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“From the Dust of the Earth”: The First Man’s Formation as an Essential Part of the Theological Message of the Iconography of the Atrium Mosaics in San Marco, Venice

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Abstract

Visual representations of biblical themes reflect interpretive and theological controversies. This article explores the way in which the atrium mosaics in San Marco in Venice mirror the textual difficulties and contradictions in the creation stories of Genesis 1–2, with reference to the history of Christian and Jewish biblical interpretations. I suggest that the mosaics depict the creation of the world in the first five days, as narrated in Genesis 1 and portray Adam's formation, on the sixth day, “from the dust of the earth” according to Genesis 2, thus merging the two creation narratives and creating a harmonious linear sequence with the presentation of the Eden narrative in Genesis 3. Formed from untilled, virgin soil, Adam became the most significant element of the christological theme that pervades the atrium, underscoring Christ's immaculate conception. This reading excludes any need to assert that a specific model served the atrium mosaicists, their portrayal of the first man on the sixth day being the consequence of theological reflection. It also goes against the grain of twenty-first century research, which regards the atrium as exhibiting clear Marian motifs.¹

1. Introduction

The Patriarchal Cathedral Basilica of San Marco is designed in the shape of a cross and covered with domes in the Byzantine tradition, the interior being decorated with mosaics picturing biblical themes. Events from Christ's life as recorded in the New Testament are represented within the church, the atrium treating episodes from Genesis and Exodus (Fig. 1). Forming the passageway from the square into the church, the atrium was decorated in the thirteenth century with golden mosaics in cupolas, vaults, and lunettes (Fig. 2).

* This article was submitted by Yaffa England in 2022 shortly before she passed away.

¹ Krause, *Venedigs Sitz im Paradies*, 36–40; Reed, *Blessing the Serpent*, *passim*; Dale, *Pictorial Narratives*, 69, 251, 263; Dale, *Epiphany at San Marco*, 12 (first published in 2014 by AIEMA [Association Internationale pour l'Étude de la Mosaïque Antique]).

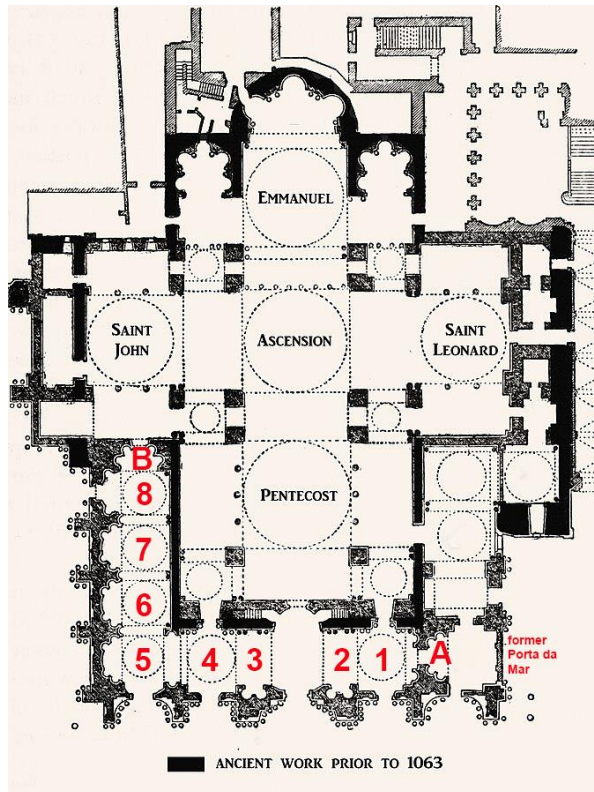


Fig. 1 Plan of San Marco, Venice. Plan of the atrium: 1) Creation + Cain and Abel; 2/3) Noah; 4) Abraham + Isaac's birth; 5/6/7): Joseph; 8) Moses. A) Madonna and child flanked by angels. Mosaic over the entrance into the atrium, Cappella Zen, former Porta da Mar; B) Madonna and child, flanked by St. John and St. Mark. Mosaic above the Porta Della Madonna.



Fig. 2 Overview of the atrium cupolas with golden mosaics Basilica di San Marco, Venice).



Fig. 3 The Creation Cupola (Basilica di San Marco, Atrium, west arm, south cupola).

The narrative is divided into seven chapters, starting with the first cupola (the creation cupola) and lunettes, which illustrate the creation, fall, and Cain and Abel (Fig. 3). Concluding with Moses' cupola portraying episodes from Moses' life. The figures from the Hebrew Bible become part of the Christian history of salvation – from the fall of man through to the advent of Christ.²

² Cf. Procuratoria di San Marco di Venezia, Patriarchal Cathedral Basilica of Saint Mark. The Iconographic Repertory, 2018 (<http://www.basilicasanmarco.it/basilica/mosaici/il-repertorio-iconografico/?lang=en>; accessed 5.6.2020).

Art historians have studied these for well over a century – the Twelfth International Conference of AIEMA in 2012 being dedicated to the Atrium of San Marco, for example.

2. The creation cupola: The debate over its visual source

The creation cupola is set in three concentric circles around a central ornamental disk. Covering the first six days of creation, it culminates with the blessing of the seventh day (Gen 1:1–2:7), each day being represented by an angelic figure. This is followed by the story of the Garden of Eden and the expulsion of Adam and Eve as set forth in Genesis 2:8–3:24.

The cupola has been the subject of intensive research since the Finnish art historian Johan Jakob Tikkanen first observed the close relationship between the Genesis mosaics and some watercolor copies of the miniatures of the so-called Cotton Genesis – an illustrated Greek manuscript from around the end of the fifth century.³ Almost destroyed by fire in 1731 and now only extant in charred fragments, its fragmentary state has prompted debate over whether it served as the model for the atrium mosaics.

Prominent Byzantine art historians Kurt Weitzmann and Herbert Kessler maintain that the Cotton Genesis miniatures served as the direct paradigm for the mosaics and on this assumption looked to the mosaics to reconstruct the illustrations in the Cotton Genesis.⁴ This postulation has continued to be proposed for decades, remaining a subject of debate amongst art historians to this day. Some scholars contend that the earliest sequence of creation followed by the formation of the first human being was lost long before the work began on San Marco, the Venice mosaicist thus turning to other sources to replace the missing episodes or recreating them. Some have even suggested that a twin manuscript of the Cotton Genesis existed. Even Herbert Kessler himself proposed at the 12th AIEMA Colloquium (Venice 2012), that the mosaicist also drew on the *Biblia atlantica* in the National Library of San Marco (now Cod. Lat. 1,1).

The most debated detail in the creation cupola relates to the iconography of the sixth day of creation – the formation of the first man – which diverges from the sequence given in Genesis 1. The inscription cites Gen 1:26 *FACIAMUS HOMINEM AD IMAGINEM ET SIMILITUDINEM NOSTRAM* “Let us make man to our image and likeness.” The statement in Gen 1:27 “And God created man in his own image: in the image of God he created him: male and female he created them” would lead us expect a scene of two human figures, male and female, created simultaneously on the sixth day. Such depictions are rare, how-

³ Tikkanen, *Die Genesismosaiken*.

⁴ Weitzmann, *The Genesis Mosaics*, 105ff.; Weitzmann / Kessler, *The Cotton Genesis*. Both scholars sought to reconstruct the lost miniatures.

however.⁵ The mosaicist of the creation cupola chose to present the Creator molding a male figure out of dark-gray matter on the sixth day – a reference to the dust/slime of the earth from which the first man was formed according to Gen 2:7: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust/slime of the earth” (Fig. 4).

Kurt Weitzmann attributes this representation to the fact that the original Cotton Genesis miniature relating to Gen 1:27 had already been lost by the thirteenth century, maintaining that the verse “God created man in his own image” demands an image such as that preserved in the Bamberg Bible of Tours rather than the formation of Adam according to Gen 2:7.⁶ He thus argues that, the original miniature no longer being available, the mosaicist may have fashioned a set of six personifications for the days. Exhibiting a number of inconsistencies, these obviously form a pastiche.⁷

Reevaluating the relationship between the Genesis mosaics of the atrium and the fifth-century Cotton Genesis manuscript, Herbert Kessler proposes that, while the San Marco mosaics of the creation cupola follow the Cotton manuscript in many details, they in fact constitute a creative response to this model, filling in lacunae in the original manuscript, adding details from other sources, and forging other elements.

As a biblical scholar, my interest lies primarily in the messages the mosaics convey rather than their origin, date, or style. I submit that the artists consciously chose to treat Adam’s formation from the dust/slime of the earth on the sixth day,



Fig. 4 God forming Adam on the sixth day (Creation cupola, middle register).

⁵ For example: Genesis front page (twelfth century) of the Walther Bible, Michaelbeuern, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Perg. 1, fol. 6 (although the page from this has unfortunately been lost, a black and white photo exists); twelfth-century Bible, Bibliothèque Mazarine in Paris (MS 36, fol. 6); Barthélemy the English, *De Proprietatibus Rerum* (Flanders, fifteenth century; trans. Jean Corbichon), Paris, BNF, Department of Manuscripts, French 134, fol. 22v). Most medieval portrayals of this scene from the eleventh century onwards either represent the Creator facing a light-skin-toned male figure, occasionally accompanied by various animals, or standing before a woman’s body emerging directly from the man’s torso or attached to it in various forms: see Englund, *The Sixth Day of Creation*, Figs. 1, 2, 6, 7.

⁶ The first scene of the Bamberg Bible front page presents the Creator with an outstretched right hand, facing a seated Adam. This is most likely an interpretation of Adam’s vivification, followed by the scene of Adam naming the animals (cf. Kessler, *Introduction*, n. 17). All the front pages of the Bibles of Tours represent the narrative of creation according to Genesis 2. Most of them portray the Creator in physical contact with the human body, followed by scenes from the story of Eden.

⁷ Weitzmann, *The Genesis Mosaics*, 111.

reflecting the history of the exegesis of Genesis 1–2 and the theological message lying behind the atrium mosaics as a whole. Whether or not the Cotton Genesis miniature was still existent thus becomes an irrelevant issue.⁸

3. The textual problem: One or two accounts of creation?

In seeking to present a linear sequence of the Hexameron⁹ and the story of Adam and Eve, the mosaicist first had to address the textual problems arising from the divergent accounts of the divine act of creation in Genesis 1 and 2. According to Genesis 1, the creation of the first human beings formed the zenith of God's work, bringing it to consummation on the sixth day. Gen 2:7 informs us that God first formed the man from the slime/dust of the ground, breathing the breath of life into his nostrils, however. Placing him in the garden, he planted in Eden, then creating all the animals and lastly constructing the woman from one of the man's צַלְעוֹת – customarily translated as “ribs.”¹⁰

Both Jewish and Christian traditions have traditionally sought to harmonize contradictions or inconsistencies in the Scriptures. Attempts in relation to the creation narratives in this regard began as early as the third-century BCE by Septuagint. Over the ages, biblical exegetes and theologians have adopted two primary approaches to the dual account of the creation of the first man and woman in Genesis. Some consider Genesis 1 to be allegorical rather than historical. Philo, for example, posits that the first two chapters of Genesis describe two independent acts of creation. Genesis 1 relates the creation of the “human” genus – a spiritual entity fashioned in God's image and likeness whose incorporeality permits his dual definition as male and female, Genesis 2 detailing the formation of the earthly man, from whose body his female counterpart was produced.¹¹

Theophilus of Antioch asserts: “God made man on the sixth day but revealed his formation after the seventh day, when he also made paradise so that man might be in a better place and a finer location” (2.23).¹² In his numerous com-

⁸ Cf. Reed, *Blessing the Serpent*, 42, 45: “I interpret its unusual iconographic features ... reading the visual narratives of the Creation Cupola in terms of the history of the exegesis, expansion, and retelling of Genesis 1-3 and against the background of broader trends in the Middle Ages.” “... the departures of the S. Marco Creation Cupola from its late Antique model tend to be motivated by the theological concerns of its medieval Christian context as well as by the increased interest in typological symbolism at the time.”

⁹ The term “hexameron” signifies the history of the six days of creation according to Genesis 1 or a theological treatise describing God's work over the six days – St. Basil's *Hexameron*, for example.

¹⁰ For the meaning of צֶלַע *ṣalʿ* in the Hebrew Bible, see England, *The Sixth Day of Creation*, 80–82.

¹¹ Philo, *Allegorical Interpretation of Genesis*, 2.19–20.

¹² Cf. Theophilus of Antioch. *Ad Autolycom*, 2.19: “And so that the formation of man might also be indicated – so that there might not seem to be an insoluble problem among men, since ‘Let us make man’ had been spoken by God but man's formation had not yet been manifested – the

mentaries on Genesis, Augustine shifts between literal and allegorical readings. Regarding the first six days as the indivisible beginning of time, the things initially created existed solely in matter and cause, only being made formally and perfectly after the seventh day – which inaugurated time. The reason-principle of Adam's body was thus created and placed in nature on the sixth day. When God formed Adam from the dust of the earth, he fashioned him visibly in accordance with the invisible reason-principle he had already created, breathing life into him.¹³

Those who adopt a literal interpretation frequently regard Genesis 2 as elaborating Genesis 1. Josephus, for example, states: "Moses says, that in just six days the world, and all that is therein, was made. And that the seventh day was a rest. Moreover, Moses, after the seventh day was over, begins to talk philosophically' (*Antiquitates* 1.1.2). In other words, Moses begins discussing what he had just written in Gen 1:20.¹⁴

In the fourth century, Ephrem the Syrian and John Chrysostom followed the same line.¹⁵ In the eighth century, Bede commented on Gen 2:7: "Here, then, is described at greater length the making of man, who was indeed made in the sixth day; but there his creation was mentioned briefly ...".¹⁶

4. The interpretive tradition as reflected in Christian visual representations

This interpretive tradition is represented visually in illuminations, mosaics, frescoes, and reliefs in Eastern and Western Christian art alike. The Anglo-Saxon manuscript Junius 11 of Oxford (c. 1000), for example, illustrates the sixth day by depicting the extraction of a rib from a sleeping Adam out of which Eve is constructed (fol. 9). The eleventh- and twelfth-century Byzantine Octateuchs – Vat. 746 fol. 37, Vat. 747 fol. 22, Ser. G.I.8 fol. 42v, and Sm. fol. 12v – portray the creation of the first human beings in Genesis 1 in precisely the same way as Genesis 2.¹⁷

scripture teaches us, saying: 'A spring went up from the earth and watered all the face of the earth, and God formed man, dust from the earth, and breathed the breath of life into his face, and man became a living soul'" (R.M. Grant, *Theophilus of Antioch. Ad Autolycum*, 65).

¹³ Hammond Taylor, *St. Augustine*, 182–85, 196–97; Teske, *On Genesis*, 91, 103; Grosseteste, *On the Six Days of Creation*, 304–5.

¹⁴ Josephus condensed and reorganized the creation stories in an effort to smooth out the biblical narrative: see Levison, *Portraits of Adam*, 99–104.

¹⁵ St. Ephrem the Syrian, *Commentary on Genesis*, 2.2; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 165.

¹⁶ Kendall, *Bede*, 109.

¹⁷ In the Octateuchs God's presence takes the form of a hand reaching out from the arc of heaven.

The Morgan Picture Bible (MS M.638, fol. 1r, 1v, and 2r) merges both creation stories, depicting the six days followed by the formation of Eve from the side of Adam's back, the fall from grace, and the expulsion from Eden.¹⁸ Corresponding accounts occur in numerous other manuscripts – the Genesis frontispiece in Saint John of Acre, copied and illuminated in the mid-thirteenth century, for example, and the *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, written during the same period in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem (Acre).¹⁹ Herein, the two creation narratives are merged into a continuous whole, no rest on the seventh day intervening between them.

When Genesis 2 is interpreted as elaborating Genesis 1, the first man – created in God's image and likeness on the sixth day of creation – is thus understood as having been fashioned “from the dust/slime of the earth,” the iconography of the sixth day in the creation copula embodying this interpretation.²⁰

No illustrated work – Eastern or Western, including the extended hexameral sequence – presents both narratives of the creation of the first human beings as narrated in Genesis 1 and 2, because doing so would have highlighted discrepancies between them.

5. Jewish and Christian understandings of the creation of Adam

The dust from which Adam was formed, the breath of life he received, and the place into which God blew it, all require elucidation. Human life forming the apex of creation, it could not be fashioned from the same matter as the animals (2:19). Various commentators thus suggest that the slime/dust from which Adam was created possessed peculiar qualities: it was collected from the four corners of the earth, came from the future site of the Temple or crucifixion, or was the “choicest” and “purest” soil.²¹ Josephus posits that the name “Adam”

¹⁸ The Morgan Picture Bible (Paris, 1240s) is also known as Crusader Bible, Maciejowski Bible, and Shah 'Abbas Bible.

¹⁹ Paris, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, MS 5211, fol. 3v. One of the copies of the French translation of the Old Testament, known as the Acre Bible, combines the Western tradition with Eastern contributions, especially Byzantine, indicating Acre's multicultural character during the cross-occupation: https://data.bnf.fr/fr/15506817/bibliotheque_de_l_arsenal_paris_-_manuscrit_ms_5211/ (accessed 11.3.2019); *Histoire ancienne jusqu'à César*, London, British Library, Add. 15268, fol. 1v.

²⁰ Cf. Reed, *Blessing the Serpent*, 52: “By integrating allusions to both original sin and eventual redemption into its illustration of Genesis 1:22-23, the S. Marco Creation Cupola shows the Fall of humankind, and the salvation that it occasions, as having been prefigured in the six days of Creation, thereby harmonizing the P and J Creation accounts in Genesis.”

²¹ For “choicest” and “purest,” see Radak (David Kimchi) on Gen 2:9. For the site of the Temple, see Gen. Rab. 14:8; Rashi, ad loc.; Tg. Ps.-Jon., ad loc.; Book of the Bee, 13. For the site of the crucifixion, see Book of the Cave of Treasures, 1.5a.2. Summing up the sixth day, the latter states that Adam was made out of dust. In its detailed account, however, he is said to have been formed from a grain of dust, a drop of water, a puff of wind, and a little heat and warmth

derives from the word *'ādom*, which “in the Hebrew tongue ... signifies one that is red, because he was fashioned out of red earth, compounded together; for that kind is *virgin and true earth*” (Antiquitates 1.1.2).²²

In the second century CE, Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons, argued that the “fashioned Adam received his substance from untilled and as yet *virgin soil* – for God had not yet caused it to rain ... and man had not tilled the ground.”²³

The Hebrew root *y-ṣ-r* “form, fashion” (Gen 2:8), the LXX and Vulgate rendering of this as ἔπλασεν *eplasen* and *formavit* respectively, and expressions such as “Thy hands have made me and fashioned me” (Ps 119[118]:73) and “Thy hands have framed me and fashioned me together round about” (Job 10:8) – have all prompted interpreters to posit that God created the first man with his own hands.²⁴ Taking the expression “and breathed into his face/nostrils the breath of life” literally, they postulate that the human soul partakes of God’s essence.

Those who find these notions (too) anthropomorphic understand the biblical phrases metaphorically. Irenaeus, for example, considers God’s “hands” to form part of his triune nature: “As if the Father did not have his own hands! For there were always with Him the Word and the Wisdom, the Son and the Spirit, through whom ... [he] made all things ...” (Haer. 4.20.1).

Augustine rejects the view that God shaped Adam with his hands, regarding the opinion that man’s soul partakes of divine substance as heretical.²⁵ Bede cautions: “... the carnal sense is to be avoided, lest perchance we should think either that God formed the body of man with corporeal hands or breathed from throat and lips into the face of man.”²⁶

6. The iconography of God’s creation of Adam as visual interpretation

Some artists similarly sought to avoid portraying God in the process of fashioning and enlivening the first man in any anthropomorphic form. Three illus-

(1.4b.2). According to 2 En 30:8, Adam was created from seven components – earth, dew/sun, water, stone, angels/clouds, grass, and spirit/wind.

²² Josephus employs the Greek term φυράω *phyrāō* “kneading”: see Levison, Portraits of Adam, 103.

²³ Steenberg, Irenaeus on Creation, 184–85.

²⁴ Book of the Cave of Treasures, 1.5a. 1; 4 Ez 8:44; Ambrose, Hexaemeron, 6.8.47: <https://archive.org/details/fathersofthechurch027571mbp/page/n273/mode/2up> (accessed 5.6.2020).

²⁵ Literal Meaning of Genesis, 1.6.20–22, 2.7.2–3. Cf. *ibid.*, 2.7.24: “Now the expression, *in his image*, can apply only to the soul ... [which] was already created with the making of the first day”. Martin Büchsel’s argument that the illustrated Cotton Genesis originated in Rome, its representations being nourished by Augustinian exegesis, is unconvincing: see Bernabò, Review, 394.

²⁶ On Genesis, 1.2.7. Cf. Peter Lombard, Sentences, 17.1: “... the breath by which he animated man was made by God, not from God; not from any matter, but from nothing”.

trations – the twelfth-century Great Canterbury Psalter, the fourteenth-century Egerton Genesis, and the Grabow Altarpiece – represent the sixth day with Adam rising from the ground, his lower part still unformed (Fig. 5).²⁷ Using neither his hands nor his breath to create him, God either rests in his heavenly abode or stands above the earthly creature, blessing him with his hands – a gesture likely symbolizing Adam’s endowment with a soul.

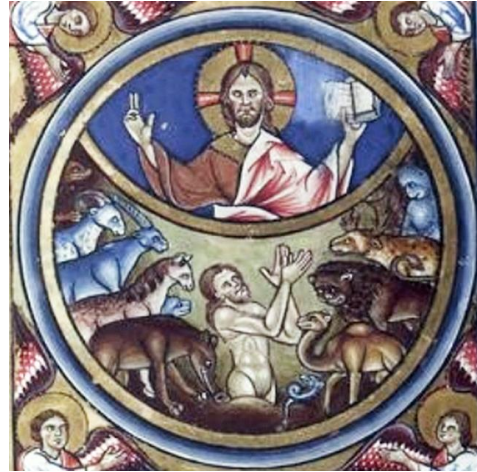


Fig. 5 Creation of Adam from earth (Great Canterbury Psalter, Paris, 1180–1190).

These presentations appear to reflect the influence of Ambrose’s opinion that the first man was created in the same manner as the creatures of the earth: after commanding “Let the earth bring forth the living creature,” God “saw that it was good and God said: let us make man.”²⁸ They may also conform to Bede’s statement: “He ordered him to be made from mud by his word.”²⁹

A different visual attempt to avoid any suggestion that God created the first man by corporal means appears in the twelfth-century Byzantine Seraglio Octateuch. On fol. 39r, Adam is presented after his creation, his brownish clay-coloured body stretched lifeless on the earth out of which it was formed. In the course of his enlivenment – by rays of light emanating from God’s hand – he becomes a natural red-brown.³⁰

Despite these theological reservations, literal anthropomorphic interpretations made their way into visual art and were integrated into the hexameral sequence, God being depicted as holding/touching the man’s shoulder, arm, hand, or head while forming him. His finishing touches on Adam’s formation appear in book illuminations – the ninth-century Carolingian Genesis frontispieces, Ælfric’s eleventh-

²⁷ Great Canterbury Psalter, Paris, BnF, MS Lat. 8846, fol. 1r. <https://www.medievalists.net/2015/02/great-canterbury-psalter/> (accessed 11.5.2020). The Egerton Genesis, London, British Library, MS 1894, fol. 1b. For Meister Bertram von Minden’s (1375–1383) Grabow Altarpiece, see https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Meister_Bertram_von_Minden_-_Grabow_Altarpiece_-_WGA14309.jpg (accessed 11.5.2020).

²⁸ Ambrose, Hexamaeron, 228–29. The Furtmeyr Bible (German, c. 1465–1499) contains a similar depiction – God touching the man’s elbow here, however (p. 22): <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021667755> (accessed 11.5.2020). Hartmann Schedel’s Nuremberg Chronicle (1493) depicts Adam’s creation in a similar way (p. 79), the Creator holding his hand as his torso rises from a lump of a yellowish matter, as though drawing him out thereof: https://www.loc.gov/resource/gdcwdl.wdl_04108/?sp=79 (accessed 11.5.2020).

²⁹ Bede, On Genesis, 110. The Canterbury Psalter miniature bears the heading: *Producat terra animam viventem. Faciamus hominem ad imaginem.*

³⁰ Cod. grc. 8, Topkapi Sarayi Muzeum, Seraglio Library, Istanbul. See Weitzmann / Bernabò, The Byzantine Octateuchs, 2:3, 28.

century Old English Paraphrase, the historiated initial I in the Lobbes Bible, and the fourteenth-century Velislavova Bible, for example.³¹ They are also represented on Bishop Bernward's eleventh-century bronze doors at Hildesheim Cathedral (1015) and the west facade of Modena Cathedral, carved by Wiligelmo (c. 1110; Fig. 6).

Some art works portray God as a potter molding a human body from matter – ranging in color from a dull gray to a deep orange-red (clay tones). The illustrator of Rudolf von Ems' *Weltchronik* (1350–1375) presents, on the sixth day, the creator holding on his left palm a tiny brown male figure (Fig. 7). An earlier stage of the creation of the first man is depicted in the roundel representing the sixth day in the



Fig. 7 God forming Adam on the Sixth Day of Creation (Rudolf von Ems, *Weltchronik*, Prague, 1350–1375).

In her *Hortus deliciarum* (Garden of Delights, fol. 17r), Herrad of Landsberg – abbess of Hohenburg Abbey – delineates the final stages of God's fashioning of the first man from yellowish clay. The

historiated initial I, the illustrator of St. Albans (1125) shows Christ the Logos shaping a human figure from orange clay with his hands in the presence of terrestrial animals.³² This likely served as the model for the initial I in the twelfth-century English Lambeth Bible, which portrays God forming Adam's body with his hands out of reddish matter on the sixth day (Fig. 8).³³



Fig. 6 Formation of Adam (Wiligelmo, marble relief, 1106; Cathedral of Modena).



Fig. 8 Formation of man on the sixth day (Lambeth Bible, ca. 1150–1170).

³¹ Bible of San Paolo (c. 870), Rome, fol. 8v; Moutier-Granval Bible, London, British Library, Cod. Add. MS 10546; British Library, MS Cotton Claudius B IV (1025), fol. 4; Lobbes Bible, Tournai, Bibl. du Seminaire MS 1 (1084), fol. 6; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. bib. e.7 (twelfth century), fol. 5r; Velislavova Bible (*Biblia picta Velislai*, 1340), Prague, National Library of the Czech Republic XXIII.C.124, fol. 2v.

³² British Library, Royal 13 D IV, fol. 3.

³³ Lambeth Bible (c. 1150–1170), London, Lambeth Palace Libr., MS 3, fol. 6v. Dodwell (*The Canterbury School of Illumination*, 81ff) suggests that this iconographical content is heavily influenced by Byzantine art.

accompanying text identifies the material as “red earth,” however, in line with Josephus. The following scene profiles the enthroned Creator holding the hands of the newly-formed man and streaming air from his open mouth into Adam’s orifice and nostrils. Hereby, the man’s color and posture change, his yellow tone giving way to “a tint of vigorous health and he holds himself up without help.”³⁴

7. The iconography of the vivification scene in the atrium mosaics



Fig. 9 Animation / Vivification of Adam (mosaic in Monreale Cathedral, Sicily, ca. 1180).



Fig. 10 Animation of Adam after the seventh day (Creation cupola, middle register).

The iconography of the vivification scene in the San Marco mosaic diverges from the MT, Septuagint, and Vulgate and the iconography of the Sicilian mosaics in the Palatine Chapel in Palermo and the Cathedral of Monreale, portraying God sitting on a globe and animating the newly created man from afar via a long stream of breath from his mouth. This is a visual representation of Gen 2:7: “he breathed into/upon his face the breath of life, and man became a living soul” (Fig. 9).³⁵ Unlike these visual accounts, the San Marco mosaicist (Fig. 10) chose to depict Christ endowing the formed man with his (previously created) soul in the form of a winged psyche, directed towards his mouth. Hereby, he is trans-

³⁴ Straub / Keller / Caratzas, Plate 7, fol. 17r, p. 22. Although the original manuscript was destroyed in 1870, many of its illustrations had previously been copied, these forming the basis of the partially complete facsimile extant today: see Green / Evans / Bischoff / Curschmann, *Hortus Deliciarum*, vol. 2. Hildegard of Binge understood Adam as having been created from clay surrounded by divine radiance: see Posch, *Das wahre Weltbild*.

³⁵ *Inspiravit in faciem eius spiraculum vitae et factus est homo in animam viventem* (Demus, *The Mosaics of Norman Sicily*, Figs. 28b, 95a [pp. 66 n. 158, 168 n. 418]). For the medieval Christian body/soul/spirit and dualist (body/soul) schemata reflected at San Marco, see Jolly, *Made in God's Image*, 24 n. 27.

formed from a small, grey, earthly creature into an erect figure almost the height of his Creator.³⁶ Following God's blessing of the seventh day, this scene indicates that the first man created on the sixth day had not yet become a living soul.

This portrayal appears to espouse St. Basil's interpretation of the two modes of the creation of the first man in Genesis 1 and 2: God "created" the inner man and "formed" the outer one. While the flesh was formed, the soul was created, the soul thus coming into being before the body.³⁷ The same notion is found in Josephus, rabbinic literature, and third- and fourth-century Christian writers such as Origen, Ephrem the Syrian, and John Chrysostom.³⁸

8. The Adam-Christ typology: Virgin origins

Electing to depict Adam's formation from the "dust of the earth" in one scene and his vivification in a separate tableau, the San Marco mosaicist thereby highlighted the fact that the first man created on the sixth day was fashioned from virgin, untilled earth. This emphasis reinforces the christological theme, underscoring the virginity of Christ's mother later developed into the dogma of her perpetual virginity.³⁹ The same theme also underlines the plan of the atrium mosaics, leading from the entrance through the Porta da Mar up to the Porta della Madonna at the passageway from the atrium into the interior of the church.

The Adam-Christ typology is based on Paul's comparison between the first man Adam and Christ – "Yet death reigned from Adam ... who was a type of the one who was to come" (Rom 5:14). As type and antitype, the two figures symmetrically resemble and differ from one another.⁴⁰ 1 Cor 15:45, 47 indicate that while death reigned as a result of Adam's transgression, "the last Adam became a life-giving spirit."

³⁶ Bernabò, Review, 394–95.

³⁷ Cf. B. Jackson in his edition of St. Basil the Great, The Treatise *De Spiritu Sancto* and the *Nine Homilies of the Hexaëmeron*: "It may, however, be noted that the Ninth Homily ends abruptly, and the latter, and apparently more important, portion of the subject is treated at less length than the former. Jerome and Cassiodorus speak of nine homilies only on the creation. Socrates says the Hexaëmeron was completed by Gregory of Nyssa. Three orations are published among Basil's works, two on the creation of men and one on paradise. Although attributed to Basil by Combefis and Du Pin, they are not considered genuine by Tillemont, Maran, Gamiier, Ceillier, and Fessler. They appear to be compositions which some editor thought congruous to the popular work of Basil, and so appended them to it" (57; <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/npnf208.vi.ii.iii.html>, accessed 20.6.2020).

³⁸ Origen, *Contra Celsum* 200; John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis*, 164–65; Kronholm, *Motifs from Genesis 1–11*, 52; Ambrose thus notes, for example, that God's image and likeness in the human race is embodied in the soul (*Hexaëmeron* 6.7).

³⁹ Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 10: "He was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary who was a virgin before childbirth and remained one ever after it, continuing without any contagion or stain of sin."

⁴⁰ Davidsen, *Adam and Christ*, Introduction.

Irenaeus of Lyon (c. 180) expanded on this typology, contending that the untilled, virginal soil of which Adam was formed symbolizes his incarnation in the flesh: “Thus the Lord, recapitulating this man, received the same arrangement of embodiment as this one, being born from the Virgin by the will and wisdom of God, that he might also demonstrate the likeness of embodiment to Adam ...” (Epideixis 32).⁴¹ For Irenaeus, this point of correspondence proves that Christ is of the same flesh as Adam.⁴²

Hippolytus (c. 170–c. 236) and Methodius (d. c. 311) also adduce the similarities between Adam and Christ – to the extent of blurring the differences between them: “For thus, in remodeling what was from the beginning and molding it all over again of the virgin and the Spirit, He fashioned the same Man; just as in the beginning when the earth was virgin and untilled, God had taken dust from the earth and formed, without seed the most rational being from it” (Methodius, Symposium, 3,4).⁴³

Adam’s creation from virginal earth in the atrium serves as a mnemonic device for the virginal birth of the Second Adam and alludes to the Virgin Mary in her role as the virgin mother of Christ.⁴⁴ As

we have noted, the principal entrance to the church was originally through the Porta da Mar on the south-west corner. The mosaic over the original entrance features the Virgin, flanked by archangels, standing – as per Dale – in the landscape of Paradise and holding the Christ-child in her arms (Fig. 11).⁴⁵



Fig. 11 Madonna with Christ-child, flanked by angels (Cappella Zen [former Porta da Mar], mosaic over the entrance to the atrium).

While Dale dates this mosaic to the twelve century, Karin Krause contends that it was most likely designed together with the Genesis mosaics, at the beginning of the thirteenth century. This dating is essential for her thesis, which

⁴¹ Irenaeus makes this claim on numerous occasions in both his extant works (Steenberg, *Irenaeus on Creation*, 108–10, 128 and n. 9).

⁴² VanMaaren, *The Adam-Christ Typology*, 283.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 286, 296.

⁴⁴ Cf. Newman, *Sister of Wisdom*, 171: “Adam was created from virgin earth, and Eve from the virgin Adam. ... As Adam arose from the inviolate earth, so also Christ was born of the inviolate Mary, and he was holy.” Venice’s special bond with the Virgin derives from the fact that the city was founded on 25 March, the day of the Annunciation: see Dale, *Pictorial Narratives*, 263.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 151.

links the mosaic with the scenes of Eve's temptation and the Fall in the third circle of the creation cupola nearby – and her assertion that Eve's responsibility for humanity's sinfulness is emphasized by what she regards, inaccurately, as an obvious deviation from the Genesis account.⁴⁶ Hereby, Mary's status as the patron saint of Venice is highlighted, the mosaic being accompanied by an inscription describing her role as redeemer from the hereditary guilt bequeathed to humanity by Eve and anticipating the message of the mosaics in the atrium as the redemption of lost paradise.⁴⁷ Mary's association with the entrance into the Garden of Eden at the opening of the church represents the latter as paradise.⁴⁸

Both Dale and Krause connect the atrium mosaics with the history and circumstances of Venice, arguing that the mosaicist sought to directly associate the city with the Christian plan of salvation.⁴⁹ Mary being the most important patron saint of Venice after San Marco, they suggest that the mosaic of Virgin Mary over the entrance of Porta da Mar, where the inscription designates her as Redemptrix, indicates that the entire atrium cycle represents the restoration of the lost paradise and a clear Marian theme.

Dale reads Mary's reappearance above the Porta della Madonna as focusing upon her intercession for Venice on the threshold between the atrium and interior of the church – Paradise – as proof of the Marian typology in the atrium mosaics.⁵⁰ He thus reconstructs the south porch sculptures of the Epiphany and their function in relation to the cult of Mary – the central figure of the enthroned Virgin holding the Holy Child – as preparing the viewer for the twelfth-century mosaic of the Virgin and Child above the inner doorway, thereby further reinforcing the theme of Venice as City of the Virgin. In my opinion however, the protagonist of the epiphany, nativity and the flight of the holy family in Cappella Zen is the Infant Christ rather than his mother.

Neither Krause nor Dale refer to the creation of Adam, thus failing to identify the association between his formation from virginal soil and Mary's virginity representing the birth of Christ. They also neglect those portrayals that emphasize Jesus' virginal birth through the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt 1:18, Luke 1:35) and other Christological messages in the atrium. In my opinion however, the protagonist of

⁴⁶ Krause (*Venedigs Sitz im Paradies*, 18) appears to have only consulted the Vulgate, which omits in Gen 3:6 the word עִמָּה „with her“ from the text that appears in the Masoretic Text and the Septuagint. For the importance of this term, see Parker, *Blaming Eve Alone*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁸ Dale, *Pictorial Narratives*, 249–63; Krause, *Venedigs Sitz im Paradies*, 36–41; *idem*, *Die Inschriften der Genesismosaiken*, 148–51.

⁴⁹ According to Krause (*Die Inschriften der Genesismosaiken*, 148), the mosaicist sought to present a typological interpretation of the Old Testament events in the context of the Christian plan of salvation based on the fate of the Republic of Venice.

⁵⁰ Dale, *Epiphany at San Marco*, 12

the epiphany, nativity and flight of the holy family in Cappella Zen is the Infant Christ rather than his virgin mother and all the mosaics in the atrium are imbued with Christological significance. Several examples help to demonstrate this claim.⁵¹

9. Beyond the creation: The Christological significance of other pentateuchal figures in the atrium mosaics

In the representation of Cain and Abel's sacrifices in the eastern lunette below the creation copula, Abel's carrying of the offering on his shoulder alludes to the Good Shepherd.⁵² The inscription above the scene also bears Eucharistic overtones.⁵³

The second cupola and two lunettes present scenes from Abraham's life in sixteen illustrations. Particular emphasis is laid upon of the story of Hagar and Ishmael – to which almost a third of the scenes in the cupola refer. These illustrations recall Paul's allegorical interpretation of Hagar and Sarah in Gal 4:21–31. As a slave, Hagar's son Ishmael is born according to the flesh – in contrast to Sarah's son, Isaac, who is born according to divine promise.⁵⁴ The east lunette portrays Abraham's hospitality in two scenes: on the left, he welcomes the angels, on the right the angels sit at a set table, Sarah standing at the door of her tent behind them. This scene illustrates the proclamation that Sarah will bear a son (Gen 18).

The absence of any illustration of Isaac's binding/Abraham's sacrifice – traditionally understood as foreshadowing the crucifixion – indicates that the mosaicist sought to portray events prefiguring Christ's birth. He thus focuses on the appearance of the three men/angels at Mamre and their revelation to Abraham.

The mosaic in the west lunette presents Isaac's birth (Fig. 12). In luxurious dress, Sarah lies semi-erect on a bed, a cushion behind her head and a maid-servant offering her a bowl of food. In the lower right corner, just beyond Sarah's room and in front of the viewer, a wet nurse sits in a landscape of green

⁵¹ Caesarius of Arles, Sermons 139: "The Catholic Church was ... [preached], from the beginning of the world. ... Indeed, in holy Abel the Catholic Church existed, in Noe, in Abraham, in Isaac, in Jacob, and in the other saintly people before the advent of our Lord and Savior"; *ibid.*, Sermon 93: "According to a mystical or allegorical interpretation Joseph prefigured a type of our Lord ...".

⁵² Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco*, 2: plate 137.

⁵³ Heb 12:24, 10:22; Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 104; Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco*, 1:96.

⁵⁴ See also Caesarius of Arles, Sermon 104. The disparities between Isaac's and Ishmael's birth scenes suggest that the mosaicist was inspired by Paul's allegory. In Isaac's birth scene, Sarah is attired befitting a noblewoman – in sharp contrast to Hagar, whose hair and arms are both uncovered, revealing a large amount of flesh. This discrepancy in garb clearly signifies Sarah as a free woman and Hagar as a bond woman: see England, *The Expulsion of Hagar*, 286–87.

grass and flowers, holding the swaddled newborn. Hereby, the mosaicist creates a close link between Isaac's birth and the portrayal of the Virgin carrying the Christ-child in her arms at the entrance to the atrium through Porta da Mar. Both scenes occurring within the "landscape of Paradise," Isaac thus prefigures Christ from the moment of his birth.⁵⁵

This scene is accompanied by a four-line inscription. Two lines are inscribed above the image, the remainder leading into the following scene – which treats Isaac's circumcision. The inscription quotes the Vulgate to Gen 21:1–5:

"And the LORD visited Sara, as he had promised: and fulfilled what he had spoken. And she conceived and bore a son in her old age, at the time that God had foretold her. And Abraham called the name of his son, whom Sara bore him, Isaac. And he circumcised him the eighth day, as God had commanded him ..."

The Latin translation diverges from the MT וַיַּעַשׂ ה' לְשָׂרָה כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר, which literally reads: "...and the LORD did unto Sarah as He had spoken." As Daniel Boyarin observes, in contrast to Hagar – of whom it is stated "And he went in to her ... she was pregnant with a child ..." (Gen 16:4) – the biblical text gives the impression that Abraham did not "know Sarah his wife" following the "annunciation." He thus suggests that "There may have even been, then, a tradition that the conception of Isaac was entirely by means of the promise. The birth of Isaac would be, then, an even more exact type of Jesus' birth."⁵⁶

The inscription and visual representation both allude to Isaac's "immaculate conception" and birth according to God's promise, thus foreshadowing Gabriel's proclamation to the Virgin and Jesus' birth through the Holy Spirit.

The pinnacle of the atrium decoration is the Moses cupola, the masterpiece of the final generation of the thirteenth-century Ve-



Fig. 12 Isaac's birth (Atrium, second cupola, west lunette).

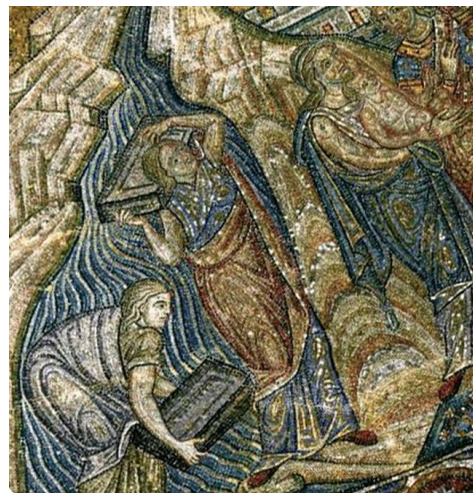


Fig. 13 Baby Moses' basket placed in and taken out of the river (San Marco Basilica, atrium, Moses' cupola).

⁵⁵ Dale, *Pictorial Narratives*, 251.

⁵⁶ Boyarin, *A Radical Jew*, 269 n. 44.

netian mosaicists.⁵⁷ Moses being a type of Jesus, the savior of all men, the cupola's narrative focuses primarily on Christological themes.⁵⁸ Rather than treating the customary scenes of Moses' life – the confrontation with Pharaoh, the plagues, or the giving of the Law –



Fig. 14 Moses cupola: On the right, Moses being rescued from the Nile; on the left, Moses in front of the burning bush (San Marco Basilica, atrium, Moses' cupola).

the first scene in the cupola depicts the infant Moses set adrift by his mother on the Nile inside a small oblong box, miraculously saved by an attendant saved by an attendant of Pharaoh's daughter and presented to her (Fig. 13).⁵⁹ This is followed by Moses' encounter with Pharaoh as told by Josephus, his life in Egypt and flight to Midian, his meeting of

Jethro's daughters at the well and driving off of the violent shepherds, and Jethro's invitation.⁶⁰ The cycle ends with the burning bush, which meets the first illustration of the cupola with the infant Moses saved from the water (Fig. 14).

These scenes lie in close proximity to the apse mosaic above the Porta Della Madonna portraying the Virgin, enthroned between Saint John and Saint Mark, the Christ-child in her arms blessing with his right hand. While the inscription above the heads of the saints identifies them by name, the Virgin is



Fig. 15 Madonna with Christ-child, flanked by St. John and St. Mark (San Marco Basilica, east apse of the northern Narthex, above the entrance to the church through the Porta della Madonna).

⁵⁷ Cf. Procuratoria di San Marco di Venezia, Patriarchal Cathedral Basilica of Saint Mark. The Iconographic Repertory, 2018 (<http://www.basilicasanmarco.it/basilica/mosaici/il-repertorio-iconografico/?lang=en>; accessed 5.6.2020).

⁵⁸ Kensky, Moses and Jesus.

⁵⁹ As McGuckin notes, Cyril suggests that "this mystery of the nativity of Moses setting out the mystery of Christ's economy of salvation is 'patently obvious': 'And so the Nativity of Moses and all those things signified along with it are patently obvious symbols of the Mystery of Christ, for people of good sense'" (Moses and the Mystery of Christ, 102).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 104 "Cyril lingers on one detail more than any other as bearing a significance in the narrative of the exile of Moses in Madian [*sic*], and that is his marriage to only one of the daughters (the 'elect one') out of no less than seven potential spouses. This, he tells us, was Sephora ... [who] signifies the woman that Moses, the type of the Saviour, has elected as his own. She is, therefore, mystically a *symbol of the 'church of the gentiles', whom Christ has chosen as his bride*" (italics added).

accompanied by a Greek caption – “Mother of God” (Fig. 15).⁶¹ The close association between this mosaic and the burning bush suggests that the unconsumed thicket symbolizes the Virgin, who conceived Jesus by the Holy Spirit without being consumed by the flames of lust.⁶² The miraculous rescue of the infant Moses corresponds to the relief on the adjacent Porta dei Fiori representing the nativity, which celebrates Jesus’ immaculate birth.

These portrayals evince that the scenes depicting events from the Old Testament convey a Christological message. The atrium mosaics can thus be said to present a reading of the Hebrew Bible once its veil has been removed in Christ (2 Cor 3:14) in an example *par excellence* of “Scriptures in pictures.”

10. Back to the creation: A harmonized Christological presentation

No need thus exists to look for any model that might have served the atrium mosaicist in his portrayal of the first man as being created from the dust of the earth on the sixth day. By depicting the formation of the world in Genesis 1 – including the blessing of the Sabbath – and Adam’s formation from untilled, virgin soil according to Genesis 2, the mosaics merge both creation narratives, making Adam into a vital element of the Christological theme that, pervading the atrium, underscores Christ’s immaculate conception.

Venetians, pilgrims, and other visitors to the church met their patron at the main entrance to the church through the Porta da Mar. Flanked by archangels, the Virgin Mary holds the Christ-child with her left arm, supporting his legs with her right. The inscription accompanying this mosaic suggests that she serves here as redeemer from the Fall for which Eve was responsible and God-bearer / mother of God, the little Christ welcoming people with a gesture of blessing with his right hand. On their way from the atrium through the Porta della Madonna into the church, visitors pass scenes from Genesis and Exodus imbued with Christological connotations stressing Christ’s virginal birth. The first scene is that of Adam created from virgin soil as a type of the one to come – the Second Adam, born of the Virgin Mary and the Holy Spirit.

⁶¹ This mosaic is a copy of the lost original executed by Giovanni Moro in 1839/40 with new material. For the iconography’s and inscription’s authenticity, see Meschinello, *La Chiesa Ducale di S. Marco*, 60; Demus, *The Mosaics of San Marco*, 168.

⁶² Ladouceur, *Old Testament Prefigurations*, 21: “Gregory of Nyssa seems to have been the first to see in the burning bush a figure of the Virgin Mary, and, in particular, of her virginal childbearing and ever-virginity ...”.

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