

CREATION OF THE WORLD AND CREATION OF ADAM AND EVE

Theme: The Creation of the world includes the Creation of mankind, that is to say, the first man and woman who were called in Christian culture Adam and Eve.

Keywords: Creation of the world, Creation of Adam and Eve, Christian Iconography, Old Testament, Genesis.

Summary: According to Genesis 1-2, the Creation of the world was achieved in seven days divided in three main periods: in the first one, which lasted four days, God put order into chaos; in the second one, which lasted the 5th and 6th days, God filled the world with natural creatures; and in the third period, which only covered the 7th day, God admired his creation.

Let's take into consideration what happened each day. On the first day light and darkness were divided. On the second day heavenly waters (the clouds) and earthly waters (seas, oceans, and rivers) were separated¹. On the third day the seas and oceans were separated from land and plants. On the fourth day God created the Sun, the Moon, and the stars, in order to make a difference between day and night. On the fifth day birds and fishes were created. On the sixth day earthy animals and mankind were created, but the process of creation changes depending on which Genesis chapter is being followed. According to Genesis 1, after having created earthy animals, God created mankind, male and female at the same time, as a reflection of himself and as a culmination of his work. By contrast, according to Genesis 2, first God created man by sculpting him with clay, then he cultivated the Garden of Eden (putting there the tree of life and the tree of science), later he created the animals with the aim of giving company to the man, and afterwards the man gave names to each animal. Finally, God noticed that no animal was equivalent to man. Thus, God made the man fall in a heavy sleep, took one of his ribs and, with it, created the woman. To conclude the creation cycle, on the seventh day God blessed his creation and rested.

Attributes and types of representation: there is at least three ways of depicting creation. Firstly, it may be depicted as a cycle, that is to say, showing what happened each day (ex. San Pedro de Rodas Bible, 11th century; the Monreale Cathedral's mosaics, 12th century; Gerona Creation tapestry, 12th century). Secondly, it can be depicted understanding the creation as an ordering activity, that is to say, under the image of God as a geometrician or a mathematician shaping the world with a compass (ex. Saint Louis Bible, Toledo Cathedral, 13th century). And thirdly, it can be depicted by choosing the most important moment, the sixth day, when Adam and Eve appeared (ex. Saint Savin sur Gartempe wall painting, ca. 1100; Aberdeen Bestiary, ca. 1200).

The *Cosmocrator* iconography or God as mathematician is linked to the opposition between order and chaos of the beginning of Genesis. Moreover, it is linked to the Christian notion of order as a synonym of beauty, goodness, perfection, and divinity.² Allain de Lille (12th century) stated that "*God's mind shapes the world by using the*

¹ Louis Réau stated that the division between earthly and heavenly waters implies the scientific knowledge of clouds formed by evaporated water of oceans, seas, and rivers. (RÉAU, Louis (1955-1959): *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*. Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, vol. II- part I, p. 69)

² Christian thought is not completely original concerning that question. In fact, the main role given to numbers in Middle Ages was inherited from Antiquity Pythagoreans. According to Pythagoreans, numbers are the origin of all the things, and of course, also of arts and music.

number”.³ No doubt, such statements must have been behind the depiction of God as a geometrician who uses a compass to shape a sphere, that is to say, a perfect mathematic form, without beginning nor end, with aquatic and chaotic content from where ordered creation emerges. An example can be seen in the Saint Louis Bible of the Toledo Cathedral, 13th century, and the Holy Spirit Altarpiece of Santa María de Manresa church, by Pere Serra, 1394.

When artists depicted the creation as a narrative cycle, the Creator used to be represented as the Syrian Christ, blessing his work each day of the week. The first day, when light and darkness were separated, could be understood in a symbolic way, that is to say, as a synonym of the creation of the angels, since they were conceived as creatures of light (see for example the Monreale Cathedral's mosaics, 12th century, and The Hague moralised Bible, 15th century). But a literal interpretation of Genesis 1, 1-5 can also be made. Verse number two states that in the beginning *the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters*. Consequently, the Spirit could be depicted under a dove shape (as the Holy Spirit), emerging from the abyss and flanked by the personifications of light and darkness, as it happened in the central top image of the Gerona tapestry, 12th century.

The second day represents the separation between the sky's and the earth's waters, what is usually depicted by dividing the image into two parts, one on the top and another one in the bottom, made of different colours, but both of them with waving lines suggesting water movements (ex. Monreale's mosaics, 12th century; left image in the Gerona tapestry, 12th century). The third day is showed strictly following Genesis. Thus, the image of a landscape where sea, earth, and plants are clearly separated is common (ex. Monreale mosaics, 12th century). In order to indicate the creation of the stars taking place on the fourth day, two personifications of the sun and the moon appear in works of art (see for ex. the two figures on top, on both sides, of San Pedro de Rodas Bible, 11th century, and the right image of the Gerona tapestry, 12th century). Nevertheless God can be depicted putting the stars in the sky, also as a synonym of the fourth day of creation (ex. Palermo palatine chapel mosaics, 12th century). Generally there is a clearly difference between the creation of birds and fishes taking place on the fifth day (ex. bottom image of Gerona tapestry, 12th century; Palermo palatine chapel mosaics and Monreale cathedral, 12th century) and the creation of quadruped animals taking place on the sixth day. According to Genesis 1, quadrupeds had been created before Adam's birth (ex. Monreale and Palermo, 12th century); according to Genesis 2, it is Adam who gave names to the animals, all of them created after him, which indicates the superiority of human being over other animal species (ex. right middle image of Gerona tapestry, 12th century; Agios Nikolaos Anapafsas, 16th century).

The sixth day was the one that usually captured all the attention of artists who often included details taken from the second chapter of Genesis, since this one had more details than the first one. Thus, God can be depicted giving form to man with clay (ex. San Pedro de Rodas Bible, 11th century), blowing life on him (ex. see the beam of light linking God and Adam in Palermo and Monreale, 12th century), or linking his finger to that of his creature as in the extraordinary painting of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel (end of 15th century). Afterwards we could find Adam sleeping (ex. Saint Savin sur Gartempe, ca. 1100), God the Creator with a rib in his hand before giving form to Eve (ex. San Pedro de Rodas Bible, 11th century), or Eve emerging from Adam's

³ BEIGBEDER, Olivier (1989): *Léxico de los símbolos*. Encuentro, Madrid, p. 319.

abdomen (ex. façade of the Orvieto Cathedral, by Lorenzo Maitani, beginning of 14th century). We could also find God and the first man walking through the Garden of Eden (ex. Monreale, 12th century) or God introducing Eve to Adam and blessing their union (ex. The Garden of Earthly Delights, Hieronimus Bosch, 1500-1510, Prado Museum). In certain examples, Adam and Eve's meeting could include non-biblical details, such as Adam's beard anecdote, probably suggested in Saint Savin sur Gartempe paintings, ca. 1100.⁴ Both the man and the woman are depicted as naked adults, since the shame caused by their nudity arrived just after eating the forbidden fruit from the Tree of Science.

Seventh day is much simpler than the sixth one. That day God just sits down and has a rest, admiring the world (ex. Monreale, 12th century).

Primary sources: From an iconographic point of view, the most influential text was Genesis 1-2. Other written sources paid attention to the Creation of the World, by giving complementary or alternative explanations to the biblical description. Nevertheless their influence on works of art was slight. Thus, some of the sources that we could consider are:

- Genesis 1-2 (Bible, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>)
- Adam's Creation and Adam's Partners, according to the Hebrew sources edited by GRAVES, Robert; PATAI, Raphael (1964): *Hebrew Myths. The Book of Genesis*, Doubleday, New York. [for the Spanish translation, click on the associated file]
- Juana de la Cruz (1481-1534), *Libro del Conorte*, chapter 72 "About the creation of Heaven, Earth, and Man", edited by GARCÍA ANDRÉS, Inocente (1999): *El conhorto: sermones de una mujer. La Santa Juana (1481-1534)*. Fundación Universitaria Española, Madrid, Vol. I-II, pp. 143-145 [for the Spanish translation, click on the associated file]

Other sources, non written sources: it is not possible to assess the influence of the liturgy in the iconography of Creation cycles. Nevertheless it is easy to check the influence of non Christian cultures on Creation images (for more details see section *Precedents, transformations and projections*).

Geographical and chronological framework: it is difficult to find a complete Creation cycle at the beginning of the Middle Ages; thus the first depictions seem to have been made not before 11th and 12th centuries. Before these dates, it is possible to find just the creation of man and woman (never the complete cycle), as seen in the example of the Carolingian Bible of Charles the Bald (9th century).

Artists and theologians seem to have paid more attention to original sin than to mankind's creation, maybe because the lost of grace made it necessary to have a redemption, one of the main ideas of Christian beliefs. In fact, there are depictions of the original sin since Early Christian Art (ex. Saint Peter and Saint Marcelline Catacomb, Rome, 3rd century), but not of the creation of the world.

⁴ Beard means also authority, so that certain authors believed that God had given a beard to Adam in order to increase his authority over Eve. One of the sources of that belief is the one of chapter 72 ("Que trata de la creacion de los çielos e la tierra e de todas las cosas que en ellos son e del hombre a imagen e semajança de Dios") in the *Libro del Conorte* by Juana de la Cruz, 1481-1534 (for more details, see part *primary sources*). Although wall paintings in Saint Savin are dated at the beginning of 12th century, several centuries before Juana de la Cruz's writings, the idea of beard equivalent to authority could have been present, so that God holds Adam's beard to insist on that symbol. Anyway, that is just a possible interpretation.

It was between the 11th and the 15th century when the Cosmocrator, the Creation of Mankind, and the Creation of the World Cycle became more and more frequent in Western Europe: France (ex. Saint Savin sur Gartempe, ca. 1100), Italy (Monreale and Palermo, 12th century), the Iberian Peninsula (Gerona Creation Tapestry, 12th century; inside part of the arch before the altar in San Justo de Segovia church, beginning of the 13th century), etc.

Artistic media and techniques: generally speaking, all the artistic media and techniques, without restrictions, could have been used for depicting the Creation cycles. So, there are examples over wall painting (Saint Savin sur Gartempe and San Justo de Segovia), mosaics (Palermo and Monreale), textiles (Gerona Tapestry), illuminated manuscripts (Charles the Bald Bible or Aberdeen Bestiary), monumental sculpture (Orvieto), panel painting (The Garden of Earthly Delights), etc.

Precedents, transformations and projection: according to Robert Graves and Raphael Patai (1964), there are many precedents of Christian Creation among the civilizations of Antiquity and the Near East, at least in terms of literary sources.

Thus, “Genesis 1 sounds like Babylonian cosmologies, since both of them tell about the Earth emerging from the primitive watery chaos, being that explanation a metaphor of dry ground emerging from the Tigris’s and Euphrates’s winter floods every year. Creation is described as the spring season, when birds and animals mate”.⁵ Moreover, the image of the Spirit of God flying over primitive waters of Genesis 1 seems to be linked to that one of a Phoenician myth quoted by Philo of Byblos.⁶

On the other hand, the creation of mankind by using clay, sand, or dust is a common topic among Egyptians (God Ptah created man by using a pottery wheel), Babylonians (God Ea mixed man by using clay) and Greeks (Prometheus give form to men by using clay⁷).

Regarding the first biblical human being, there could have been an influence of the Babylonian poem *Enuma Elish* (7th century B.C.), which explains that the creation of mankind was made by mixing *blood and stones*⁸. That explanation is more or less similar to Eve’s creation by shaping Adam’s rib. Another source of this part of Genesis could be found in Greek mythology. In fact, Athena emerging from her father Zeus’ forehead seems very similar to Eve emerging from Adam’s side.

Graves and Patai (1964) affirm that the idea of God giving a similar female partner to Adam, after having realised the great gap between man and animals, could have been a

⁵ GRAVES, Robert; PATAI, Raphael (2000): *Los mitos hebreos*, Alianza Editorial, Madrid, p. 24

⁶ Ibidem, p.31

⁷ For more details see *Olympos: repertorio iconográfico de mitología clásica*. More specifically, GONZÁLEZ ZYMLA, Herbert “Prometeo: perfil mitológico”, *Olympos: repertorio iconográfico de mitología clásica*, p. 6, PIMCD 2008-2010 directed by prof. Rodríguez López, available on http://campusvirtual.ucm.es/SCRIPT/portal-5859886-1/scripts/serve_home and also on <http://www.ucm.es/centros/webs/fghis/index.php?tp=Investigaci%F3n&a=invest&d=7861.php>, last access 10-06-2010.

⁸ A Spanish translation of *Enuma Elish* Poem could be read through http://www.cervantesvirtual.com/historia/TH/cosmogonia_mesopotamia.shtml (last access on 17-06-2010). An English translation is available on <http://www.sacred-texts.com/ane/enuma.htm> (last access on 23-09-2010)

reminiscence of ancient zoophilia and it could have been linked to the Acadian myth of Enkidu and Aruru quoted in the Poem of Gilgamesh.⁹

Taking into account all these precedents, Christian art produced its own depiction of Creation, which did not suffer from many variations from its literary account, as it was explained in the section entitled *attributes and types of representation*. The main changes just concerned the image of the Creator. Usually, he was depicted as the Son or the Syrian Christ. Nevertheless, from the 14th century onwards, he could occasionally be depicted as God the Father, old, with white hair, and a papal tiara (ex. Nicolaus de Lyra, Bibliothèque Municipale Troyes, ms. 0129, fol. 035, ca. 1480). The image of God the Father would become more and more popular in Modern Times, as it can be seen throughout the Sistine Chapel's ceiling paintings.

Typology and related themes: in general terms, the Creation cycle does not take part in the Christian typology system. However, some medieval theologians compared Eve emerging from Adam's side to the Church emerging from the wound in Christ's side.

Images:

- Creation Cycle, San Pedro de Rodas Bible (Spain), 11th century.
- Creation Cycle, Gerona Cathedral's Tapestry (Spain), 12th century.
- Creation Cycle, Mosaics in the Monreale Cathedral in Sicily (Italy), 12th century.
- Adam's creation and First meeting of Adam and Eve, Wall painting in Saint Savin sur Gartempe (France), 12th century.
- God as a geometrician, Saint Louis Bible, fol. 1, Toledo Cathedral (Spain), 13th century.
- Eve's creation, Lorenzo Maitani, Façade of Orvieto Cathedral (Italy), beginning of 14th century.
- Eve's creation, Nicolaus de Lyra, ms. 0129, fol. 035, Bibliothèque Municipale de Troyes (France), end of 15th century.
- Adam giving names to animals, Wall painting in Agios Nikolaos Anapafsas Monastery (Greece), 16th century.
- First meeting of Adam and Eve, The Garden of Earthly Delights, Hyeronimus Bosch, 1500-1510, Prado Museum (Spain), beginning of the 16th century.

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⁹ GRAVES, R.; PATAI, R, 2000, op.cit., p. 75.

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