm. The Flight into Egypt (cont.), the Pursuit of Elizabeth and John the Baptist. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

Fig. 9: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, eastern vault of the southern arm. The Presentation of Christ at the Temple. Photo credit: J. Zanghi.*

Fig. 10: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, apsidiole on the eastern wall of the southern arm. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

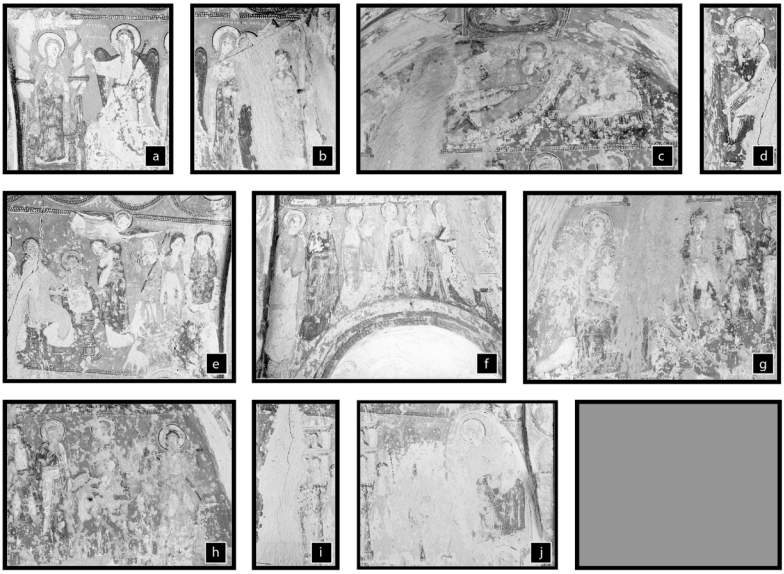

Fig. 11: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, scenes from the Infancy of Christ in the southern arm. From three photos taken by Guillaume de Jerphanion, cropped and reorganized. Photo credit: Collection chrétienne et byzantine dite Phototothèque Gabriel Millet, École Pratique des Hautes Études.*

Fig. 12: *Tokalı Kilise, Göreme, western vault of the north portion of the central nave. The Nativity of Christ. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

Fig. 13: *Karabaş Kilise, Soğanlı, southern vault. The Nativity of Christ. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*

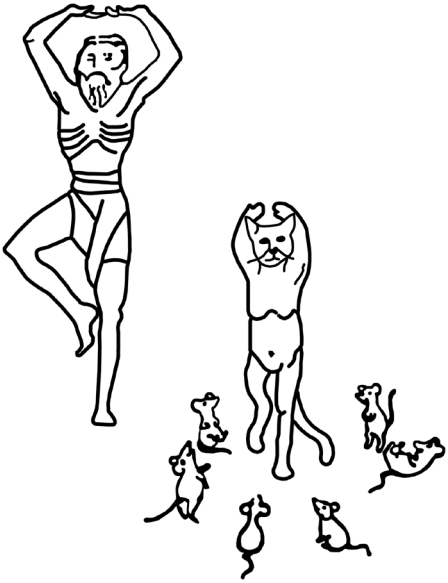

Fig. 14: *Drawing of the yoga master Arjuna. Based on Fransje van Zoest's drawing in Bal 2017, p. 134.*

Fig. 15: *El Nazar Kilise, Göreme, northern arm. The Passion of Christ. Photo credit: E. Zanghi.*