

THE LAST JUDGMENT
AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF
BYZANTINE AND WESTERN 13th CENTURY EXAMPLES

B+

by Elizabeth Ratcliffe

Seminar East-West Medieval Art 507
Spring Term, 1972
McKenzie

"THE TRUMPET SHALL SOUND, AND THE DEAD SHALL BE RAISED"

AN ICONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE LAST JUDGMENT
AS PRESENTED IN BYZANTINE AND WESTERN ART OF
THE 13th CENTURY

Summing up as it does, how the Christian's view of life on earth affects his final relationship to the universe, the Last Judgment of both Byzantine and Western art reflect similar concepts. Yet, since the two traditions grew out of different interpretations of Christian teaching, as presented by Eastern and Western sources, the two iconographic culminations which fully evolved in the 13th century, show certain differences.

awkward Variations, too, occur in the placement of monumental representations in the church building. In both Eastern and Western church decoration, which was determined by liturgical practice, the Last Judgment, as a late-comer to Christian iconographic schemes, was usually placed at the west end: in the Byzantine church, frescoed inside the narthex or exonarthex, or on the exterior of the western facade--in the Western church, carved on the west facade or frescoed on the west interior wall of the nave.¹

Traditional iconography of the mature Byzantine Last Judgment as seen today at Kariye Djami--produced in the early 14th century but also standing for 13th century representations--includes: (1) Unrolling of the Scroll of Heaven, (2) the Parousia, (3) the Deisis, (4) the Etimasia, (5) Resurrection of the Dead, in the sea and on the land, (6) Separation of the Blessed from the Damned, (7) Paradise, and Hell's fiery river and lake. Always accompanying and preceeding the Last Judgment, though not technically a part of the ending of the world, the mature Byzantine iconographic scheme included the Anastasis, in which Christ's apocryphal descent into Limbo after His resurrection, the first Easter, is depicted.

Traditional iconography of the mature Western Last Judgment as seen on the French Gothic cathedrals of the 13th century included: (1) the Parousia, (2) the Deesis, (3) Weighing of the Souls, (4) Heaven and Hell, (5) Resurrection of the Dead from their sarcophagi. Eliminated from the Western representations are the Eastern Scroll of Heaven, Hetimasia, Anastasis, the sea giving up its dead, and the fiery river and lake.

In both iconographic components and placement in the church, then, there are similarities and specific differences between Eastern and Western Last Judgment depictions. In this paper I will sort out these differences and try to determine how they came about.

The Kariye Djami frescoed Last Judgment departs from traditional placement at the west end of the church. Its expanding scenes stretch over the entire east vault, pendentives and lunettes of the Parecclesion; its accompanying Anastasis fills the center dome of the eastern apse. Both are set against a blue background of the heavens. Carefully the composition of the Last Judgment unfolds: to the east of the central angel unrolling a shell-like scroll of heaven, the hieratic eschatological Christ (right palm up in blessing, left palm down in retribution) sits flanked by the Virgin, John the Baptist, twelve apostles, angels and archangels; surrounding this wide group clouds filled with the elect, encircle all the the southeast area of the vault; centered below the enthroned Christ is the Etimasia flanked by Adam and Eve; below this is the ^{weighing} ~~dividing~~ of souls, giving way at the southeast to an enchained group of naked souls limping off sadly into the fiery lake of hell beyond, set just above the pendentive; this pendentive frames an enormous nude figure of the Rich Man in Hell, his two upside-down purses spewing coins into the angle; the lunette below presents multiple torments of the very naked and huddled Damned; relating to this, the southwest pendentive shows the land ^{and} the sea giving up their dead; the northern lunette depicts the elects' entrance into Paradise with

*Basin of ABRAHAM should be mentioned
since it appears as well in the West, sword not visible*

St. Peter unlocking the gates guarded by a sword-carrying seraphim, while inside a loinclothed Good Thief (imported to Heaven's elect apocryphally because he repented on his cross beside Christ at His Crucifixion), stands next to the enthroned Virgin flanked by two angels. The Greek-lettered tituli above Christ's globed mandorla reads: "The Second Coming of Christ". Below Him and to ~~the~~ ^{his} right is Matthew's "Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (25:34); below Him to ~~the~~ ^{his} left is a second Matthew text, "Depart from me, ye cursed into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (25:41). Two other tituli occur: Revelations, "And the heavens departed as a scroll when it is rolled together" (6:14), and Matthew, "The Son of Man shall come in glory and all the holy angels with him" (25:31).

In iconographic material as well as Biblical texts Kariye Djami's Last Judgment stresses the Apocalyptic elements of the event, and the retributive aspect of its Judge. Filling out the eschatological texts of the New Testament, ^{are} Old Testament details from the Psalms, "Justice and Judgment are the habitation of thy throne" (88:15), Daniel--"A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him and the judgment was set" (7:10). Basically these Old and New Testament selections supply textual material for the entire composition. The choice of imagery in which they are clothed is supplied by Greek Fathers and by official Church sanctions directed to the artists. And over its long history, the Byzantine presentation of the Last Judgment did not essentially change.²

In the West, there was a gradual and obvious evolution of the theme. Its maturely developed form is seen in the Gothic 13th century cathedrals. Taking the south porch central tympanum of Chartres as the starting point, for the mature presentation, I will try to show how this Western culmination differed from that of the East.

Chartres! placement on the cathedral, like Kariye Djami's, departed from the usual one, the south portal having been added in the rebuilding

of most of the Cathedral after the disastrous fire of 1194; in accordance with the changed theological ethos of the 13th century, the Apocalyptic Christ in Majesty and Four Beasts, which represented the mid-12th century thinking in the Royal west Portal, was redesigned into the more humanistic redemptive Son of Man who comes to judge the world. The scene is enacted in three horizontal levels: Christ, right breast exposed sits without a halo, his raised hands are turned to show the wounded palms; flanking him sit similar-sized Virgin and St. John, also without halos, hands pressed together in supplication; flanking them two angels, kneel holding instruments of Passion: the spear, the column and the flail; above this central group at the top of the tympanum four angels emerge from a bank of clouds, hands ritually covered to support over Christ's head the cross, the crown of thorns and the nails of the Crucifixion; below the central Deesis group clouds produce a guard of trumpeting angels who observe the central, and hieratic, St. Michael as he separates the two groups of the blessed and the damned; among the blessed a bishop is clearly defined; among the damned, next to St. Michael, a gloating little devil directs the sad procession--churchmen and a high-born lady in its ranks--towards the frothing fires of hell, well-stocked with goulish, naked demons.

In the surrounding archivolts appear ranks of angels; below them, and at the right of Christ, the blessed rise from their coffins and Abraham holds three little souls tenderly in his bosom while at the left, devils sprouting heads of lust on their naked stomachs, push the unfortunate doomed who just above them rise from their graves. Not included in the actual tympanum scene but symbolically closely related to it, are the twelve Apostles--presented life sized as door jams, and the wise and foolish virgins--standing for the elect and the damned--on the flanking porch archivolts.

All in all, it is a lively scene in which Christ appears as the

[Matthew (25:31)] Son of Man. He no longer wears a crown or mandorla. The instruments of His Passion, sacredly carried by angels, symbolize that His martyrdom has triumphed over Death itself. With variations of different hieratic scale between Christ and the Deesis Virgin and John (Christ becoming larger), different numbers of layers, the addition of the balance-scale for soul-weighing to St. Michael, more displayed nudity among the damned, contemporary people among the blessed, and various changes of placement of scenes as well as dramatis personae, Chartres' representation of the Last Judgment stands as prototype for all subsequent Western Last Judgments. Since it, like Kariye Djami, takes as its basic texts Matthew's Gospel, with embroideries from the Old Testament, how then is the mature iconographic scheme so different from that of the East?

In the earliest Christian art a symbolic Last Judgment was presented as the Etimasia which separated the sheep from the goats. Matthew's text supplied, "and before him shall be gathered all the nations of the world, and he shall separate them one from another as a shepherd separateth the sheep from the goats" (25:32). In the mosaics of Fundi, not far from Rome, and of St. Apollinare ^{C. 504 AD} Nuovo in Ravenna, this is seen. Less monumental Early Christian art seems to have tried its hand, also in the 5th century, at a more realistic form in which Christ, the judge, sits facing those whom he judges. This we see in the 5th century Barberini plaque which takes its cue from the imperial court scenes like that on the base of Theodosius' Column in Constantinople. A bit later the 7th century repeats this realistic Judgment but enlarges Christ hieratically and put him in a mandorla with a cruciform halo on his head: a page from the Byzantine-originated Cosmas Indicopleustes manuscript includes a layer of winged angels above the two-layers of judged people before Christ. Originating in the West, also in the 7th century, the Anglebert sarcophagus shows trumpeting angels on either side of a central figure flanked by Orants.

In the earliest presentations, then, the symbolic, the apocalyptic, and the realistic judge is seen and the stage was thus early set for the iconographic changes which took place during the next six centuries. As the Last Judgment became a more popular theme for visual representation, a body of writings grew up in both East and West upon which Orthodox and Roman Christian iconography based themselves and from which each eventually drew its distinctive forms.

In the East, Ephrem of Syria, the 4th century saint (who made conscious attempts to counter the heretical and severe teachings of Manes from Persia) wrote down his visions and a series of homilies. Based on St. Matthew's Gospel and on the Book of Revelations, Ephrem emphasized especially the triumphant character of the Last Judgment, in which the King of Glory presides.³ As adjunct to this softening of the retributive aspects of the judge, Ephrem envisioned that the Virgin, feeling compassion for the eternal punishment of wrongdoers, had been granted a trip to Hades to intercede for them. St. John of Damascus, an active opponent ^{of} ~~to~~ Leo III's iconoclasm of the 8th century, revived and enlarged upon St. Ephrem's earlier writings, giving special attention to descriptions of the Etimasia and the Deesis; this, in Eastern versions always includes John the Baptist with the Virgin, while that of the West usually shows John the Evangelist who in the ^{Western} cult of the Virgin was felt to be more closely related to the Virgin than the Old Testament baptiser. John of Damascus' writings added many vivid details to those of St. Ephrem describing Hell, the enormous Anti-Christ, King of Hell, among others. Well-known "false prophets", as mentioned in the Old Testament books of Job and Daniel, became contemporary royalty or religious leaders.⁴

Essentially it was the writings of these two Eastern saints which formed the basis of all subsequent Byzantine representations of the Last Judgment. From early times there had been guidebooks prepared for artists which set forth official Church-sanctioned schemes of iconography for all subjects to be depicted. The earliest known such book was discovered at

Mount Athos in the 19th century and seems to have been a 15th or 16th century copy of an original 12th century Guide to Painting. Compiled by the monk Dionysius from the works of a famous Byzantine painter, Panselinos of Thessalonica, it directs painters to show Christ in "a terrible aspect".⁵ This interpretation seems to have been derived from Ephrem's and St. John's combined writings, as well does the visual detailing of instructions:

Christ is seated on a lofty throne of fire; he is clad in white, and darts his thunderbolt over the sun. All the chorus of angels are seized with dread, and tremble before him. With the right hand he bestows his benediction on the saints, but with his left he indicates to sinners the place of torment...A river of fire flows from the feet of Christ, and the wicked are flung by demons into the stream... Prophets, with their rolls, stand on the right and left of the scene of Judgment.⁶

In the West, the commentaries and compilations of the Latin Church Fathers Jerome, Augustine, and Gregory the Great, supplied the basis for the compendium of most subsequent Church writings. Following the lead of St. Augustine, who in the City of God took special pains to trace prefigurations of the Old and New Testaments, visionary material from the Old Testament of Daniel, Ezechiel and Job became common iconographic elements in every sort of represented Biblical scene. In Book XXII of the City of God which deals exclusively with escatological matters, Augustine says:

In this book, I plan, with God's help, to discuss His day of final judgment and to defend its reality against those who deliberately disbelieve in it.⁷ My first duty will be to lay a solid foundation of revealed data.

It was in this book that Augustine vividly detailed the physical characteristics connected with the Resurrection: all people would re-appear at the prime of life, about 30 years old, since that was Christ's age when He had died; except for differences of sex, physical differences of age or deformity would not appear; everyone would arrive on the last day stark naked; Christ and the martyrs, however, would return at that same time clothed in splendor and with their attributes of martyrdom.

In the 8th century when the 2nd Council of Nicaea met, an official

Church pronouncement was drawn up, partly representing a Western Church attempt to challenge the Byzantine Iconoclastic restrictions, in which official Church Doctrine was set down for the first time regarding the iconographical imagery which was to be permitted. ~~for~~ the executing artists:

The compilation of religious imagery is not left to the initiative of artists, but is formed upon principles laid down by the Catholic Church and by religious tradition... The execution belongs to the painter, the selection and arrangement of subject belong to the Fathers.

This was the doctrine of the Church and it so remained in both the East and the West from the 8th till the 13th century.⁸

From the 8th to the 12th century in the West the Apocalyptic and Avenging God is stressed in representations of the Last Judgment. Always shown is the terrible judge described in St. John's vision in Revelations (4:1-8). From here come the sea of glass, the radiant throne of jasper stone, the twenty-four elders and the four Apocalyptic Beasts.⁹ Gradually the 12th century Church Fathers' writings, as they became accepted doctrine, were included in visual iconography of the subject. In the final 13th century version seen in the French Cathedrals, Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians and Matthew's humanized Gospel took precedence over other New Testament accounts, for both put special emphasis on the redemptive aspects of Christ and this appealed to Church doctrine of the times and to the Scholastics who propounded it.¹⁰

Most important among these writers was Honorius of Autun, who about 1100 compiled and commented ~~on~~ the writings of all previous Church writers in his Elucidarium. To Book III of the Elucidarium, in which Honorius elaborated upon all of what Augustine had previously detailed in Book XXII of the City of God, later 12th and 13th century cathedrals owe most of their imagery.¹¹ Beginning with Giselbertus the ~~growingly~~ picturesque details of the last day's doomday activities were based on Honorius' writings, and ~~to~~ its spreading influence the bared-breast, wound-exposing Christ in the

Last Judgment 12th century tympanums at Beaulieu and Conques are traced, for Honorius made much of the symbolic meaning of the Instruments of Christ's Passion, calling them "the signs of the Son of Man". Taking a simile from St. John Chrysostom he says that like a victorious emperor whose servants precede him carrying crown, scepter and standard, the Son of God shall appear at His Second Coming preceded by angels carrying His cross, crown of thorns and spear.¹²

In the 13th century Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica dwelling upon the role of the Virgin as Intercessor in the Last Days, did much to further the growing cult of the Virgin. Vincent of Beauvais, contemporary with the sculptors of Reims and Amiens, summarized the entire history of the world to his time in his Speculum Historiale; inline with the ever-increasing humanistic ethos of the age, the epilogue (devoted to the Last Judgment), dwelt upon the human aspects of Christ and the significance of his wounds saying, "He shows his wounds to bear witness to the truth of the gospel and to prove that He was in truth crucified for us."¹³

Jacobus de Voragine in the mid-13th century compiled all previous apocryphal writings and their sources in the Golden Legend. In the detailed section devoted to the Passion and Last Judgment he says:

His scars show His mercy, for they recall His willing sacrifice, and they justify His anger by reminding us that all men are not willing to profit by this sacrifice.¹⁴

Thus all the essential visual iconographic elements of the fully-developed Western Last Judgment were presented in these four 12th and 13th century writers; who, in turn had taken them from the earlier writings of 4th, 5th and 7th century writers.

Since St. Augustine had treated extensively the two Old Testament texts, "Thou are weighed in the balance and found wanting" (Daniel 5:27), and "Let him weigh me in a just balance", (Job 31:6), there is no quandry about this weighing being represented prominently in 12th and 13th century

Last Judgment^s. However, long before Medieval scholastic writers had taken up their speculations, scenes of the Last Judgment scale-users had occurred in Ireland. Here where manuscript illumination first flowered in 675 with ~~The~~ Book of Durrow, a 7th century ivory plaque, now in the Victoria and Albert ^{Museum}, presented ^s a picturesque Last Judgment. This contains a tiny soul being weighed in one side of a scale while a tugging demon drags at the other, a huge monster head devouring the damned, and an angel welcoming the blessed into a temple. Irish monastic ^{ism or art?} which from its inception reflected different sources than that produced on the continent which was closer to Rome, seems to have had special contacts with Coptic monastic art from Egypt. Probably the ancient Egyptian Horus god, comparable to St. Michael as overseer of the dead, is often pictured weighing souls in scales, and this iconography seems to have been used in the Christian scene.¹⁵

In the 10th century, still 200 years before Honorius of Autun, the Muiredach stone cross at Monasterboice worked ~~(the idea out)~~ more fully. Here, along with the soul-weighing and cavernous Leviathan jaw of hell, angels and devils flanking Christ to the right and left are much occupied with books. Apparently the Irish' preoccupation with visions of Doomsday which they recorded in the Book of The Devil (also derived from Egypt--in the 2nd century Testament of Abraham), is reflected in the Muiredach multiplicity of books.¹⁶ Dictated then, by these combined Christian and Egyptian sources, the earliest pictured weighing-balance, seems to have been born in Ireland. From here doubtless the iconographic element spread with the spread of Irish monasticism to the continent, where the earliest time known for its re-occurrence is the 12th century.¹⁷

Earlier than the Irish scale-weighing representation, however, in the East on a 5th century monastic doorjamb in Alahan Isauria--close to the Syria of St. Ephrem--St. Michael appears weighing a struggling

soul. A 5th century Pisidian church fresco is also known which shows the same scene. In late Armenian manuscripts the scene is common in the margins;¹⁸ and an 11th century Byzantine manuscript (gr. 74, ^{B.N.} Paris), depicts an entire page in which several lines of Greek writing surmount a fully-developed Byzantine Last Judgment containing all the elements of the Parousia, the Deesis, the Etimasia, the river and lake of fire, the scroll of heaven, torments of the damned, bliss of the blessed, sarcophagus-climbers, the sea giving up ^{its} ~~their~~ dead and--centered at the bottom-- St. Michael weighing a soul while two little black stick-like devils try to tip the scales ^{by} their way.

It seems, then, that weighing of the souls had been known as an iconographic element of the Last Judgment theme in both East and West long before it becomes an established part of the fully-evolved 12th and 13th century Western ones. The fact that it had existed for centuries in the East would account for its being a part of the monumental typically Byzantine Torcello mosaic of the 12th century. The fact that Honorius of Autun had not yet revived St. Augustine's vivid descriptions of the Last Days, when San Angelo in Formis was frescoed around 1075, would account for absence of the soul-weighing in this Western representation. Though executed by Byzantine-trained artists who show various Byzantine stylistic features, the scene must have been laid out from Latin Church prelates, not Orthodox, for it lacks the Etimasia, the Anastasis, the Deesis, the river of fire, and the sea giving up its dead.

East and West, both taking their original inspiration from Old and New Testament texts, have added their own characteristic ^{interpretations} ~~iconographies~~ as the Orthodox and the Roman Churches produced them in their own unique interpretive writings. Though the West borrowed much from the East throughout the historical evolution of its Last Judgment, its final product iconographically shows the stamp of the progressive new humanistic ideas which permeated both East and West during the 11th, 12th and 13th centuries.

* pictorial references ?

The East, more rigid in its ties to traditions of both liturgy and art, basically remained tied to the earliest representations of the theme which showed Christ as the severe Apocalyptic King of the Universe. The more progressive West, in every respect, adopted the more humanistic approach.

While the French cathedrals' throng of damned romp almost gleefully with their laughing goulsh little devils into the eternal fires prepared for them in hell, the suffering crowded bodies at Kariye Djami agonize under the "gnashing of teeth" and provision the "worm that sleepeth not" in their "unquenchable fire of outer darkness". In the French cathedrals, from the exposed wounds of the humanized King of Heaven, flows redemptive compassion; in the East, from the base of the Apocalyptic Judge's throne of glory flow the red fires of eternal damnation for those who have sinned.

FOOT NOTES

¹Louis Reau, Iconographie de L'art Chretien(Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1957), Vol.II,p2, p. 738.

²All information for the above was taken from text and pictures from:
Paul A. Underwood, The Karive Djam, Bollinger Series(New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), Vols. I & II, pp. 200-208.

³Andre Grabar, Christian Iconography. A Study of Its Origins. Bollinger Series,(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968., pp. 27-28.

⁴Louis Reau, Op. Cit., pp. 729-31.

⁵Adolphe Napoleon Didron, Christian Iconography(London: George Bell & Sons, 1896), Vol. II, pp. 189-90.

⁶Op. Cit., Vol.I, p. 257.

⁷St. Augustine, City of God, Vol. 24 of The Fathers of The Church Series, trans. Gerald B. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan, S.J.(New York: Fathers of The Church Inc., 1954), p. 249.

⁸Emile Male, The Gothic Image, trans. by Dora Nussey (New York: Harper Bros., Torchbook Ed., 1958), p. 392.

⁹Op. cit., p. 356.

¹⁰Op. cit., p. 366

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Male, Op. cit., p. 370.

¹³Op. cit., p. 369.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Francoise Henry, Irish Art, Vol. II; During The Viking Invasions. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 196-99.

¹⁶Op. cit., p. 172.

¹⁷Op. cit. p. 173.

¹⁸Op. cit. p. 170.

BOOKS CONSULTED

- Christes, Yves. Les Grands Portails Roman. Etudes sur l'iconologie des theophanies romanes. Geneve: Librairie Droz, 1969.
- Didron, Adolphe Napoleon. Christian Iconography. 2v. London: George Bell and Sons, 1896.
- de Voragine, Jacobus. The Golden Legend. Translated and adapted from the Latin by Granger Ryan and Helmut Rippergen. 2v. London: Longmans Green, 1941.
- Grabar, Andre. Christian Iconography. A Study of Its Origins. Bollinger Series, #XXXV. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968.
- Henry, Francoise. Irish Art. 3v., Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- Katzenellenbogen, Adolf. The Sculptural Programs of Chartres Cathedral. New York: W.W.Norton Inc., 1959.
- Male, Emile. The Gothic Image. Translated by Dora Nussey. New York: Harper Bros., Torchbooks Ed., 1958.
- Reau, Louis. Iconographie de L'art Chretien. 6v., Vol. II, p.2. Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1957.
- St. Augustine, The City of God. Translated by Gerald G. Walsh and Daniel J. Honan S.J.. The Fathers of the Church Series, Vol. 24. New York: Fathers of the Church Inc., 1954.
- Underwood, Paul A. The Kariye Diani. 3v., Bollinger Series. New York: Pantheon Books, 1966.