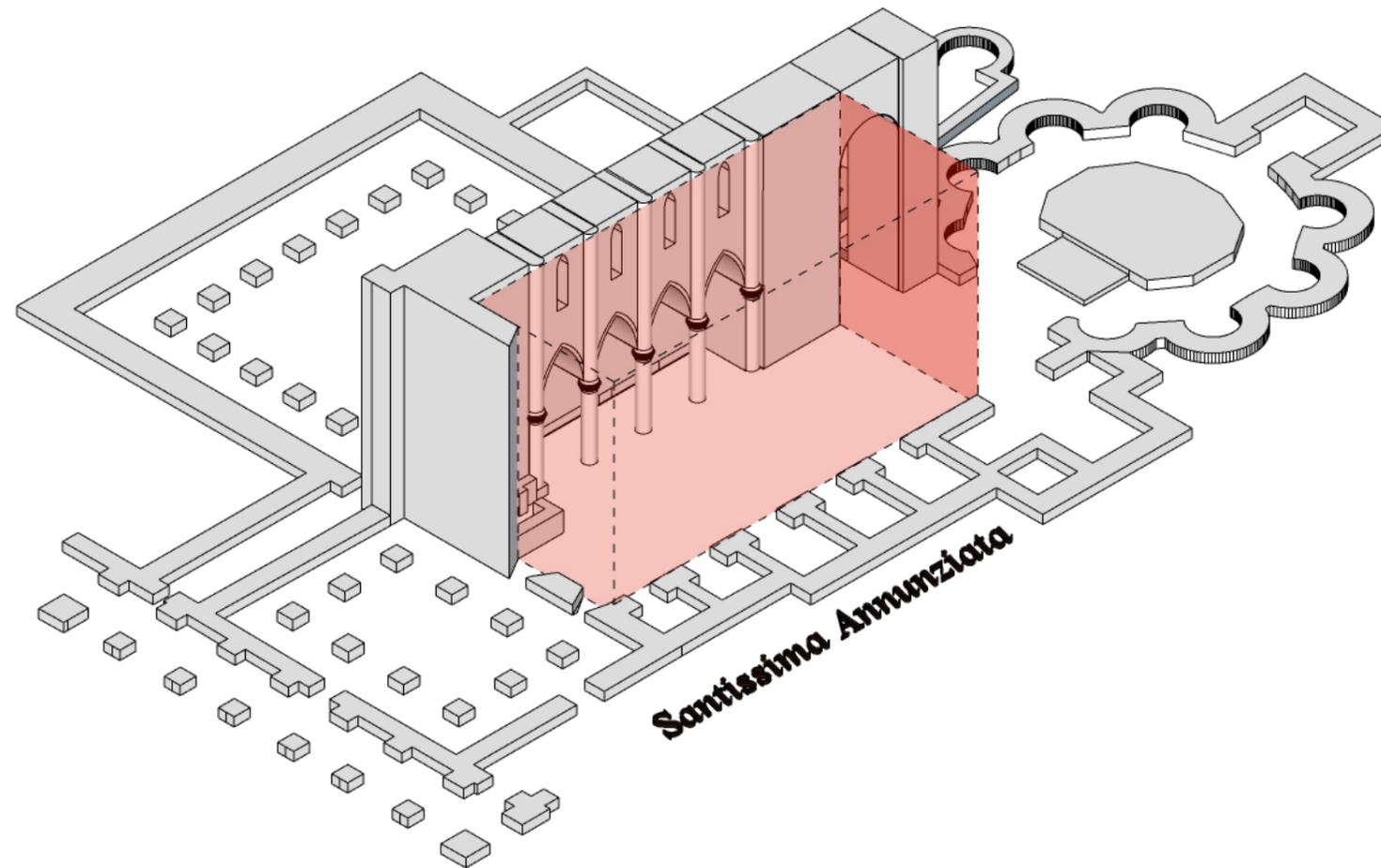


The Annunciation



Bishop Abraham's account tells us of the representation of the Annunciation in 1439, a representation that was carried out in different churches in the city: San Felice in Piazza, the Santissima Annunziata (and it is believed that also in San Marco).

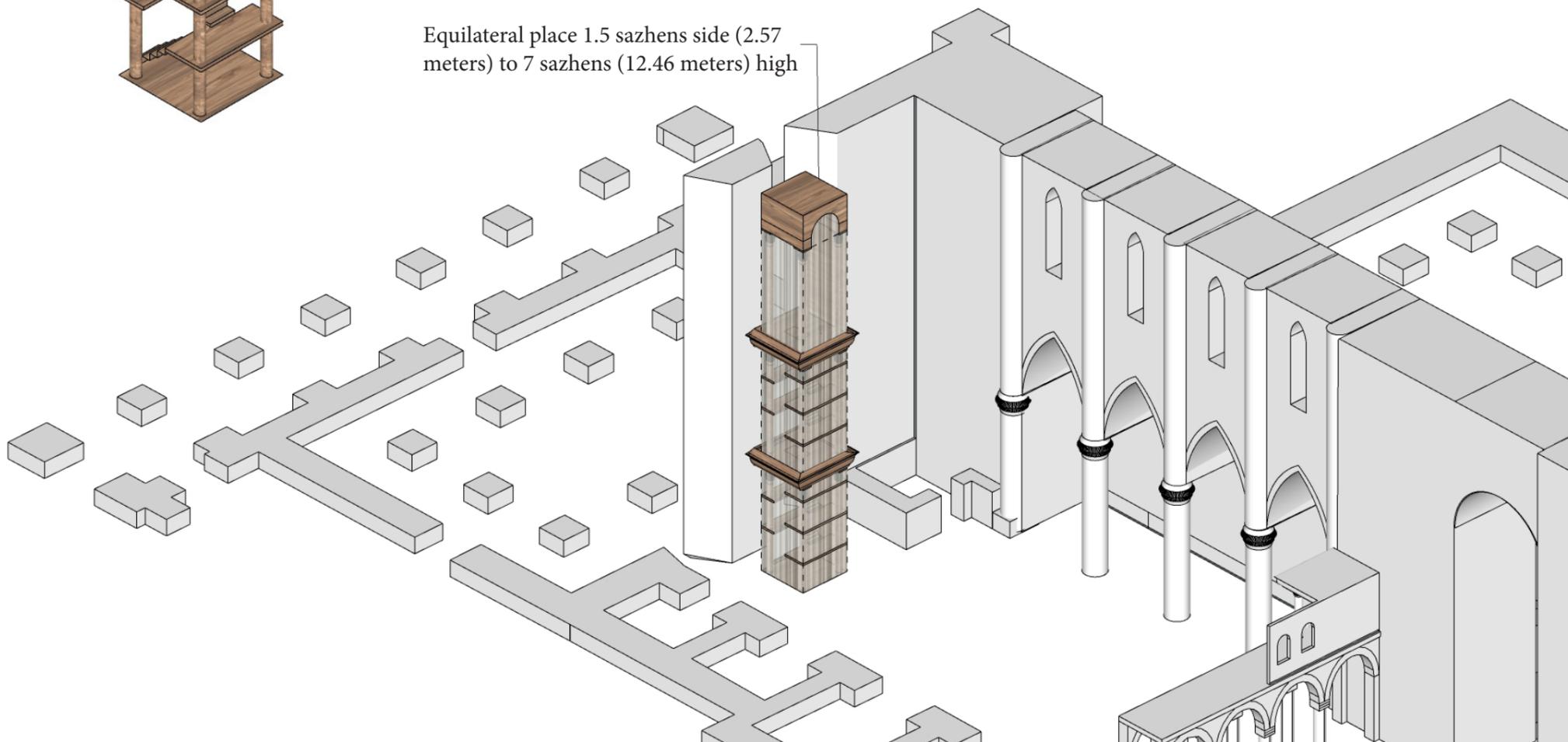
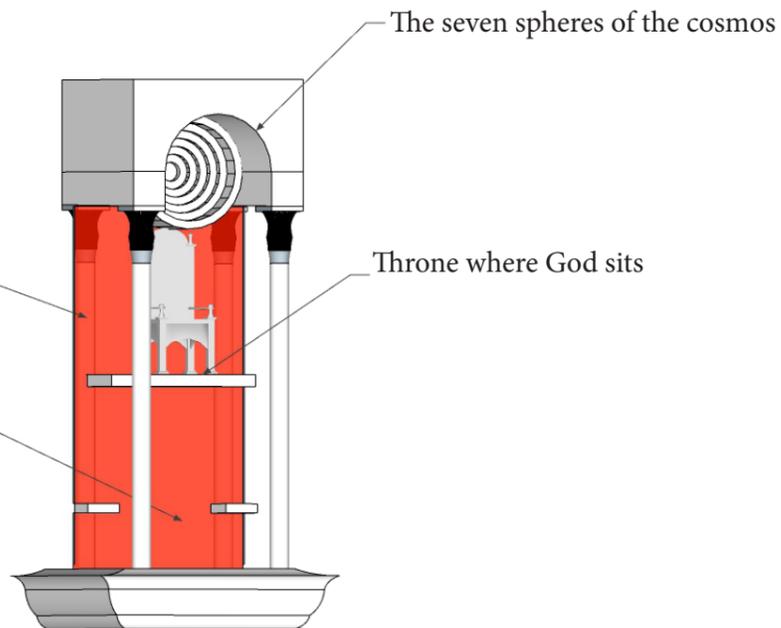
These churches could perfectly house the Annunciation, and in fact models or descriptions have reached us that reproduce the layout of the scenography inside the churches (Ruzza and Tancredi 1987). Due to a series of factors it is likely that the representation of the Annunciation attended by the bishop took place in the church of Santissima Annunziata. First of all, the bishop defines the church as a church "in the name of our pure (Lady) the Mother of God", a denomination that makes me think that it was a church dedicated to the Virgin Mary. Secondly, the description of the spaces and locations of the various machinery and routes suggests that it was a church that could house a distribution at various heights and horizontally, a description that is more in line with that of Santissima Annunziata. Contrary to this, San Felice in Piazza was a smaller church, therefore, whenever this church is mentioned or a model has been made, the machinery and scenography have always been distributed more vertically. More recently in *La ilusión de Ícaro* (1997), Francesc Massip bets for the Santissima Annunziata church to be a space where these types of machinery described by the bishop could be afforded more.



This wall could have small “shelves”, brackets, where all the candles are placed

Where the angels are located, along with possible platforms around the throne

Equilateral place 1.5 sazhen side (2.57 meters) to 7 sazhen (12.46 meters) high



The text of the bishop, in the English translation made by Doctor Juliana Dresvina in the article Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels says:

“In this church, diagonally over the front door at the very top, at the height of about seven sazhen, there is an equilateral place, each of its sides measuring one and a half sazhen, with a small and intricate staircase leading to it, and this place and the staircase are concealed with curtains.”

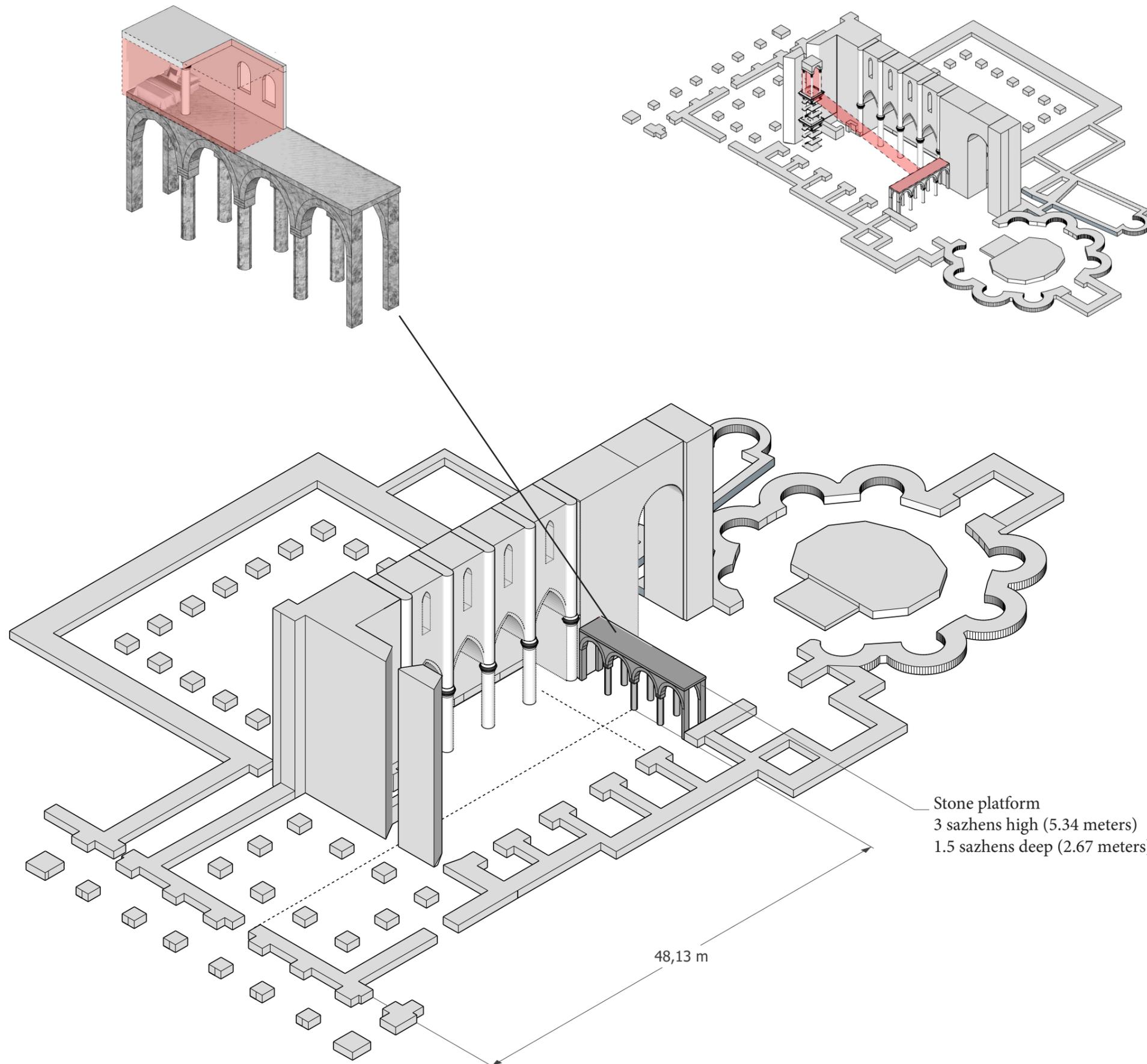
The bishop’s account begins by placing us inside the church where he observes some structures that have been built inside it and that will be crucial for the representation of the mystery of the Annunciation. Specifically, the bishop describes a structure located above the entrance door that can be accessed via a very intricate staircase. This structure has the shape of an equilateral and both it and the staircase are hidden by curtains.

As a general measure for the Annunciation, the conversion of one sazhen to 1.78 meters has been taken, since in the time of Bishop Abraham of Suzdal, the makhovaia sazhen was used, which was the distance between the two fingertips when arms are outstretched.

“In the same place, at the top, is made a throne, and on this throne there sits a dignified man, dresses in a chasuble and a crown, in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father; holding a gospel book in his left hand. A multitude of little children are suspended around him and at his feet through an intricate device, that is to say, to depict the Heavenly Powers. Surrounding that throne, amongst the children and around the Father there are over five hundred candles, and this is made exceedingly marvellous. It is all arranged high above behind the curtains” Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

Dins la part escenogràfica de l’estructura en forma d’equilàter, és a dir, quadrat, trobem tots aquests elements. Es tracta de la descripció del Paradís on es troben Déu i els àngels. Segons el que es pot interpretar pel text, es parla com si poguessin existir dues altures diferents, però amb les mesures descrites pel bisbe només dona lloc per a una. Encara així el que he fet ha estat elevar el tron en una plataforma. Aquesta plataforma, juntament amb la dels àngels, sorgeixen d’una paret trassera. Aquesta paret no coincideix amb la paret de l’església, sino que es tracta d’una paret que podria dividir aquesta superfície en dues parts: una més cara al públic i l’altra on es podien amagar els tramoistes (Tal i com es pot observar a la figura x). També s’ha pogut investigar que en aquesta zona del Paradís es troben les set esferes del cosmos, que funcionen com a rodes i giren en elles mateixes concèntricament, justament al damunt del tron de Déu. A l’inici de l’obra tota aquesta zona està coberta amb cortines, que posteriorment s’obriran per mostrat al públic els personatges i els elements escenogràfics.

The Annunciation



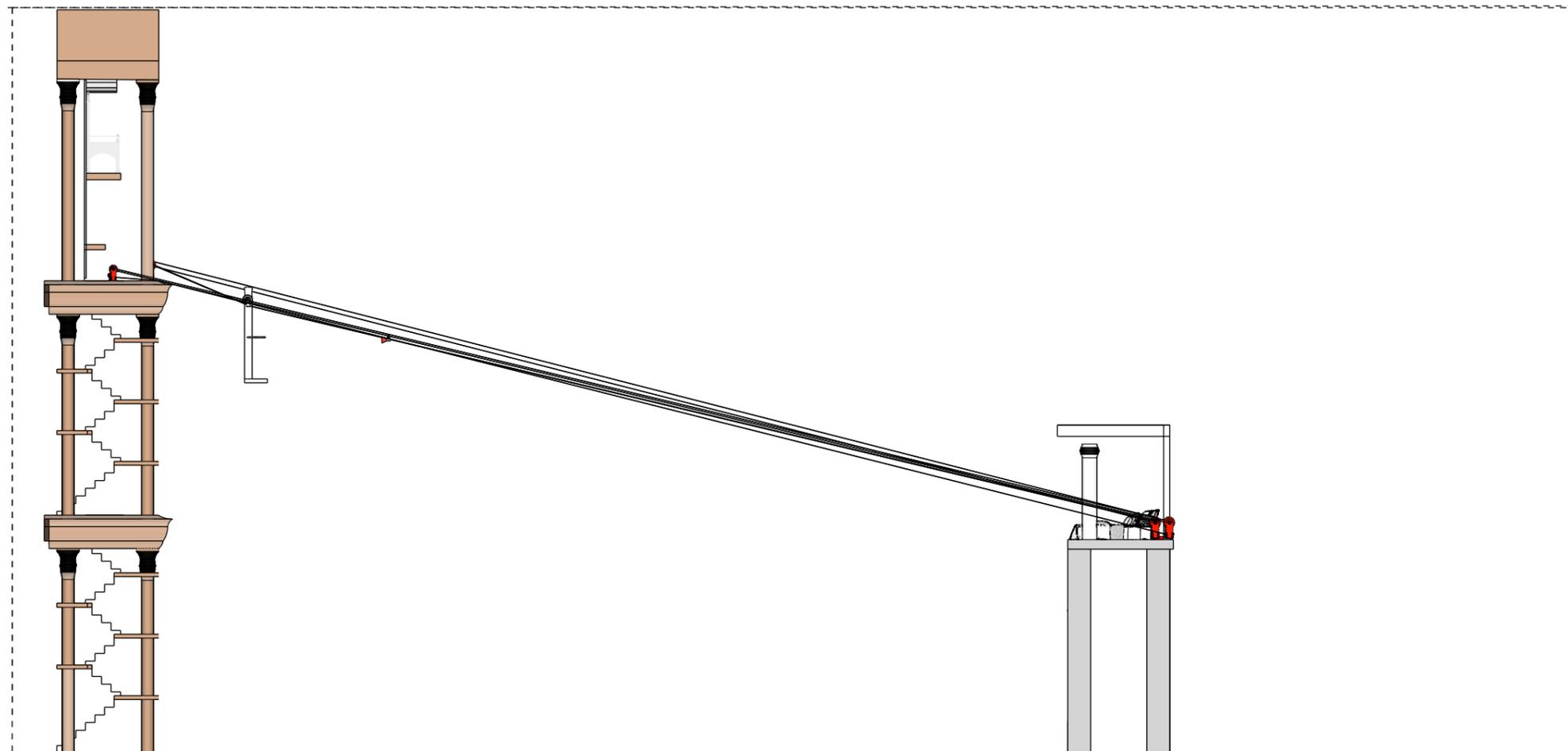
“In the same place, there are twenty-five long sazhens between the above-mentioned doors and the middle of the church. In this space a stone platform (i. e. rood screen) is made from one wall to the other, on stone pillars, three sazhens high and one and a half sazhens wide. And this platform is all lined with beautiful fabric.” Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

The other important part of the scenography of this work is the space where the house of the Virgin Mary is located, located on a stone platform 25 sazhens from the main door. These 25 sazhens would be 44.5 meters, but in order to better place the scenography on the site, the measurement had to be varied to approximately 48 meters.

“Upon this lined place on the left-hand side there is a bed with magnificent lordly bedding and blankets. Most wonderful and rich cushions are laid at the head of this bed. In this great and marvellous place there sits a prudent young man, dressed in rich and most wonderful maiden robes and diadem. In his hands he holds a book and reads silently, everything in his appearance looking like he were the most pure Virgin Mary herself.” Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

Then the bishop tells us that in the tremezzo of stone pillars is the house of the Virgin Mary, where you can see a bed adorned with fabrics and pillows on which the figure representing the Virgin Mary is sitting. This same platform is a space through which other characters also move, as the bishop describes later in his story.

The Annunciation

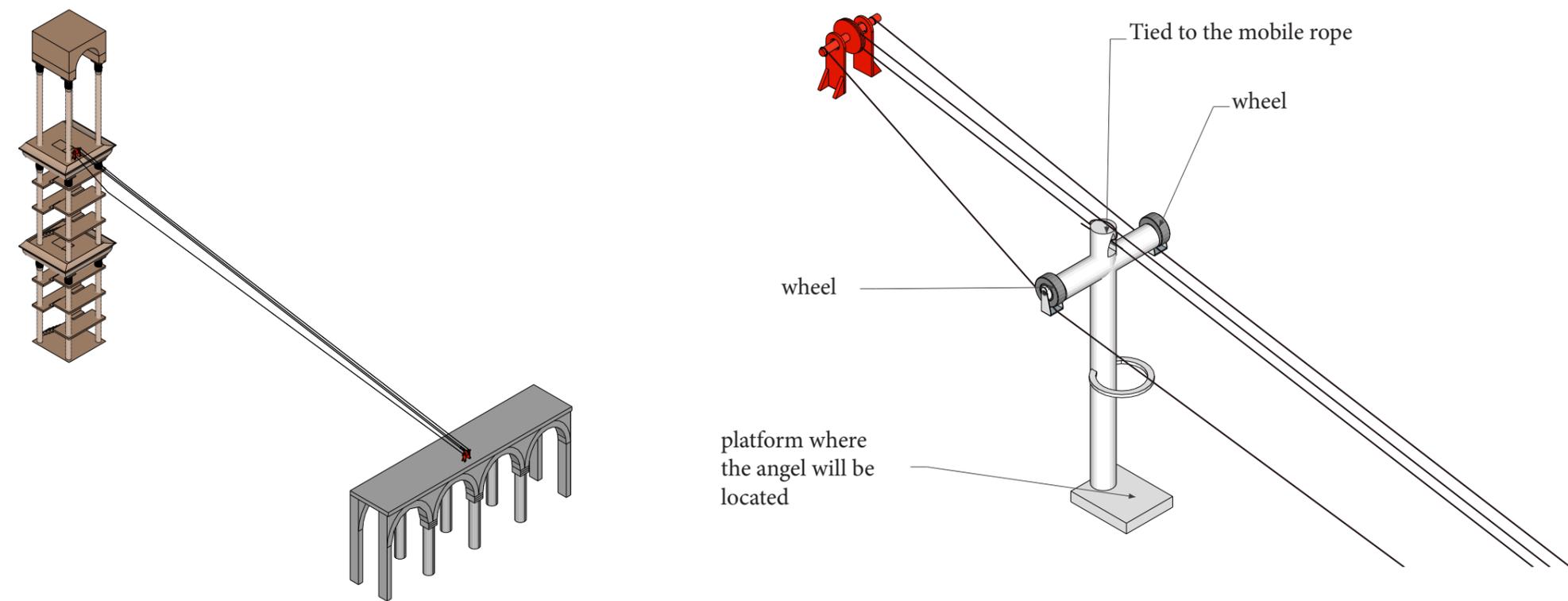


“From the above mentioned upper place through this stone platform there are five thin and strong ropes, made to run all the way down to the very altar. Two of them are made to go past next to that [boy] dressed up as the Pure Virgin. Upon the same rope the angel, with the help of the third, very thin one, comes down when sent by the Father with the good tidings [lit. with the Annunciation]; having descended from Him, he then ascends back with joy. Meanwhile three thin ropes run right through the middle of the platform.”

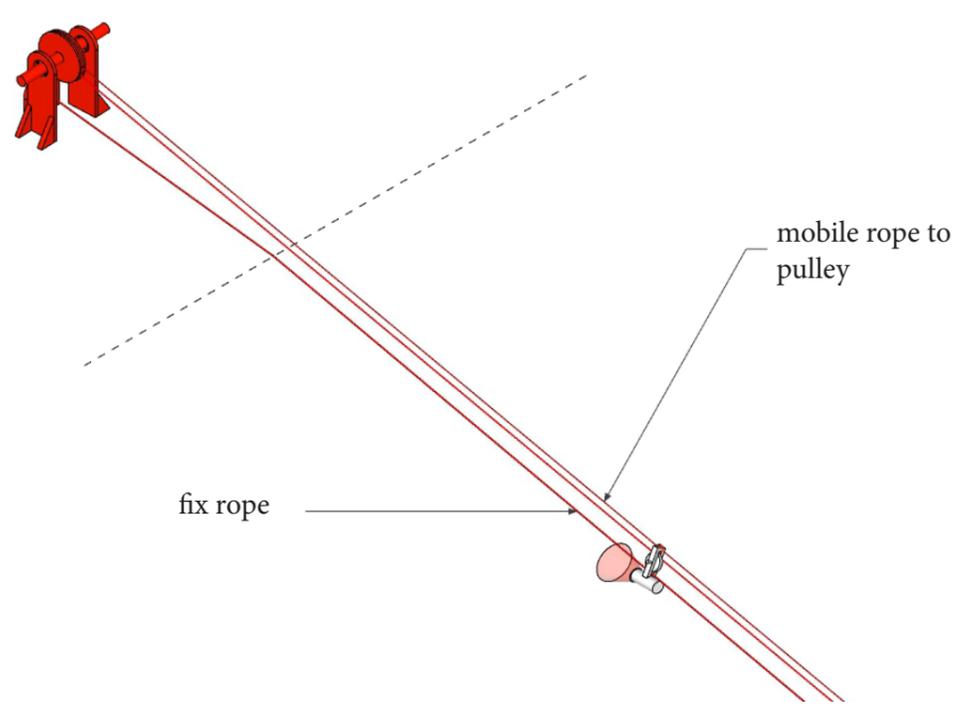
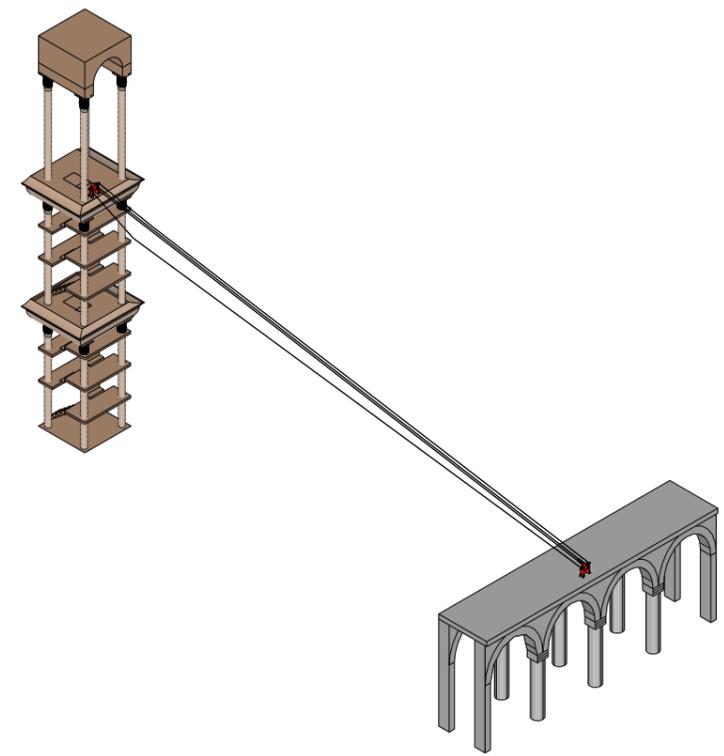
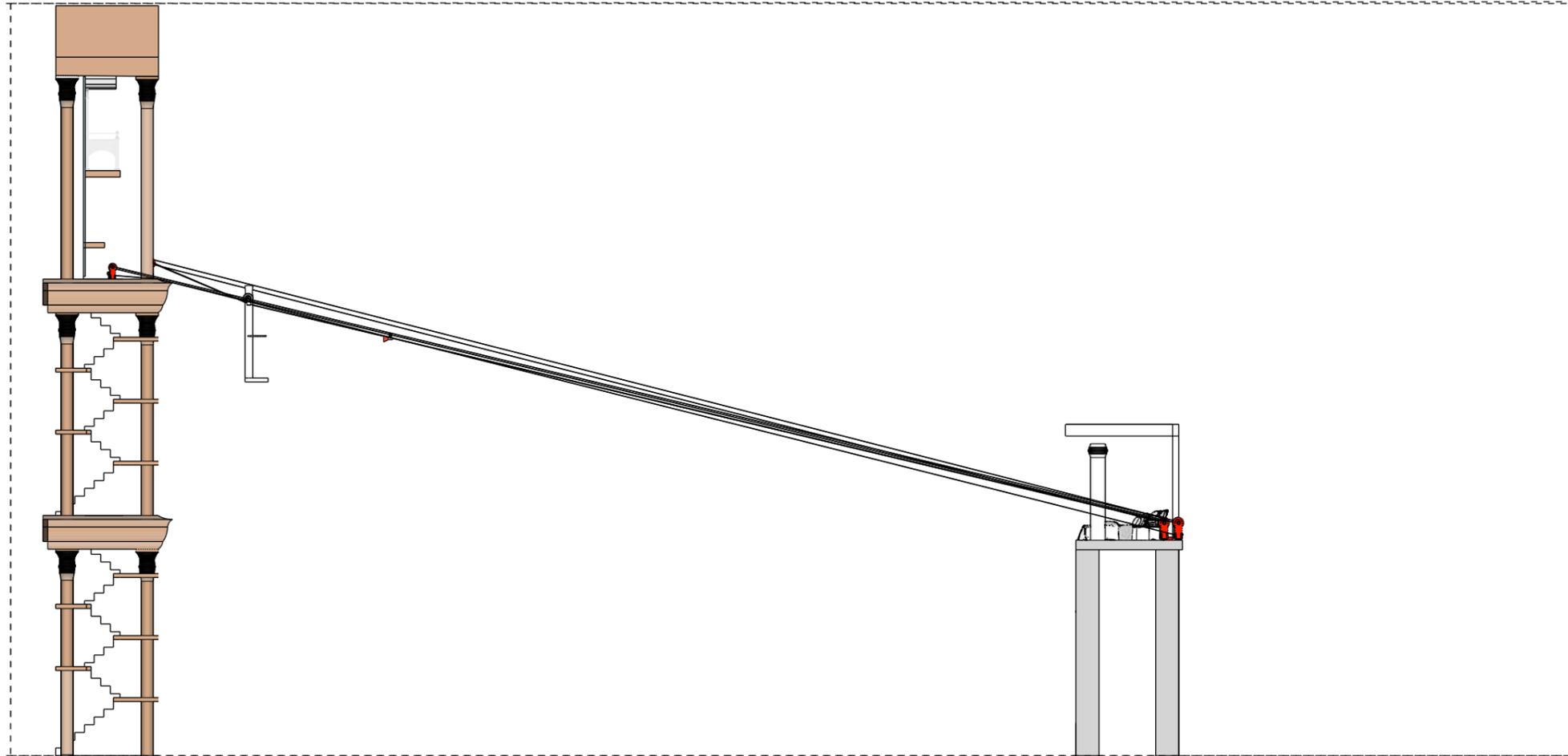
“After a short while from that very same upper (platform) the angel appears from the Father; descending on these two abovementioned ropes down to the Virgin to announce the conception of the Son of God. [...]. His descent is carried out as follows: to his pants, in the middle of his back, are attached two wheels which are small and invisible due to the height. And those wheels are held together with two ropes, and on them, with the third very thin rope people lower him down from above and pull him back up again, all without being seen by anybody.” *Unorthodox 'itinerary' of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels*

These two fragments describe the same scenographic mechanism related to the flight. From the upper equilateral platform five ropes come up to the stone platform where the Virgin Mary stands. These five ropes perform two different functions, that is to say, they are used for the displacement of two different elements: the Angel Gabriel and a pyrotechnic element.

Regarding the first, in the last paragraph, we can see the description of one of the flight mechanisms, in this case that of the Angel Gabriel. This character first descends from the equilateral platform to the stone platform where the Virgin's house is located, and then ascends in the opposite direction. To perform these descents and ascents, three ropes are used. Two fixed ropes, along which the wheels that hold the angel will move, and a mobile one that will drive the movement of the angel since it will be linked to the mechanism that holds it.



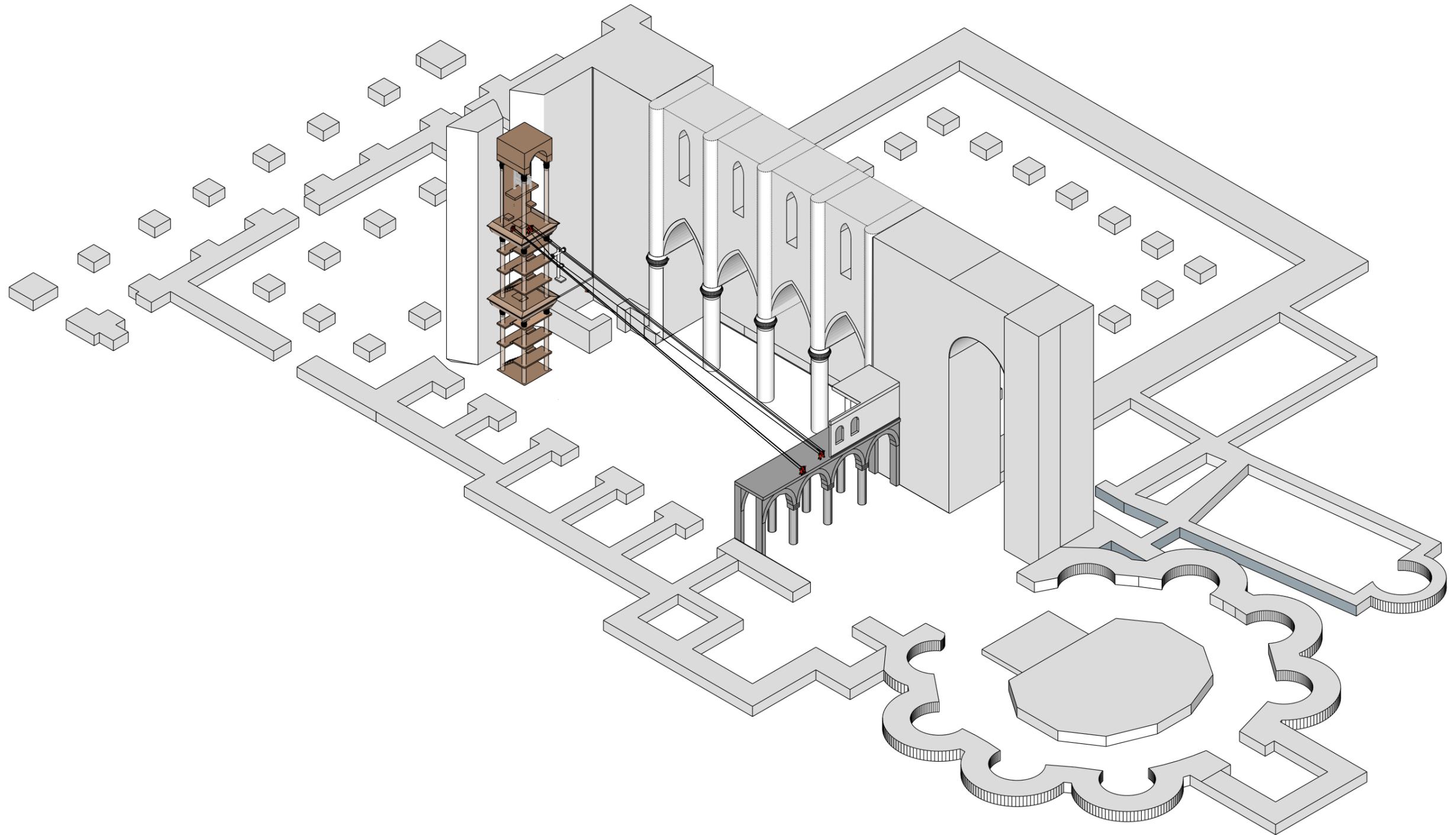
The Annunciation



“While the angel is going up, at the same time from above, where the Father is, fire emerges with great noise and unceasing thunder down on the afore-mentioned ropes to the middle of that platform where the prophets were standing. And the same time fire goes back up again and then quickly comes down from above; because of this circulation [of the fire] and due to the claps of thunder the whole church is filled with sparks.” Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

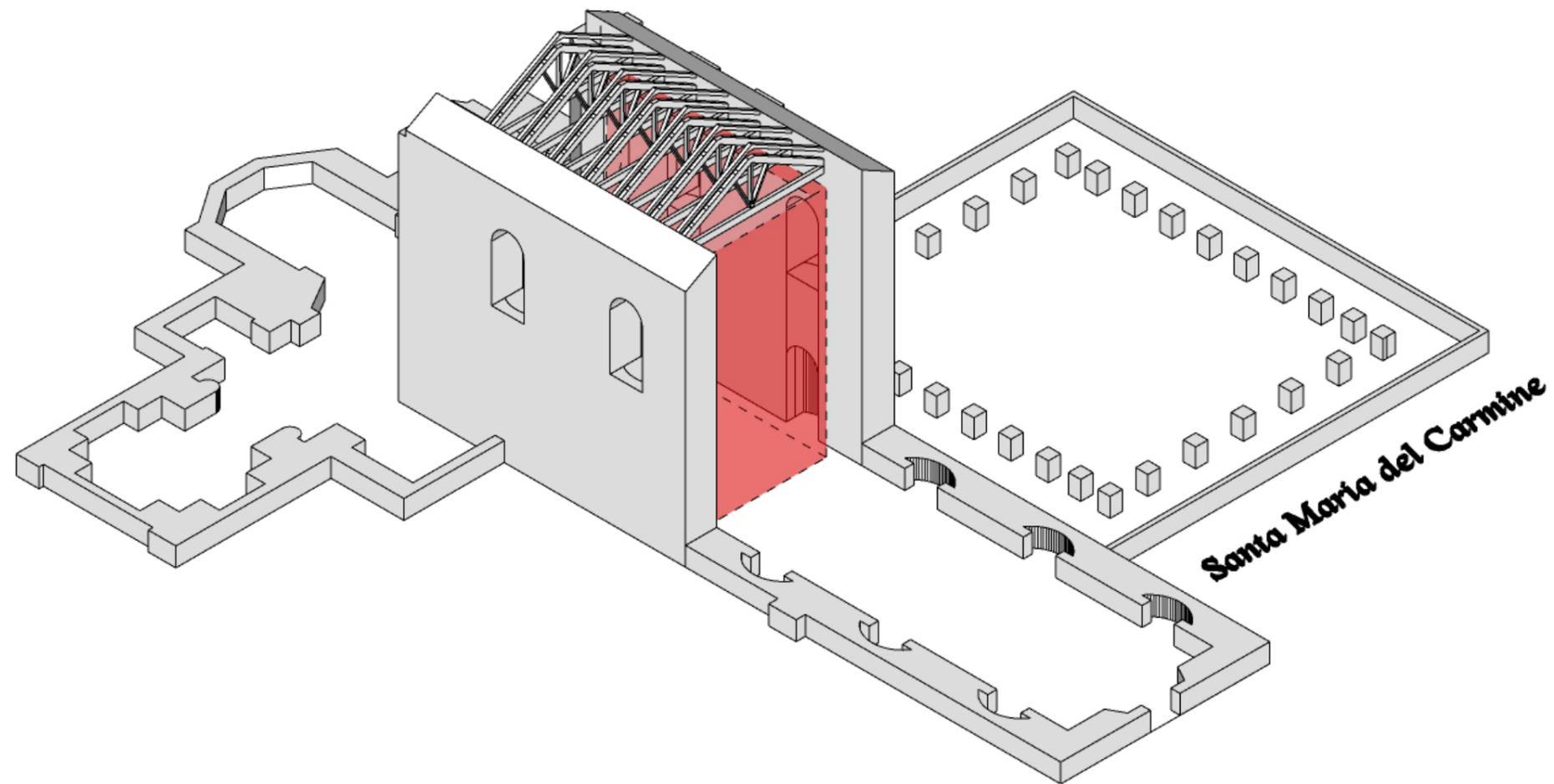
This fragment describes the other “flight” mechanism, which uses the other two ropes of the five between the two platforms. These ropes allow the movement of an object that simulates a ray sent by God and that is represented in the form of fire, in fact this object will have fireworks that will emit sparks as it moves through the church.

The Annunciation

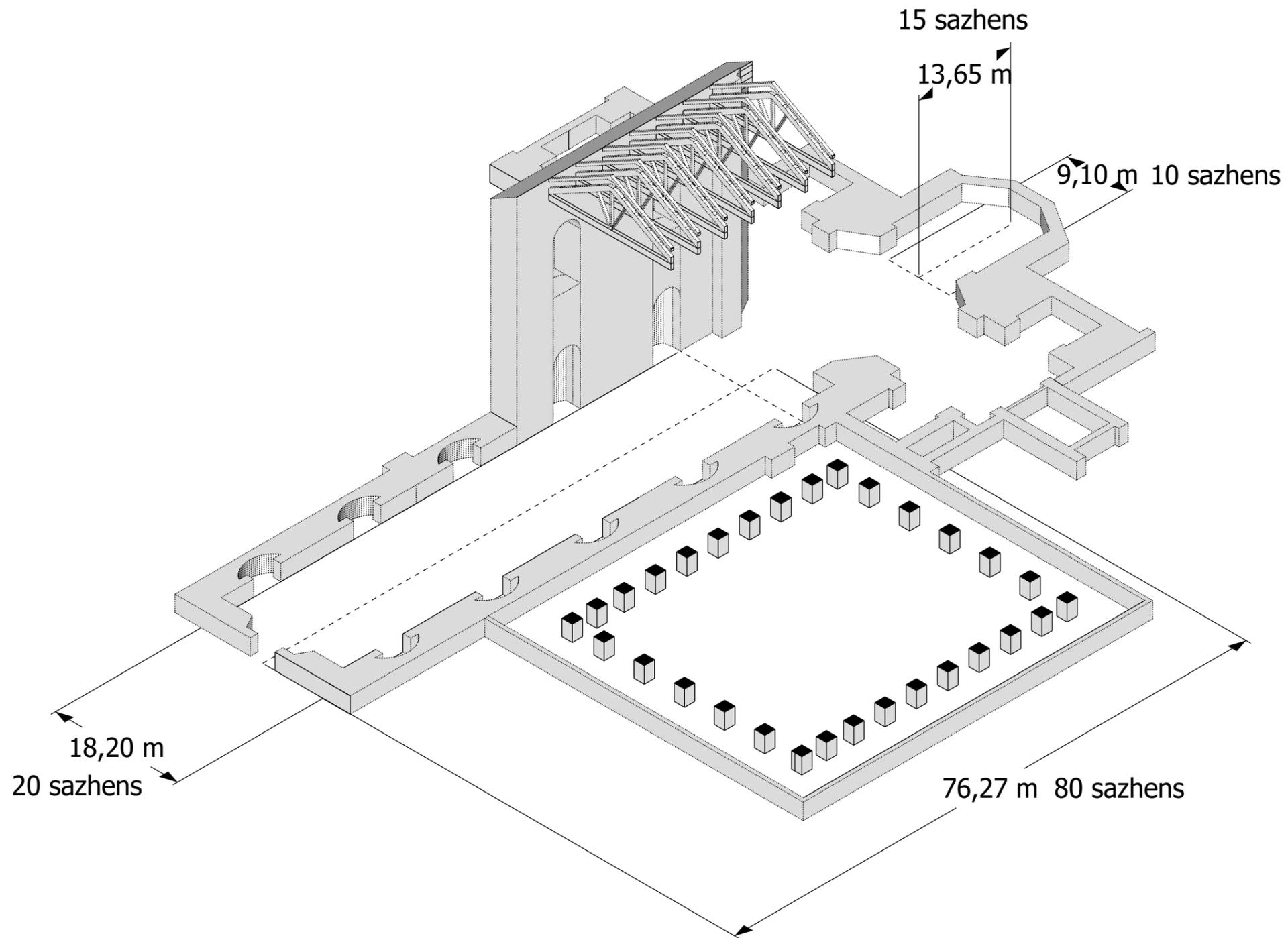


The Ascension

As for the representation of the Ascension, which was also carried out in 1439 in Florence, there is no doubt that this work was performed in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, although simply gives the name of the party to the church.



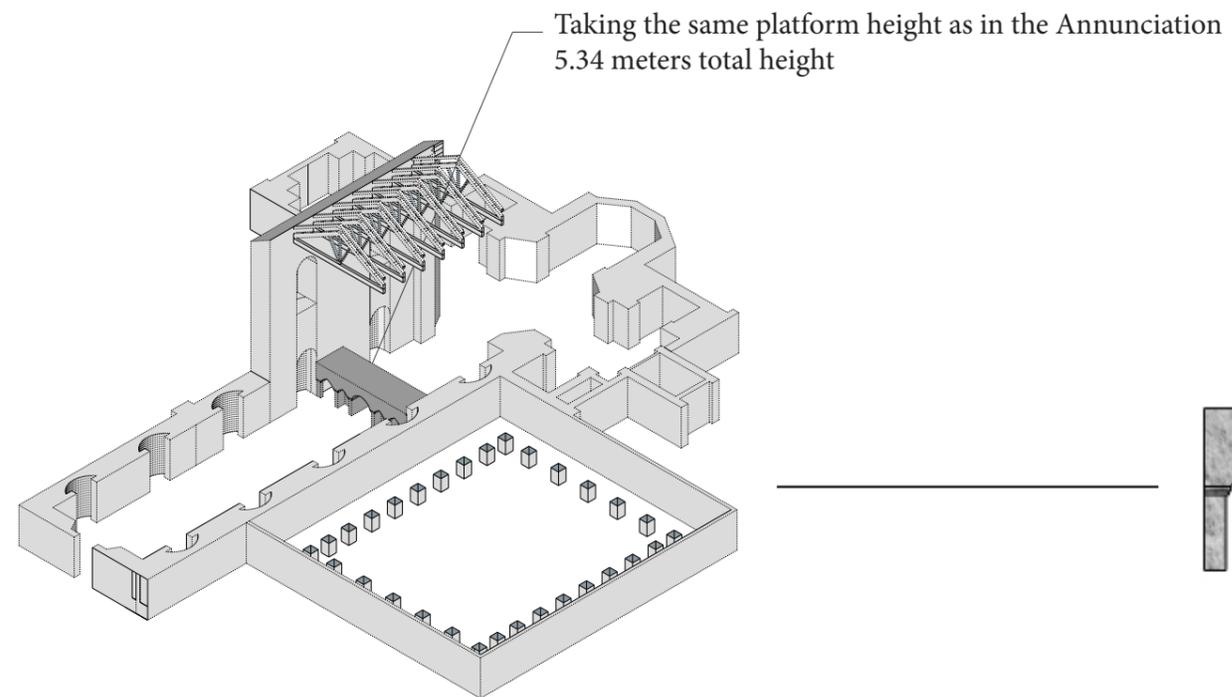
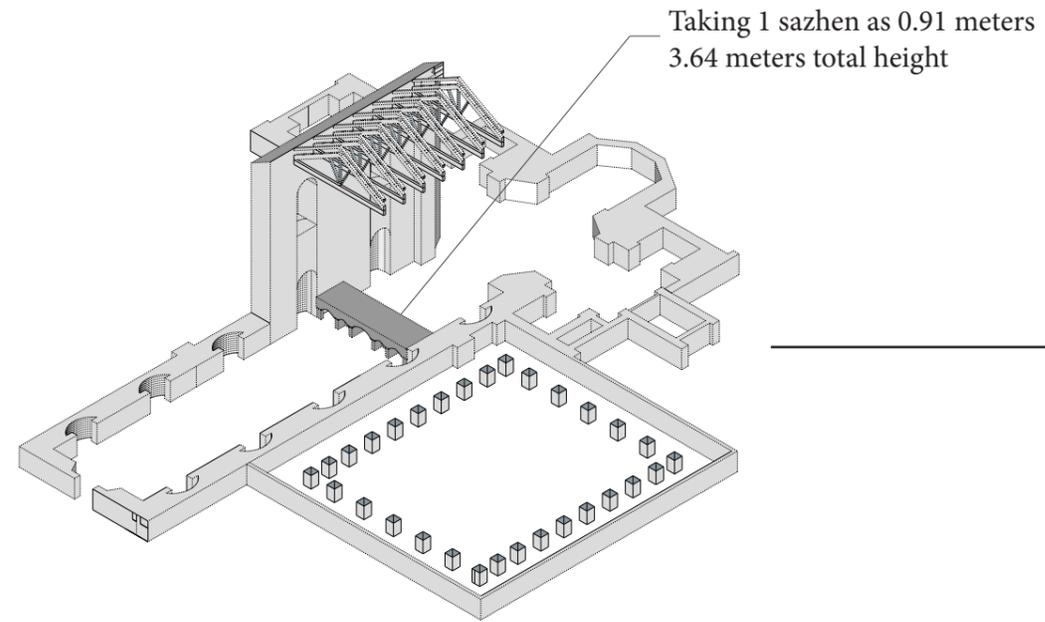
The Ascension



“That church is made long in size, because it is eighty sazhen from its front wall to the choir (or ‘to the altar’, Russian ‘altar’), while in width it is twenty sazhen. The choir of that church is fifteen sazhen long, while in width it is ten sazhen. And in the middle of this church there is a similar [platform], just as in the previously described Church [of the Annunciation], [...]” Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

The bishop’s account of this work begins with the description of the measurements of the church itself. These measurements in sazhen have been calculated with the conversion factor of one sazhen equal to 0.91 meters, according to Professor Newbiggin. The measurements described with the given units would give this result about the church. We also note a discrepancy in the measurements described by F. Massip (1997), who tells us that it is 560 feet long (170 meters) by 140 feet wide (42 meters), and according to the measurements of this church in plan that would be almost double what I think is the reality.

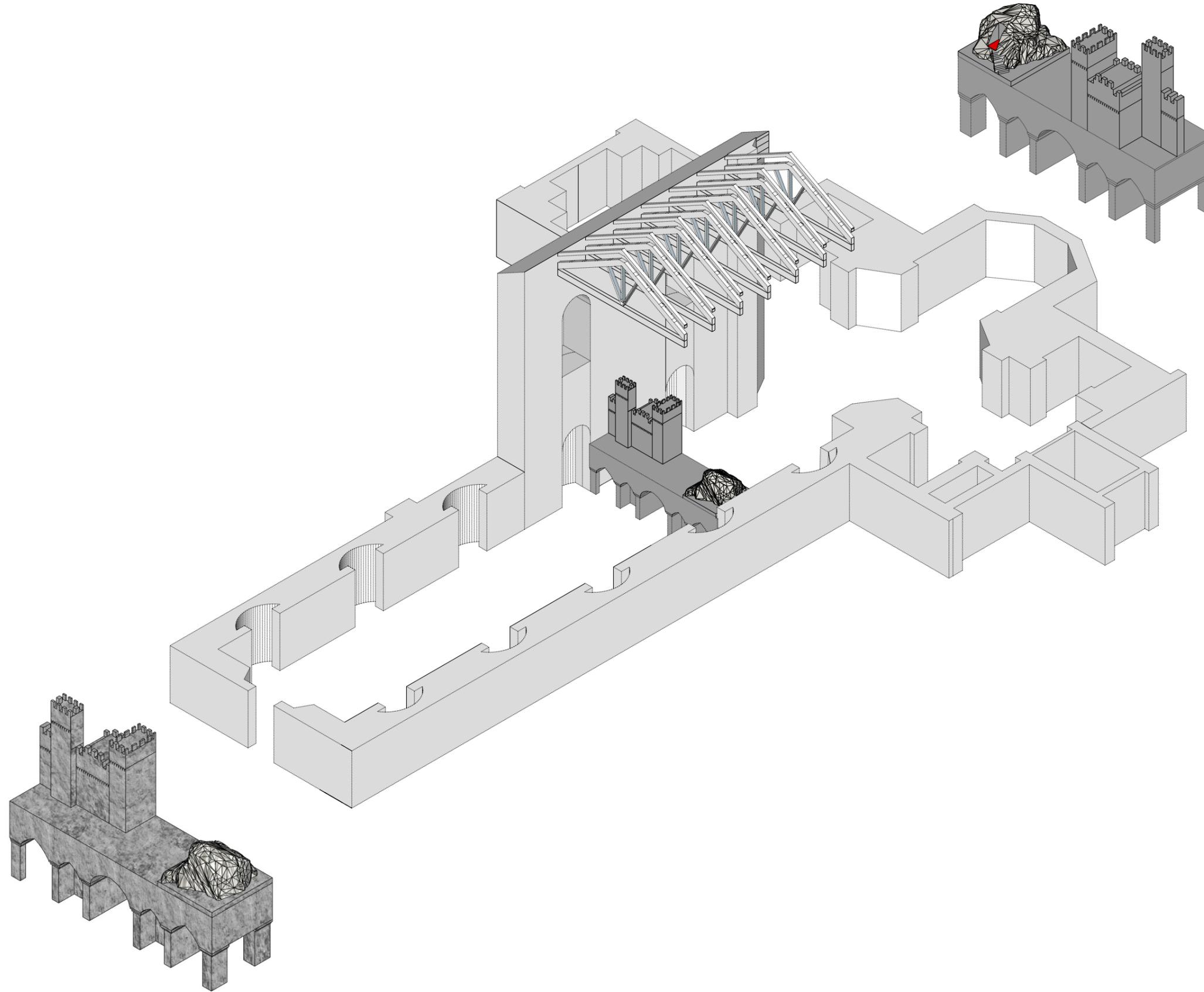
The Ascension



“And in the middle of this church there is a similar [platform], just as in the previously described Church [of the Annunciation], [...]. Its platform is made of stone, on stone pillars. This platform is arranged to be four sazhen high and twenty sazhen wide. On the left hand side of that platform there is built a small town of stone, exceedingly marvellous, with towers and walls, in the name of the holy city of Jerusalem. Opposite this town by the first wall there is made a hill one and a half sazhen high; from it steps are built approximately two hand-spans high from the ground. And this mountain is draped with beautiful cloths, and above this tall mountain, about eight sazhen high, is arranged a platform of wooden planks, with each side measuring four sazhen, also adorned in various ways, panelled with boards on all sides, and decorated exceedingly wonderfully with Italian-style paintings underneath and on either side. In the middle of that platform a big round hole has been made, about two sazhen in diameter, covered with blue cloth.” *Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels*

In this fragment the bishop describes a large number of scenographic elements, so to explain it more clearly we will describe each of them separately. First of all we find the description of a platform similar to that of the Annunciation made of stone. The bishop says that the width of this structure is about 20 sazhen, so it will occupy a space that goes from one wall to the other of the nave since it is the same measure with which he describes the width of the church. On top of this structure, there are the two main places that make up the location of the scene. These two places are: on the left the small stone town with walls and towers, which represent the city of Jerusalem and on the right a hill.

The Ascension



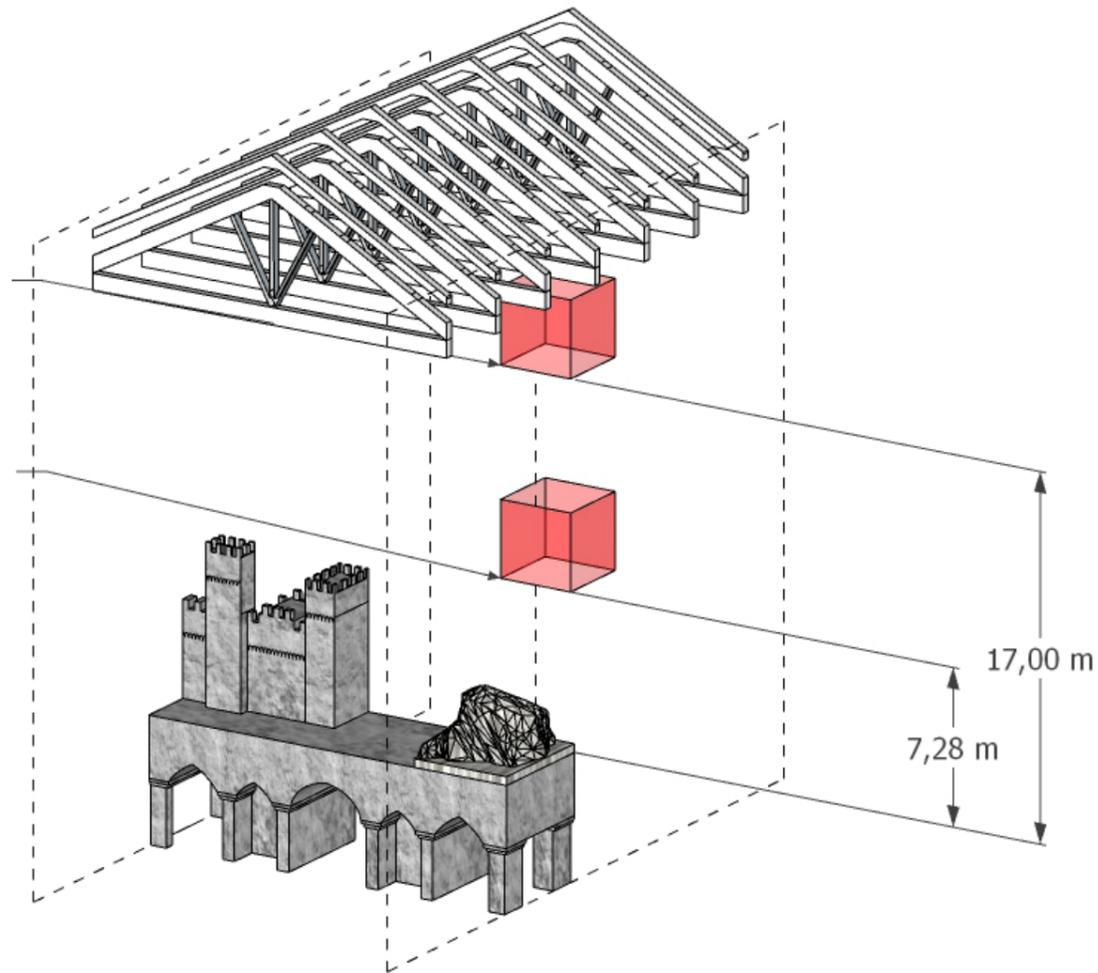
According to the bishop's story, the hill has a size of one and a half sazhen in height, which would be 1.36 meters. I do think that the mountain can have stairs and be elevated two feet from the ground as described in the text, but I doubt that this could have a height of only 1.36 meters which would be the conversion of the 1.5 sazhens described by bishop Therefore, for the height of this element, I have taken the measurement given by F. Massip (1997) of 10.5 feet high, which would be 3.2 meters.

We can interpret that behind the mountain there was a space located 1.36 meters from the base of the stone structure where the characters who had to ascend to the upper platform located under the beams could prepare the mechanisms for the 'ascension

The Ascension

17 meters according to
L. Ruzza and M. Tancredi (1987)
F. Massip (1997)

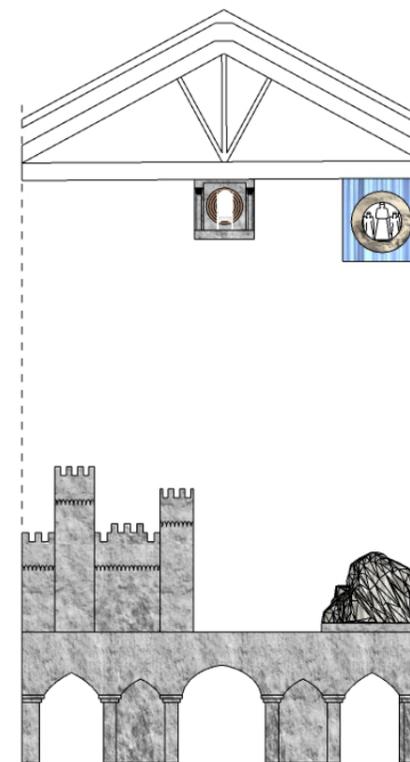
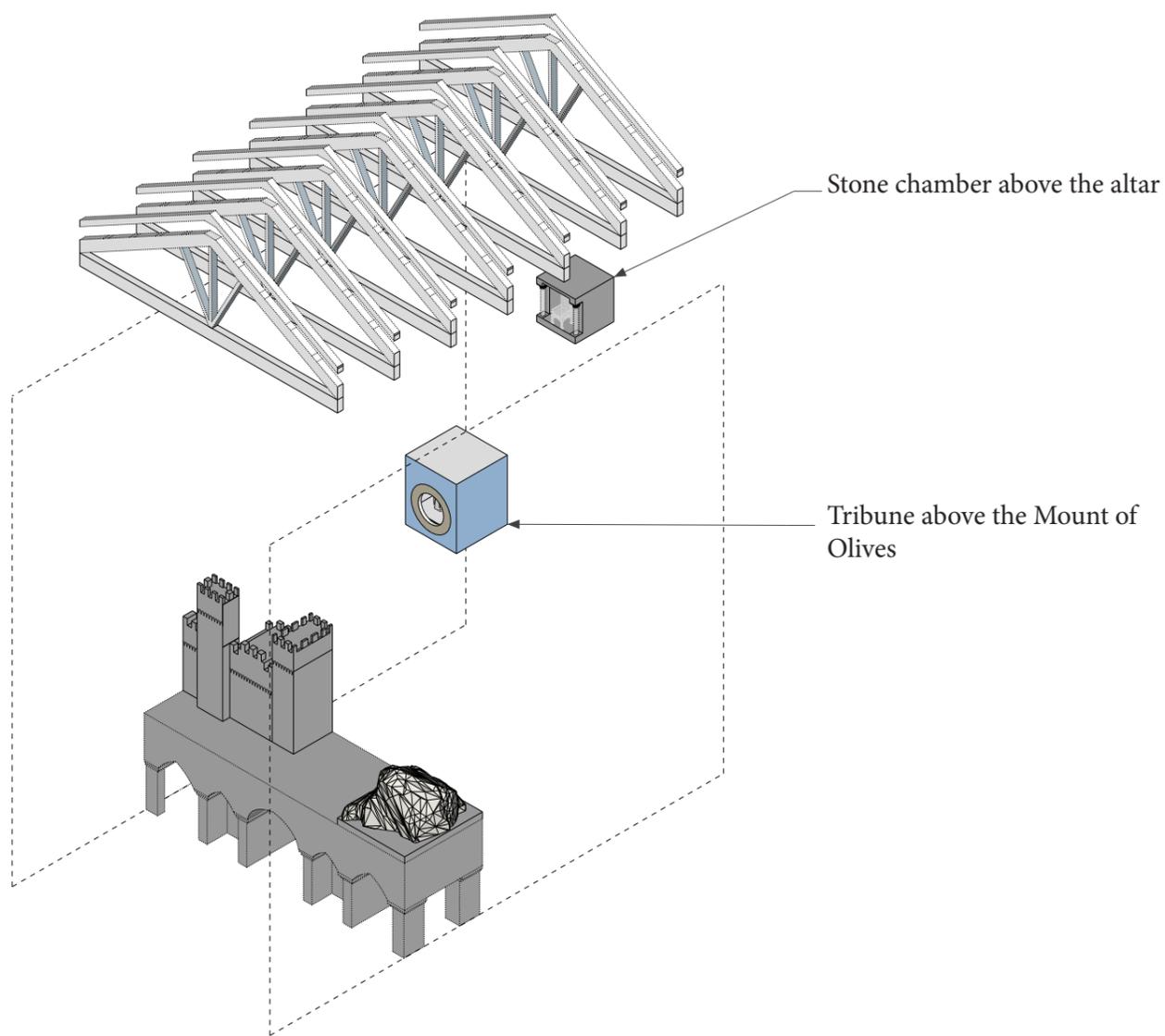
8 sazhens according to the text
(7.28 meters)



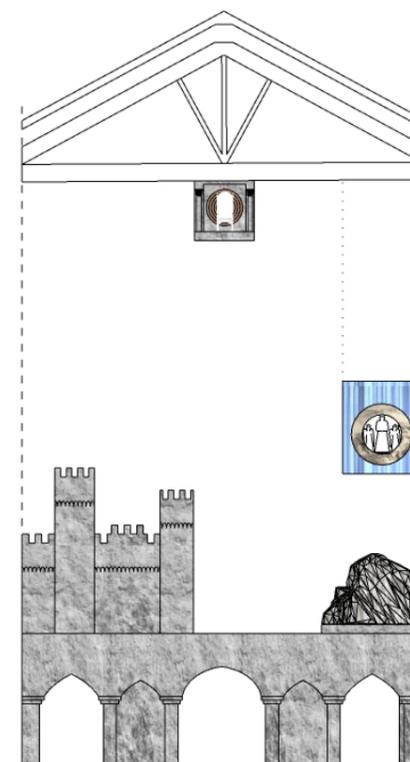
Above this mountain, the bishop describes another platform whose height is difficult to identify. According to the bishop, this upper platform, which will actually turn out to be a box-shaped structure, would be eight sazhens high, which would be 7.28 meters. I consider that these sizes do not adapt to the real situation of the church and do not agree with all the hypotheses of representation and models made by Ruzza and Tancredi and F. Massip.

According to the height situation of this upper platform, which will actually turn out to be a box, I have also compared the measurement that the bishop says according to the conversion factor of 0.91 meters with the proposed measurement described in book *Storie degli spazi teatrali*, (Ruzza and Tancredi 1987), which describes it as "In front, at a height of 17 meters, a platform had been erected with a curtain which, when opened, revealed a Paradise made up of concentric circles.", thus taking the 17 meters of height from the platform of the Mont of Olives a measure also mentioned by F. Massip (1997).

The Ascension



Two options of the height



“In the middle of that platform a big round hole has been made, about two sazhen in diameter; covered with blue cloth. [...] It open up on two sides at the top that is to say, as the celestial gates are opened, and then all people see through those gates of heaven a man dressed in a chausable and a crown, in every way reflecting the likeness of the Father [...] Around him there is a multitude of little children, to represent the heavenly powers. [...]”

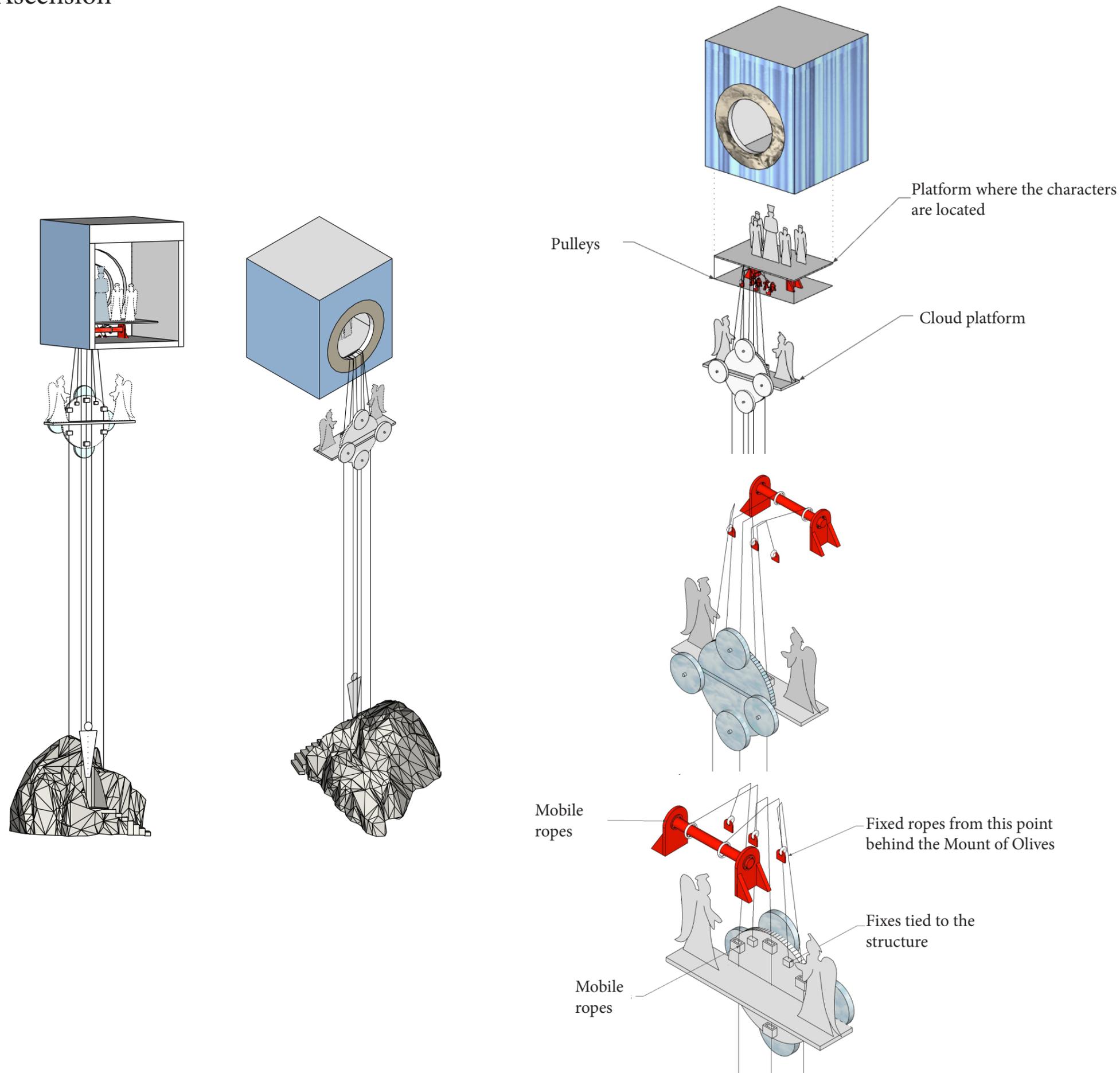
Above the same altar, under the church ceiling, there is a stone chamber attached to the wall of the altar, square, with its sides measuring three sazhen each, separated from the church with a red curtain; [...], there is made a throne, and around that throne there is a multitude of little children held by an intricate device, that is to say, to represent the cherubim. On them the sovereign throne is resting, and next to it and to the children there are seven circles, as if they were wheels, the smallest measuring two cubits from side to side, and [each] next one two spans bigger.” Unorthodox 'itinerary' of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

According to these fragments we can deduce that there are two elevated spaces where the actions take place. A platform that acts as the Tribuna del Paradís, placed on the hill, which is the space that has been talked about before. In this fragment, the bishop informs us that this structure is 4 sazhen on a side, that is, a quarter of the width of the nave, and that it is covered with blue fabrics to represent the first heavenly sphere. The other space is described as a stone chamber that is located above the altar of the church, under the roof, and that is 3 sazhen on a side.

In the description of the tribune it is said that there is a hole 2 sazhen in diameter which, once the curtains hiding this large hole are opened, show the Father and the angels beside him as if they were levitating. Logically then, this hole is located on the front face of the structure facing the public, since if it were located at the bottom of this platform so that it could be seen from below, this hole would not leave room for place the subsequent machinery that will be described and the characters themselves. It is true that they would come to use machinery that came out of a horizontally located hole, such as those developed by Cecca, but these would be representations made in the years following the bishop's visit to the city of Florence.

Regarding the description of the other structure, it is a stone chamber where the throne is said to be located with the Father, angels around and the seven circles, which work like wheels. All this description makes us think of the scenography itself located on the platform of the Annunciation. This space will also initially be covered with curtains. The two locations will never be shown at the same time, since it is inferred that they are the two places where God will be located, who will be represented by two actors, one located in each of the two structures, and who can never be seen at the same time.

The Ascension



"In the middle of that platform a big round hole has been And something like a cloud comes down from the Father above, that is to say, from the gates of heaven, along those previously described seven ropes, in a very crafty and incomprehensible way, filled with much beauty and complexity.

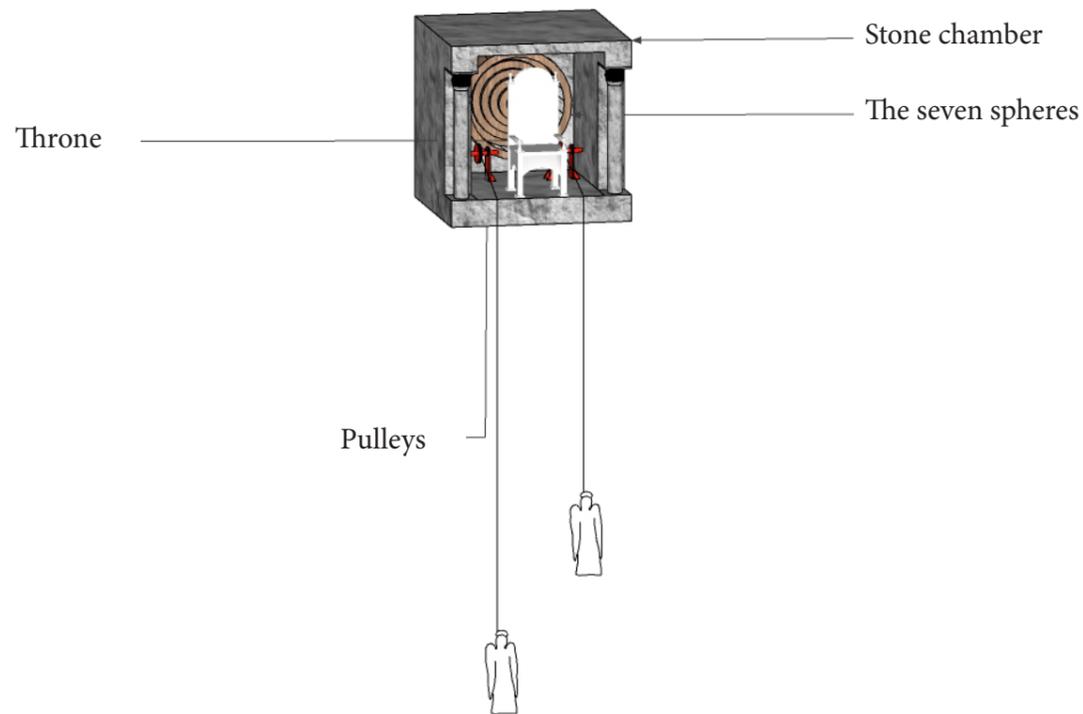
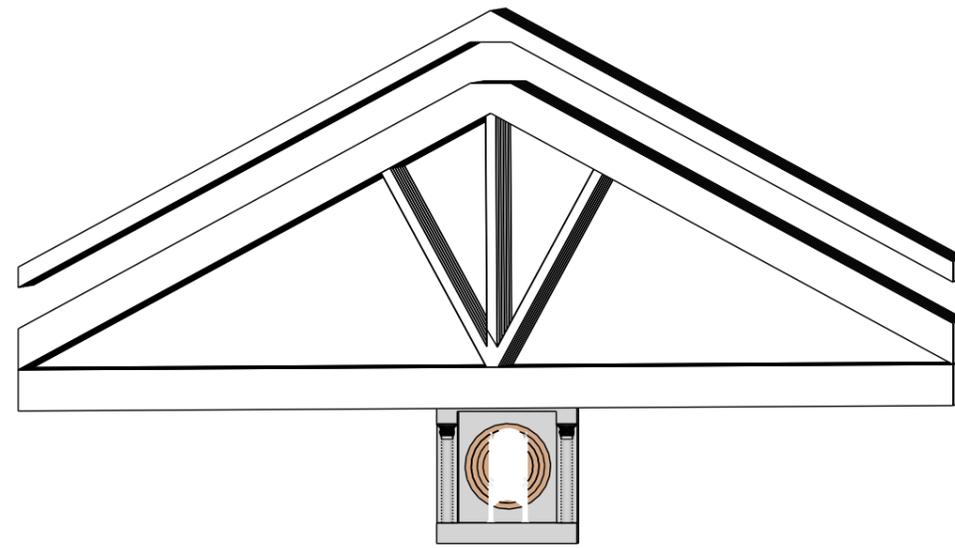
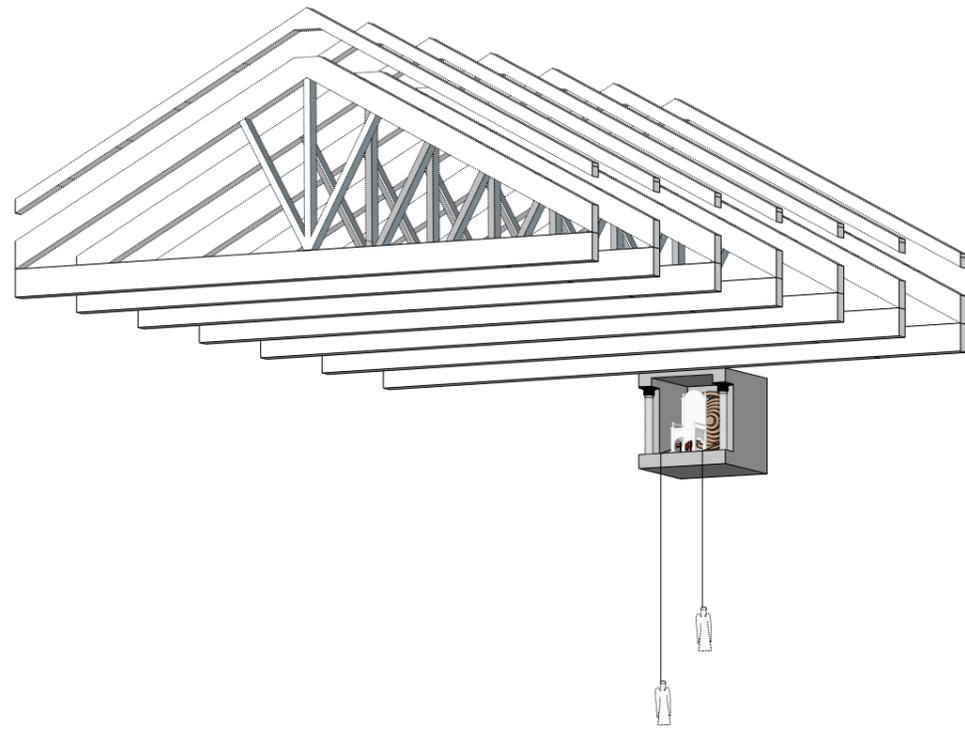
It is made to be circular in form, and around it there are many discs, which incessantly move swiftly hither and whither; on its rightt and left sides there are two young adolescents, adorned with hait and garments to imitate those angels, with gilded wings. [...].

[...] puts them into his hands and begins ascending towards the cloud, standing, by means of those aforementioned seven ropes, sending his blessing to his Mother and the apostles. [...] These ropes are made [to be hidden] behind his back in a very intricate and incomprehensible way, through the iron swivels, as if it is not through them he is lifted up, but walks that height himself, without swinging sideways. And the swivels are made so that they cannot be seen. " Unorthodox 'itinerary' of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels

In these two fragments, the two types of flying elements that leave from the tribune on the Mount of Olives are described. From this tribune come seven ropes, which I have distributed among the different flying elements, in the following way: five ropes for the cloud that we will now describe, and two for the elevation of Jesus from the hill.

The cloud is described as a circle that incorporates other smaller circles that revolve around themselves. In these spheres to give a more cloudy image, it has also been commented that it would be covered with cotton. From this cloud image emerges a kind of platform on which two angels are located, although later Jesus will join as well. For the ascension of Jesus, a simpler type of flight is used, made only with ropes. The character representing Jesus will hide behind the hill and once attached to the ascension mechanism will be lifted up until it meets the cloud. Also no possibility that it was carried out with a platform, but then the bishop would have mentioned it and not said that it seemed to walk on air. Therefore the strings were tied to the actor himself.

The Ascension



“Also from that place, that is to say, through the middle of the church platform, there come three thin and strong ropes, with the fourth below these three and the platform. Between the platform and the altar there are very thin strings.

[...]

While they watch, the curtains of that arranged place, that is to say, of the highest heaven, are promptly opened [...] And from the Father and the Son above descend two little children upon the aforementioned four ropes, bumping into each other with their shoulders, and made to look, with their gilded hair and garments, just like angels, with gilded wings and angelic stoles over each of them.” *Unorthodox ‘itinerary’ of an orthodox Bishop: Abraham of Suzdal and his travels*

In these two paragraphs we observe the description of the last flight effect of the work: it is the flight of two angels made from the stone chamber, which the bishop calls “the highest heaven”. Therefore I deduce that it is in a higher position than the tribune. This flight is also simple as it is done with only 4 ropes and pulleys in the vertical direction.

The Annunciation

