7

Embryonic Modernity

Time and Agricultural Work in the Images of Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Introduction

IN THE LAST FIVE CHAPTERS, when looking at medieval landscape images, I have chiefly focussed on aspects of the images that originated in the Golden Age paradigm. But the Middle Ages comprise a complex transitional phase in the evolution of culture, in which ingredients of the Golden Age paradigm are passed on, exposed to an almost primitivising deconstruction as well as being superseded by completely new features which develop under the protection of iconographic pockets. I will now switch the lens and in this chapter focus on these new features, as I consider them to be the seeds of and prerequisite for the subject of volume II: the modernity paradigm, which breaks through in Western pictorial art around 1420.

In my study of the pre-modern evolution of pictorial space, in chapter 1, I could already confirm that, although the medieval pictorial space on the face of it appears archaically 'flat', this flatness is qualified, as it points diagrammatically towards a divine infinity beyond itself – an infinity which, in late medieval cosmology, invades the earthly domain and can thereby be depicted within the new illusionism of the modern paradigm. If the modern pictorial infinity is 'born' around 1420, it can thus be said to be in an 'embryonic stage' in late antiquity and the Middle Ages.

Similar seeds to the fully-developed pictorial paradigm of modernity will now be identified when we turn towards two of its other principal components: on the one hand, *time* and its manifestation in seasons, months, diurnal cycle and weather; on the other hand, *work*, which in my landscape context refers in particular to agricultural work but also, sporadically, to road-work and mining. Accordingly, even though the medieval pictorial space, by and large, maintains the time- and work-shy Golden Age paradigm, late antiquity nonetheless opens up for the occasional iconographically-qualified pocket featuring, as an exception to the rule, actions determined by

time and work – especially the new genres of *Seasons* and *Labours of the Months*. In the Late Middle Ages, the Golden Age paradigm has become so saturated by these and other themes that it eventually, intensified by pressure from the pictorial space, has to burst open and surrender to the reality of the Fall – the modernity paradigm – with its changeable weather, grids of fields and perspectival vistas.

To insert these observations in my overarching evolutionary model of analysis – especially its sociological track – I must by way of introduction note that here we are in even more virgin territory than was the case with the sacral-idyllic painting. Apart from a very few detailed studies, the landscape images of late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages would seem to lack sociologically-oriented analyses placing them in a broader developmental sequence.[1] Nevertheless, it is my hope that I can here fit together enough culture-historical pieces to allow for an interpretation of pictorial phenomena as symptoms of general changes in the epistemic *field*. The time pockets in the images may thereby be construed as structurally homologous with an incipient awareness of time and its effect on earthly conditions – an awareness which, although it continues to be subordinate to the Golden Age *field*, marks a watershed between medieval culture and its antique predecessor. In the religious sphere, this awareness not only finds expression in conditions such as Christianity's irreversible temporal direction and incarnation – the manifestation of the deity in the variable, corporeal and worldly domain – but also the regulation of monastic life itself as a strictly timetabled day becomes part of it. The leap from the perception of time to that of work does not, therefore, seem too big because, through a general raising of the worldly values, work is also endowed with an emergent worthiness. More specifically, it would seem productive to further implement Hegel's and Kojève's evolutionist model of humankind's struggle for recognition, as where recognition in ancient times depended exclusively on slaves looking up to the master (the work-free), it now increasingly shifts to include dependence on the slaves' mutual appreciation and the master's appreciation of them (the workers). This intermediary step in the evolution of recognition, then, is manifest societally by the feudal system in which the farmer changes status from slave to serf – a midway position between formal deprivation of civic rights (the slave) and formal provision of civic rights (the free citizen).

That just about all the components of the modernity paradigm and their homologies in the epistemic *field* are in a state of embryonic development in the Middle Ages does not, however, mean that this was a smooth development. As regards the ideology both of time and of work, a closer examination will reveal an at least two-phased development in which an increasing visualisation of time and work in late antiquity and on to *c.* 400 AD is succeeded by a period of reaction which lasts until the Carolingian period. Although images of time do not apparently fade away

to the same extent as their work companions, both themes experience a vigorous blossoming around 800 AD, and the ground is thus prepared for that explosion of secular motifs in the Late Middle Ages which lead to the breakthrough of the modern paradigm.

7.1 Images of time and agricultural work in late antiquity – from 0 to 400 AD

Transformation of the notion of time

As was hopefully apparent from chapter 1, pre-modern thought had no concept of an absolute void. Space nestled around the body like a glove around a hand, and without a hand there was no glove. The same interdependence of substance and medium characterised the archaic time. Time was only appreciable in that things were formed and disintegrated, grew forth only to be swallowed back into the womb of the earth – indeed, this cyclic rhythm was *one and the same* as time. It is not until the more advanced stage of cultural evolution that this tie between event and notion of time is broken, as units of time are homogenised and moved to their own abstract space – eventually, in modernity, breaking off their connection to events completely.[2]

Development of the patriarchal world picture in Mesopotamia, Judaism and classical antiquity already denotes a significant step out of cyclic time, as here the actual reality – of *logos* or the ideas – is shifted from the earth's rhythmic embrace to an indestructible heaven. Time – left behind in the earthly cavity – hereby begins to level off. This levelling off is effected, on the one hand, through the Judeo-Christian concept of a unique history: a chronology binding together all events in an irreversible chain, from Creation to birth of the Saviour to Day of Judgement and the coming of the Kingdom of God.[3] This history contains some of the seeds of the modern notion of time, which now becomes linear and acquires direction, and can also be sub-divided and measured out. On the lower part of the scale, measurement of time becomes manifest in, for example, the strict discipline with which monastic life is regulated. A monastic pioneer such as Saint Benedict (*c.* 480-543) insisted on monks standing at attention for late arrival at prayers, whereas Saint Columba (521-97) even meted out a punishment of fifty lashes or fifty hymns for the same sin.[4]

Also the Greco-Roman culture, even though it never gets away from a perception of its historiography as principally cyclic and repeatable, develops a tendency in the direction of a more linear concept of time.[5] In cultures where cyclicity is absolute, the division of the year constitutes a varying and unstable phenomenon dependant on degree of latitude, natural environment and way of life. So, in Egypt, on Crete

and in early Indo-European cultures such as the Greek there were not four but three 'seasons': in Egypt, as we have seen (cf. chapter 4), flooding, sowing and harvesting; in the other cultures, autumn, spring and summer.[6] In Greece and Rome, these seasons were linked to the trio of *orai* (Latin *horae*), which were female deities along the lines of graces, nymphs and muses. Even though the Horae gradually became abstract designations of time – besides seasons, also year, hour (Latin *hora*), point in time (Latin *hora*) or simply now (Italian *ora*) – they originally acted as 'midwives' for growth forces and were only active during plant growing periods. In the Attic cult of *orai*, Thallo was the flower and Carpo the fruit, and the *orai* were also, at least from the 8th century BC, brought by Demeter or were playmates of her daughter Persephone.[7]

As a portent of their later, more aerial identity, however, we also meet them beyond the ground – in the *Iliad*, for example, where the gates of heaven are presided over by *orai*: "to whom are entrusted great heaven and Olympus, whether to throw open the thick cloud or shut it."[8] This other, atmosphere-bound assignment then takes over after Greek astronomy has recast the year from three to four parts – *tropai* – denoted by a summer and a winter solstice, a spring and an autumn equinox; for in Hellenistic time *tropai* are one and the same as *orai* with an additional member.[9] Albeit in somewhat obscure phrases, Aristotle couples the annual cycle with the slanting ecliptic, which he considers imperfect in relation to the outer fixed-star sphere with its perfect circular movement.[10] This operation signals an important move away from the cyclical conception of time: from a time which, qua growth, is born of and returns to a flat earth, to a time which unfolds in the gap between a spherical earth and celestial spheres that break away from time toward the upper parts. In this system, weather, lightning and rain have slipped out of the celestial gods' hands in favour of the residual zone between earth and heavens, where sun and seasons slide by: time becomes weather. The extent of kinship between these two parties is apparent from the Latin word *tempestas* and from Romance successors to *tempus* such as *tempo* (Italian) and *temps* (French), all words meaning both weather and time. The dark period of the year has arrived at the gap from below, as it can now no longer be unconditionally imputed that the growth forces are swallowed up cyclically by the depths of the earth. Rather, winter is on the way to equality with the other periods of the year. Or put another way: it is exhumed and left unburied in time.

This unburiedness is especially applicable to Aeolus' winds – storm winds – which were formerly confined to the earth's womb. Even though they actually have a special connection with death and darkness, they are required to become part of the general weather time, *tempestas*. Albeit on the basis of other observations, it is precisely this unburiedness which Michel Serres connects with the formation of modernity. He

dates its beginning to the point at which the three Marys find Christ's tomb empty apart from the shroud. From then on, unburied death becomes what Serres calls a *motor* placed on the back of the West.[11] This motor could also be understood as time that does not vanish in and rise again cyclically from the underworld, but in its elevation above it is transformed into a medium in which events flow.

Secularisation of the Golden Age

Considering how little the cultural history of the notion of time has been explored, it seems persistently difficult to pick up threads from this more bird's-eye perspectival description of the change in the notion of time and on to the microhistorical turbulences of culture, including, not least, the pictorial art domains in which time is variously rendered visible. Nevertheless, here it will be rendered feasible that medieval art appropriates a temporal role similar to that of the spatial. If antique pictorial art can be said to shift its focus away from the embrace of cyclicity and out to the supra-temporal domains of the Golden Age paradigm, medieval art would seem to represent a return to the cyclic time – just as it seemed to be a relapse to a level, pre-classical pictorial space. As was also the case with the pictorial space, however, this 'primitiveness' is only imperfectly realised as, rather than an archaic cyclicity incarnating time, we are dealing with a quasi-modern time in which cyclicity appears as ripples in an ever more linear, irreversible and abstract fluid medium.

If we now also note that time and work are closely connected subjects for images, we will see that the described temporal transformation fits in with my overarching evolutionary model of the manifestation of work in the landscape image. My overview in chapter 4 thus detected a three-phased pattern in which a central paradigm of work shyness, the Golden Age paradigm, was symmetrically flanked by two more pro-work paradigms: the Neolithic-Egyptian and the modern. A more miniature version of this pattern is then found in the Greco-Roman epoch between 800 BC and 400 AD, for while the central paradigm – the classical (450 BC-100 AD) – appears as a sub-variant of the epistemic Golden Age paradigm, on the one hand the archaic phase (800 BC-450 BC) replays the Egyptian stage (cf. chapter 1.1 and 4.3), whereas, on the other hand, the late antique phase (100-400 AD), as we will see in the following, conceives of modernity. It is thus also in the late antique phase, with its reappeared work images, that the aforementioned transformation in the concept of time results recognisably in images.

It is perhaps because of its foundations in the dying Ancient Egyptian culture, a civilisation which paid homage to work and time, that Ptolemaic Hellenism displays some of the forerunners of late antique depictions of those subjects. Extant evidence of the personifications of the four seasons – the innovation of Greek

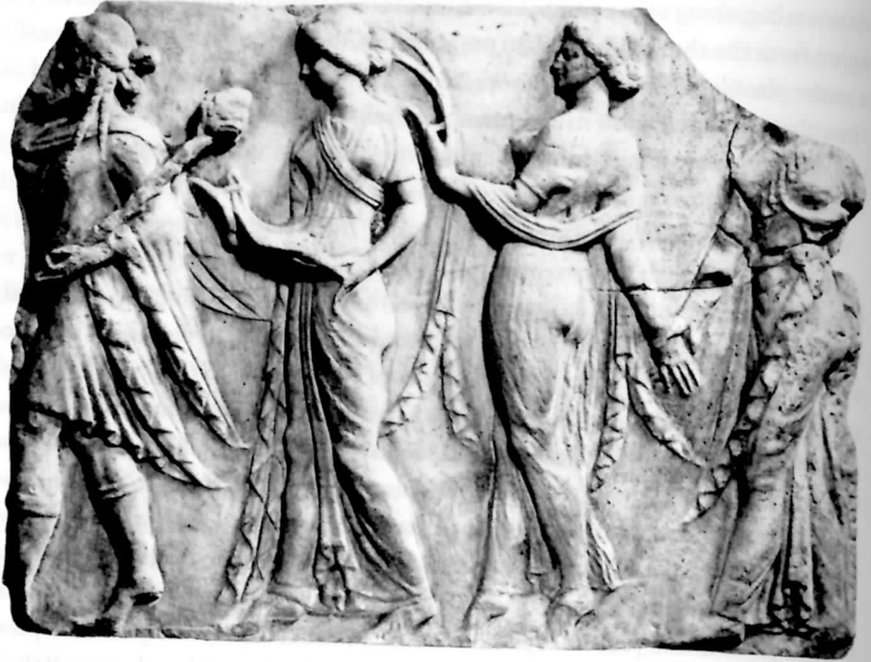


Fig. 7.1. *Dionysus with Spring, Summer and Autumn* (1st century AD?), fragmented Roman relief. Paris, Musée du Louvre.

astronomy – are thus first encountered in Alexandria, in the Dionysian procession of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (reigned 285-42 BC) referred to by Athenaeus. Following a vanguard, which included *inter alia* silens and satyrs, we meet the *Year*, the tragic masked Eniautos with cornucopia, and another god of time, the five-year period Lustrum with a palm branch. This is followed by the seasons, the four female *orai* displaying the various fruits that grow during the year – indirect testimony to the outcome of work.[12] A sculptural example of this processional form can be seen in a fragmented Roman relief; here it is Dionysus who is at the head of the three Horae: Spring, Summer and Autumn (Winter has presumably broken off) (FIG. 7.1).[13]

Images of time and work found an expanded pictorial forum in the illustrated calendar. The calendar not only divided the year into seasons, but also into months and days, periods characterised by specific activities – related to work and religion alike – and, moreover, influenced by astrology. While the rare Hellenistic calendar illustrations only offer allusions to religious activities[14] – in line with the Alexandrian

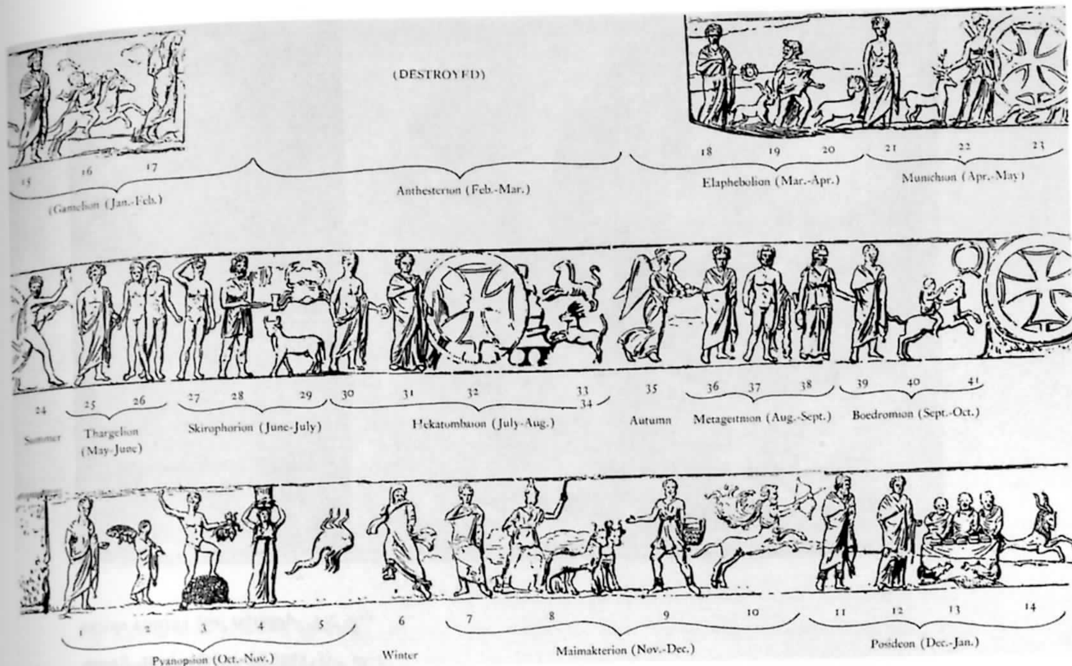


Fig. 7.2. *Calendar with Labours of the Months and Religious Festivals* (1st-3rd century AD (?)), relief frieze. Athens, Hagios Eleutherios.

procession – Late Hellenism, around or after the birth of Christ, sees the beginning of references not only to changes in weather and time, but also explicitly to work. In a Greek relief, later placed in the Athenian church of Hagios Eleutherios, we thus see a calendar that combines personifications of seasons and months with work, religious rituals and astrology (**FIG. 7.2**).[15] Summer, a man walking, is not only holding out a sheaf of corn, but also the sickle used to cut it. Winter, an old man wrapped in a cowl, reminds us of the low temperatures and death of plants. Furthermore, the month personifications are accompanied by various assisting figures: some referring to religious rituals such as *Panathenaia* and big and small *Dionysia*, some who are simply working.[16] The most conspicuous activities are grape treading (for *Pyanopsion*, October-November) and ploughing and sowing (for *Maimakterion*, November-December).

As the reader will notice, the summer and winter motifs are blatantly those of cereal culture: the subject that has been ousted from Greco-Roman pictorial art since classical culture let the Golden Age paradigm triumph in the mid-5th century

Fig. 7.3. Augustan *cistophorus* with sheaf of wheat (27-26 BC), from Pergamum.

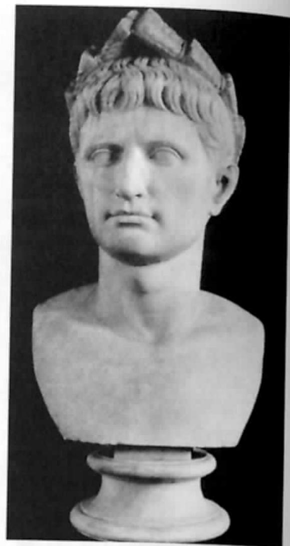


Fig. 7.4. *Augustus with* corona spicea (*c.* year 0), marble bust. Rome, Vatican, Musei Vaticani, inv. 715.

BC. Its late antique emergence thus signals the return of the pro time and work current which, in the archaic Greek era, found its most explicit literary manifestation in Hesiod's *Works and Days*. In focussing on seasonal produce, work, the passage of time and the weather, this current breaks sharply, albeit still to a limited extent, with the Golden Age *field*. What had previously been ascribed to an eternal and immutable blossoming beyond accursed time, is transformed – to use a phrase from Roman imperial coins – into *felicitas temporum*: the very prosperity afforded by the periodic fluctuations of the year. The Golden Age is introduced, as it were, to time.

The idea of a Golden Age occurring in this world was formulated just before the seasons entered pictorial art – that is, during the rule of Augustus. That the Augustan Golden Age – *aurea aetas* – differs from its paradisiacal predecessor is particularly evident in its focus on cereal culture.[17] Roman coins of the later republic, and particularly from the 40s BC, often bear depictions of Ceres and sheaves of corn – propaganda presumably indicating that the rulers have become increasingly dependent on support from the plebs.[18] The connection reaches an interim culmination under Augustus who, for example, inserts a sheaf of wheat in the middle of his name on coins (*cistophori*) from Pergamum, 27-26 BC (FIG. 7.3), or tops off his likeness with a crown made of wheat (*corona spicea*) (FIG. 7.4).[19]

Fig. 7.5. *Ceres with Fertility Symbols, Flanked by Naiads and Nereids* (13-9 BC), relief. Rome, Ara Pacis.

The most monumental representation of this iconography is without doubt the Ceres relief on Ara Pacis, commissioned by the Senate in honour of the Emperor Augustus after his return from Spain and Gaul (13-9 BC; FIG. 7.5).[20] Here the new Golden Age appears in the figure of a goddess of corn, who also has connotations of Tellus, Venus, Italia and Pax. The earth goddess has, in typical fashion, seated herself on a piece of her own element, a slab of rock, and she has two infants in her arms, possibly Ceres' mythological children Liber and Libera, albeit they could also be construed as the two children, the fruits *karpoi*, with which Tellus is usually equipped.[21] As an indication of her power over the fertility of nature, her lap – like a veritable cornucopia – is full of fruit, just as her head is wreathed with a *corona spicea* of poppy capsules and corn, plants which are also growing on the rock outcrop behind her. A cow is resting at her feet, a sheep grazes on the ground and at her side sit, as recently identified by Spaeth, two nymphs: a nymph of springs (*Naiad*) on a goose or a swan, and a sea nymph (*Nereid*) on a sea monster (*Keto*). The interpretation is clarified by the nymphs' underlying elements: respectively, a reed-filled river flowing from a pitcher and unruly waves indicating the sea.[22]

A stanza from Horace's *Carmen Saeculare*, an ode written to be performed at Augustus' new and fertility-promoting *ludi saeculares* ('secular games') in 17 BC,

Fig. 7.6. *Birds in Reed Marsh with Ears of Corn and Poppies* (*c.* 20 BC), Augustan relief from Falerii. Rome, Palazzo Primoli, via dei Soldati 25.

sums up the theme of this sculptural work: "May our Earth, abundant in fruits and cattle,/ Yield the headed grain as a crown for Ceres;/ May our crops be nurtured with wholesome rains and Jupiter's breezes."[23] This relief really makes us feel we are on the threshold to the breakthrough of the seasons in pictorial culture. Even though fertility is still ascribed primarily to the earth, products of the seasons are almost ready to jump out into weightless time: the paradisiacal fruits of autumn are in the goddess's lap; the corn and poppies of summer by her head and the rock; the wet reeds of winter alongside the river pitcher. Against this background, an Augustan relief of birds in marsh vegetation looks like another attempt to approach the new reality of summer and winter: suddenly, poppies and ears of corn are seen growing among the marsh reeds (FIG. 7.6). Considering that the *saeculum* – the new century and, in a more figurative sense, the new epoch Augustus ushered in – is the same *saeculum* that, in identifying *the year*, comes to accompany the seasons, it is striking that the modern term *secularise* means to take into civil use, i.e. to draw down into the world and into worldly time. In a number of ways, it thus makes sense to see the time around year nought as the period in which modernity began to be programmed, or, in a different metaphor: conceived.

To judge by Suetonius' comments on Nero's Golden House in Rome (64-68 AD), Augustus' vision of a worldly Golden Age was still an ambition of the later Roman

emperors. In the enormous vestibule, Nero installed an artificial pleasure landscape encompassing the three dimensions of the space. A pool, creating the illusion of a sea, was not only surrounded by buildings representing cities, but also by stretches of countryside with tilled fields (*rura insuper arvis*), vineyards and pasture, besides woodland with large numbers of wild and domestic animals[24] – so, again a landscape in which the self-seeded is mixed with the cultivated.

Formation of the feudal system

Not only does the epistemic *field* determining the new pictorial culture of late antiquity and the Middle Ages involve a transformation of the concept of time, it also involves a transformation of the ideologies relating to physical labour – ideologies held by those in power as well as by those performing the work. In order to gain an impression of the evolutionary mechanisms behind these ideologies, it would again be appropriate to consult Hegel's and Kojève's ideas concerning the evolution of self-consciousness and its foundation in recognition by others. If the classical period, the consummation of the advanced intermediate stage, brings the master recognition from the subjugated slave, this recognition is, in the long run, found wanting as it does not come from an equal. The slave therefore takes over the incentive of the evolution of consciousness, which now no longer relies on risking one's own life, but on transforming one's essential conditions of life through work. By this means Kojève also explains the significance of time in post-antique culture, for unlike the master living in an immediate – and therefore time-independent – gratification of needs, the slave has to cultivate and sublimate desires by repressing them in work time. Through this process of education, humankind creates "History – i.e., human *Time*. Work *is* time, and that is why it necessarily exists *in* time: it requires time."[25] [Kojève's italics] Furthermore, it is only via the agency of work that the human being becomes aware of himself or herself *as a human being*: an individual elevated above nature, for in the historical process of progress this individual changes both nature and self.[26]

Hegel and Kojève are, however, clear that this new way of ensuring human recognition and consciousness has to go through an extensive intermediate phase – late antiquity and the Middle Ages – before it reaches its consummation: modernity's synthesis of master and slave in a homogenised society of civic individuals. In this intermediate phase the slave goes through a series of ideologies – Stoicism, solipsism, Christianity – which with increasing success reconcile his ideal, personal freedom, with the as yet to be surmounted reality, lack of freedom associated with bondage. Christianity, the most successful of these ideologies, shifts authority from society's lord and master to a celestial Lord, in the presence of whom all, masters and slaves

alike, are equal: "Indeed, the Christian Slave can affirm his equality with the Master only by accepting the existence of an 'other world' and a transcendent God."[27]

Although I must here limit myself to just a few pieces of evidence, this interpretation of the emergence of the Middle Ages via the philosophy of consciousness would seem to find plenty of backing in the history of religion and also studies of a more sociological bent. Firstly, it would seem indisputable that Christianity, both in its stories and its appeal, gives those of limited means a more pro-active role than had been normal practice in the antique religions. In the early Church, urban artisans were important proselytes,[28] and Paul gives a quite straightforward order to work with one's hands in order to help the frail (Acts of the Apostles 20: 34-35) and "if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thessalonians 3: 10).[29] Moreover, this work ethic continually spilled over into the spiritual sphere, as many early Christian symbols (grape press, tumbrel, sickle, hoe, fish, ladle) refer more or less directly to work, and in one of the episodes when Jesus calls to be followed unconditionally, he specifies that: "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God." (Luke 9: 62)[30]

Nevertheless, if the Christian tradition is the first in which slave and master really become equal in the eyes of God, the Judaic tradition also demonstrates many tendencies to a world order characterised by work. In fact, the spiritual product par excellence, the Creation, is described as a work – a work so strenuous that its maker has to rest on the seventh day (Genesis 2: 2-3). Nor is the work-free place, Paradise, completely devoid of strenuous activity: Adam is put into the Garden of Eden in order to "work it and keep it" (Genesis 2: 15). Later, many of the Jewish leaders are correspondingly described as working the land – farmers, wheat threshers, ploughmen[31] – and Deuteronomy (24: 14-15) prescribes that the needy hired servant should be treated well and paid on time.

That this religiously-determined goodwill towards the lower classes intensifies during late antiquity can be substantiated via a sociological factor. As one of several homologically interacting domains in an epistemic *field*, it is accompanied by a real social innovation, the feudal system, which disbands the slave class and places it in a – at least officially – closer relationship to the elite. The process is, as suggested in chapter 6 and earlier in this chapter, already in preparation during Augustus' day when, apart from appealing to plebs through visual propaganda alluding to corn, he also began the overhaul of Roman agricultural practices. And under an intensified impression of landowners' power, slaves' suffering and agriculture's accelerating decline, his reforms are carried forward in late antiquity. Here private ownership of land is gradually phased out in favour of a feudal system in which supervisors oversee farmers who work the emperor's land.[32]

Officially, the peasants were free tenants on the imperial land and there were

major and often successful endeavours to protect *coloni Caesaris* from greedy middlemen. And yet they still ended up in a strict system of castes and guilds, which exacted fines for moving off the land, so in practice they were serfs. The system, which was possibly instigated by Vespasian (69-79 AD) and which was certainly developing in the 2nd century, bore much resemblance to the archaic intermediate stage in Egypt, and considering that Egypt became Rome's chief supplier of grain for four months of the year (with eight months being taken care of by the other areas of North Africa), it would again not seem unlikely that it made a tangible impact.[33] The system might not have been as humane and paradisiacal as that wished for by the Augustan court poets, but it nevertheless forged a more robust relationship between peasants and their masters, the imperial overseers. The peasants were no longer – as they had been in classical antiquity – anonymous slaves, but became, in the official ideology at least, the foundations of society.

These sociological shifts in late antiquity provide quite concrete support for Hegel's and Kojève's theories, based on the philosophy of consciousness, of the slave's incipient liberation through work. Rather than the classical antique society in which a sovereign and a work-shy elite oppress a slave class deprived of responsibility, we here encounter a society in which an emperor is the leader of a peasant class which cultivates his land in a state of, an at least official, freedom. This context also explains how work on the land, having been taboo as pictorial motif in classical times, now makes its entrance into such monumental genres as floor mosaics and sarcophagi – pictorial media in a new borderland between official and private.

The landscape paradigm in late antiquity

But before I embark on an analysis of these iconographically-determined pockets in the pictorial paradigm of late antiquity, we should form an introductory impression of what this paradigm in itself looked like. What, in short, is the method of depiction for a landscape image which, at certain peak thematic moments, is furrowed by the plough and covered by ears of corn?

There is no doubt that the late antique landscape paradigm comprises a striking transformation of its classical forerunner as we encountered it in the sacral-idyllic paintings (cf. chapter 6). While the sacral-idylls were characterised by rocks, water and a pictorial space which, in degree of illusion and extent, approached the modern pictorial space, but never reached it, the landscape image of late antiquity seems to be the object of two conflicting movements: one which continues the sacral-idylls' spatial expansion and one which deconstructs it synchronously by draining infinity out to the divine heavens. The first movement leads towards the contours of a landscape image, which in a striking way anticipates that of modernity – a landscape

Fig. 7.7. *Threshing Scene* (4th century AD), floor mosaic. Tripoli, Museo Archeologico.

image in which rocks have to give way to an outstretched and softened surface. At the same time, however, the second movement ensures that this surface is only defined sporadically, as if the very same facilitating pictorial space is in the process of being dismantled.

The result is a remarkably insubstantial landscape image without the horizon suggested by the terrain's levelling out. In a threshing scene from the archaeological museum in Tripoli (FIG. 7.7), for example, the columned villa has been placed on what at first glance looks like a distant horizon, but perspectively it forms the villa's foundations, almost as if the house has been placed on a wall. Similar vertical planes

Fig. 7.8. *Shepherd with Sheep in Landscape* (3rd century AD), lunette fresco on arcosolium tomb. Rome, Catacombs of Domitilla.

cut off the landscape images at the bottom, although this does not prevent the figures from moving upwards – and inwards – across the imaginarily outstretched expanse. The ambivalence is strengthened by the soil only being visible in the areas of trees, hills or human figures. It is almost as if the earth formations under the objects consist solely of the shadows these objects cast, and that the objects besides this are placed in a pure void.

This flattened-out landscape image is by no means limited to depictions of feudal work life, but spreads to all manner of contexts, including the catacomb scenes of shepherds in the wild (FIG. 7.8). Nevertheless, it is tempting to view it as symptomatic of a culture which, for the first time since the Egyptians, values farming so much that it becomes worthy of depiction. Whereas I earlier stated that the sacral-idyllic landscapes were impervious to the interventions of agriculture simply because these would glance off on the rocks or be flooded in the chasms between them, I here have to note that the landscape has now actually attained a flatness and softness that will make it receptive to cultivation. As we saw in chapter 6, the tendency to flattening-out could already be traced in the late sacral-idylls (FIG. 6.9) – possibly

at the same time as the Hagios Eleutherios frieze (FIG. 7.2) – and it culminates in the 4th century, synchronously with the zenith of work depiction in late antiquity. Homological interactions in the epistemic *field* taken into consideration, the conclusion, then, seems obvious: the pictorial space adopts a flat plane because the surface of the earth in its cultivated – i.e. flat – state is met with new sympathy by those in power. Control of the image plane is dependent, as it were, on the rocks being crushed, levelled with the ground and ploughed in.

Seasons

In the main, landscape images in late antiquity continue to be controlled by the Golden Age paradigm with its resistance to traces of work and time. But as a manifestation of late antiquity's dawning appreciation of physical effort and its medium – time – a few pockets are admitted at points where a local iconographic requirement breaks the paradisiacal stagnation. One such pocket is comprised of rare instances of night scenes such as that found in the late-4th-century *Vatican Virgil* in which a crescent moon and serrated stars fill the purple sky behind a dark blue Tiber and the siege of the Trojan camp.[34]

The new and highly un-classical genre of the *Seasons* is another and far more numerous instance of this kind of iconographic pocket. This genre, which culminates in the period from the 2nd to 5th centuries, is found everywhere in Late Roman art: on frescoes, triumphal arches, sarcophagi, coins and floor mosaics in private homes, the latter especially in North Africa. Besides personifications such as women (fresco 1st-century (FIG. 7.9), mosaic *c.* 150-early-200s), cupids (2nd century), men (after 200, first in sculpture) and busts (mosaic *c.* 150-*c.* 400), the seasons are characterised by clothing, fruit symbolism, animals, work tools, festival attributes and climatic signals. As in the Ptolemaic procession, they often appear with attendant figures highlighting a particular aspect of their character. Dionysus and the couple *Earth* and *Ocean* with cornucopia (both regular elements of sarcophagi: FIGS. 7.10 and 7.10A-*7.10b*), for example, tell us about their fertility and connection with the soil, whereas *Annus* (the Year) links their fertility to time. The latter is also identified as *Aion*, *Aeternitas* (both: Eternity), *Saturn* (growth-giving time) or, as I mentioned earlier, *Saeculum* (the Age).[35] In floor mosaics, Annus will typically be featured in the centre, crowned with a wreath of mixed fruit, while the seasons are placed in the four corners (FIG. 7.11). If he assumes the figure of Aion, he is always placed inside or next to a circle with signs of the zodiac, which acts as a mandorlesque opening to the heavens; in a 3rd-century floor mosaic from Sassoferrato, for example, such an appearance is attended by a reclining Mother Earth and the seasons represented by four children (PLATE 25).[36] Where the mandorla symbolises the god's manifestation

Fig. 7.9. *Winter* (*c.* 50-79 AD), fresco (section). Pompeii, House of Cnaeus Poppaeus Habitus.

in earthly matter, the zodiac – the star signs along the sloping and thereby imperfect ecliptic – now signifies his manifestation in time.

Both *Spring* and *Autumn*, however, are tempered, festive, graceful and marked with Dionysian elements, and could therefore be seen as descendants of classical art and the supra-temporal Golden Age paradigm. *Spring* has attributes such as roses (from the *Rosalia* festival), peacocks and richly adorned, flimsy garments, besides garlands, kid goats, dogs, milk vases, *thyrsoi*, shepherd's crooks and cheese baskets: all symbols indicating that the pastoral season has begun and that Dionysian sacrifices will be made during festivals such as the *Liberalia*. Similarly, *Autumn* is indicated by overt Dionysian symbols such as grapes, ivy, *thyrsoi*, serpents and panthers.

Compared with this, *Summer* and *Winter* with their toil and temperature extremes can but seem prosaic. Apart from festive attributes such as lions, poppies

Fig. 7.10. *Triumph of Dionysus and the Seasons* (3rd century AD), sarcophagus relief. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art. All rights reserved, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Fig. 7.10a. *Mother Earth with Cornucopia and Children* (detail of the sarcophagus in fig. 7.10).

Fig. 7.10b. *Ocean with Cornucopia and Children* (detail of the sarcophagus in fig. 7.10).

Fig. 7.11. *Annus and the Seasons* (*c.* 170-80 AD), floor mosaic from El Jem (Thysdrus), Maison de la Procession Dionysiaque. El Jem, Musée Archéologique.

and garlands, *Summer* is characterised by indications of reaping and heat: ears of wheat, sickles, broad-brimmed hats, nakedness, fans (*flabellae*, against the heat) and water vases (*fillones*, against thirst). And the new, wet member of the family of seasons, *Winter*, is - possibly with the exception of its kinship with *Ocean* - an even more un-classical creation. Aged, melancholy, wrapped in cowl-like robes and wearing boots, he is provided with a hoe (to attend to the vines) and surrounded

Fig. 7.12. *Winter* (*c.* 300 AD), floor mosaic from Aumale (Anzia), Algeria. Algiers, Musée Nationale des Antiquités.

by reeds from rainy marshes (PLATE 25 and FIG. 7.12). Besides hunted quarry such as ducks, hares and wild boars, his only consolation is found in the olives, which at this season ripened in North Africa and therefore, from the end of the 2nd century, were a common winter symbol throughout the Roman Empire.

The polarisation between *Spring-Autumn* and *Summer-Winter* is even clear in such a complex image as the late-4th-century *Dominus Julius Mosaic* (PLATE 26). Although

it decorated the floor of the owner's city dwelling in Carthage, the mosaic provides scrupulous evidence of Julius' rural villa and the agricultural enterprise on the surrounding estate.[37] What usually feature as, at most, landscape fragments around personifications, are here gathered into a whole landscape image on three levels centred on Julius's villa complete with domed thermae.

To the right, in the central register, a hunting party prepares to depart, while Julius, to the left of the villa, rides towards them, accompanied by a servant carrying provisions on his shoulder. As an indication of the new weather time and the toil necessary to contain it, we see – possibly for the first time in Western art! – smoke coming from the chimneys of the domed thermae. On the upper and most distant tier, the seated lady of the house is, on the other hand, obliged to fan herself in the summer heat, all the while being presented with the seasonal produce from her *coloni*: to the left, winter ducks, a cock and new-fallen olives; to the right, summer lamb, poultry and sheep, plus, discreetly placed in the upper corner, a ripe cornfield.

That this upper landscape register must now be viewed as more prosaic than its spring-autumn counterpart below is not only apparent from the degree of heat, unchronological seasonal links and displacement to the background, but also from the fact that both the female owner and Dominus Julius appear in the foreground scene. In the springtime tableau to the left, Julius' wife features as a veritable Venus with mirror, all the while being greeted with roses, fish and a necklace. And, as attributes of autumn, the lord and master receives cranes, fruit, grapes, a hare and a papyrus scroll inscribed "IVL(IO) DOM(INO)" (a letter from another villa owner?).[38] The couple's joint presence here conforms well with historical practice, given that spring and autumn were the fair seasons when the feudal lord resided on his rural estate. In wintertime, on the other hand, he returned to the city – where the mosaic was found – and in the summer he escaped to the coolness of the coast.[39]

Agricultural work

If we extend our attention from time to the occupation undertaken in that time, agricultural work, its initial phase until *c.* 300 AD would seem to be managed by genre figures which are either directly connected with *personifications of the seasons* or are linked more indirectly with these personifications as illustrations of the *months*. For, as the Hagios Eleutherios frieze suggested, in this early period it only seems possible to elicit illustrations of months if they are accompanied by the seasons – and for the sake of two functions: they either show the year's religious festivals or they use illustrations to demonstrate the physical labour associated with each month. Examples of early depictions of active agricultural work are the floor mosaics from El Jem, formerly Thysdrus, in North Africa (Alexander Severus'

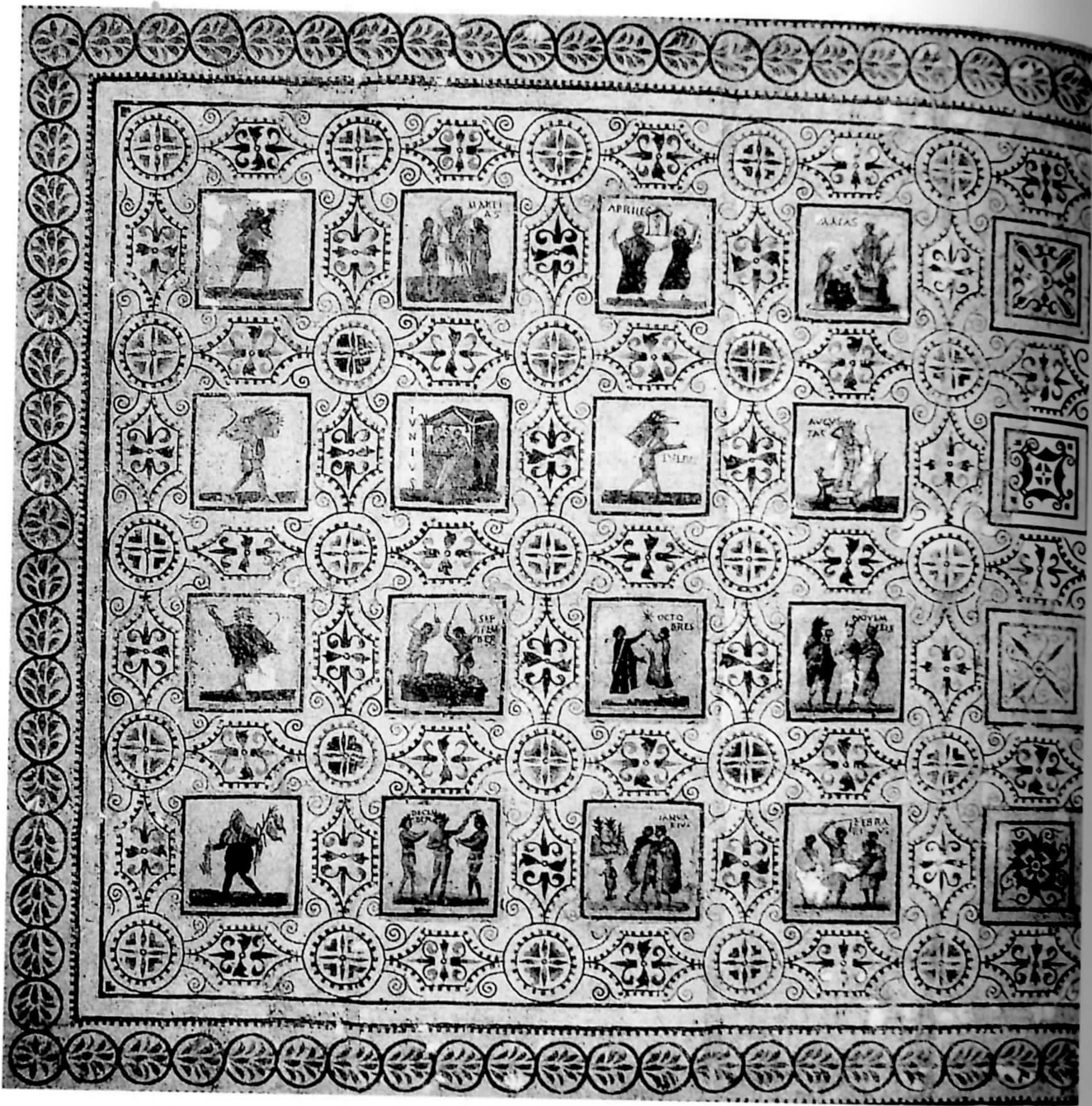


Fig. 7.13. *Seasons and Months* (*c.* 222-35), floor mosaic from El Jem (Thysdrus), cubiculum in west wing of Maison des Mois. Tunis, Musée du Sousse.

Fig. 7.14a. *Sowing and Ploughing* (detail from the mosaic in fig. 7.14, original).

Fig. 7.14. *The Seasons and Their Activities* (late 3rd century), drawing after Roman floor mosaic. Saint-Romain-en-Gal, Musée Gallo-Romain.

period, *c.* 222-35; FIG. 7.13) and Saint-Romain-en-Gal in France (end of 3rd century?; FIGS. 7.14-7.14A). The small squares in both these examples feature genre figures alternating between religious rituals and work: in El Jem as a series of months relating to each season; in Gaul directly as seven-part illustrations of the seasons.[40] An earlier, more modest example of genre figures working on the land, directly illustrating the personified seasons, is the mosaic of *Neptune and the Four Seasons* from La Chebba (*c.* 150; FIG. 7.15).[41] This mosaic shows: a rose-basket carrier and a lion for spring; a man placing wheat in a basket alongside a panther for summer; a man carrying baskets of grapes next to rush and a wild boar for autumn; a man picking olives alongside a dog for winter.

After this warming-up phase, rural activities seem ready for a provisional climax in the 4th century when, for example, figures engage in pure labours of the months, as they do in the fresco fragments under Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome, excavated

Fig. 7.15. *Neptune and the Four Seasons* (*c.* 150 AD), floor mosaic from La Chebba. Tunis, Musée du Bardo.

from 1966 (FIG. 7.16); the 2.8 m-long panels that can still be deciphered – those for September and November – show, respectively, apple picking plus ploughing and olive gathering in illustration of the neighbouring calendar: the Roman *menologia rustica*.[42] In the 4th century, work also fills the seasons in their totality, as is the case with the putti harvesters on the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus (359 AD; FIG. 7.17) and several places in the catacombs. The Pretestato catacombs, for example, show four sections with, respectively, garland weaving (spring), corn harvest (summer), grape harvest (autumn) and olive picking (winter).[43]

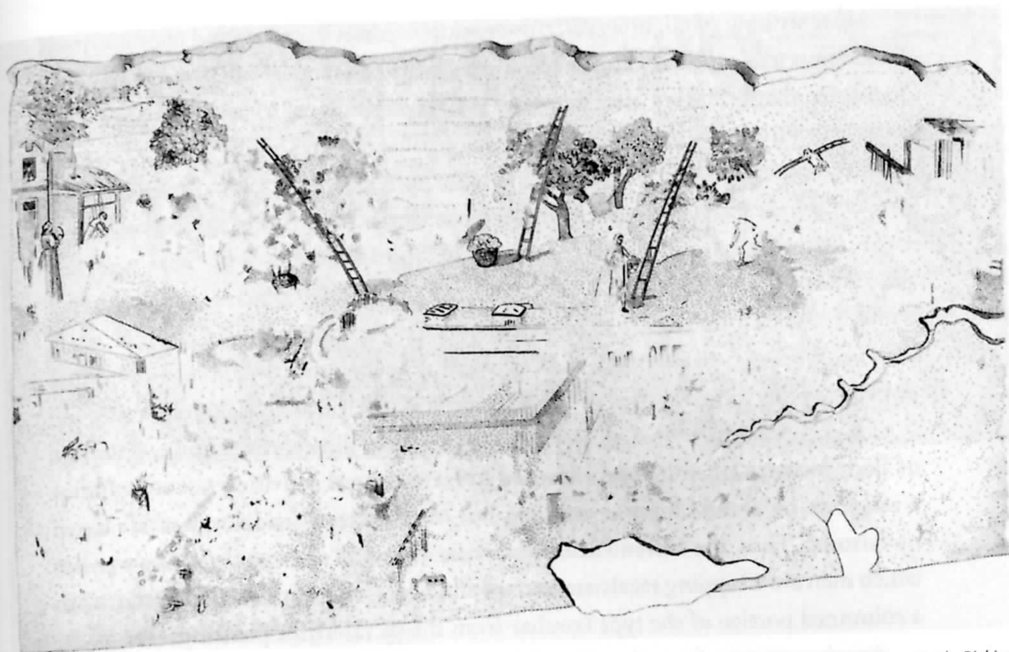


Fig. 7.16. *September: Apple Picking* (*c.* 300-350), section of calendar frieze, fresco. Rome, Santa Maria Maggiore, crypt.

Fig. 7.17. The Seasons: left, *Autumn*; right, *Summer, Winter, Spring* (359 AD), end reliefs from the sarcophagus of Junius Bassus. Rome, Vatican, Musei Vaticani.

Most striking of all, however, this century sees work on the land *liberating* itself from temporal legitimacy and becoming a more or less independent subject. Christian sarcophagi display rustic vignettes with ploughing or harvesting figures, men as well as putti (FIGS. 7.18-7.19).[44] At the same time, Adam and Eve are often shown against a background of a lamb and a sheaf of corn, or they are entrusted with these provisions by means of Logos, as manifest in Christ (FIG. 7.20).[45] In scenes such as these, fieldwork has achieved a redeeming function almost on a par with wine and pastoralism. Correspondingly, a Latin sermon, apocryphally attributed to Augustine, states: "In the church the catechumens [the recently converted] are as grass; when they believe it is as though they raise to stalks. The believers, too, grow into mature corn ears; therefore also the corn of the saints is put into celestial granaries."[46]

In North Africa, known as "the granary of Rome" during the Empire, a number of floor mosaics are, moreover, devoted to various rural activities, not to manifest a religious, let alone Christian content, but to celebrate a feudal way of life based on farming. Thus, the aforementioned mosaic in Tripoli shows a threshing scene in which men are whipping recalcitrant cows and horses in front of a grand estate with a columned portico of the type familiar from the sacral-idyllic paintings (FIG. 7.7).

Another mosaic, from the villa of the Laberii family in Uthina, has assembled a whole montage of work scenes around a more modest cattle shed (FIG. 7.21); on flat, shadowlike landscape grounds we see warmly-clad ploughing, horse watering, donkey driving, herding, fowling, wild boar and panther hunting.[47] Farms and residence are also portrayed alone in their surrounding environment, as seen on a trio of apse mosaics from a large trifolium in Tabarka (early 4th century; FIGS. 7.22-7.24).[48] In this figureless forum – in which the closest we get to heroic toil is a simple spinner on a knoll surrounded by sheep in front of the tenants' quarters, the *villa rustica* – there is obviously going to be greater semantic pressure placed on the bare natural environment (FIG. 7.22). Interestingly, this makes it more conservative and affected by the Golden Age paradigm. Neither in this mosaic nor around what look like more modest, and therefore so much the more operational, small farms, *villae fructuariae*, in the second part of the trio, do we see any presence of corn, the main produce of the area, but just pictogram-like rows of grapevines (FIG. 7.23). And the lord of the estate's residence itself, *villa urbana*, is shifted to a schematic park with roses, trees and a pond with geese and ducks: altogether paradisiacal and beyond any kind of utilitarian purpose (FIG. 7.24).

In a 4th-century floor mosaic of *Earth and Ocean* from an ensemble of thermae in Antioch, we finally encounter a more indirect, albeit unmistakeable, reference to work in the fields (FIGS. 7.25-7.25A).[49] The earth goddess, encircled by corn and given her Greek name Ge, is here surrounded by her many children, fruits (*Karpoi*) in the form of a collection of cupids. Between them they carry another of her

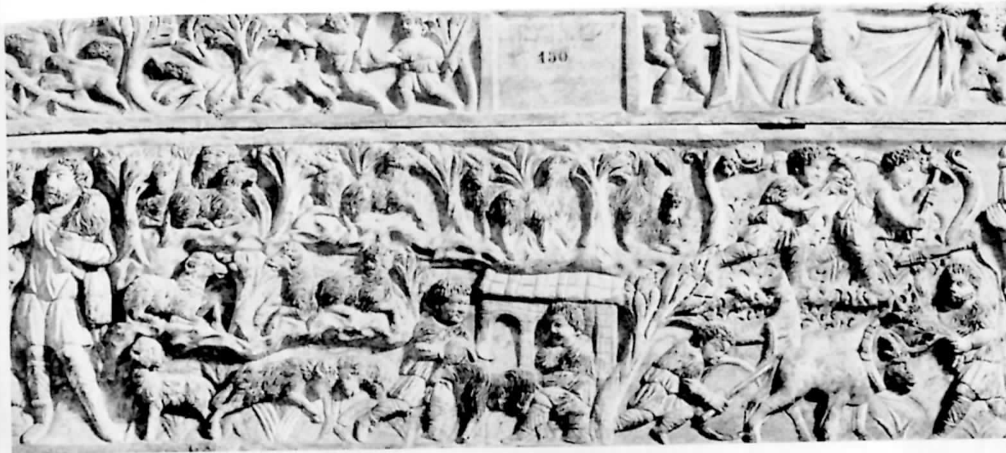


Fig. 7.18. Men engaged in rural pursuits, and Blessing Christ (early 4th century), relief on sarcophagus (section) from Tor Sapienza. Rome, Vatican, Musei Vaticani, inv. 31485 (Lat. 150).

Fig. 7.19. *Man Ploughing, and Harvesters* (4th century AD), relief on sarcophagus (section). Benevento, Museo del Sannio, inv. 580.

Fig. 7.20. *Christ as Logos Entrusting a Lamb and a Sheaf of Corn to Adam and Eve* (4th century AD), relief on sarcophagus (section). Rome, Vatican, Musei Vaticani, inv. 31427 (Lat. 114).

Fig. 7.21. *Rustic Scenes* (4th century AD), floor mosaic from the villa of the Laberii family in Uthina.

Fig. 7.22. *Woman Spinning in front of* Villa Rustica *and Vines* (early 4th century AD), mosaic from Tabarka. Tunis, Musée du Bardo.

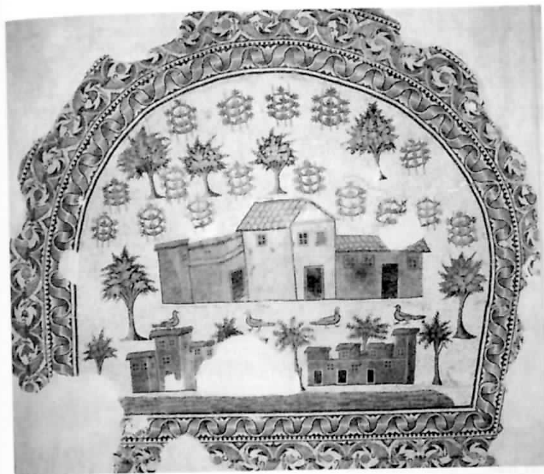
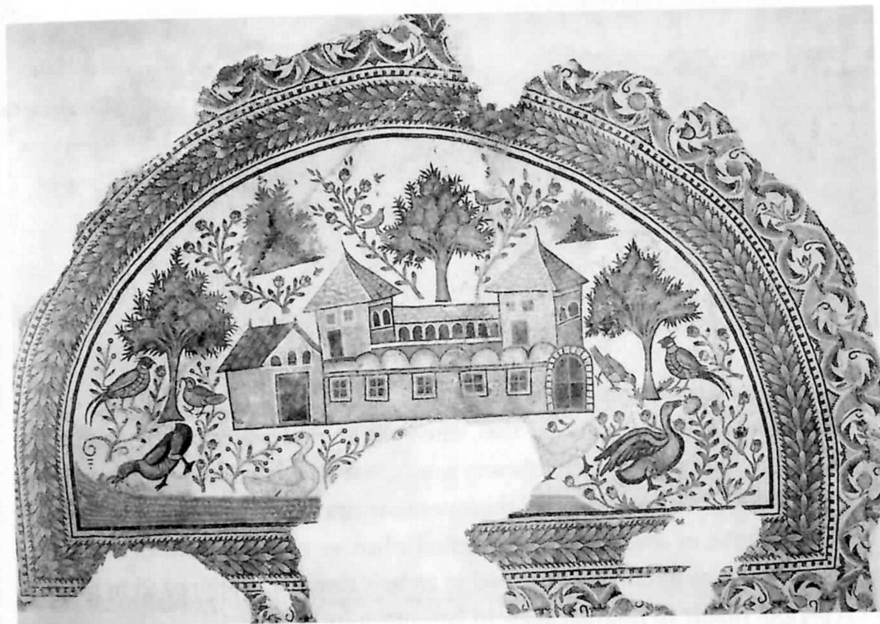


Fig. 7.23. *Small Farms, Vines and Trees* (early 4th century AD), mosaic from Tabarka. Tunis, Musée du Bardo.

Fig. 7.24. *Estate and Park* (early 4th century AD), mosaic from Tabarka. Tunis, Musée du Bardo.



products, the field (*Aroura*), shaped as a huge garland of corn. The iconography, in other words, follows the tradition from the Ceres relief on Ara Pacis (FIG. 7.5), but in the pro-work 4th century the corn is here extremely prominent. This accent is possibly further strengthened by a local cultural *field* because the Antiochian school of theology emphasised Christ's human nature and thereby the worldly aspect. The image of the world as corn culture surrounded by ocean corresponds strikingly with

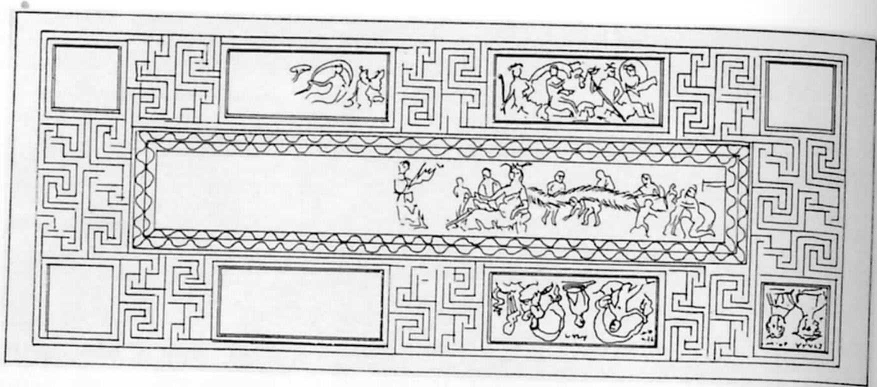


Fig. 7.25. *Earth and Ocean* (4th century), drawing after floor mosaic. Antioch, Bath "E", great hall.

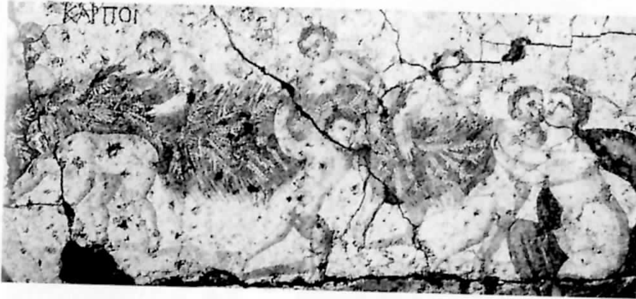


Fig. 7.25a. *Cupids Bearing Garlands of Corn*, detail of mosaic in fig. 7.25, original.

Achilles' shield as described in the *Iliad*, where the many descriptions of agricultural activities are rounded off with this very sea: "On it [Hephaistus] set also the great might of the river Oceanus, around the outermost rim of the strongly made shield."[50] The similarity is, of course, not coincidental when we take into consideration that seasonal work was initially represented in archaic times, was oppressed in the classical period, finally to flourish anew in late antiquity.

Despite late antiquity's generally levelled-off pictorial landscape grounds and the fields which, under local iconographic pressure, are admitted into these flattened terrains, we should, however, note that we are still far from a depiction of a broader cultivated terrain, a *territory* akin to that which, under the verticality of the mapping gaze, is represented in the contemporaneous tracts of the *agrimensores* (cf. chapter 6). What is lacking is the integration of the mapping gaze into the panoramic gaze of the monumental image, a synthesis in which the illusionist depictions of single fields merge into a network of cultivated units.

Fig. 7.26. *Soldiers Building a Road* (112-13 AD), drawing after relief. Rome, Trajan's Column.

Fig. 7.27. *Soldiers Felling Trees to Construct a Fortification during Campaign against the Dacians* (112-13 AD), drawing after relief. Rome, Trajan's Column.

Roads

Nor is it surprising, due to the atomised appearance of territory in the late antique images, that the units which, above all others, create networks in the landscape – roads – are an extremely rarely-depicted phenomenon. As was also the case with the Neo-Assyrian reliefs (cf. chapter 4.1), it is not in the everyday cyclical enterprises that we will find depictions of roads; rather, the pictorial catalyst is formed by the secularised narrative of the ruler. Trajan's Column (112-13, Rome) thus depicts Trajan's victorious deeds in a way that recalls those of the monarchs in the Neo-Assyrian reliefs. In particular, many of the reliefs are devoted to the soldiers' heroic work efforts. Trees are felled and inserted in an entrenchment during a campaign against the Dacians, or they are cut down during the construction of a road (FIGS. 7.26-7.27).[51]

The representation of this road, which cuts through rocks drawn with shallow plasticity, is one of the very few examples of pre-modern division of terrain that I have been able to trace in images beyond the domain of the map.

Mining and quarrying

If we, in conclusion, turn from labour undertaken on the surface of the earth to the more radical in-depth interventions – from agriculture to roads to mining and quarrying, and from Silver Age to Iron Age – we must note that the pictorial evolution runs more or less parallel. While mining and quarrying, the Iron Age rape of Mother Earth, is, as mentioned earlier, completely absent as a pictorial motif throughout classical antiquity, from classical Greek culture through Hellenism to the Romano-Campanian wall paintings, it reappears for a brief period in late antiquity, from *c.* 250-450 AD, only to be ousted again in the High Middle Ages.[52] One of the pictorial forums can be seen as a product of the mining workers themselves: again, the Early Christian catacombs, whose almost 900-kilometre-long underground system of galleries, tombs, chambers and ventilation shafts required considerable mining expertise (FIG. 7.28). The 'deep diggers', *fossores*, mentioned in the catacomb inscriptions and in the Early Christian literature are indeed referred to by the same term as was generally applied to mining workers.

Other pictorial forums of this period are represented by: an unfinished (?) relief showing a hammer-wielding god of mining, possibly Hercules Saxanus, from Bacher Gebirge in the Eastern Alps (the mountains of which were rich in both iron and marble); a fragmented sarcophagus lid showing a procession of miners, from Linares in Southern Spain (presumably that of an official at the silver and lead mines in the region);[53] and, finally, a miniature from the late-4th-century *Vergilius Vaticanus* manuscript (FIG. 7.29). The latter example is an illustration of the scene where Aeneas surveys the building of Carthage, which involves hewing "out of the cliffs vast columns", and finally exclaims: "Happy they whose walls already rise!"[54] The miniature not only shows the building work and the hewing of blocks and columns, but also takes us to their very point of origin: a cave entrance with two stonemasons breaking up rock. If we disregard the latter illustration, then, we will observe that mining themes in the extant images of the Greek archaic period (cf. chapter 4) and late antiquity alike are manifested exclusively by figures with an occupational interest in mining and quarrying: if not actual miners, then their superiors. As the theme thus lacks support in a socially broader-based iconographic tradition, its vulnerability and even weaker traces in the pictorial culture than its above-ground counterpart, farming, become understandable.

Fig. 7.28. *Miners (fossores)* (*c.* 250-300 AD), wall painting. Rome, Catacombs of Petrus and Marcellinus.

Fig. 7.29. *Foundation of Carthage* (late 4th century), miniature from *Vergilius Vaticanus* manuscript. Rome, Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, ms Vat. lat. 3225, f. 13.

7.2 Images of time and agricultural work in the Middle Ages – after 400 AD

Agricultural work

Following the culmination of work images in the 4th century, it is as if the cultural energy has been – provisionally – used up and a reaction sets in that is not discarded until the Carolingian period. Work in the fields can no longer be celebrated outside specific, usually biblical, themes and the genre figures of the labours of the months vanish in favour of standing personifications which, although they have absorbed something of the genre imprint, only allude indirectly to the labours of the months. Nevertheless, the allusions to work are purer in that the former religious attributes are filtered away by the Christian orthodoxy.[55] This type would seem to go back to a 3rd-century hybrid tradition, bringing together religion and work in personifications standing upright in rectangular sections or sections arranged in circles. In a typical later example of the circular type – a monastery floor in Beisan in the Jordan Valley, made in 567-68 – *December* is incarnated by a man scattering grain seed from a basket, while *October* is a hare-hunter and *July* is a man with scythe and sheaf of corn (FIG. 7.30).[56]

As was the case in the preceding epoch, this pictorial reaction against agricultural work can be explained in a sociological light. In both the East and the West Roman Empire, the status of physical labour as deemed by the elites would seem to fall markedly after 400, in the West intensified by the chaos of migrations.[57] The most labour-intensive aspect of farming, crop growing, is given, for example, a conspicuously insignificant role in the Byzantine writings on agrarian subjects, the 6th-7th-century *Geoponica*.[58] And if we look westwards, Jacques Le Goff submits the observation that agriculture, including tenant farmers and their masters – the *domini* – are totally absent in 5th-6th-century literature.[59] Between the 6th and 8th centuries, the work connotations of agriculture became so strong that the verb *laborare* was restricted solely to agricultural work, either as transitive verb (*laborare campum, terram*, etc.) or absolute (*laborare*=to plough). This was also a period in which the idea of *opus servile* was taken up again, while the military and religious duties were put on the same footing as recreational time. In the *Law of the Burgundii* (*c.* 590-650) we encounter ploughmen (*aratores*) in the lowest wage group with swineherds, herdsmen and other thralls (*alii servii*). Just above them come carpenters and foundry workers, while silver- and goldsmiths earn three times as much, or more.

A countercurrent in this massive scepticism of work prospered at the core of Christianity: among the monks who saw work as a form of penance and thereby a good thing in measured doses. Monastic rules recommended daily work, albeit

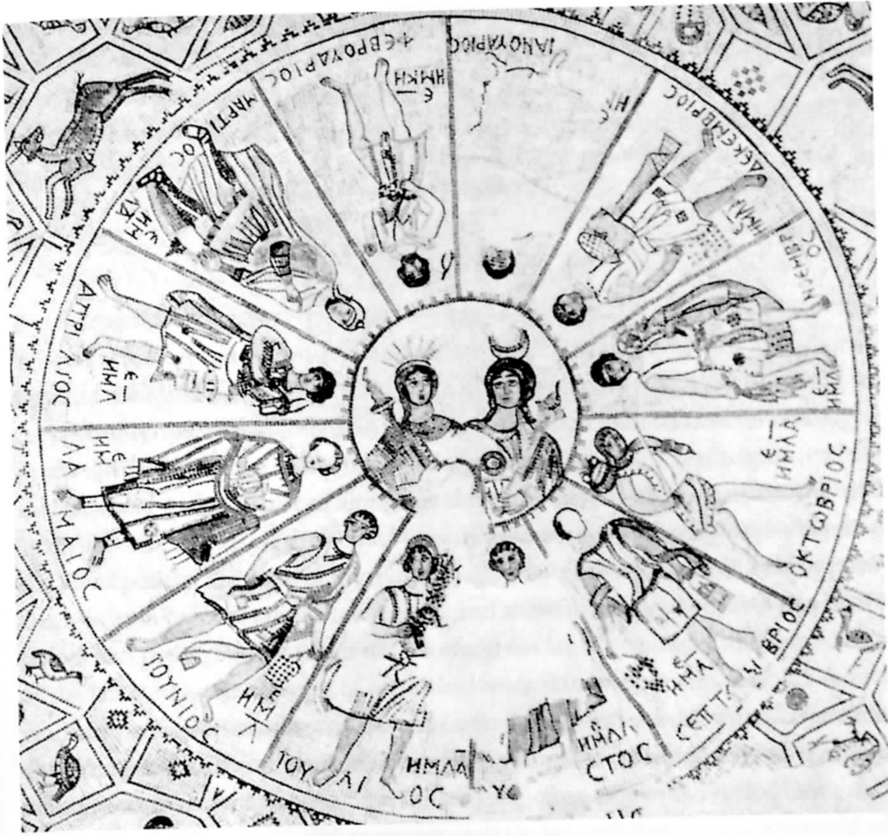


Fig. 7.30. *Calendar with the Months* (567-68), floor mosaic (section) from monastery in Beisan (Beth-Shan), Israel.

gardening and other gentler forms of work were preferred to farming. Another countercurrent came from the Northern, pre-antique traditions which, as a consequence of their origins in the advanced primitive stage, imbued the craftsman, especially the metalworker, with a sacred charisma. Even in the monasteries, the rarity of implements gave them an almost cultic significance: mills, for example, were considered to be supernatural machines, and Saint Benedict gained a reputation as a miracle-worker by, for instance, reassembling a broken kneading trough and retrieving the blade of a spade from the bottom of the monastery well.

The change from countercurrent to more dominant tendency in the epistemic *field* occurs, to all appearances, in the Carolingian *renovatio*. According to Le Goff, the Carolingians impose a veritable ideology of productive effort. *Labor* – work – is

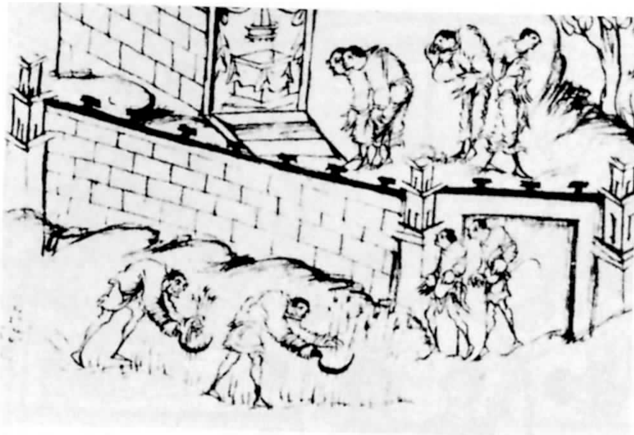


Fig. 7.31. *Harvesters* (816-35), illumination for Psalm 127 (128) in the *Utrecht Psalter*, executed in Rheims. Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Cat. Cod. ms Bibl. Rhenotraiectinae, I, No. 32.

no longer simply slavery, but is given new and positive connotations of acquisition, earnings and conquest. By reclaiming the pro-work elements of late antique legislation – *lex Hadriana de rudibus agris* – the peasant has been given renewed potential to be his own master – *pro labore suo*. At the same time, large tracts of land are cleared under improved administrative systems, which, among other initiatives, highlight Sunday as a day off.

Again, we observe a close correspondence between the work ideology of those in power and the extant pictorial art, for the Carolingian period also marks a revival of images of the months with genre figures at work – albeit this work is no longer carried out in a late antique flattened-out terrain, but among medieval rugged rocks, which are gradually transformed to take on an undulating or cloudlike appearance. This is how we see them, for example, under the ploughs, spades and mattocks in a no longer extant 9th-century manuscript from Rheims, the general thrust of which is presumably depicted in two 11th-century Winchester manuscripts (FIG. 19).[60] Even though the resurrected empire now has as many as four oxen pulling the plough and two peasants behind it, we do not get the impression that the hectically protruding ground will budge an inch under the cutting metal. In this epoch, rock is not levelled with the flat earth; as we saw in chapter 3, the angle of attack for the construction of a more homogenised pictorial space is rather to compare rock and cloud under the expanded common denominator: matter under infinite heavens.

In fact, the Carolingian elites are so pro-work that agriculture again, as in late antiquity, breaks through its obligation to the labour of the months and emerges in other, less programmatic, contexts. This is particularly so in the *Utrecht Psalter*, which teems with peasants ploughing, sowing, harvesting, vine-planting and milking (FIG. 7.31).[61]

Seasonal weather

From depictions of work, I now have to move to the question of the extent to which time and weather can be construed concretely in landscape depictions in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Even if there is a highly explosive potential secreted in the concept of seasons, it has to be said that this only makes itself felt to a limited degree in the actual landscape space. The slenderest indications of landscape are vines, rinceaux and garlands placed alongside their respective personifications – if, that is, they are not shown on their own. An early example is a garlanded sarcophagus in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (*c.* 140-50 AD), the garland of which, held by putti, changes from harebells seen from the side and above (spring), to wheat (summer), to grapes and pomegranates (autumn), to evergreen laurel (winter) – the immortality of the latter suggests a degree of continued uncertainty about this season.[62] Actual landscape space devoted to the seasons is, however, rare and chiefly manifested as small strips of land and plants; for example, marsh reeds around winter or ears of wheat around summer (FIG. 7.15).[63]

If we look for seasonal effects outside the seasons' own domain in early medieval images, we will again mainly be searching in vain, albeit there are also exceptions here, a significant one appearing, if not in the middle of, then at least in the vicinity of the total contrast of the seasons: Paradise itself. In the narthex mosaic in the Large Basilica in Macedonian Heraklea Lynkestis (*c.* 500; FIG. 5.10), earth is, as mentioned earlier, represented by an extensive Paradise garden with trees, animals and birds centred around a *cantharos* on which vine rinceaux grow and deer search for refreshment.[64] The rectangular central section is surrounded by a border decorated with marine animals inserted in octagons: a symbol of the ocean encircling the expanse of the earth. This portrait of *Earth and Ocean* is pulled further from the original image of Paradise by the presence of a dead tree just inside the right-hand section. Ducks flying upwards show that this must be referring to winter. Thus, not only does the pagan Golden Age slide into time, the Christian Paradise does so also.

If we call upon literary testimony, we will see that this movement could also be turned around and time could be introduced into Paradise itself. Avitus (d. 518), in his epic poem on *Genesis*, might indeed still declare that Paradise has no seasons

"since winter is lacking and there is no scorched summer; autumn with its fruits and spring with its flowers fill the whole year",[65] but that he mentions the year at all, and points out spring and autumn as paradisiacal, nevertheless indicates a new and post-antique epistemic *field*. Others, such as the author of *De Paradiso*, Basil the Great (*c.* 330-79?), go even further. This text refers to a Paradise that might be mild, but is no longer devoid of seasons:

> In that place there is no violence of winds, none of the excesses of the seasons, no hail, no furious storms, no thunderbolts, no wintry ice, no dampness of spring, no heat and burning of summer, no dryness of autumn; but a temperate and peaceful *mutual concord of the seasons of the year*, each adorned with its own beauty, and unthreatened by its neighbor. For neither does heat, perhaps coming unseasonably early, ruin the flowers of spring; nor do the fruits of summer and autumn waste and perish as a result of being burnt by frequent disturbances of the atmosphere. [my italics][66]

Similarly, Ephrem the Syrian imagines a gradation stretching from Paradise's ideal seasons via a temperate intermediary zone to our own wretched seasons. In Paradise itself the seasons are again flourishing and forever fertile, whereas the intermediary zone is described as follows:

> In the temperate air, which, on the outside, embraces [Paradise], the neighboring months show themselves to be tempered: somber February laughs here like May; December, in spite of its frost and its cold wind, here is like August with its fruits. June here is like April, and July, in spite of its dog days, here provides itself with the dew of October. Our miserable months become like Eden.[67]

A pictorial parallel to this sliding connection between the seasons of Paradise and those of earth is found in a late-5th-century work, the mosaic of *Earth and Ocean*, in the Peloponnesian Basilica of Thyrsos at Tegea. Here we quite simply see an earth made up of twelve month sections flanked by the four Rivers of Paradise.[68]

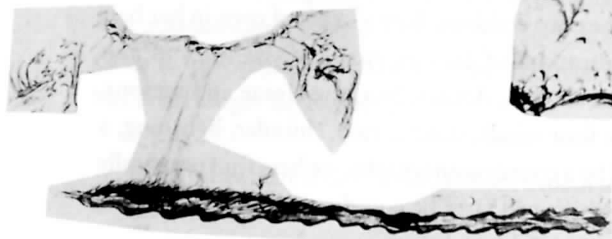
The earlier Church Fathers would seem to have been altogether intent on determining the place of seasons and months in the universe. Some compared the seasons and months with Christ's resurrection, by means of which their redeeming and paradisiacal character is put into relief. Others likened seasonal produce with the heart's produce. In a poem on cosmos, the Byzantine George of Pisidia (7th century) describes the seasons and compares the actual sun, which ripens the growth, with the intelligible sun, which nourishes the fruit in the infertile heart.[69] Translation of this less paradisiacal and more production-oriented subject area into images, however, does not occur in churches, but in the more worldly thermae.[70]

Besides the abovementioned 4th-century mosaic from Antioch (FIGS. 7.25-7.25A), there is an example in a 6th-century decoration in Gaza: a now lost vault mosaic (or painting) of the cosmos, described by John of Gaza. To judge from his *ekphrasis*, this included, *inter alia*: a Ge with her two children (*Karpoi*), ears of corn in her hair and a cornucopia; terrain personifications of Europe, Asia and the sea; and, not least, personifications of time such as Aion, Aurora, Nyx, the Horae and seasons, plus climate elements such as the four winds, storms, rain, thunder, lightning, a cloud and a rainbow.[71] Occasioned by a cosmic iconography, we here find practically all the programmatic fragments which will later be coordinated into a complete controlling function: modernity's pictorial paradigm.

Weather beyond the seasons

Although, from the outset, the seasons and labours of the months hold indirect references to weather, strangely it is not here that we should look for further depictions of weather in the images of late antiquity and the Early Middle Ages. Interestingly, weather would seem to be manifested as more independent pictorial motifs at approximately the same time as its complementary aspect – work – is suppressed, namely in the 5th century. Presumably one of the earliest surviving examples is the 'neo-primitive' illustrated *Vergilius Romanus* manuscript of *c.* 450. In the illustration of the storm scene from the *Aeneid*, the pictorial means are still mostly of an allegorical type: the lightning is a torch-like flame held by a winged woman; the winds are jets blown from reeds by their male personifications.[72] But in the scene with Aeneas and Dido sheltering in the cave, genuine rain is released. The rod-like streams of water are marked out with dark-brown and light-grey brushstrokes, and they are so strong that a soldier has converted his shield into what is most probably the first umbrella to feature in Western pictorial art (PLATE 27).

Later in the Middle Ages, however, weather and work converge. This occurs, for possibly the first time, in the abovementioned Carolingian *Utrecht Psalter*, in which we see lots of scenes of rain activated by the winds' heads expelling jet-like streams (FIGS. 7.32A-7.32B).[73] Another subject area provoking weather is that of apocalyptic themes. In the *Bamberg Apocalypse*, the four winds have stuck their devilish, horned heads out of the miniature's four corners of the world, but in accordance with Scripture (Book of Revelation 7: 1) their storm breath – bundles of jet-like lines – are kept in check by four minatory angels (FIG. 7.33).[74] And later, when the first angel sounds the trumpet (Book of Revelation 8: 7), it is hail mingled with blood and fire which fills the sky. This happens, for example, in the French *Apocalypse of Saint-Sever* (*c.* 1050; FIG. 7.34), or in an apocalypse made for King Edward I of England (late 13th century; FIG. 7.35).[75] Hail was actually depicted in images as early as the 9th



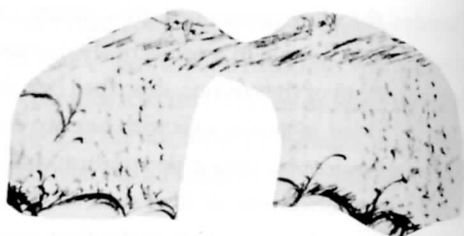


Fig. 7.32a. *Winds Causing Stormy Weather* (816-35), illustration for Psalm 28: 3 and 5 (section) from the *Utrecht Psalter* executed in Rheims. Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Cat. Cod. Ms. Bibl. Rhenotraiectinae, I, No. 32, f. 16.

Fig. 7.32b. *Winds and Rain* (816-35), illustration (section) from the *Utrecht Psalter* executed in Rheims. Utrecht, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit, Cat. Cod. Ms. Bibl. Rhenotraiectinae, I, No. 32, f. 87v.

Fig. 7.33. *The Four Angels Facing the Four Winds* (11th century), miniature from the *Bamberg Apocalypse*, produced in Reichenau. Bamberg, Staatsbibliothek, ms A. II. 42, f. 17v.

Fig. 7.34. Stephanus Garcia (?), *Hail, Fire and Blood Raining down upon the Earth* (*c.* 1050), miniature from the *Apocalypse of Saint-Sever*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale ms lat. 8878, f. 137v.

Fig. 7.35. *The First Trumpet Blast* (late 13th century), miniature from the *Douce Apocalypse* made for King Edward I of England. Oxford, Bodleian Library, Douce 180, no. 23, f. 12.

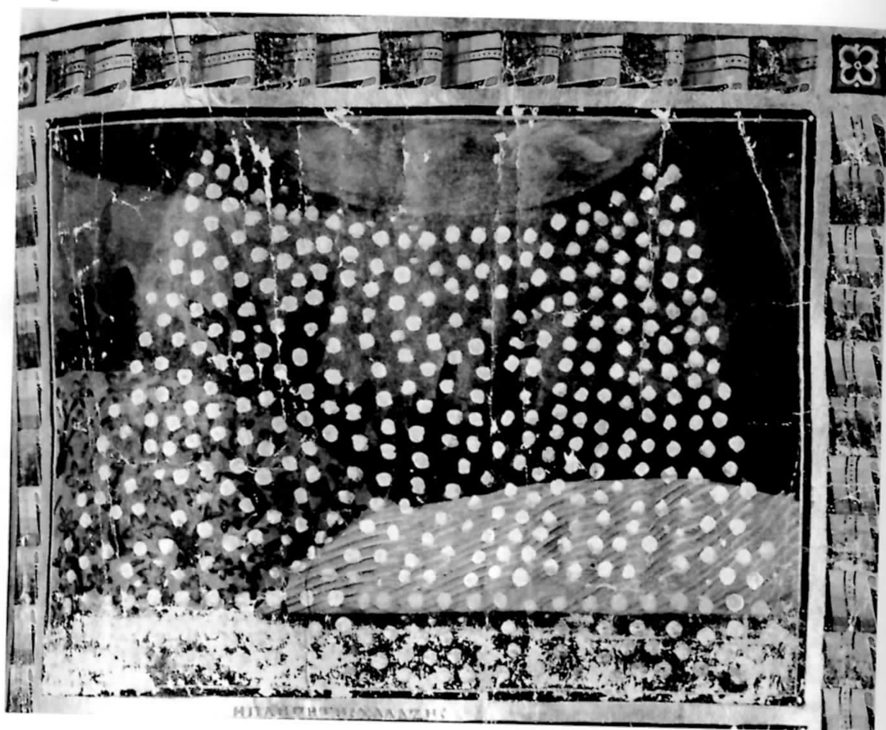


Fig. 7.36. *Hail Storm* (*c.* 880-83), miniature from the *Homilies of Gregory of Nazianzus*. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, ms gr. 510, f. 78.

century, for in a Byzantine illustration of Gregory of Nazianzus' homily on hail, white spots descend across spherical fields, destroying their crops, so that we are left with a kind of autonomous landscape image (FIG. 7.36).[76]

However suggestive they might look, depictions of weather such as these are, still, rare phenomena in medieval images – pockets in the otherwise impervious Golden Age paradigm. But exactly as in the case of themes dealing with agricultural work, their potential is considerable. As we will see in volume II, this is the stuff of which the modern pictorial paradigm is made.

Jacob Wamberg

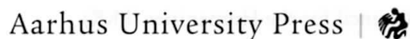
Landscape as World Picture

Tracing Cultural Evolution in Images

VOLUME I

From the Palaeolithic Period to the Middle Ages

Translated by Gaye Kynoch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