

Misteri d'Elx

Guide to the Representation

First Act or "Vespra"

When the solemn Vespers of the Assumption of the Virgin, which are sung on the same stage of La Festa or Mystery of Elche by the clergy of the basilica of Saint Mary are finished, the first act of Elche's sacred drama starts. It is generally known by the name of la Vespra, as opposed to the second act which is called La Festa.

At six o'clock in the afternoon an escort procession leaves from the nearby hermitage of Saint Sebastian to guide the performers to the parish church. It is headed by the chief priest of Saint Mary's, the Elected knights and the "Caballero" who bears the standard. The gentlemen wear tail coats and the first two carry golden sticks as a sign of their authority. Behind them come the characters of the play, followed by members of the National Trust for the Mystery of Elche, the governing body entrusted with the organization and custody of the drama of the Assumption. The short progress to the basilica is led by the Municipal Band playing an arrangement of a pasodoble from Elche, entitled The Fan.

The performance starts when the Virgin and her companions appear at the main door of the church. The Mother of Christ is represented by a young boy dressed in a white robe and blue cloak, wearing a golden halo on his head. Her little entourage is made up of Mary Salome and Mary Jacobi, who are dressed in a similar manner to the Virgin and have their names written on their respective haloes. With them are two angels of the cushions- so called because they carry red velvet cushions on their outstretched hands- and four angels in cloaks. All these characters are also played by boys, as the liturgical origin of the religious medieval theatre did not permit the participation of women.

As soon as the little singers appear through the doorway of the church, the organ plays. The Virgin Mary, called in Elche la María, and her escort remain very near the door, at the beginning of the andador, the gangway which takes the form of an inclined plane leading from the door to the stage or cadafal, built between the transepts and the sanctuary. Meanwhile, the priest and Caballeros go up the mentioned andador and occupy their places on ceremonial seats, situated at a widened part of the andador, just next to the door on to the stage. The boy who represents the Mother of God faces the main altar of the church sings to his companions, asking them for help on a day so important to her:

Germanes mies, jo voldria
fer certa petició aquest dia:
prec-vos no em vullau deixar
puix tant me mostrau amar.

My sisters, I would like
to make a plea this day:
I beg you not to leave me
as you show me so much love.

The members of Mary's entourage answer with another chant in which they demonstrate their absolute fidelity:

Verge i Mare de Déu,
on Vós voldreu anar
vos irem a acompanyar.

Virgin and Mother of God,
wherever You want to go
we will accompany You.

The Virgin Mary moves forward a few steps and, kneeling on the two red cushions which the angels carried, expresses her wish to join her Son:

Ai, trista vida corporal!

Oh, unhappy bodily existence!

Oh, món cruel, tan desigual!
Trista de mi! Jo que faré?
Lo meu car Fill, quan lo veuré?

Oh, cruel world, so unjust!
Unhappy me! What shall I do?
When shall I see my dear Son?

Mary, always surrounded by her entourage, begins her ascent along the andador. On her way she stops on three occasions. In each of them she kneels on the two cushions and turns towards certain small sculpted reliefs on the pillars of the nave of the church, carrying out a kind of Via Dolorosa recalling the Passion of Christ.

The first of these sacred places represents the Garden of Gethsemane, and in front of it the Virgin sings:

Oh, Sant Verger Getsemaní
on fonc pres lo Senyor aquí!
En tu finà tracte cruel
contra el Senyor d'Israel (1).

Oh, Holy Garden of Gethsemane
where Our Lord was made prisoner!
In you ended the cruel conspiracy
against the Lord of Israel.

(1) This chant is omitted in the dress rehearsals, although the corresponding dramatic action is retained.

A few steps further on, she stops in front of the representation of the Mount Calvary:

Oh, Arbre Sant digne d'honor,
car sobre tots ets lo millor!
En tu volgué sang escampar
Aquell qui lo món volgué salvar.

Oh, Holy Tree, Worthy of honour,
since you are the best of all!
On you He wanted to shed blood
He who wanted to save the world.

Finally, she kneels near the Holy Sepulchre and sings:

Oh, Sant Sepulcre virtuos,
en dignitat molt valerós,
puix en tu estigué i reposà
Aquell qui cel e món crea.

Oh, pure Holy Sepulchre,
most worthy of honour,
since He was inside you and rested,
Who created heaven and earth.

After these chants, the entourage continues its progress towards the cadafal. This is square in shape, covered with a thick carpet in the same colours as that of the andador, and is surrounded by a small Baroque balustrade. On this railing, twelve thick candles glow, lighting up the stage. On the left, a bed covered with white veiling can be seen. On the right there are eight seats destined for the characters of Mary's entourage.

The Virgin kneels in the above described bed, facing the main door of the church, and the two Marias and the cushion-bearing and cloaked angels arrange themselves standing around her. From this place, the Mother of God again expresses her overwhelming desire to be in the company of her Son:

Gran desig m'ha vengut al cor
del meu car Fill ple d'amor
tan gran que no ho podria dir
on, per remei, desig morir.

Great desire has filled my heart,
for my beloved Son full o love,
so great that I cannot express it
and, for relief, I wish to die.

When Mary has finished singing this plea, the doors of heaven, which are represented in la festa in the dome of the church, are opened. Heaven is made up of a canvas painted with clouds which completely covers the main drum of the dome. Only a square aperture, coinciding with the centre of the cadafal, can be opened and closed by means of sliding doors, the doors of heaven. Through the gap left by these doors, a machine known as the cloud or the pomegranate begins to descend, first appearing in the form of a sphere, suspended from a stout rope. It is crimson, and its exterior is adorned with geometrical patterns and gilt decoration. From the lower end hangs a beautiful golden tail.

Once it has gone through the door of heaven, and by means of guy-ropes, the pomegranate starts opening into eight wings or segments. Its interior, which is totally covered in golden tinsel paper, reveals a boy dressed in a sky blue robe with wings on his shoulders, who represents an angel. In his hands he holds a golden palm. The opening of heaven and the emergence of the aerial machine are accompanied by organ music, pealing of bells and firework display. When the cloud has descended a few metres, this show of jubilation ends, and the angel, after dropping a handkerchief full of pieces of golden paper representing very fine golden rain, begins his singing. He greets Mary with this song, announcing to her that Christ has listened to her pleas and accedes to her wishes:

Déu vos salve Verge imperial,
Mare del Rei celestial,
jo us port saluts e salvament
del vostre Fill omnipotent.

God save you, Imperial Virgin
Mother of the celestial King,
I bring you greetings and salvation
from your omnipotent Son.

Lo vostre Fill qui tant amau
e ab gran goig lo desitjau,
Ell vos espera ab gran amor
per ensalçar-vos en honor.

Your Son, whom you love so much
and desire with great joy,
is waiting for you with great love,
to exalt you with honour.

E diu que al terç jorn, sens dubtar,
Ell ab sí us vol apel·lar
alt en lo Regne Celestial
per Regina angelical.

And He says that on the third day,
without doubt,
He wants to call you to Him
high in the Celestial Kingdom
to be the Queen of the angels.

E mana'm que us la portàs
aquesta palma i us la donàs,
que us la façau davant portar
quan vos porten a soterrar (2).

And He orders me to bring you
this palm, and to give it to you,
to be carried in front of you
when you are carried to your burial.

(2) In the present performances only the first verses of this chant are sung.

As soon as the pomegranate arrives at the cadafal, the members of the Virgin's entourage hurry to approach the machine and unfasten the cords which secure the little actor during his descent. Once he is released, the angel approaches Mary's bed and, kneeling in front of her, hands her the symbolic palm after touching it with his lips and forehead. The Mother of God, with the same ceremony, takes this special gift and expresses a new wish to the messenger of Christ, that the apostles be present at the moment of her death:

Angel plaent e lluminós,
si gracia trob jo davant vós,
un do vos vull demanar,
prec-vos no me'l vullau negar.

Welcome and shining angel,
if I find favour with you,
I would like to ask you a boon,
I beg you, do not deny it to me.

Ab mon ser, si possible és,
ans de la mia fi jo veés,
los Apòstols ací justar
per lo meu cos assoterrar (3).

If its is possible for me,
to see before my end
the apostles gathered here
to bury my body.

(3) This chant is omitted in dress rehearsals, but the dramatic action is retained.

After hearing this appeal, the angel gets into the pomegranate again where, secured with a strong leather belt to avoid accidents, begins to ascend to heaven, while reassuring the Virgin that her wishes will be fulfilled:

Los Apostols ací seran
i tots ab brevetat vindran,
car Déu qui és omnipotent
los portarà sobtosament.

The apostles will be here.
All of them will shortly come,
since God who is omnipotent
will suddenly bring them.

I, puix, Verge ho demanau,
lo etern Déu diu que li plau
que sien ací sens dilació
per vostra consolació. (4)

And since, Virgin, you ask it,
the eternal God says that He will be
pleased
that they be here without delay
for your consolation.

(4) In present performances, only the first verses of this chant are sung.

When the pomegranate arrives to the doors of heaven, these are opened with the same signs of jubilation as on the first occasion. Once the wings of the colud are closed, it starts to disappear through the doors again.

When the pomegranate is a few metres from heaven, on the cadafal the angels of the Virgin's entourage, as well as Mary Salome and Mary Jacobi, greet the Mother of Christ, genuflecting in front of her and then passing to the prepared seats on the opposite side of the stage. The two "Caballeros Electos" also get up from their seats of honour, and exit through the andador to the street. This action, which nowadays is merely symbolic, reminds us of the age in which they organized La Festa on behalf of the city council. Then they were guided by the priest of the church, who acted as master of ceremonies, to leave in search of the different actors who, waiting in the nearby hermitage of Saint Sebastian, needed to be brought on stage at the proper time. The Caballeros, therefore, really had the function of theatrical callboys.

A few moments after heaven has been closed behind the pomegranate, the Caballeros return to their seats, in that way pretending that they have gone to the chapel of Saint Sebastian to indicate to the actor who plays the part of the apostle Saint John that it is time for his entrance. Then the apostle appears at the end of the gangway. He is dressed in a white robe and green cloak. In his left hand he holds an old parchment book, symbolizing his own Gospel. As he moves up the central gangway, his face shows surprise at the incomprehensible force which is driving him in this direction. Towards the middle of the andador, when he sees the Virgin Mary kneeling on her bed, Saint John walks more quickly and greets his Mother kissing both her hands. His shining shows pleasure in the face of such an

unexpected encounter:

Saluts, honor e salvament
sia a Vós, Mare excel.lent
e lo Senyor, qui és del tro,
vos done consolació.

Greetings, honour and salvation
be with you, excellent Mother
and may the Lord of thunder,
grant You consolation.

Mary tells the most beloved disciple of Jesus all that the angel of the pomegranate has told her about the proximity of her death. Furthermore, when she has finished her chant, she gives him the golden palm which was brought down from heaven:

Ai fill Joan e amic meu
conforte-us lo ver Fill de Déu
car lo meu cor és molt plaent
del vostre bon adveniment (5).

Oh John, my son and friend
may the rue Son of God comfort you
since my heart is full of joy
by your happy arrival.

Ai fill Joan, si a vós plau,
aquesta palma vós prengau
e la'm façau davant portar
quan me porten a soterrar.

Oh son John, please,
take this palm
and have it borne in front of me
when I am carried to my burial.

(5) This chant is omitted in the dress rehearsals.

Saint John receives the present from Mary. On this occasion, as was the case in the presence of the angel, the handing over of the palm involves a rite of eastern influence, in which it is kissed and touched with the forehead. Then the favourite disciple sings, as one lost in thought, a wistful and emotional chant:

Ai, trista vida corporal!
Oh, món cruel, tan desigual!
Oh, trist de mi! on iré?
Oh, llas, mesquí! Jo que faré?

Oh, unhappy bodily existence!
Oh, cruel world, so unjust!
Oh, unhappy me! Where shall I go?
Oh, wretched snare! What shall I do?

Approaching Mary again, he exclaims:

Oh, Verge Reina imperial!
Mare del Rei celestial!
Com nos deixau ab gran dolor,
sens ningun cap ne regidor?

Oh, Virgin, Imperial Queen!
Mother of the celestial King!
Why do you leave us in great sorrow,
without any head or leader?

Immediately afterwards, Saint John moves to the entrance of the stage and, looking towards the main door of the church, calls his fellow apostles:

Oh, Apòstols e germans meus!

Oh, apostles and my brethren!

Veniu, plorem ab tristes veus,
car hui perdem tot nostre bé,
lo clar govern de nostra fe.

Come, weep with sad voices,
since today we lose all our favour,
the pure guidance of our faith.

Saint John returns to sing to Mary, expressing his sadness and confusion once again:

Sens Vós, Senyora, que farem?
E ab qui ens aconsolarem?
D'ulls e de cor devem plorar
mentres viurem e sospirar.

Without You, Lady, what shall we do?
And with whom shall we comfort
ourselves?
We must weep with our eyes and hearts,
for as long as we live, and sigh.

While Saint John is directing the preceding chant to Mary, the apostle Saint Peter starts going up the andador. He wears a grey robe and his shoulders are covered with a crimson cloak. He holds symbolically in his hands a bunch of golden keys, recalling those of the doors of heaven which Christ gave to him. It should be pointed out that this character has to be played by a priest, given his sacred role, as is the case with two others who will be pointed out later.

Saint Peter, showing the same gestures of surprise as Saint John, moves along the gangway little by little. On arriving in front of the bed of the Virgin, he greets her, kissing her hands, and then embraces Saint John. Saint Peter sings his address to Mary in a deep voice:

Verge humil, flor d'honor,
Mare del nostre Redemptor.
Saluts, honor e salvament
vos done Déu omnipotent.

Humble Virgin, folwer of honour,
Mother of our Redeemer.
Greetings, honour and salvation
may the omnipotent God give you.

At the same time that the notes of this chant resound, six more apostles go up the andador, simulating surprise. The apostles move closer to the cadafal and, after arriving on it, they approach the bed of the Virgin and greet her, kissing her hands and genuflecting in front of her. They also greet Saint Peter and Saint John with embraces of friendship. It should be pointed out that one of these six apostles is the Chapel Master, or musical director of the Mystery who, because he is also cast as an apostle, will be able to conduct the choir's canticles in a discreet way and without the public noticing his presence.

Simultaneously, on the andador, another scene of La Festa begins, the one known as the Ternari. At the beginning of the sloping gangway three apostles meet. Each of them enters through one of the rear doors of the church, i.e. the main door, the door of San Agatàngelo and the door of the Resurrection (erroneously called Saint John's door). One of these apostles is Saint James, who is dressed as a pilgrim, in a robe, a cloak decorated with shells, wearing his hat on his back, and carrying a stick surmounted by a gourd for water. This simultaneous entrance through different doorways symbolizes the meeting of the disciples at crossroads. The apostles greet each other and, astonished at being gathered together, they sing:

Oh, poder de l' Alt Imperi,
Senyor de tots los creats!
Cert és aquest gran misteri
ser ací tots ajustats.

Oh, power from the empire on high,
Lord of everything created!
Certainly this is a great mystery
to be here all gathered together.

De les parts d'ací estranyes
som venguts molt prestament,
passant viles i muntanyes
en menys temps d'un moment.

From foreign parts here
we have very quickly come,
crossing cities and mountains
in less than a moment of time.

They advance a few steps and then sing again:

Ab gran goig, sens impropri,
som ací en breu portats.
Cert és aquest gran misteri
ser ací tots ajustats.

With great joy, without harm,
we are swiftly transported here.
Certainly this is a great mystery
to be here all gathered together.

De les parts d'ací estranyes
som venguts molt prestament,
passant viles i muntanyes
en menys temps d'un moment.

From foreign parts here
we have very quickly come,
crossing cities and mountains
in less than a moment of time.

Once this chant is finished, the three apostles head for the cadafal. They arrive on it and, like the disciples who preceded them; they greet Mary, Saint Peter and Saint John. In this way the apostles gather, just as the angel of the cloud said they would, around the bed of the Virgin. There is only one exception, Saint Thomas, who will not appear until the end of the second act. The apostles sing all together a unique chant which is written both in Valencian and Latin. It constitutes a Salve dedicated to the Virgin, and the apostles begin it, kneeling. After the first verse, they stand up and, from that moment, they begin to bow in turn, by groups of voices-tenors, then baritones and then bases- as the chant is developed:

Salve Regina, princesa,
Mater Regis angelorum,
advocata peccatorum,
consolatrix afflictorum.

Hail Queen, Princess,
Mother of the King of angels,
advocate of sinners,
consoler of the afflicted.

L'omnipotent Déu, Fill vostre,
per nostra consolació,
fa la tal congregació,
en lo sant conspecte vostre.

The omnipotent God, your Son,
for our consolation,
such gathering,
in your holy presence.

Vós, molt pura e defesa,
reatus patrum nostrorum,
advocata peccatorum,
consolatrix afflictorum.

You, most pure and protected,
from the sin of our parents,
advocate of sinners,
consoler of the afflicted.

During the last verse of the Salve, all the apostles, except for Saint John, fall on their knees. Saint John, holding the golden palm. is the only character who stands up all the time throughout the play. After a few moments. Saint Peter

gets up and, addressing the Virgin Mary, he sings:

Oh, Déu, valeu! E que és açò
d'aquesta congregació?
Algun misteri amagat
vol Déu nos sia revelat.

Oh God, help me. What is the meaning
of this gathering?
A hidden mystery
God wants to be revealed to us.

Saint Peter kneels again; Mary Salome, Mary Jacobi and the angels of the Virgins entourage leave their seats and place themselves at the head of the Virgin's bed. The boy who plays the part of the Virgin Mary takes a thick lighted candle in his hands. This is the prelude to her death. With a flattering and sad voice she entrusts her sons to bury her body in the Valley of Jehoshaphat:

Los meus cars fills, puix sou venguts
i lo Senyor vos haja duts,
mon cos vos sia acomanat
lo soterrreu en Josafat.

My dear sons, since you have come
and the Lord has brought you,
may my body be entrusted to you
and be buried in Jehoshaphat.

After the last notes of the chant, la María drops as if dead on the bed. The apostles and the Marías approach to help her.

In fact, all the characters on the stage, while simulating to attempt to assist the Virgin, try to position in order to hide from the public view an interesting mechanical part of the sacred drama which takes place at this moment. After collapsing, the actor who represented the Mother of Christ is made to disappear into the interior of the cadafal through a trap-door under the bed. Then a little platform with the image of the Virgin of the Assumption, patroness of Elche, lying in state, is made to rise to the surface of the bed. In that way the image of Mary venerated in the basilica of Elche is brought on to the stage. Her face is covered with a mask, on which the eyes are closed in order to give a faithful representation of her death.

In front of the body of the Mother of God lying on the bed, the apostles, who hold lighted candles in their hands, sing a beautiful funeral chant in which they express hope of her future resurrection:

Oh, cos sant glorificat
de la Verge santa i pura,
hui seràs tu sepultat
i reinaràs en l'altura.

Oh, holy and glorified body
of the sanctified and pure Virgin,
today you will be buried
and will reign on high.

When this deeply moving chant of the apostles is over, the doors of heaven open again and the descent of an aerial machine called the araceli or recélica begins. This is a machine with the configuration of the reredos of an altar, built of iron, wrapped in golden foil. It is made up of four ledges symmetrically placed around a central niche. On the upper ledges there are two kneeling men-angels who play the guitar and the harp respectively. On the lower ledges there are two boy-angels, each with a small guitar. The central niche is assigned to the so-called Principal Angel, who appears standing up and wearing a priestly alb and stole. This character has to be played by a priest. As soon as the recélica has come through the doors of heaven, a rain of golden tinsel paper falls on the stage. The angelical chori starts its singing, telling Mary of her coming Assumption:

Esposa e Mare de Déu
a nós, àngels, seguireu.
Seureu en cadira real
en lo regne celestial.

Wife and Mother of God
you will follow us, angels.
will sit on a royal chair
in the celestial kingdom.

Car, puix en Vós reposa
Aquell qui cel e món crea,
deveu haver exalçament
e corona molt excel·lent.

Since in you rested
The one who created heaven and earth,
you should have exaltations
and a most excellent crown.

Apòstols e amics de Déu,
aquest cos sagrat pendreu
e portau-lo a Josafat
on vol sia sepultat (6).

Apostles and friends of God,
take this holy body
and carry it to Jenoshaphat
where it will be buried.

(6) In present performances only the first quatrain of this previous chant is performed.

When the Araceli arrives at the cadafal, without a stop to the singing it goes through the stage by a great central trap-door which has been opened secretly by the hands inside the stage. Its stay inside the stage, however, will be very brief: the time necessary for the Principal Angel to collect a small image of the Virgin dressed in white veiling. This tiny carved model represents the soul of Mary. With this, the separation of the soul from the body, the actual death of the Mother of Christ, is symbolized visually. On its ascent, the angels sing the same verses which they sang on their descent. And with the arrival of the Araceli in heaven the first act of the Mystery finishes. (This descent of the Araceli is omitted in the dress rehearsals in order not to make them too long.

The only remaining action is that now the priest of Saint Mary, the Caballero who bears the standard and the other Caballeros Electos, enter the cadafal to kiss the feet of the image of the dead Virgin. The Maries, angels of the entourage and the apostles follow suit. Last will be Saint John who, in addition, leaves the golden palm on top of the image of the Virgin, across her bosom. Afterwards the actors leave for the hermitage of Saint Sebastian, where they take off their costumes until the following day.

Second Act or "Festa"

The second act of the Mystery of Elche also begins with the singing of the Vísperas of the Assumption of Mary. In the same way as at the beginning of the first act, the actors depart again in the procession from the hermitage of Saint Sebastian which take them to the door of the basilica of Saint Mary. The priest and the three Caballeros enter along the andador. They kiss the feet of the image of the Virgin, whose funeral bier is situated on the right hand side of the stage, and then they take their seats. Behind them, the apostles enter and venerate the image of the Virgin too and arrange themselves around her. In this second act, Saint Peter has replaced his robe with an alb, stole and a white cope. During the time between La Vespra and La Festa, a great square pit enclosed by a balustrade has been opened up in the centre of the stage, representing the tomb, ready to receive the body of the Mother of Christ. For their part, Mary Salome, Mary Jacobi and the angels of the Virgin's entourage stop at the beginning of the andador, beside the main door of the church. Then three of the apostles sing a strophe, in which they decide to approach the place where the Virgin's entourage is waiting and invite them to her burial:

Par-nos, germans, devem anar
a les Maries nregar

It seems, brethren, that we should go
to ask the Maries

devotament vullen venir
per a la Verge sepelir.

if they will come devoutly
to bury the Virgin.

Then four apostles go down to the beginning of the gangway and, addressing to the Maries and angels, sing the following invitation:

A vosaltres venim pregar
que ensems anem a soterrar
la Mare de Déu gloriós,
puix tant de bé ha fet per nós.

We come to ask you
to go together to bury
the Mother of the glorious God,
since she has done so much good for us.

E anem tots
ab amor i alegria,
per amor del Redemptor
e de la Verge Maria.

And let us all go
with love and joy,
for the love of the Redeemer
and of the Virgin Mary.

To these words the entourage replies:

Vosaltres siau ben vinguts,
parents e amics de grans virtuts.
Promptes som per a anar
a la Verge soterrar.

You are welcome
family and friends of great virtue
We are ready to go
to bury the Virgin.

When the answer has been given in the affirmative, all move together up to the cadafal. On their arrival, the little actors of the Virgin's entourage kiss the feet of the image and immediately afterwards move towards the seats assigned to them which, in this second act, are placed on the left side of the stage.

Saint Peter then collects the palm which was laid on the body of the Virgin and singing to Saint John, asks him to carry it in the front of the body of Mary:

Preneu vós, Joan, la palma preciosa
e portau-la davant lo cos glorificat
car així ho dix la Verge gloriosa
ans que als cels se n'hagués pujat.

John, take the precious palm
and bring it in front of the glorified body,
since the glorious Virgin said to do so
before she went to heaven.

Saint John recognizing the power of Peter, power bequeathed by Christ himself, accepts the charge:

De grat prendré la palma preciosa
a compliré lo que heveu manat,
puix que heveu potestat copiosa
de condemnar e delir tot pecat.

I will willingly take the precious palm
and I will fulfil what you have ordered
since you have extensive power
to condemn and to wipe out all sin.

As in the first act, the transferral of the golden palm involves the ceremony of kissing it and lightly palcing it on the

forehead, both in giving and receiving it. Then all the apostles kneel around Mary's bier and start singing verses of praise in preparation for her burial:

Flor de virginal bellesa,
temple d'humilitat,
on la Santa Trinitat
fon enclosa e contesa.

Flower of virginal beauty,
temple of humilty,
where the Holy Trinity
was enclosed and held captive.

Pregam-vos, cos molt sagrat,
que de nostra parentat
vos acord tota vegada
quan sereu als cels pujada.

We pary you, most sacred body,
that our relationship
you constantly remember
whwn you are ascended to heaven.

When the chant is finished, everyone rises and begins to sing Psalm 114, In exitu Israel d'Egipto, customary in funeral rites. A large group of Jews, however, appears at the main door of the church, attracted by the canticles and led by the Chief Rabbi who stands out at their head. Whereas the majority of them stop at the beginning of the andador, two of them start going along the gangway with the intention of observing the origin of the music. Both Jews appear to speak together and to be surprised at such unusual chanting. They make gestures which indicate amazement. Suddenly, one of the two approaches the cadafal and discovers a group of apostles singing around the Virgin. Quickly, he calls his companion and both of them confirm the discovery. After a short run along the andador towards the large crowd of infidels, they explain, with gestures, all that they have just seen. The Jews get angry, talk among themselves, become more enraged, and decide to attack the group of Christ's apostles, to steal the body of Mary and to destroy it afterwards. In this way they want to avoid the apostles saying, after the burial of the Virgin, that she has resuscitated, as they did with Jesus. At a certain moment, the chanting of the apostles 'psalm is interrupted by the angry voice of the Chief Rabbi, backed up by the rest of the Jews who show their hostile intentions, going along the andador in a threatening attitude:

Aquesta gran novetat
nos procura deshonor;
anem tots a pas cuitat,
no comportem tal error.

This great piece of news
procures dishonour for us;
let us all go with swift steps,
not to permit such an error.

No és nostra voluntat
que esta dona soterreu,
ans de tota pietat
vos manam que ens la deixeu.

It is no tour will
that you bury this woman;
firstly, with all reverence
we order you to give her to us.

E si açò no fareu,
nosaltres cert vos direm
que us manam en quant podem,
per Adonai que ens la deixeu.

And if you do not,
we will surely say to you
that we order you, as we can
By Adonai, give her to us.

The surprised apostles crowd around the bier of the Mother of God while they try to see what is happening outside the stage. The Jews who acted as explorers stand out from the rest and go on ahead. The disciples, realizing their

stage. The Jews who acted as explorers stand out from the rest and go on ahead. The disciples, realizing their intentions, decide to go to stop them. First, Saint John and Saint Peter go down. The former, raising the palm, tries to stop a Jew who is approaching and Saint Peter behaves in the same way. They push and simulate a hand-to-hand fight, while the rest of the disciples place themselves in front of the bier to avoid its being desecrated. The large number of Jews who struggle forward, however, make the apostles move backwards on the cadafal while the singing continues. In spite of the intense opposition of the followers of Christ, the first Jew manages finally to arrive on the stage, to break the barrier and to approach Mary's bier. Just as he is about to seize the body of the Virgin, he is left paralyzed, with his hands stiff. His companions, as they arrive on the stage and witness this miracle, fall on their knees, repenting the action. They sing a chant in which they beg for help:

Oh, Déu Adonai
qui formis natura,
ajuda'ns Sabdai
saviesa pura!

Oh God Adonai
who created nature,
help us, Sabdai,
wisdom pure!

Som nós peneditis
de tot nostre cor.
Pregam-te, Senyor,
no vulles guarir.

We are repentant
with all our hearts.
We beg you, Lord,
to cure us, if you will.

Tal miracle mai
no féu creatura.
Ajudan'ns, sant Pere,
qui tens la procura!

Such a miracle was never
accomplished by any created thing.
Help us, Saint Peter,
you who have the power!

The disciples of Jesus, recognising the sincerity of the Jews' repentance, ask them to show their faith in the virginity of Mary in order that they may be forgiven:

Prohomens jueus. si tots creeu
que la Mare del Fill de Déu
tostemps fon verge, sens dubtar,
ans e après d'infantar.

Leaders of the Jews, if all of you believe
that the Mother of the Son of God
was a virgin at all times, without doubt,
before and after giving birth.

Pura fon e sens pecat
la Mare de Déu glorificat,
advocada dels pecadors.
creent açò guarireu tots.

That she was pure, without sin,
the Mother of the glorified God,
advocate of the sinners
believing in that, you will all be cured.

The Jews, who continue kneeling without moving, ask for help from the apostles whom they implore to baptise them, demonstrating their, firm belief in Mary as the Mother of God:

Nosaltres tots creem
que és la Mare del Fill de Déu.
Bateiau-nos tots en breu

We all believe
that she is the Mother of the Son of God.
Briefly baptise all of us

Dacjau-nos tots en Déu,
que en tal fe viure volem.

He they baptise all of us,
who want to live in such faith.

Saint Peter baptises the infidels touching their heads with the golden palm. At this moment they are miraculously cured and the Jew who was left with his hands stiff next to the bier manages to move them, and falls immediately to kiss his knees. Their joy of the Jews is transformed into song:

Cantem, senyors!
Que cantarem?
Ab clamors, façam gracies i llaors
a la humil Mare de Déu.

Let us sing, sirs!
What shall we sing?
Let us give thanks and praises with
shouting
to the humble Mother of God.

A ella devem servir
tot lo temps de nostra vida,
puix sa bondat infinida
nos vullgué així guarir.

We ought to serve her
all the days of our life,
since her infinitive kindness
wished to cure us thus.

Doncs cantem tots,
tots la lloem!
Ab clamors, façam gràcies i llaors
a la humil Mare de Déu.

Then, let us all sing,
we all praise her!
So let us give thanks and praises with
shouting
to the humble Mother of God.

When the infidels are cured of their affliction, they stand up, moving their hands to show that they are healed. Apostles and Jews together get ready to perform the burial of Mary. In this scene a little procession is developed around the cadafal. The movement of the procession, solemn despite the narrowness of the stage, starts with the cross raised, carried by one of the Jews. Groups of apostles and Jews follow. Behind them, the processional bier with the body of the Virgin is carried, under a canopy, by the actors themselves. Saint Peter, who acts as priest, the two Maries and the angels of the entourage come last. The funeral procession makes a complete circuit of the stage during which Psalm 114 is sung:

In exitu Israel d'Egipto
Domus Jacob de populo barbaro,
Facta est Judea sanctificatio eius,
Israel potestas eius.

When Israel went out of Egypt,
the house of Jacob from a strange people,
He made Judah his sanctuary,
and Israel his dominion.

Mare vidit, et fugit:
Jordanis conversus est retrorsum.
Montes exultaverunt ut arietes:
et colles sicut agni ovium.

The sea saw him and escaped:
the Jordan flowed backwards.
The mountains jumped like goats:
and the hills like lambs.

When the circuit of the cadafal has been completed, the bier with the image of the Virgin is returned to its former place and all the characters sing a beautiful chant in her veneration:

Ans d'entrar en sepultura
aquest cos glorificat
de la Verge santa i pura,
adorem-lo de bon grat.

Before it enters the tomb,
this glorified body
of the saintly and pure Virgin,
let us adore willingly.

Contemplant la tal figura,
ab contricció i dolor,
de la Verge santa i pura
en servei del Creador.

Looking at such an image
with contrition and sorrow,
of the saintly and pure Virgin,
in service of the creator.

Respectant la tal figura,
ser de tanta majestat,
de la Verge santa i pura,
adorem-lo de bon grat.

Offering respect to such a figure,
of such great majesty,
of the saintly and pure Virgin,
willingly let us adore her.

Immediately afterwards, the image of the Virgin is lifted in the arms of the apostles from the processional bier and placed in front of her simulated tomb, as referred to above, in the centre of the stage. The figure is placed on a beautiful embroidered canvas and her head, reclining on cushions, is rested on the balustrade of the sepulcher. Saint Peter, kneeling in front of her, censens three times following customary funeral practice. The apostles and Jews, standing around, sing *In exitu Israel d'Egipto* once again. When the ceremony is finished, the body of Mary is lowered into the sepulcher in the canvas. And at that precise moment the organ plays to announce that the doors of heaven have been opened and the *araceli* has started descending. As in *La Vespra*, four angels play guitars and harp and the Àngel Major carries the soul of the Virgin in his hands. The beautiful singing of the angelic choir fills the church with the promise of resurrection:

Llevantau's, Reina excel·lent,
Mare de Déu omnipotent.
Veni, sereu coronada
en la celestial morada.

Rise up, excellent Queen,
Mother of omnipotent God.
Come up and you will be crowned
in the celestial dwelling-place.

Alegrau's que hui veureu
de qui sou Esposa e Mare
e també veureu lo Pare
del car Fill i etern Déu.

Be happy, because today you will see
he of whom you are Wife and Mother,
also you will see the Father
of the dear Son and eternal God.

Allí estareu sens tristor
on pregareu per lo pecador
e reinareu eternament,
contemplant Déu onnipotent. (9)

There you will be without sorrow,
where you will pray for the sinner,
and you will reign eternally,
contemplating omnipotent God.

(9) In present day performances, only the first quatrain of this chant is sung

As soon as the araceli arrives at the cadafal, it goes into the interior through the same opening or trap-door that was used to bury the body of Mary. Moreover, in precisely the same place, under this trap-door, a pit has been dug out in the church, allowing the aerial machine to be able to go under the stage completely. Throughout the rest of the year, this pit is covered with boards and can be observed at the entrance to the presbytery of Saint Mary's. Once the araceli is hidden from the public view, the substitution on the celestial device of the Virgin's image for the Àngel Major takes place. She is cared for and adorned by her attendants, and secured tightly on to the apparatus. After that, the recélica starts ascending to heaven. The image of Mary, with her gown spread out, and now without the death mask which simulated her death, appears as if resuscitated. Thus is reflected mimetically, the reunion of the soul, which descends from heaven, with the body which had been buried in the ground; that is the Assumption of the Mother of Christ in body and soul.

The ascent of the araceli, with its angels singing the same canticle as in their descent, is held up mid way, suspended between heaven and the cadafal. AT that moment the two Caballeros Electos who, a few minutes ago, had gone out to find the remaining apostle, Saint Thomas, return to the church. According to tradition he was preaching in India. He makes gestures of astonishment, since, like his apostle companions, he does not understand the reason for such a long mysterious journey. Suddenly, after moving forward a few metres along the central gangway, understands that it must be Mary's:

Oh, bé és fort desaventura
de mi trist, desaconsolat,
que no em sia ací trobat
en esta santa sepultura!

Oh, what a great misfortune
for me, sad and disconsolate,
not no be present here
at this holy tomb!

He moves forward a few steps and stops amazed, almost frightened, when he discovers high up, suspended in the air, the Virgin, surrounded by angels. It is at this moment that he addresses his Mother to ask her forgiveness for his delay:

Prec-vos, Verge excel·lent,
Mare de Déu omnipotent.
Vós m'hajau per excusat
que les Índies m'han ocupat.

I ask you, excellent Virgin,
Mother of omnipotent God.
that you excuse me
that the Indies have occupied me.

Saint Thomas falls on his knees once he has finished his moving chant. Heaven opens its doors and, with soft music from the organ, the coronació, a little aerial device of similar structure to the araceli but of smaller dimensions, begins to descend. It is formed of a kind of central seat, occupied by the Eternal Father, and on either side of him, kneeling on ledges, two boys who represent the other two persons of the Holy Trinity. God the Father is the third of the characters in the Mystery who has to be played by a priest. Slowly the Trinity approaches the araceli, while its occupants sing the following chant:

Vós siau ben arribada
a reinar eternalment,
on tantost, de continent,
per Nós sereu coronada.

You are welcome
to reign eternally,
in a place where now, straight away,
you will be crowned by Us.

As the Eternal Father sings the final part of this canticle, he lets go of the golden imperial crown which he holds in his hands, tied on a string. Little by little it descends the few metres which separate both machines. At the same time

golden rain from heaven engulfs the characters and, finally, the crown is placed on Mary's head.

That moment is inexpressible. The crowd who fill the church burst out in applause and cheering. All the bells of the church, outside and inside peal. A salvo of fireworks is displayed on the roof-terraces of Saint Mary's. The organ, with all its stops opened, plays a tutti. 'Long live the Mother of God!' is shouted aloud by actors and spectators alike. This is La Festa's climax, the high-point of the Mystery. The Virgin, patroness of Elche, has been crowned as Queen of all creation in the presence of all the people.

The oldest of the extant known texts of the Mystery, dated at 1625, indicates that the chant of the Holy Trinity was corrected by Comes, Licenciado, and music master of the Palacio Real. It seems, however, that the correction, which follows, was never performed, and, for that reason, this second lyric is not sung nowadays.

Veni, Mare excel·lent,
puix que virtut vos abona,
ab esta imperial corona
reinareu eternalment.

Come, excellent Mother,
since you are all virtue,
with this imperial crown
you will reign eternally.

While the Coronation of Mary is taking place, the apostles and Jews on the cadafal observe the moving scene. They understand that the Virgin is not in the tomb which they surround because she has been resuscitated and is going, crowned, far up into heaven. For that reason, they lift their hands on high, and join in the action, receiving the profuse golden rain of tinsel paper which fills the stage and its surroundings. Saint Thomas walks the remaining steps to arrive on stage, where he greets and embraces Saint Peter and Saint John. The latter strips the leaves off the golden palm and descending from the stage makes his way among the people with difficulty. He climbs up to the platforms which have been raised on the sides of the church for official guests, and gives the leaves of this palm to the city's mayor and to the president of the Patronato del Misteri. (This action doesn't take place during dress rehearsals).

When the Holy Trinity arrives at the dome, the araceli starts ascending. The applause continues without abatement. The sound of the organ fills the confines of the basilica. And as a culminating moment, through into heaven, the apostles and Jews sing a Gloria of thanksgiving:

Gloria Patri et Filio
et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principio
et nunc et semper
et in saecula saeculorum.
Amen.

Glory be to the Father and Son
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning
is now, and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

The araceli, with the image of the Virgin, is bidden farewell with loud applause. Then the actors leave in two files for the hermitage of Saint Sebastian. Bringing up the rear come Saint John, Saint James and Saint Peter, and, following them, the priest and, last of all, the three Caballeros. The Mystery play of Elche, La Festa d'Elx, is over.