

Development of the iconography of the Holy Women at the Empty Tomb (*Visitatio Sepulchri*) in  
light of the medieval Church music-drama

## Abstract

The work connects the iconography of the *Visitatio Sepulchri* theme in the visual art with the same motive in the medieval Church music-drama, also known as *Quem quaeritis*, which is the cradle of the Western theatre. As a result, the work puts to light several schemes in the visual art which can be understood only with reference to the drama, as scenes from a play. Additionally, several typical space arrangements are identified. The work also looks deeper into the participation of women in those plays as authors, singers and actors, which is still much less known than it should be by the general public. Case studies are given, such as how it must have looked at the cathedral of Essen.

Geography-wise, since the *Visitatio Sepulchri* belongs to the Latin liturgy, naturally the focus is there, while the Greek, Coptic and Armenian worlds are observed in passing with the fascinated eyes of a foreigner, the exception being the plays brought to the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the 12th century by the Augustine canons.

Time-wise, material is more than abundant up to the present day, but iconographic innovations seem to stop at the end of the Late Middle Ages - interestingly, this creative period in visual art coincides with the time of *Visitatio Sepulchri* plays being performed, which is up to around 1600. Therefore, the presence of innovations defines the time limits of the research. Finally, with reference to an ivory from Northern France, a *terminus ante quem* is proposed for the creation of the *Quem quaeritis* dialogue.

## Keywords

*Visitatio Sepulchri*, Holy Women, Three Marys, *Quem quaeritis*, Church drama, liturgical drama, medieval theatre, iconography, monastic life