

Dr Valerie Shrimplin

vshrimplin@gmail.com

Michelangelo, Copernicus and the *Giudizio Universale*

Biblical Cosmology

- From the Creation (*Genesis*), to the Last Judgment (*Revelation*) – appears primarily based on the flat earth view of the universe
- Concept of layered arrangement with ranks of Saints, angels, save and damned with Christ at the top - where the 'Good' go up to Heaven; the 'Bad' go down to Hell
- Carried over to Christian art and architecture, especially the *Last Judgment* based on depiction of the universe (Heaven, Earth, Hell together)

Hypothesis

- In Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* - Christ is unusually depicted as a beardless, Apollonian 'sun god' in a circular 'cosmic' design
- Could this reflect Copernicus' theory of the sun-centred universe? (*De Revolutionibus*)
- Rejected on the grounds of dating:

Last Judgment 1541; Copernicus' *Revolutions* 1543

Sources and Evidence

1. **Religious** (Christian analogy of deity and the sun)
2. **Literary** (Dante's cosmology, Michelangelo's poetry)
3. **Philosophical** (Neoplatonic sun-symbolism)
4. **Scientific** (Copernican heliocentricity)

Together, these show that sun-symbolism and

Copernican astronomy are key themes in the fresco



Ceiling, painted 1508-12

Sistine Chapel, 1475



Michelangelo, *Last Judgment* 1536-41

In the midst of all assuredly dwells the Sun.
For in this most beautiful temple who
would place this illuminary in any better
position ... some call him the Light of the
World .. So he remains, governing the
family of Heavenly bodies which circles
around him

Copernicus, *Revolutions* 1, X
published 1543

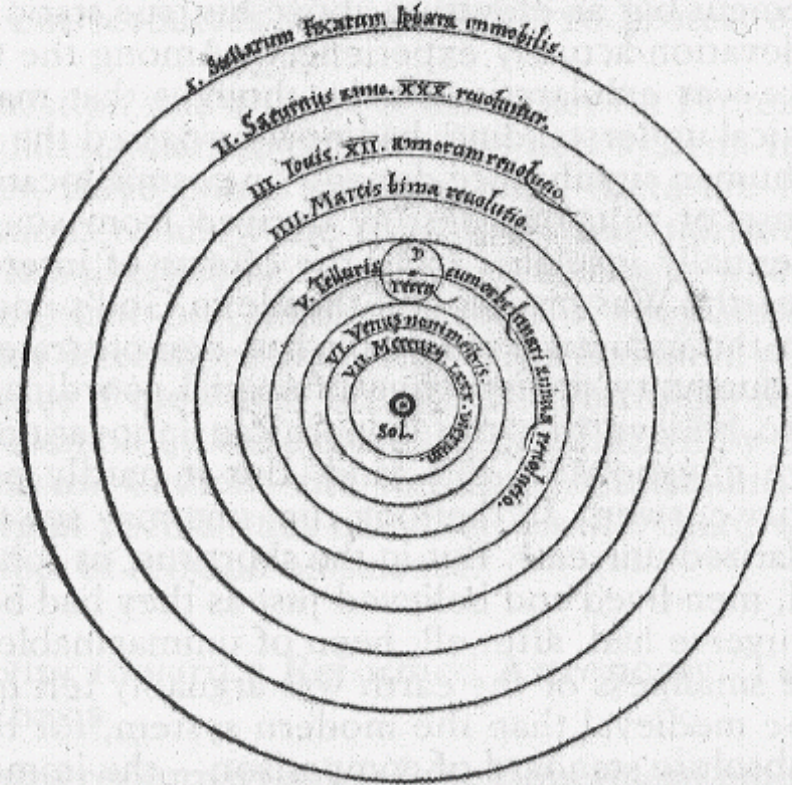
De Revolutionibus, 1543, 1, X

*In medio vero omnium residet Sol.
Quis enim in hoc pulcherimo templo
lampadem hanc in alio meliori loco
poneret, quam unde totum simul
possit illuminare.*

*Siquidem non inepte quidam
lucernam mundi*

*Sol residens circum agentem
gubernat Astrorum familiam ...*

NICOLAI COPERNICI
net, in quo terram cum orbe lunari tanquam epicyclo contineri
diximus. Quinto loco Venus nono mense reducitur. Sextum
denique locum Mercurius tenet, octuaginta dierum spacio circū
currens. In medio uero omnium residet Sol. Quis enim in hoc



pulcherimo templo lampadem hanc in alio uel meliori loco po-
neret, quàm unde totum simul possit illuminare? Siquidem non
inepte quidam lucernam mundi, alij mentem, alij rectorem uo-
cant. Trimegistus uisibilem Deum, Sophoclis Electra intuentē
omnia. Ita profecto tanquam in solio re gali Sol residens circum
agentem gubernat Astrorum familiam. Tellus quoque minime
fraudatur lunari ministerio, sed ut Aristoteles de animalibus
ait, maximā Luna cū terra cognatio nē habet. Concipit interea à
Sole terra, & impregnatur annuo partu. Inuenimus igitur sub
hac

*In medio vero omnium residet
Sol. Quis enim in hoc
pulcherimo templo lampadem
hanc in alio meliori loco
poneret, quam unde totum
simul possit illuminare.*

In the midst of all assuredly dwells
the Sun. For in this most beautiful
temple who would place this
illuminary in any better position
from which to light the whole
simultaneously

*Sidiquem non inepte quidam
lucernam mundi*

Some call him the Light of the
World ...

*Sol residens circum agentem
gubernat Astrorum familiam ...*

So he remains, governing the
family of Heavenly bodies which
circles around him

By means of the central place which Michelangelo reserved in his composition for the Sun (Christ-Apollo) ... the artist came of himself to a vision of the universe which surprisingly corresponds to that of his contemporary Copernicus.

Yet he could not have known Copernicus' book *which was published in 1543 – at least seven years after Michelangelo conceived his fresco*

(Charles de Tolnay, 1960)

Context

1. Traditional links between astronomy and iconography (Old/New Testaments)
1. Traditional versions of the *Last Judgment*
2. Interpretations of Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*
3. The Italian Renaissance and the Classical tradition
4. Theological, Literary, Philosophical sources and Scientific sources

Traditional links, Astronomy-Iconography



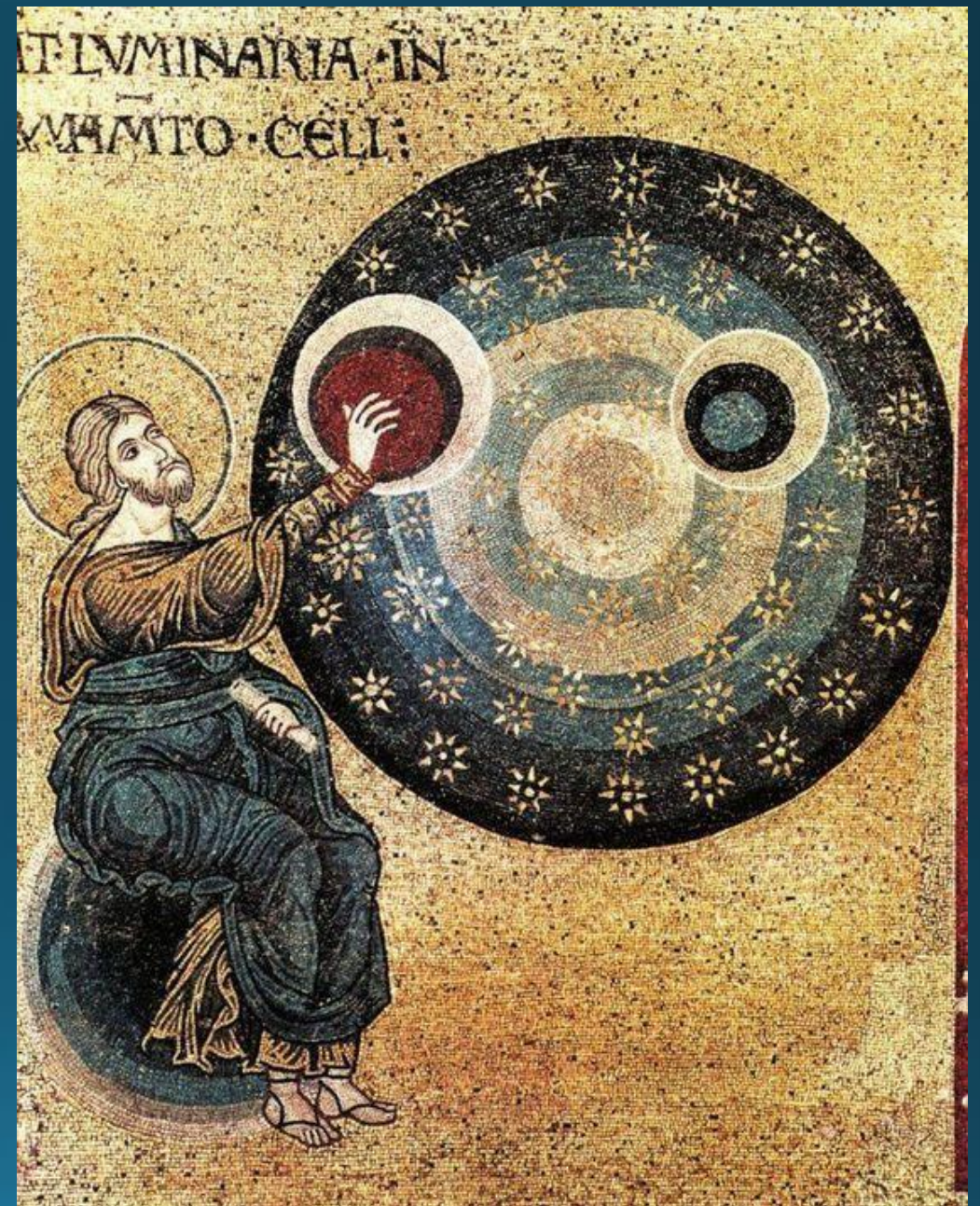
Galla Placidia, 425

S Vitale Ravenna, 6th century

Astronomy and Christian Iconography

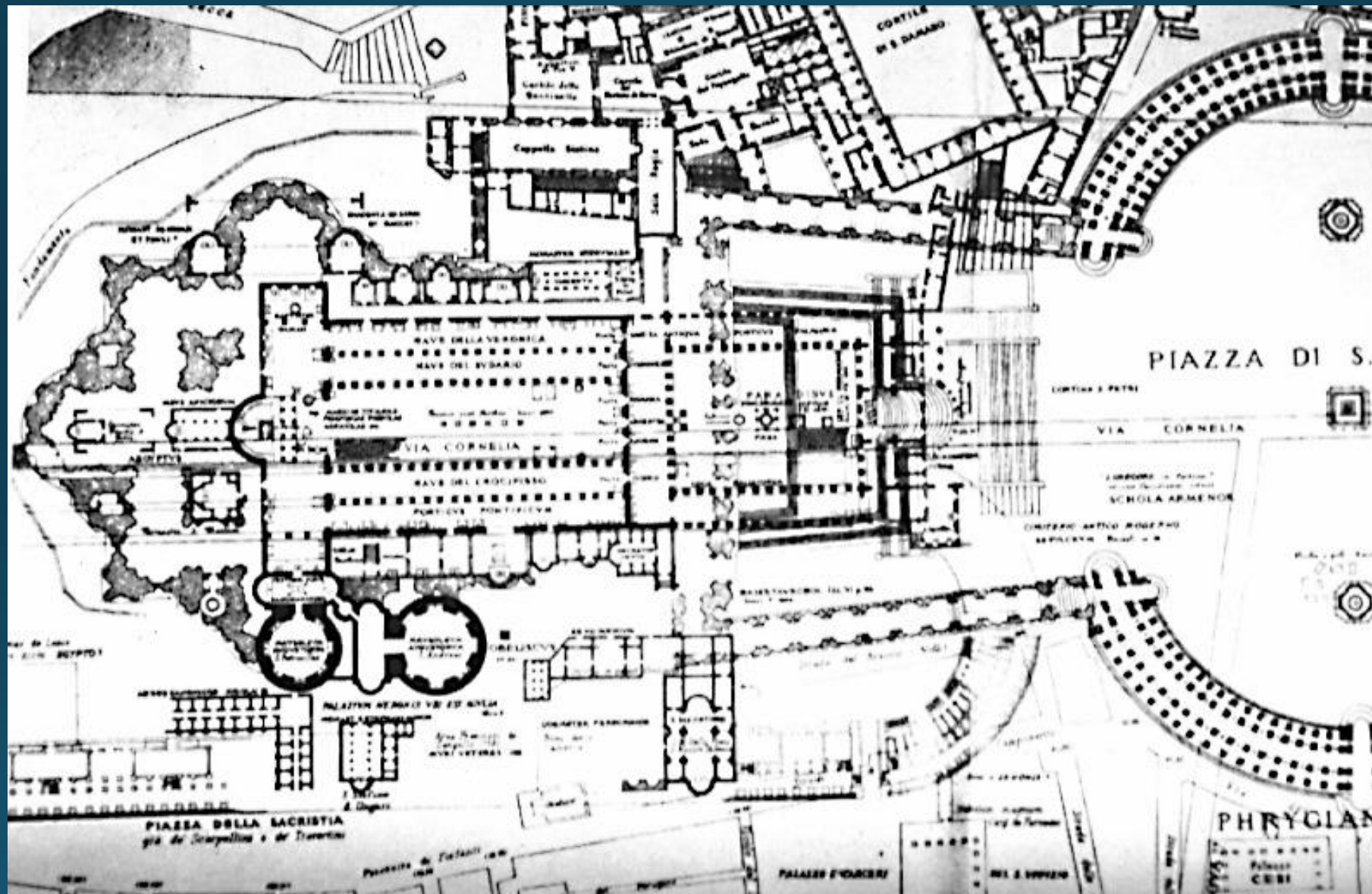


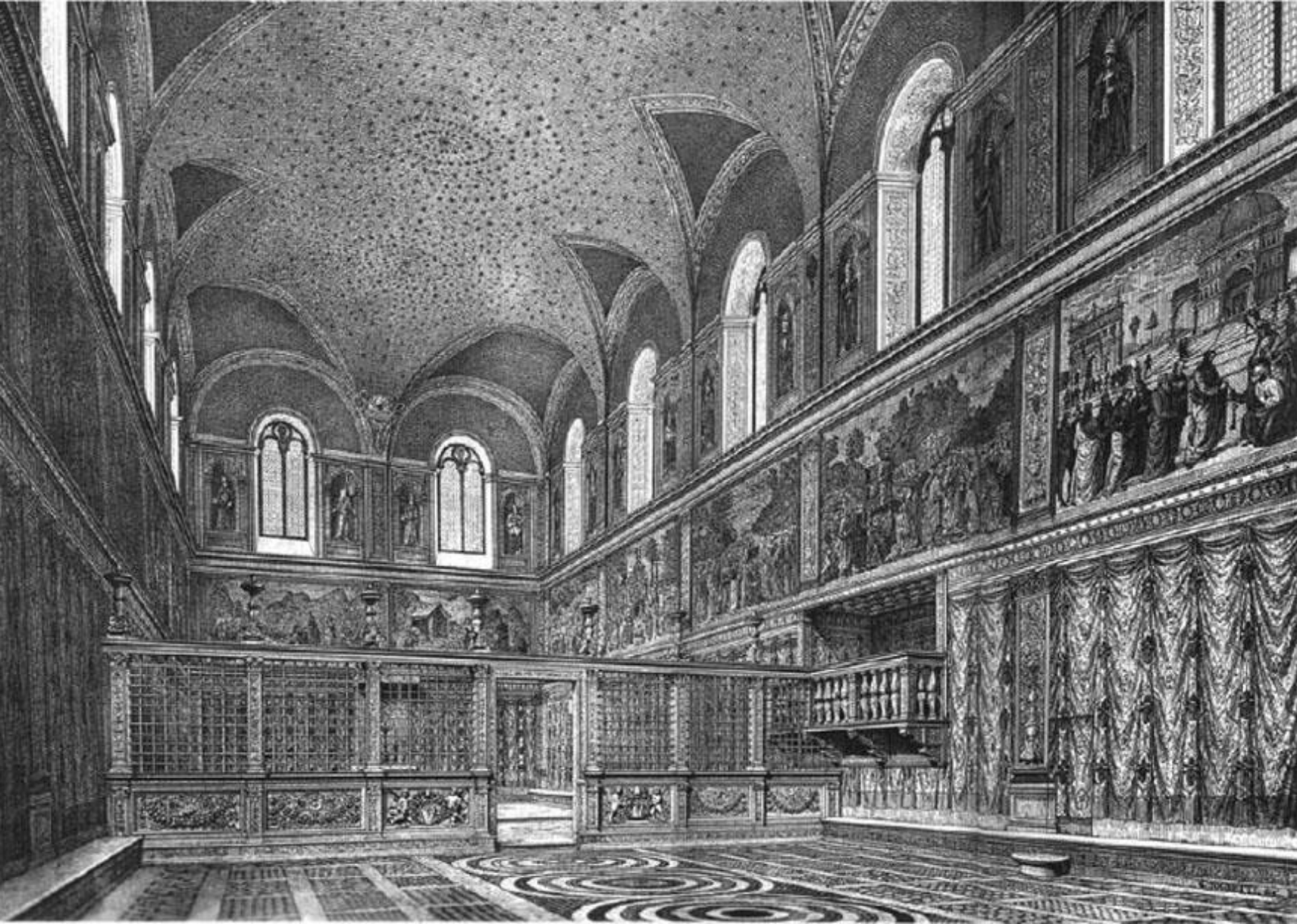
St Mark's Venice, *Creation*, 11th cent



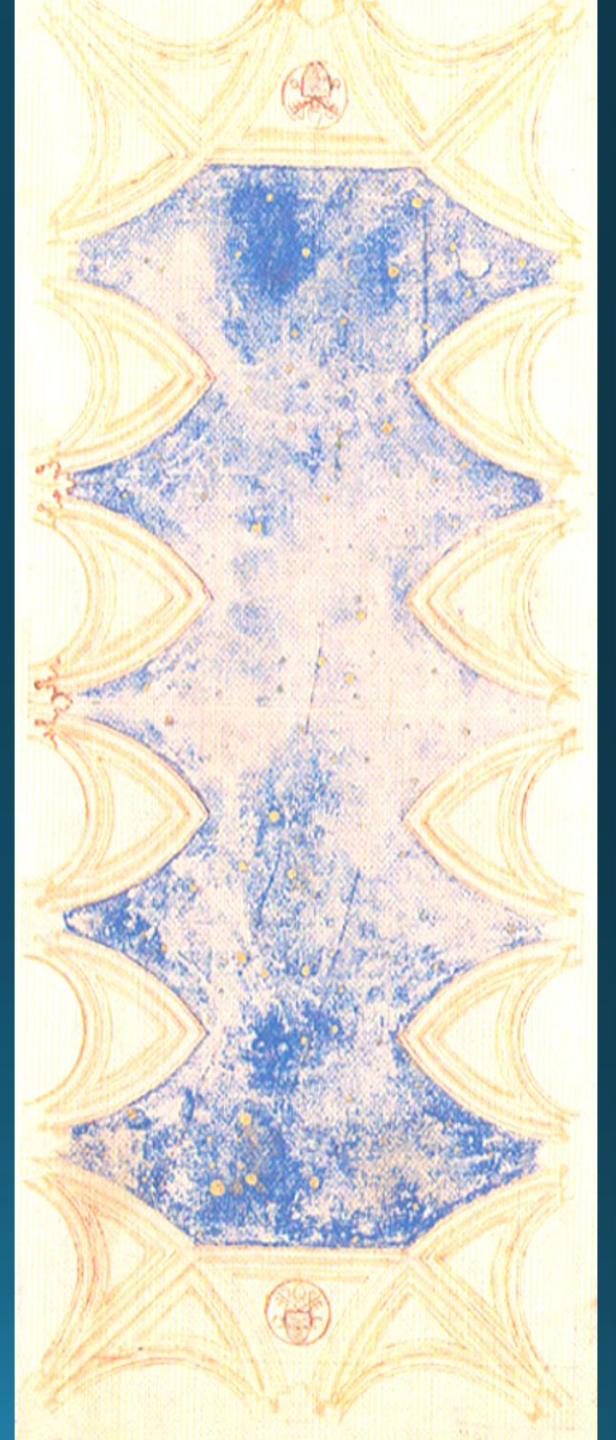
Monreale, Sicily *God Creating the Universe*, 1175

Orientation of St Peter's (18th cent)

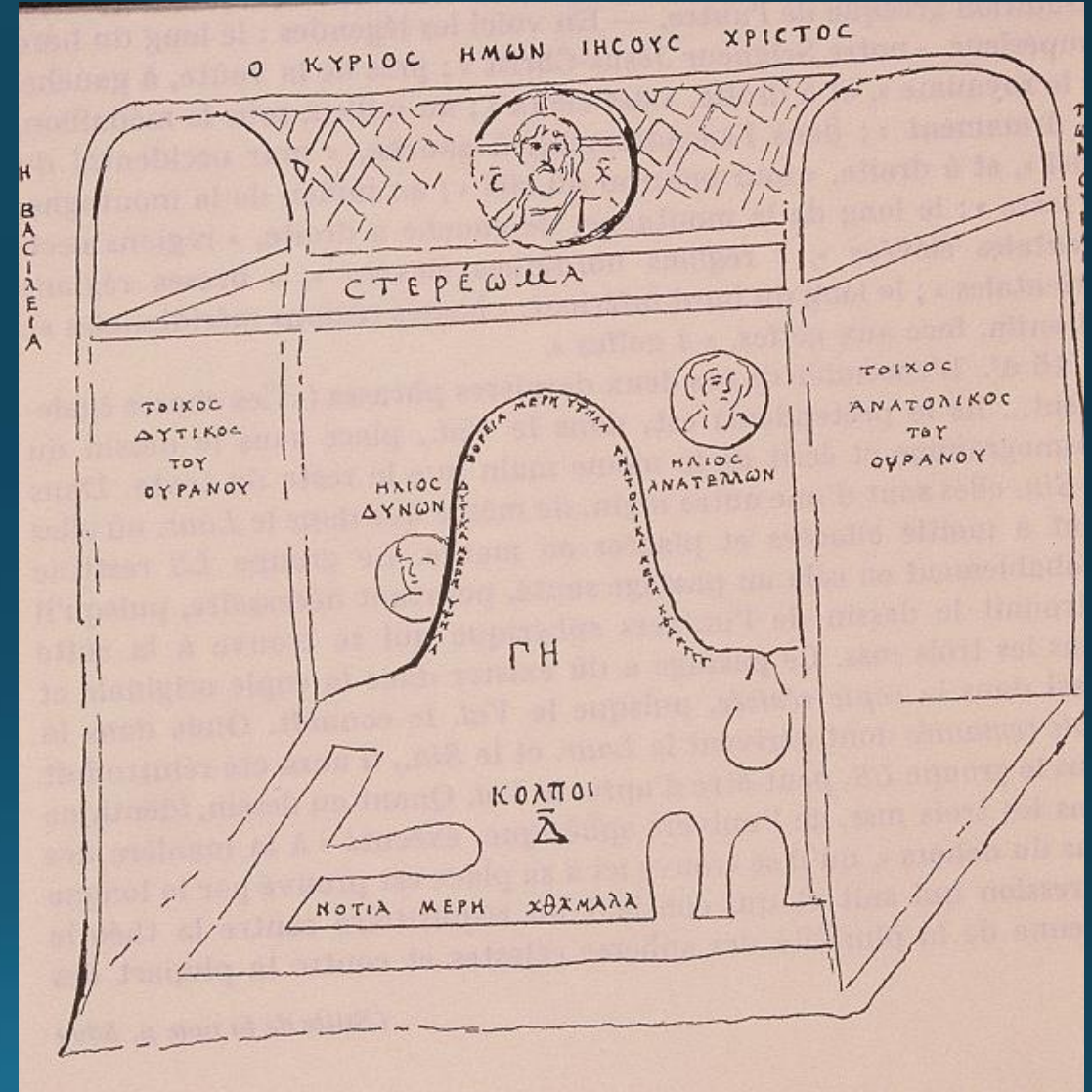




Sistine Chapel, 15th century

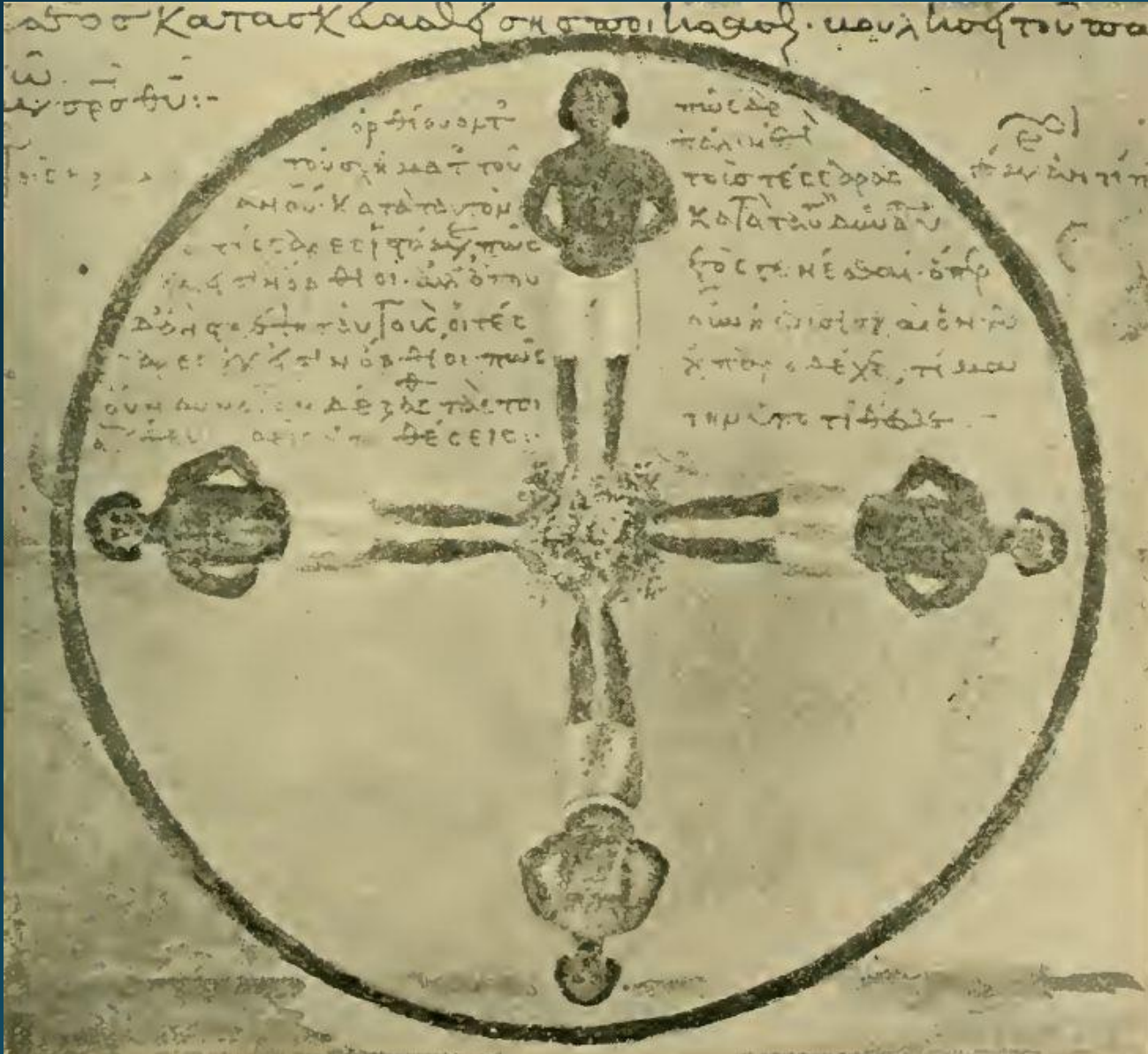


Byzantine view of the cosmos/earth



Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Universe* 6th cent (and diagram)

Cosmas' view of the earth/planet

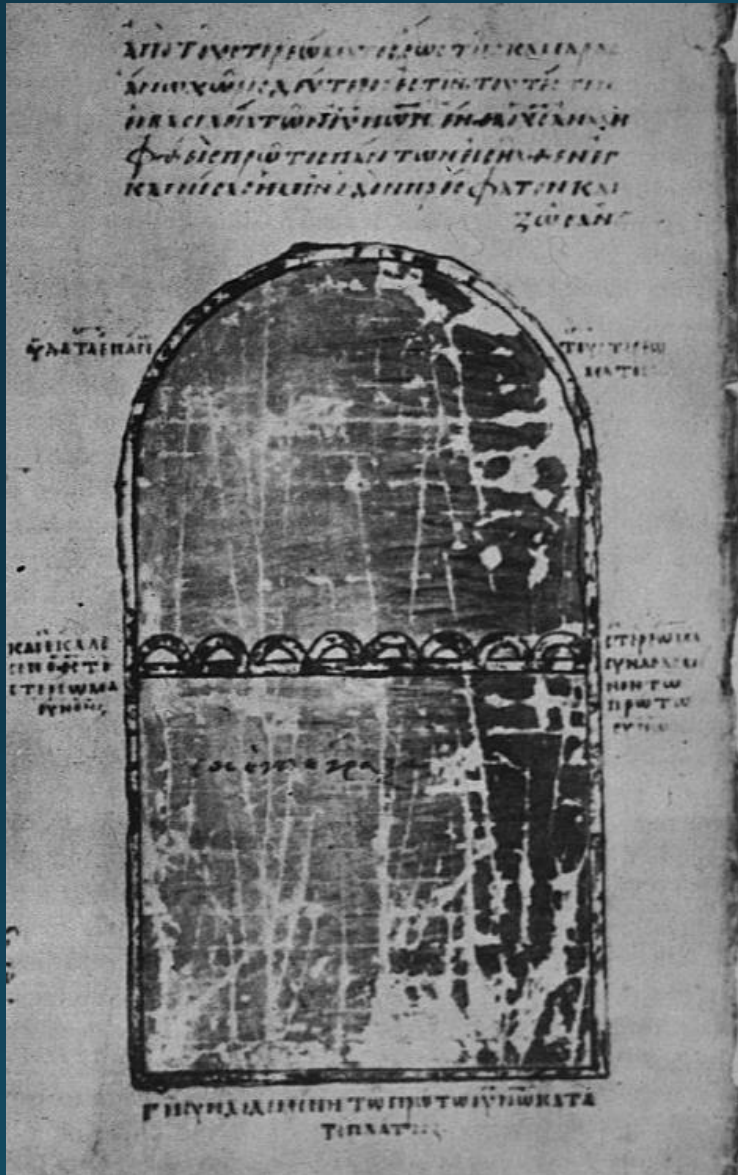


Cosmas: impossible to explain how rain should fall, how the earth could have become covered at the time of the flood. Not possible to conceive of ascent to heaven (*Christian Topography*)

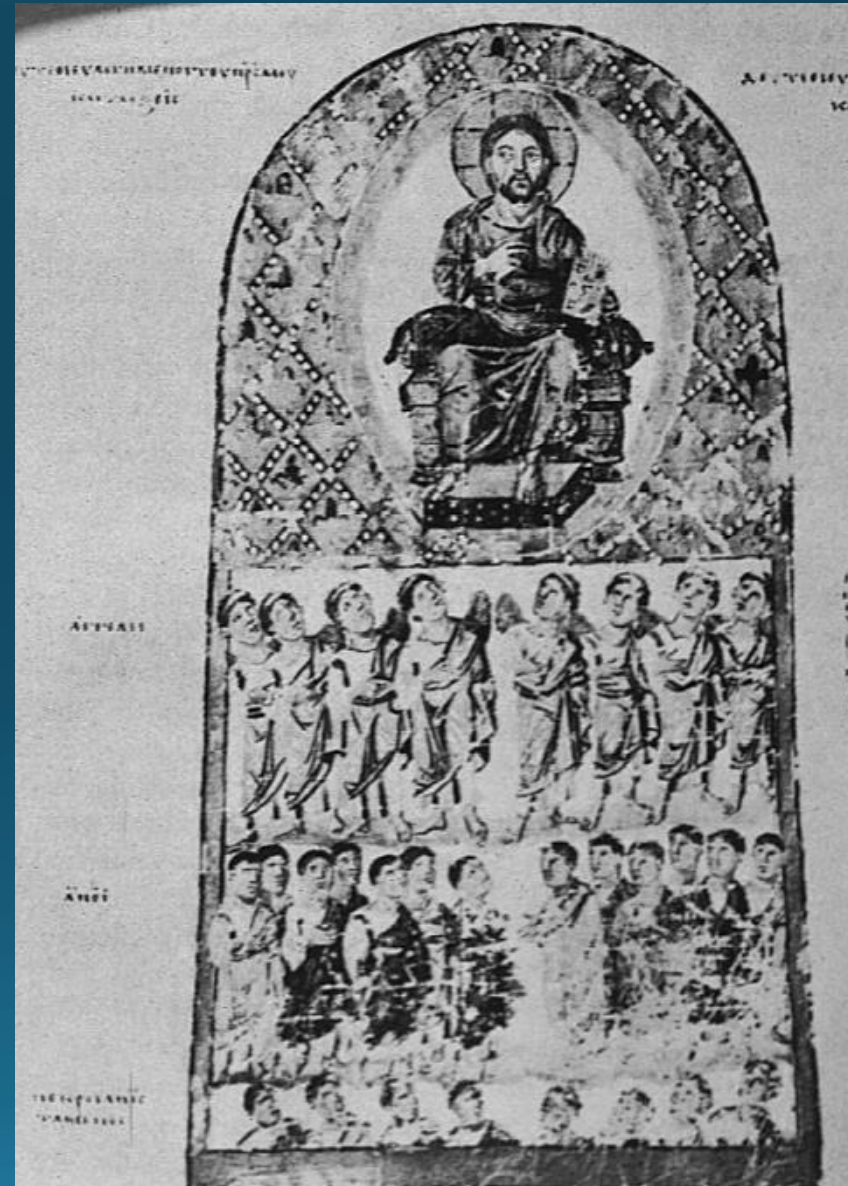
Plato: Seeing that the whole is spherical, the assertion that it has one region 'above' and one region 'below' does not become a man of sense *Timaeus* 63B

Cosmas Indicopleustes, *Earth, Antipodes* 6th cent

View of the universe cf depiction of the *Last Judgment*



Cosmas
Indicopleustes,
Universe 6th cent

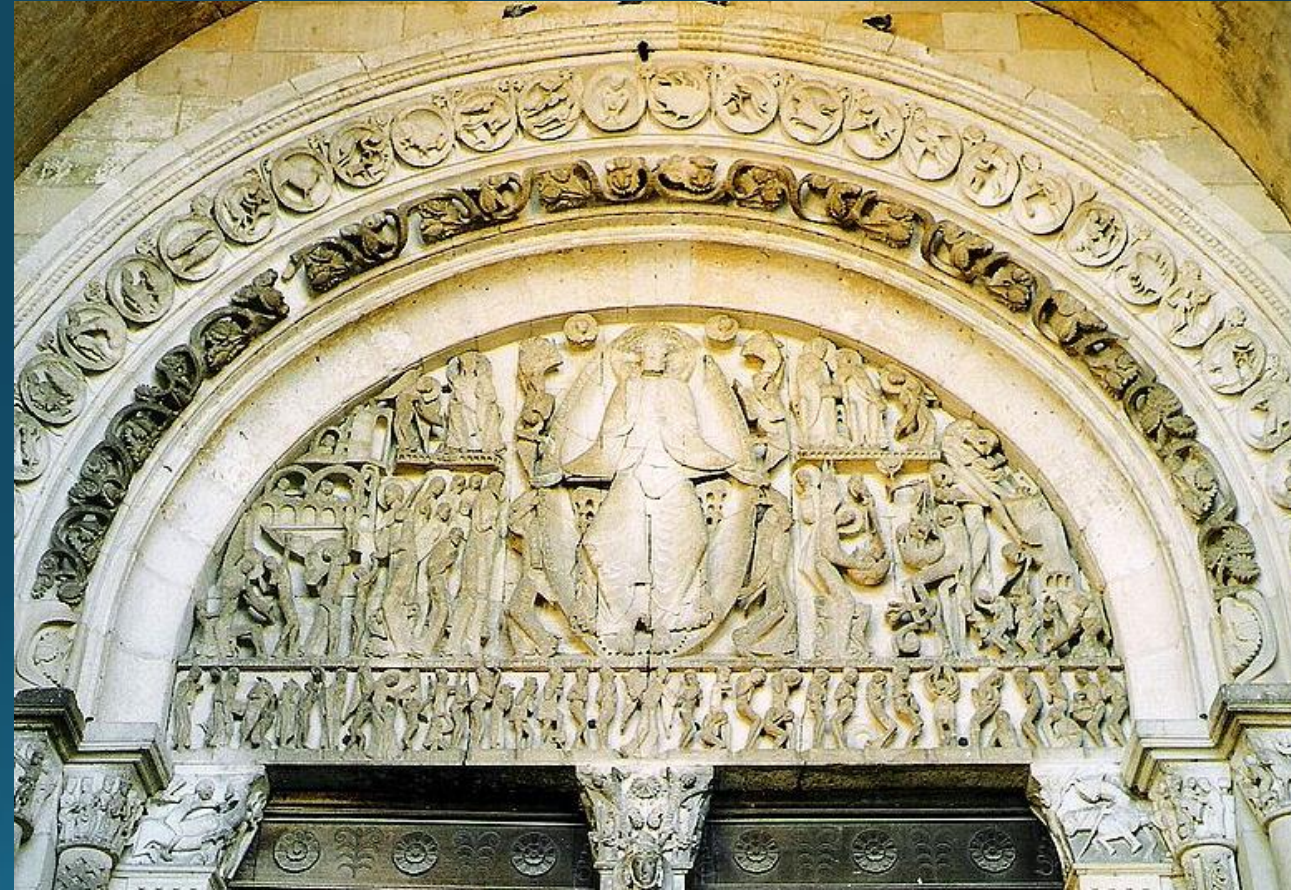


Last Judgment 6th
century (VatGr699)

Traditional examples: Romanesque



Vezelay, *Last Judgment*, 1125



Autun, *Last Judgment*, 1130-40

Traditional examples: Gothic



Notre Dame Paris, 1163-1250



Bourges, 1230-65

Italo-Byzantine Examples



S Maria Assunta, Torcello, 12th century



Coppo di Marcovaldo, Florence
Baptistery, late 13th century

Early Renaissance: Giotto



Giotto, *Last Judgment*, c 1305

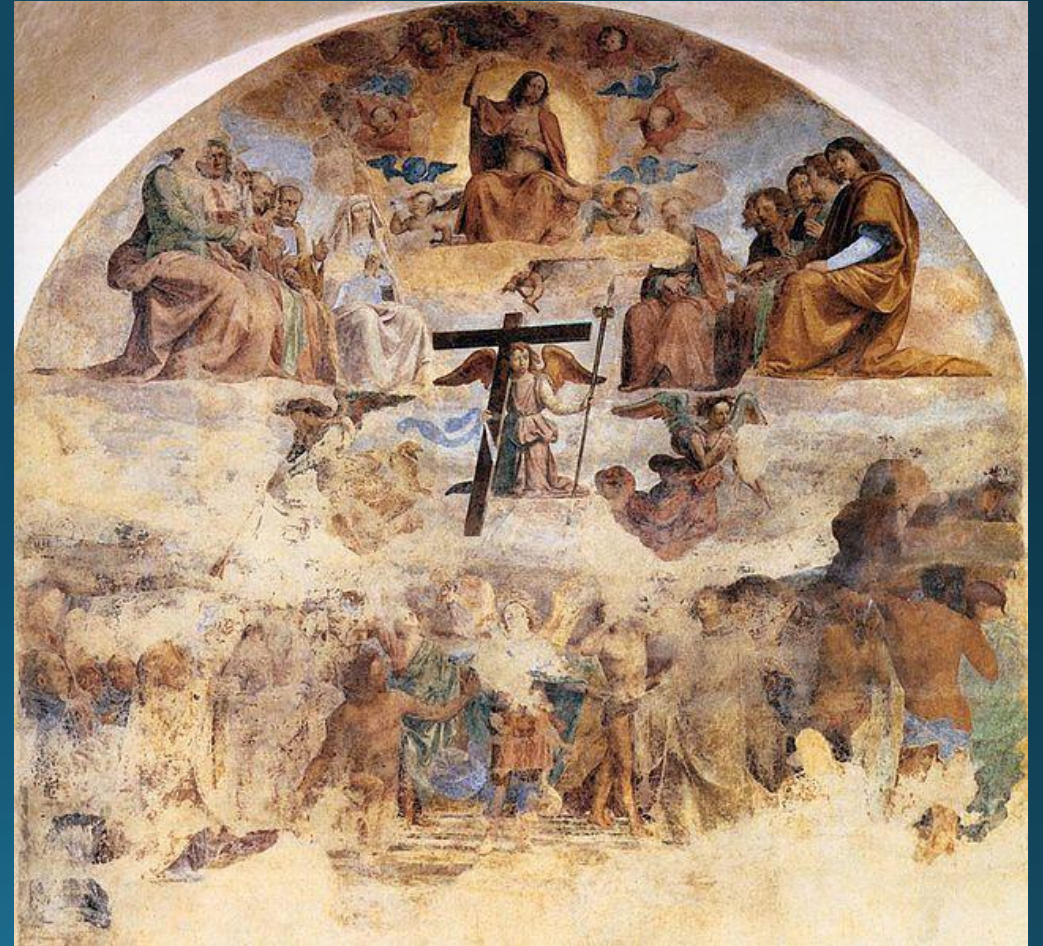


Giotto, detail, angels 'rolling back the heavens'

Renaissance examples (Italy)

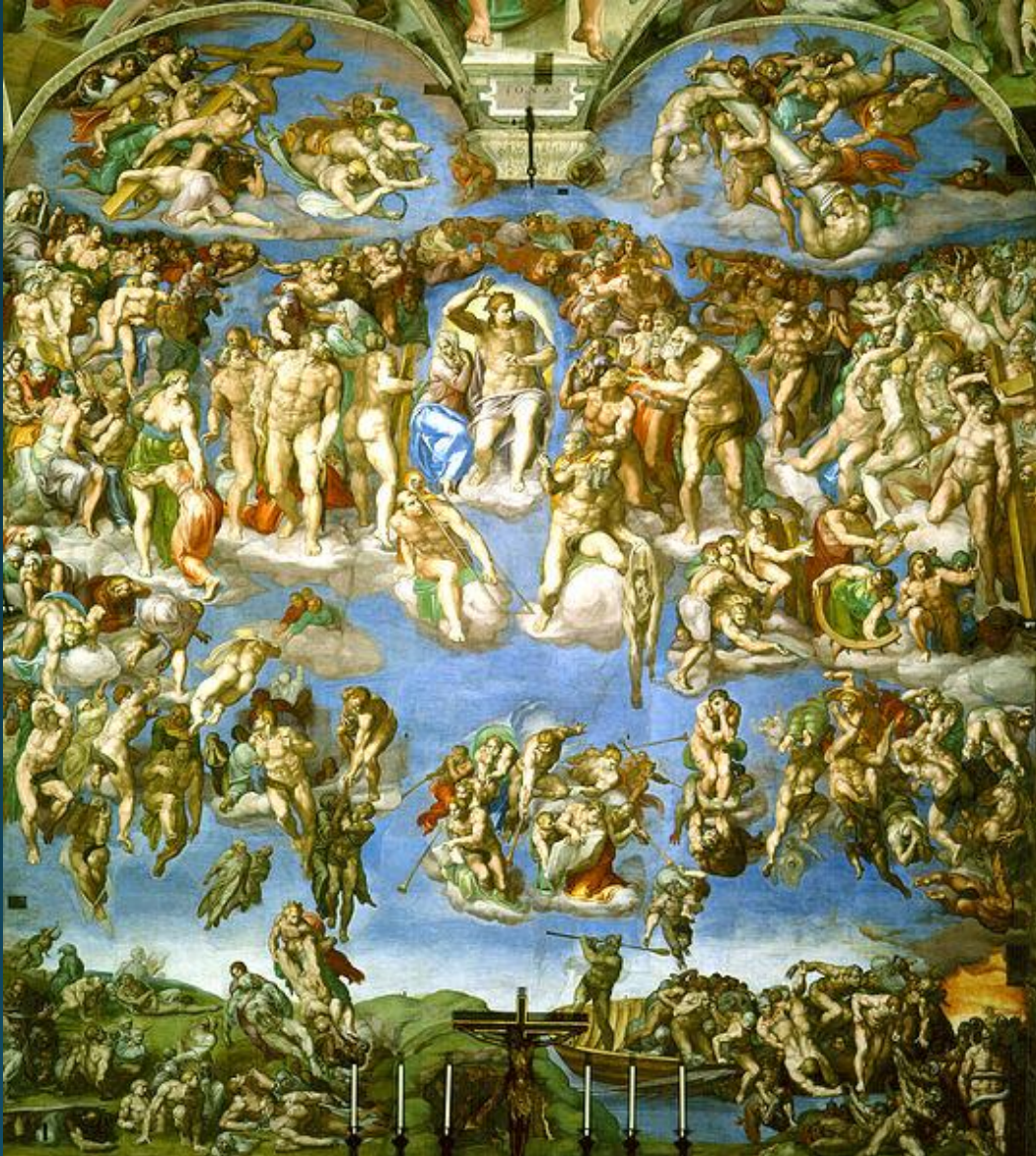


Fra Angelico, c 1440



Fra Bartolommeo, S Marco, 1499-1500

Last Judgment showing circular format



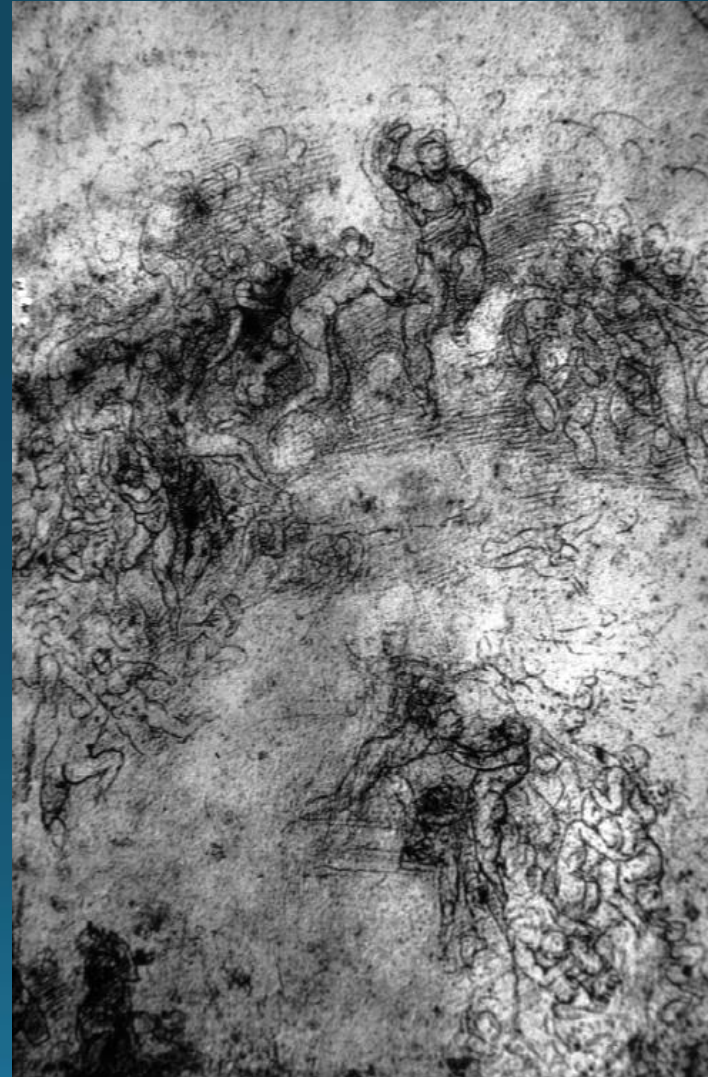
Christ-Apollo (pre-cleaning)

NB Clement VII Medici died 1534, succeeded by Paul III Farnese

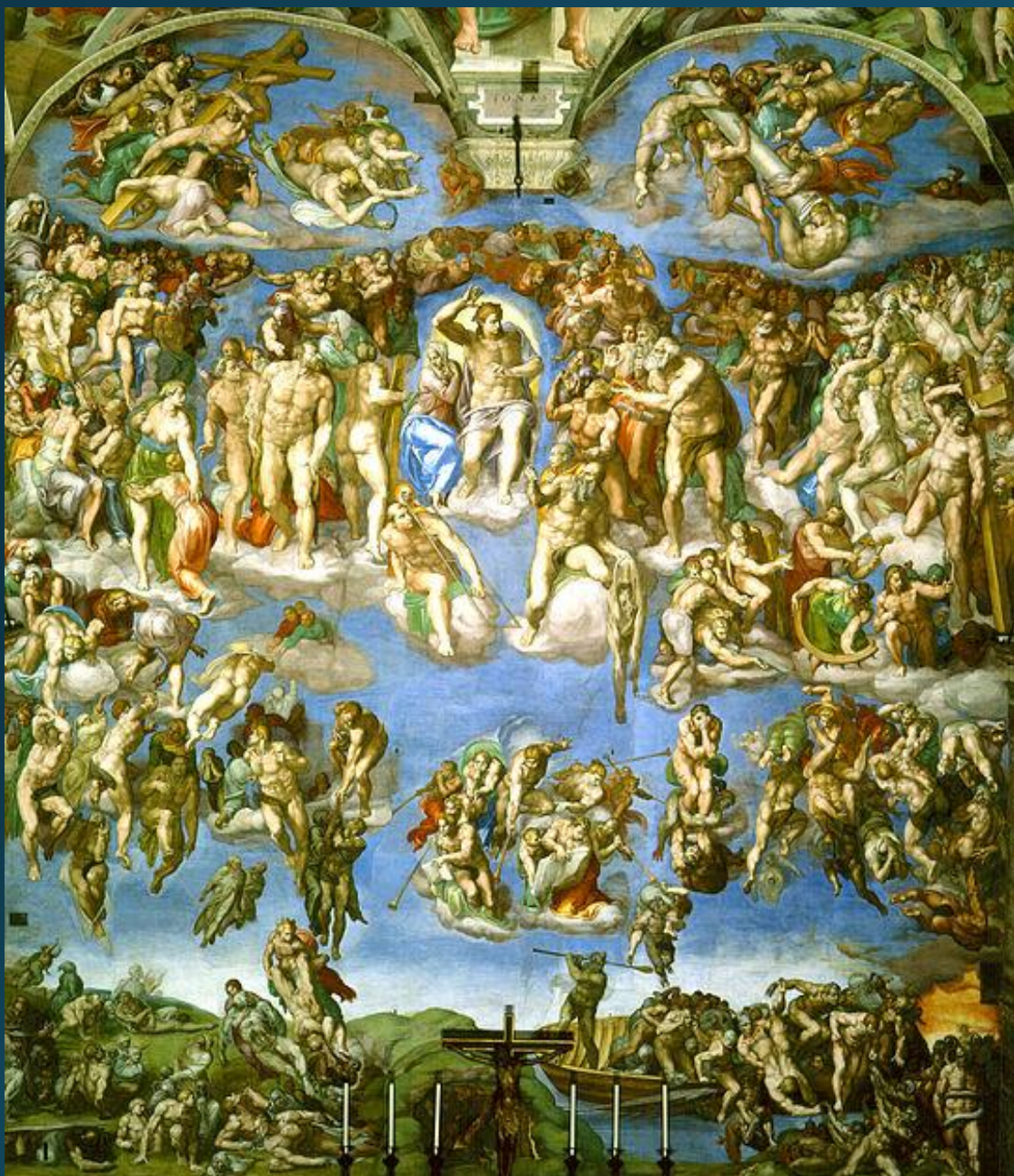
Michelangelo's drawings



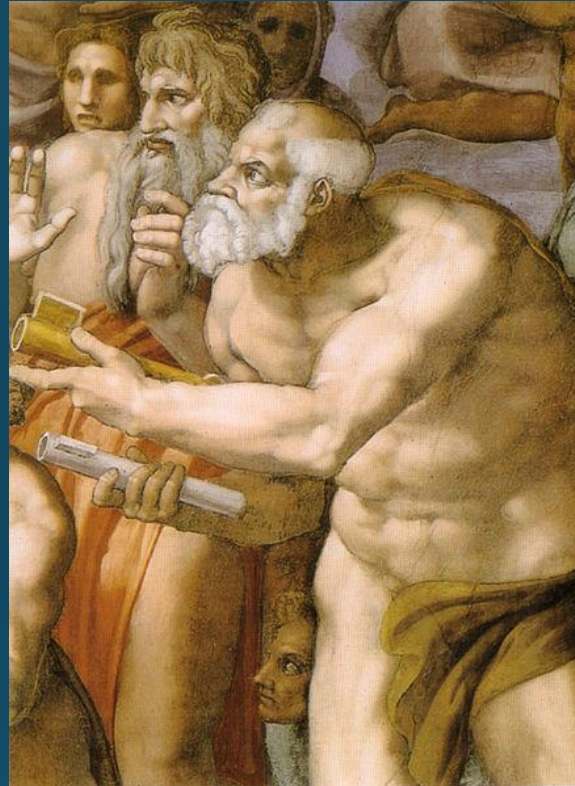
Preliminary drawing (Bayonne) 1533



Preliminary drawing (Buonarroti) 1534 (Rev 12)



Inner and outer circles



St Peter

Tradition and Innovation

Aretino said that Michelangelo:

'hid the mysteries under a veil that they might not be understood by the vulgar'

Inner circle – circular movement

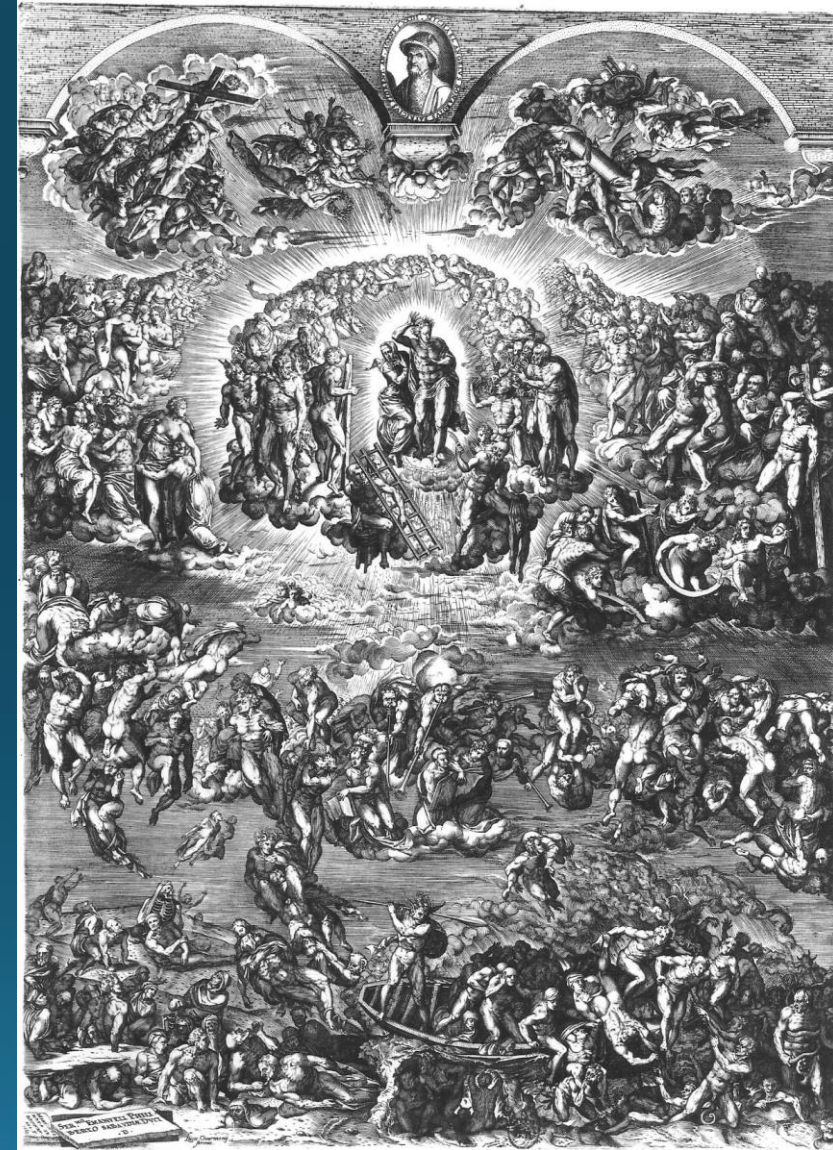


Vasari 'in a circle around the figure of Christ are innumerable prophets ...'

Early interpretations/copies

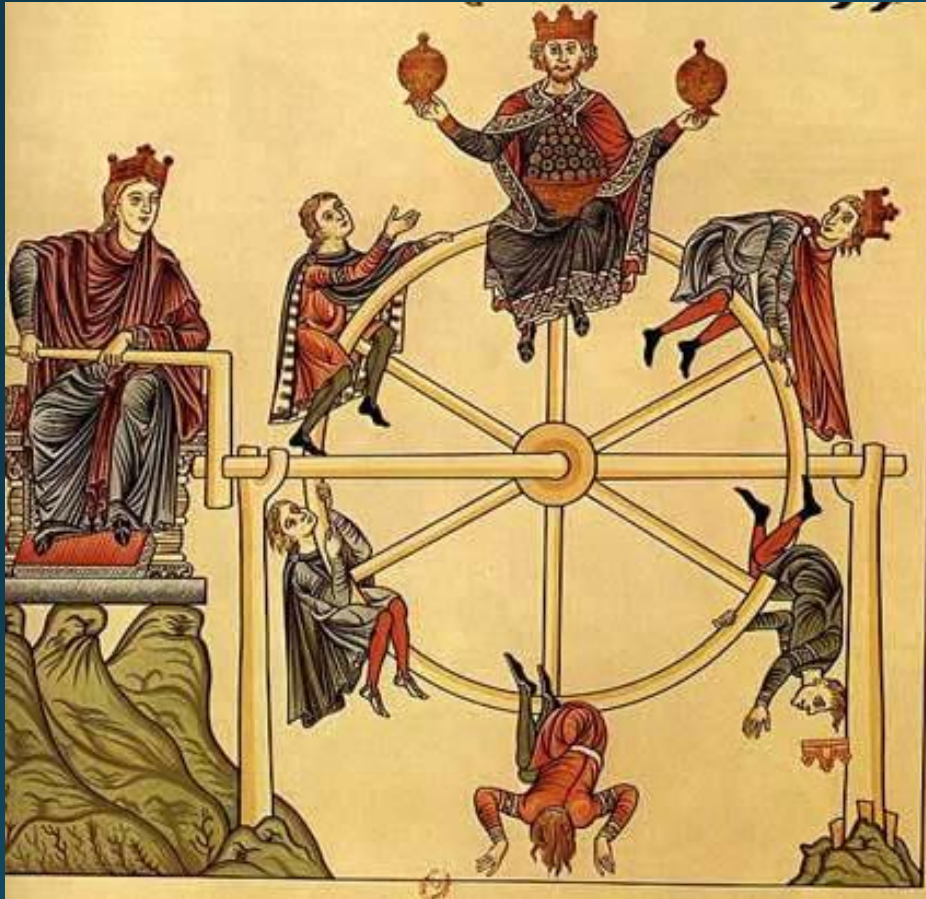


Marcello Venusti's copy, 1549



Martinus Rota's copy, 1569

Medieval view of Wheel of Fortune



Hortus deliciarum, English 12th cent

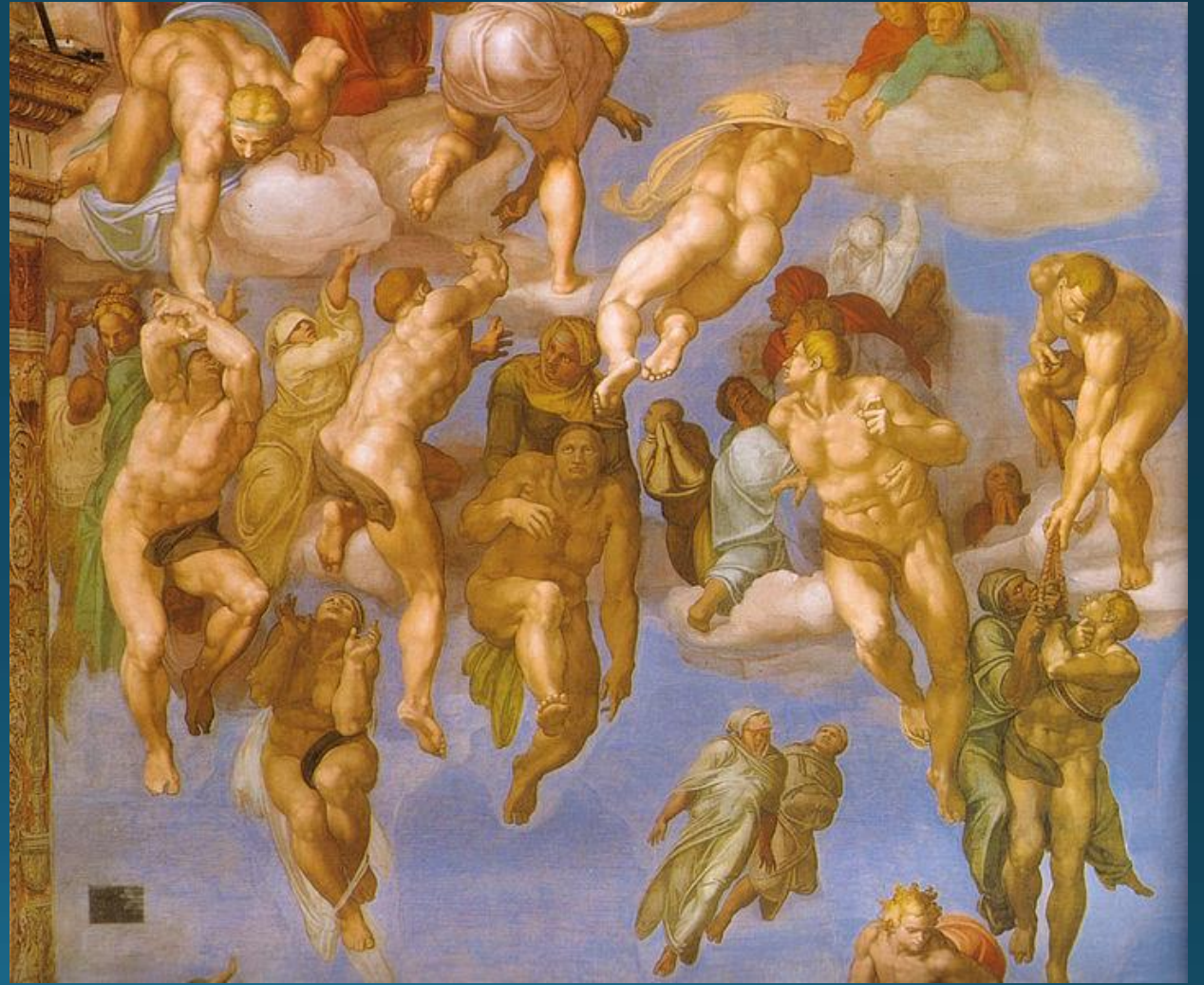


Lydgate m/s, English 15th cent

Haloless Saints; wingless angels



St Sebastian



Angels saving souls



Resurrection of the dead (The Saved)

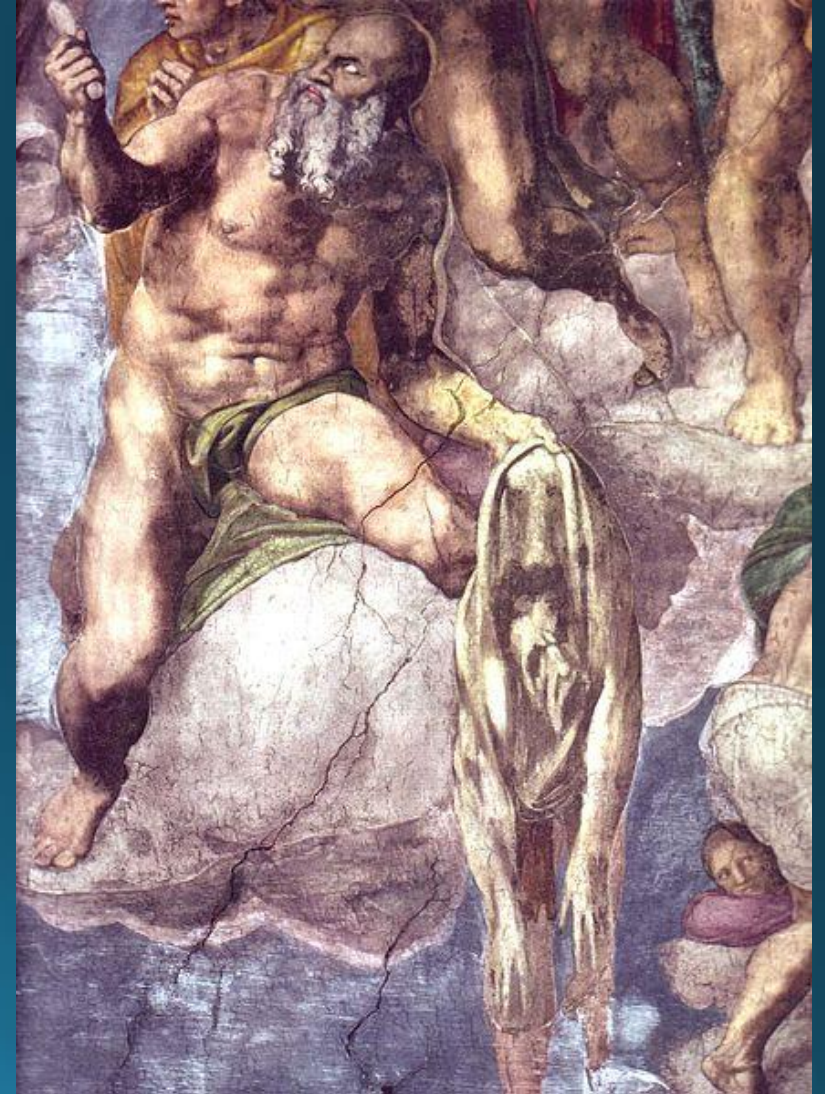


The Damned (penalty for greed)

Hell as psychological (self portrait)



Damned soul



St Bartholomew
(spirit/flesh dichotomy)



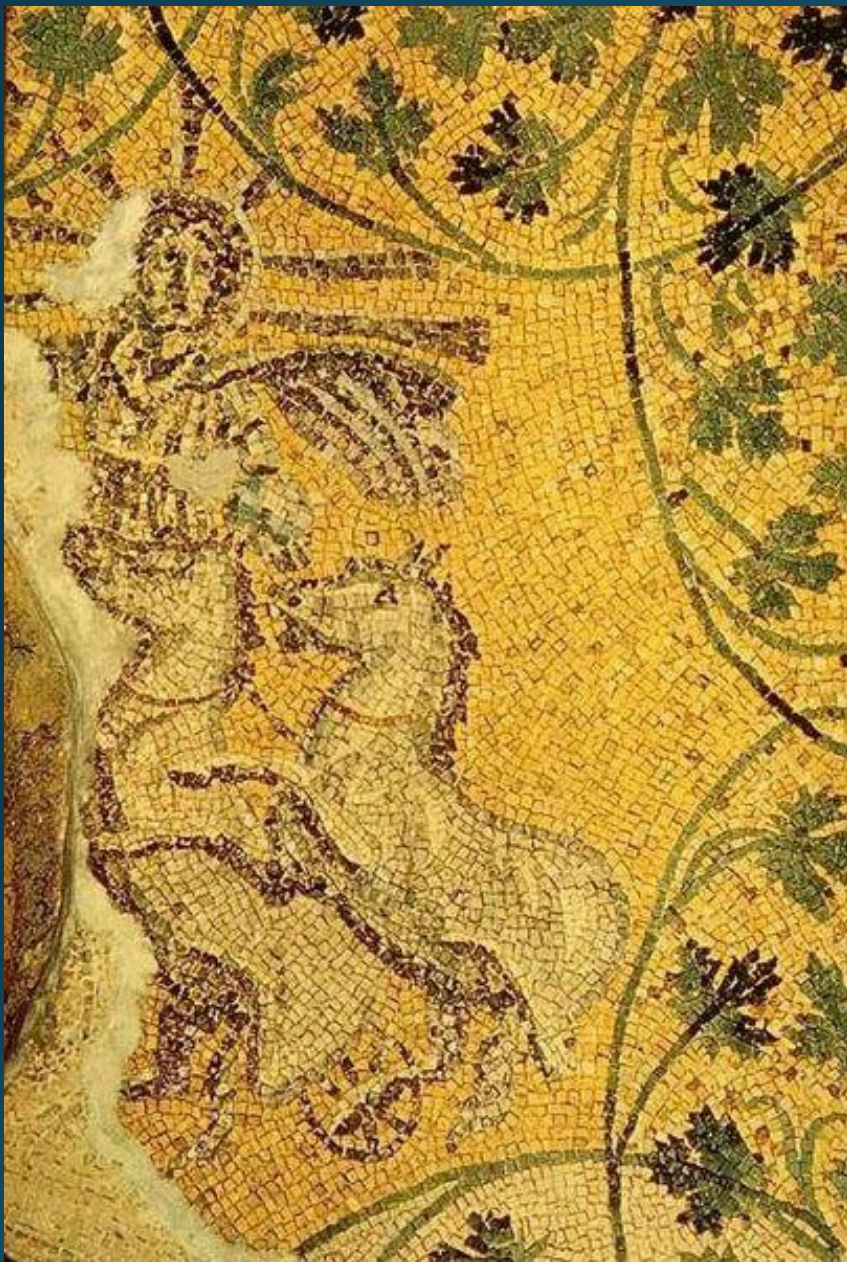
Christ-
Apollo



Apollo
Belvedere

Christ as the sun ... light of the world

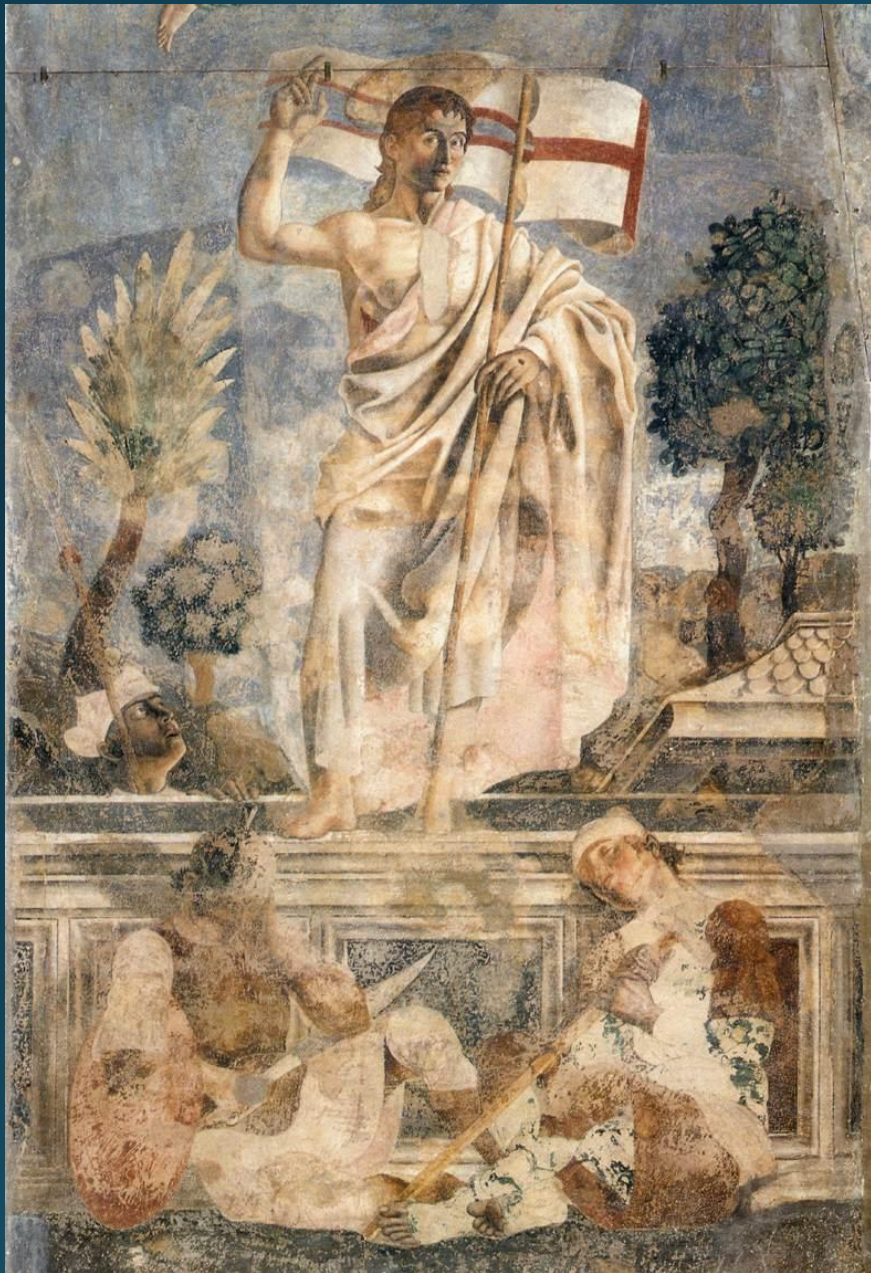
- *I am the light of the world; he that followeth me shall ... have the light of life (John 8:12)*
- *I am come as a light into the world (John 12:46)*
- *For the Lord God is a sun and a shield (Psalm 18:11)*
- *The sun of righteousness shall arise (Malachi 4:2)*
- *His face did shine as the sun (Matthew 17:2)*
- *His countenance was as the sun (Revelation 1:16)*
- Also:
 - Writings of St Augustine
 - Revival/emphasis in Catholic Reformation
(the *Spirituali*, *Illuminism*, *Viterbo Group*)



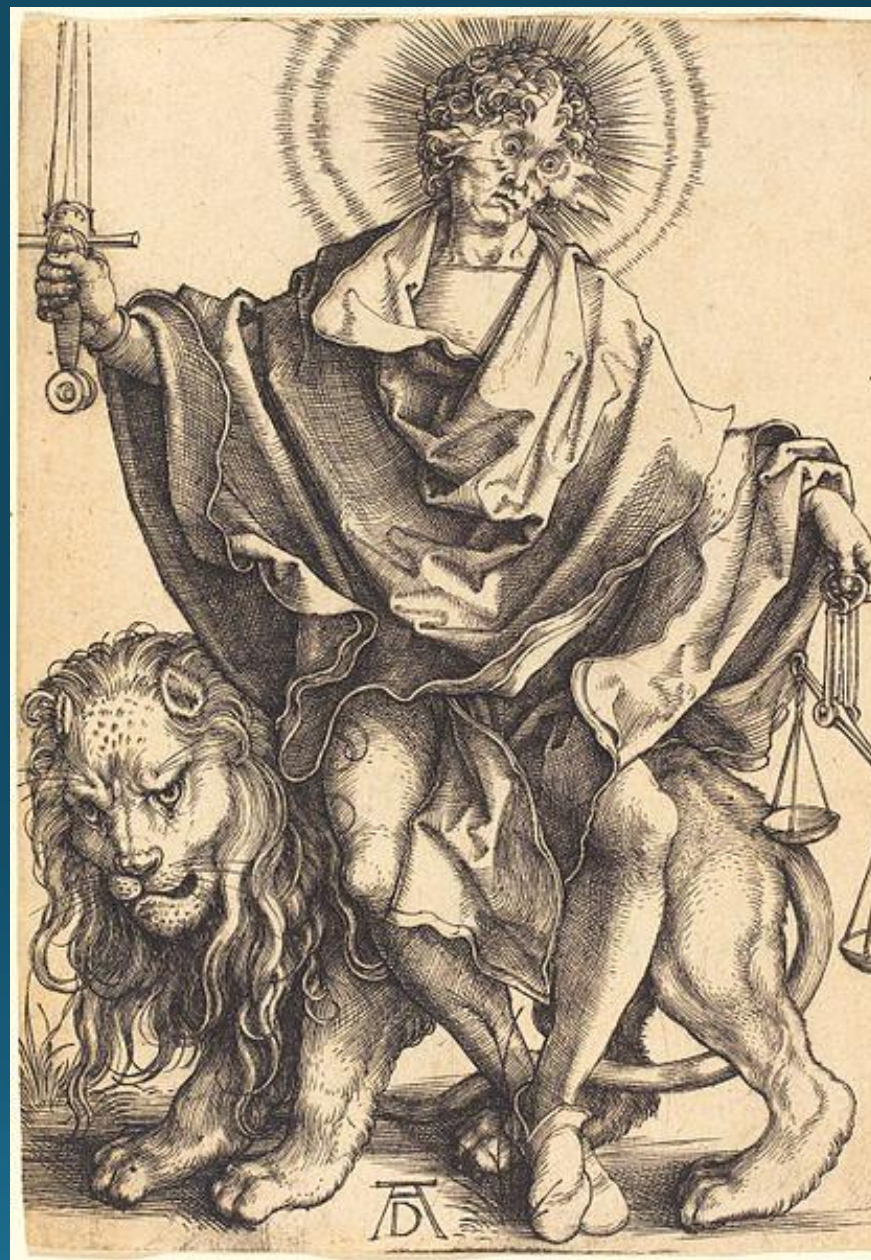
Christ as the Sun-God 3rd cent, St Peter's



Christ enthroned as Master of the Universe
Sarcophagus of Junius Bassus 439



Castagno *Resurrection* 1447



Dürer *Sol Invictus* 1499-1500



Alessandro Botticelli, *Lamentation* 1492



Florence, Palazzo della Signoria, sun symbol 1528
NB inscription: *Rex Regem et Dominus Dominantium*

Allusions to Dante



Charon, Minos – but Dante's cosmology as well

Concept of the centre of the universe (as flat? geocentric?)



T&O Map 1250
(NB Jerusalem as centre)

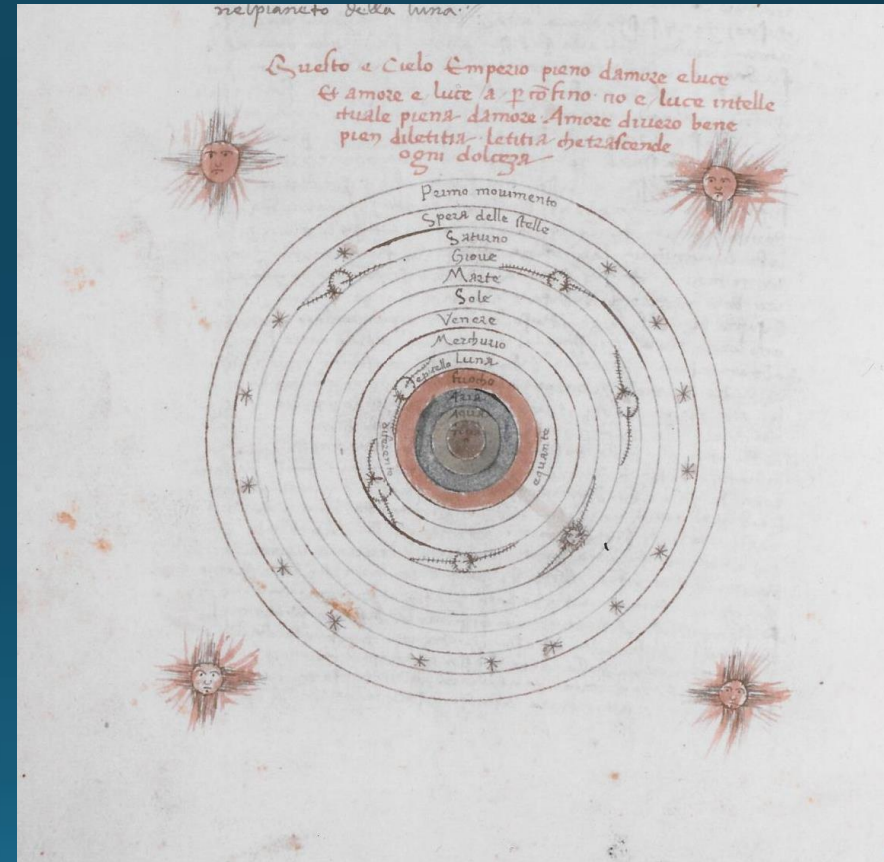
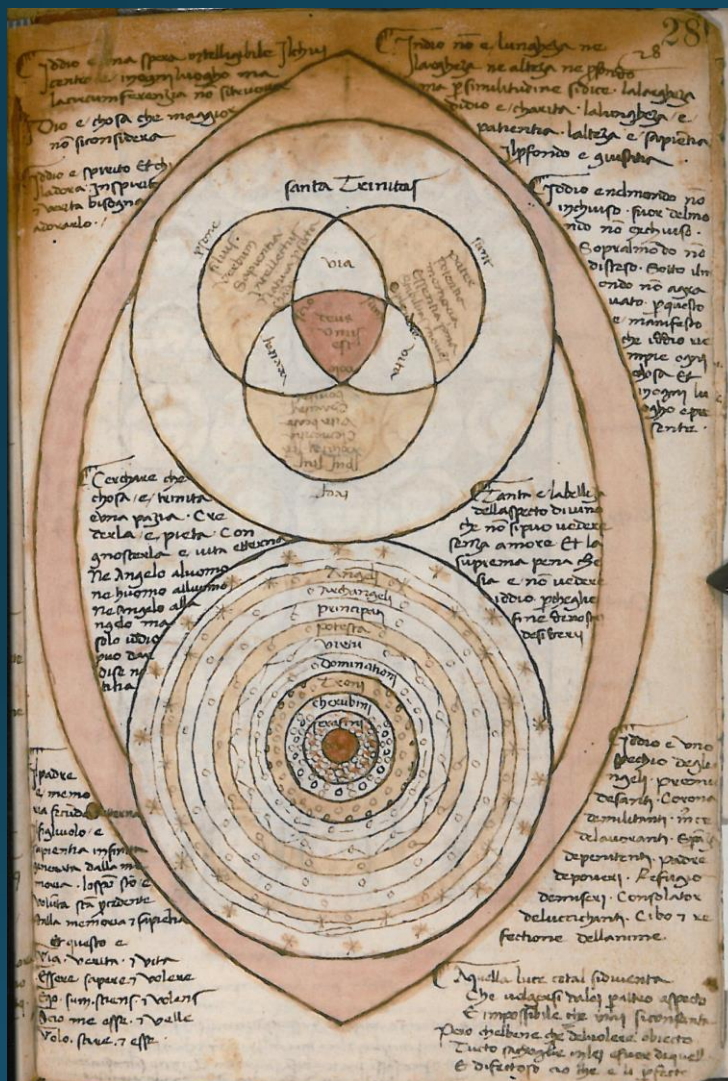
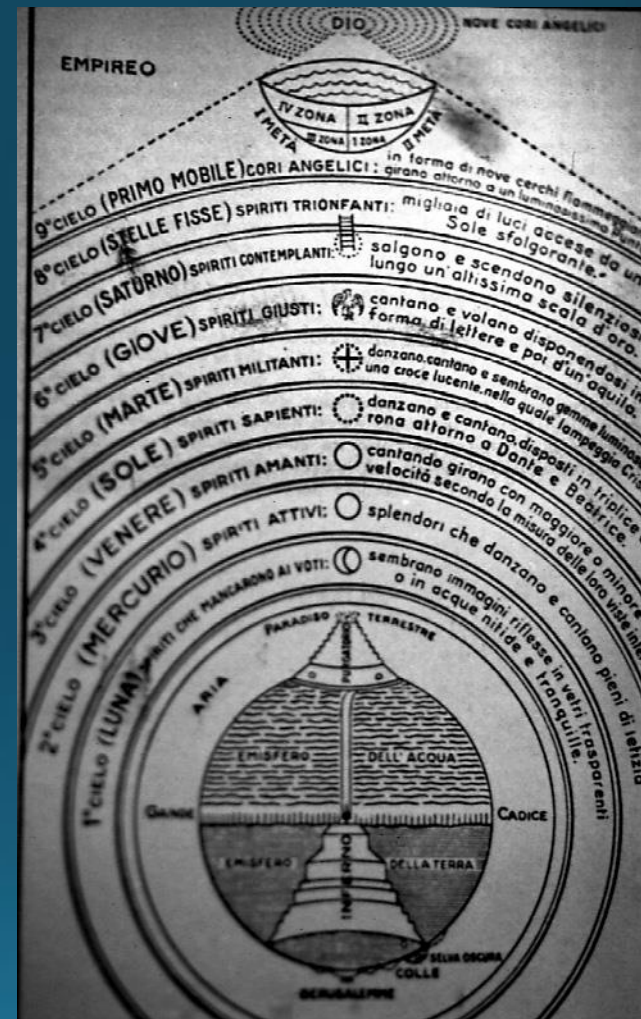


Diagram of Cosmos, Florence, 15th century
(earth as centre - 'geocentric')

Dante's dual system

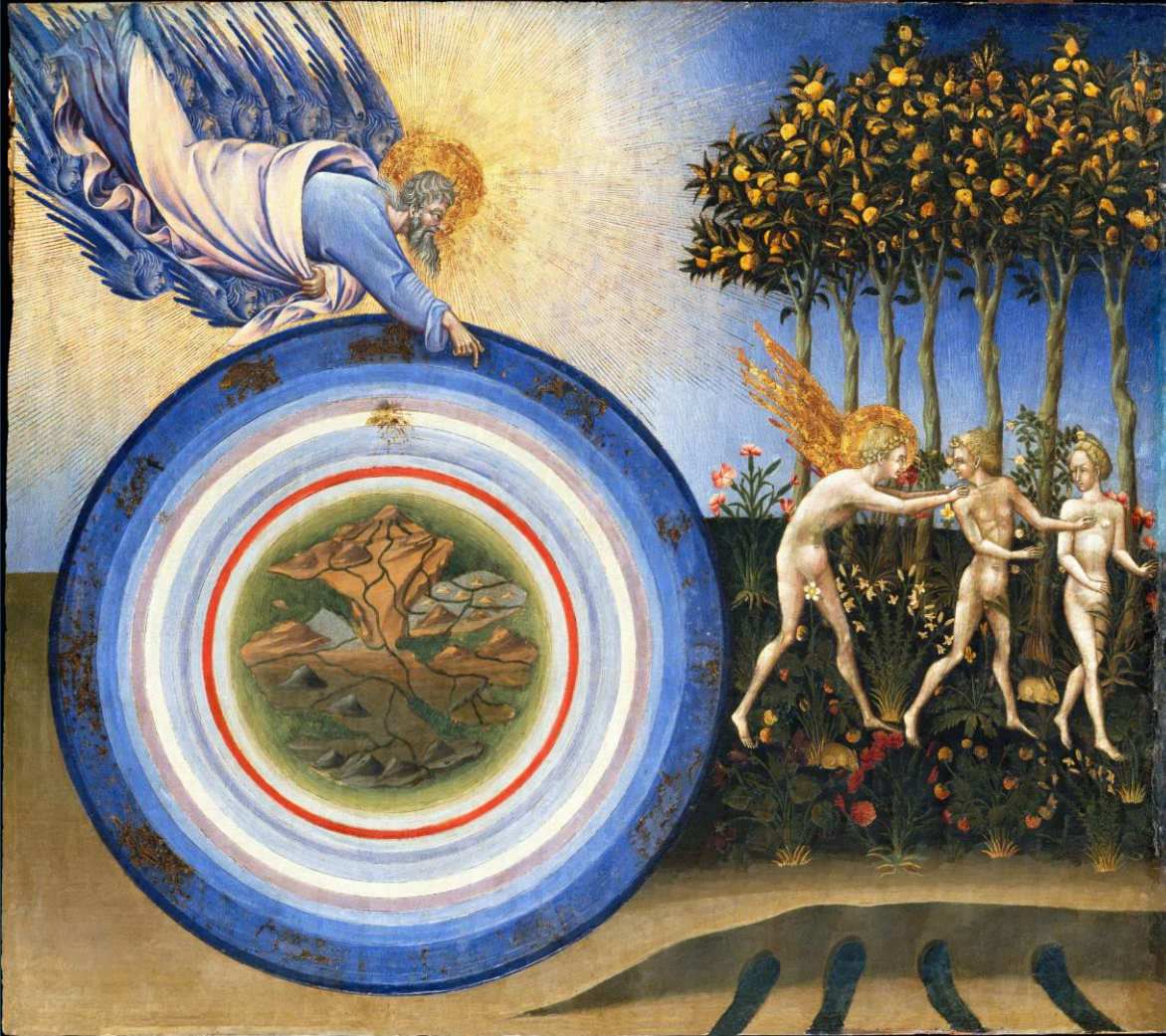


Dante schema, Buonaccorsi, 1440



Diagram, 1980's (ed. Provenzal)

Dante's Universe, 15th century



Giovanni di Paolo *Creation and Expulsion* 1445

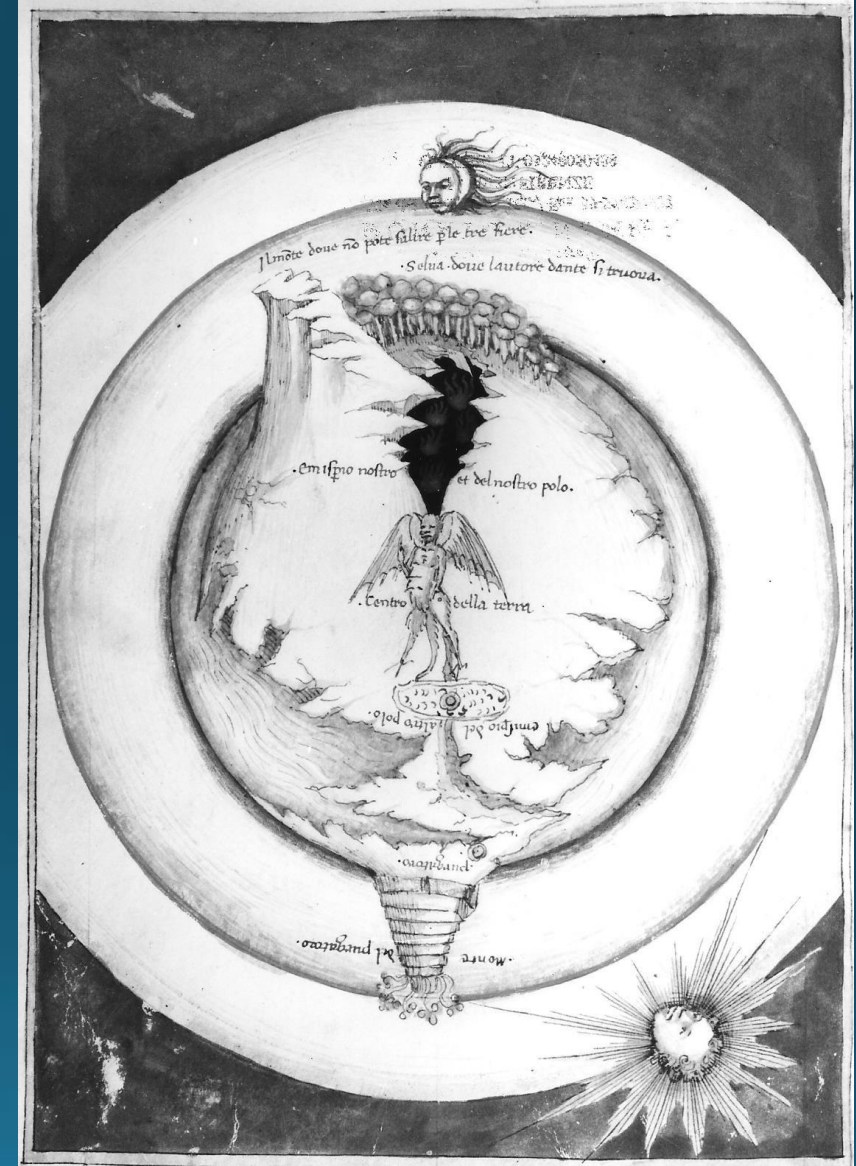


Giovanni di Paolo *Illustration to Paradiso 38*, c 1450
(God in the centre as sun)

Dante's *Inferno* - Haidocentric?



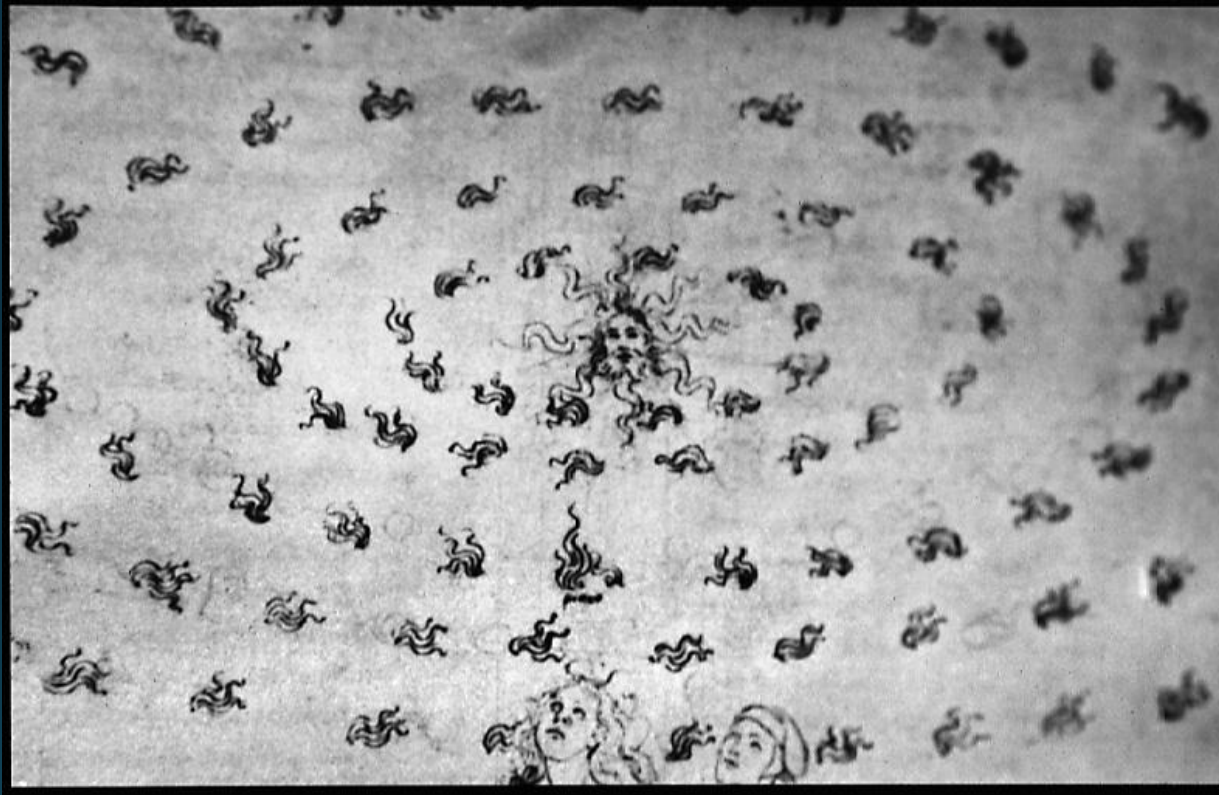
Botticelli, drawing for *Inferno* 34:76
*Quando noi fummo là dove la coscia si
volge, a punto in sul grosso de l'anche ..*



Topography of Hell, Florence c 1575

Dante's vision of the Empyrean

Botticelli, *Paradiso* 24, 1490's



Botticelli, *Paradiso* 27, 1490's



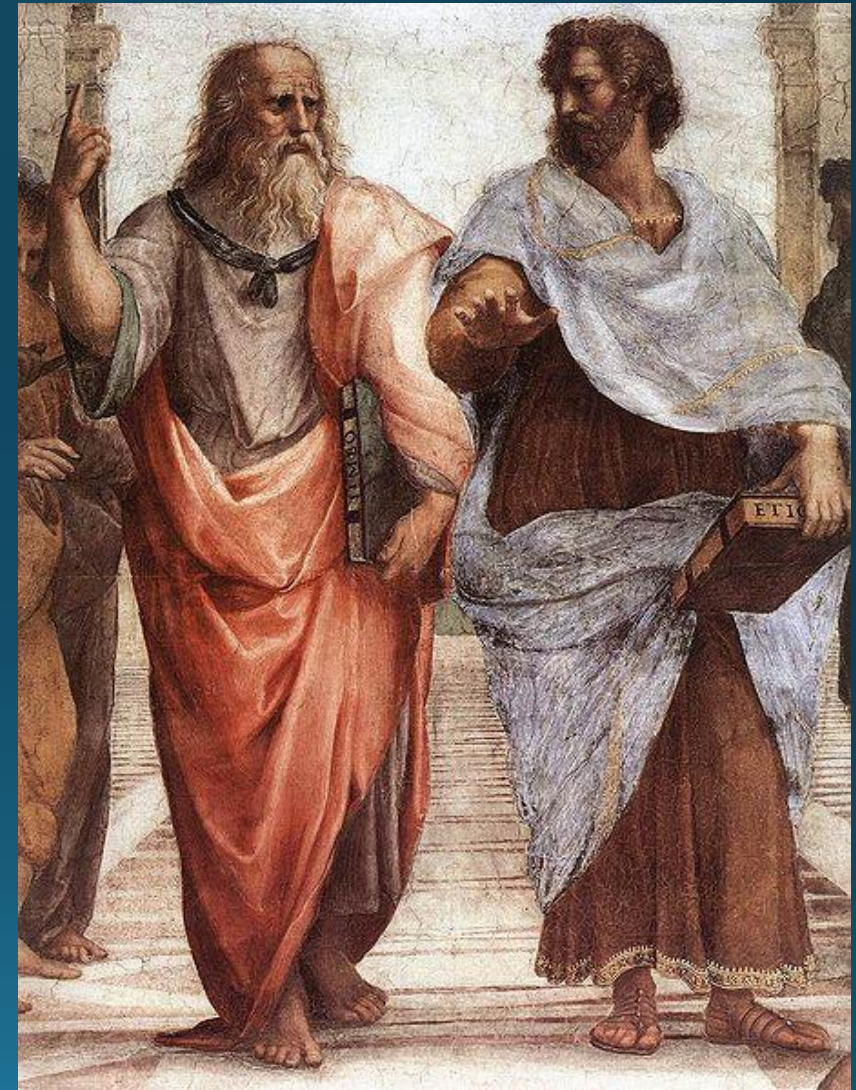
I saw a Point that sent forth so acute a light that anyone who faced the force with which it blazed would have to shut his eyes ... On yonder point depend the heavens and the whole of nature... (Paradiso, 28)

NB – and poems by Michelangelo and Vittoria Colonna

Neoplatonic Cosmology (*Republic* VI and VII)



Raphael, *School of Athens*, 1510-11



Detail, Plato with copy of *Timaeus*

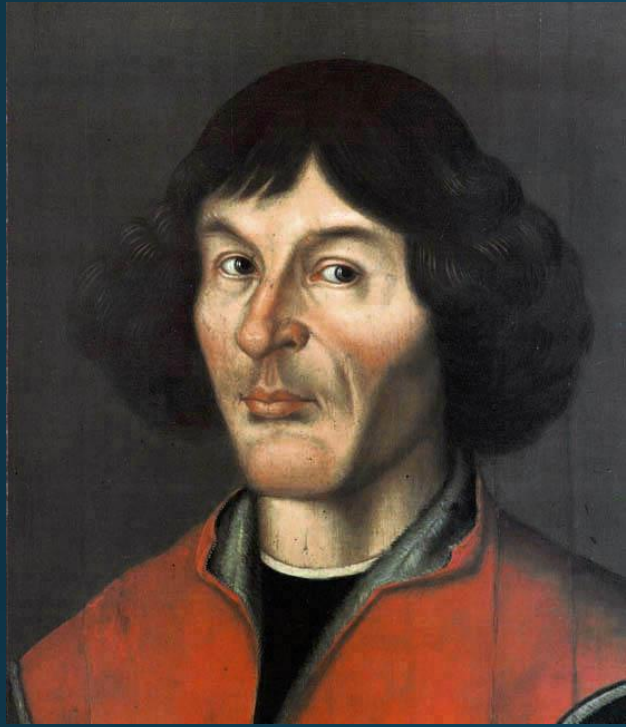
Marsilio Ficino, Cristoforo Landino, Angelo Poliziano



Ghirlandaio, fresco in Santa Maria Novella, Tornabuoni Cappella [detail]

Marsilio Ficino and Neoplatonism

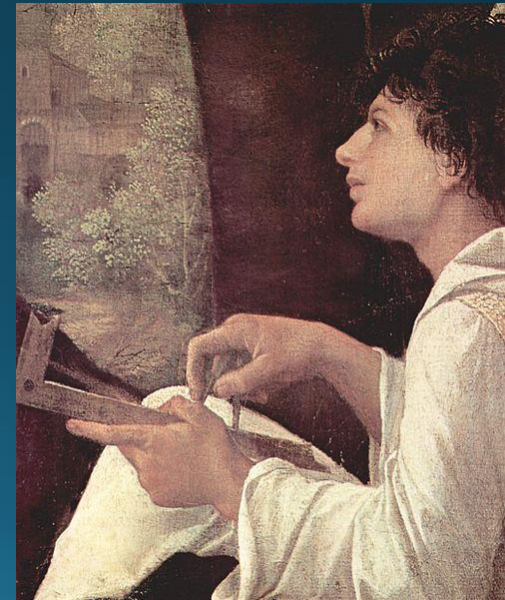
- *But in the sixth book on the Republic, that divine man [Plato] explains the whole thing and he says that the light of the intellect for understanding all things is the same God Himself by whom all things are made and he compares the Sun and God to each other*
- *The greatest wonder in Nature...the middle point of all that is, the chain of the world, the face of all and the knot and bond of the universe (De Amore, book 3)*
- *The Sun will give you clear signs. Who will dare to say that the Sun is false? (De Sole)*
- *Christ will awaken the dead 'like the new sun awakens the world each spring'*
- *The sun was the first to be created and was placed at the centre of the sky ... It sits, as if occupying a rock in the manner of a king*



Nicholas
Copernicus
1473-1543



Giorgione *Three Philosophers* 1509-10



Portrait of Copernicus, Theodorus de Bry, 1597

- Copernicus 1500-1530's
- 1596 - University of Bologna
- 1500 - public lectures, Rome
- 1514 - *Commentariolus*
- 1514 - Fifth Lateran Council
- 1524 - *Letter against Werner*
- 1531 - Satires on Copernicus
- 1530's - 'conversations of the common people gathered in the evening in the Piazza del Duomo' recorded by Anton Francesco Doni
- 1539 – Luther describes Copernicus 'upstart astrologer'



Clemens VII. Pont. Max. hunc Codicem
mihi D. DD. Anno M D XXXIII
Romae postquam ei praesentibus Fr. Ursino,
Joh. Salviato Card. Joh. Petro Ep. Viter-
biensi, et Mattaeo Curtio Medico phy-
sico in hortis Vaticanis Copernicana
de motu terrae sententiam explicavi.

Joh. Albertus Widmanstadius
cogn. Luerctius, 3^m D.
N. Secretarius domesticus
et familiaris.

Vidit Pius VI. Pont. Max. 30. Aprilis 1782.
cum Vindobonae sedes Monachii accessit

Steigerberger Biblioth.



6. 33.

Codex Graecus Monacensis 151

*Clemens VII, Pontifex Maximus hunc codicem
mihi dono dedit Anno MDXXXIII Romae,
postquam ei, praesentibus Fr Ursino, Joh.
Salviato Cardinalibus, Joh. Petro episcopo
Viterbiensi, et Mattaeo Curtio Medico physico in
hortis Vaticanis Copernicana de motu terrae
sententiam explicavi.*

Joh. Albertus Widmanstadius

Codex Graecus Monacensis 151

Clement VII Supreme Pontiff presented this codex to me as a gift AD 1533, in Rome, after I had, in the presence of Fra Ursino, Cardinal Joh. Salviati, Joh. Petrus Bishop of Viterbo, and Matthias Curtius, medical physician, explained to him in the garden of the Vatican, Copernicus' teaching concerning the motion of the earth

Albertus Widmanstadius

Clemens VII. Pont. Max. hunc Codicem
mihi D. DD. Anno M D XXXIII
Roma postea ei praesentib. Fr. Ursino,
Joh. Salviato Card. Joh. Petro Ep'o Viter.
bien. et Mattheo Curtio Medico phy.
sico in hortis Vaticanis Coperniciana
de motu terra sententiam explicavi.

Joh. Albertus Widmanstadius
cogn. Luerctius, 3^m D.
R. Secretarius domesticus
et familiaris.

Vidit Pius VI. Pont. Max. 30. Aprilis 1782.
cum Vindobona sedes Monachii afoet

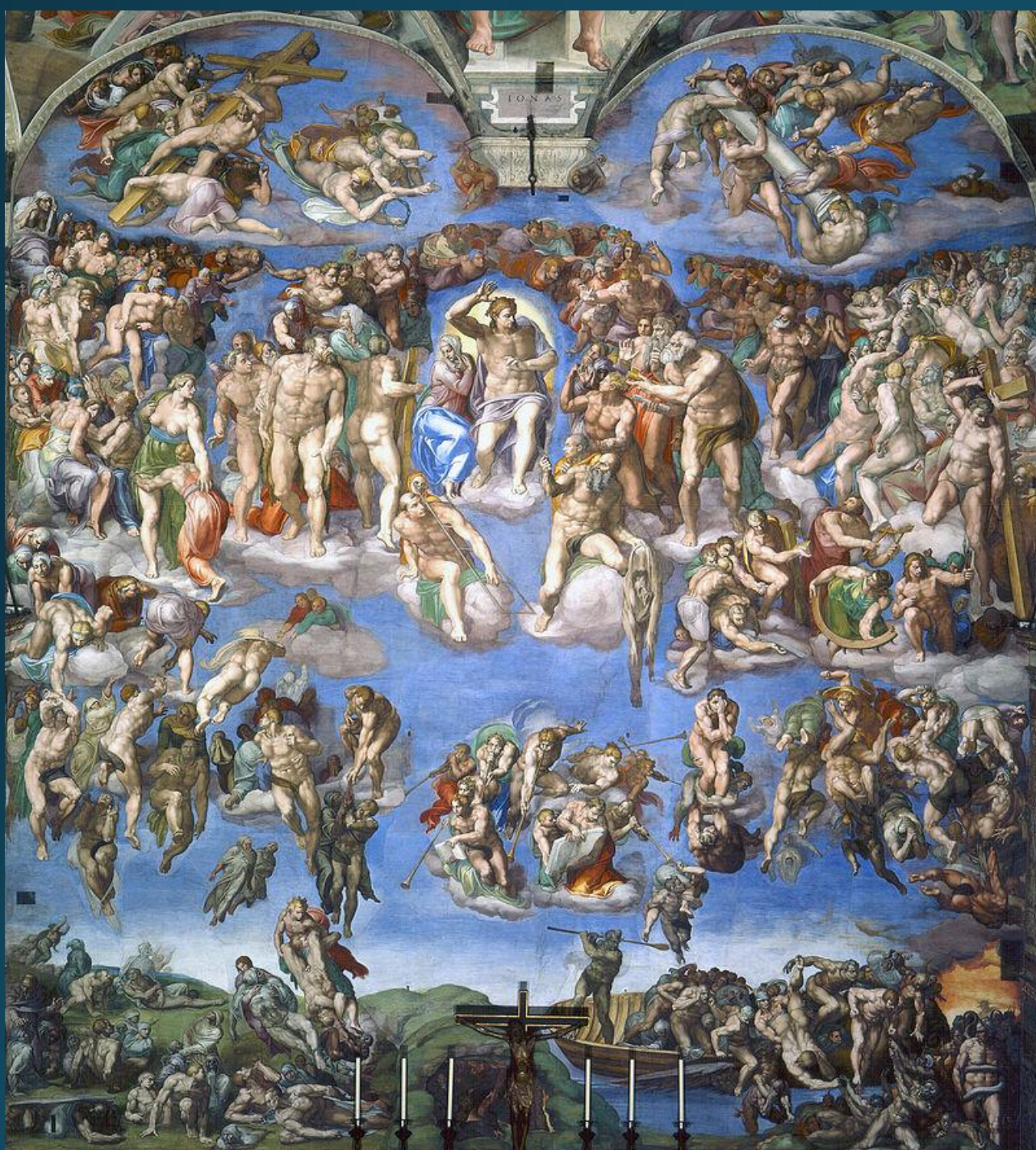
Reigenberger Biblioth.



6. 33.

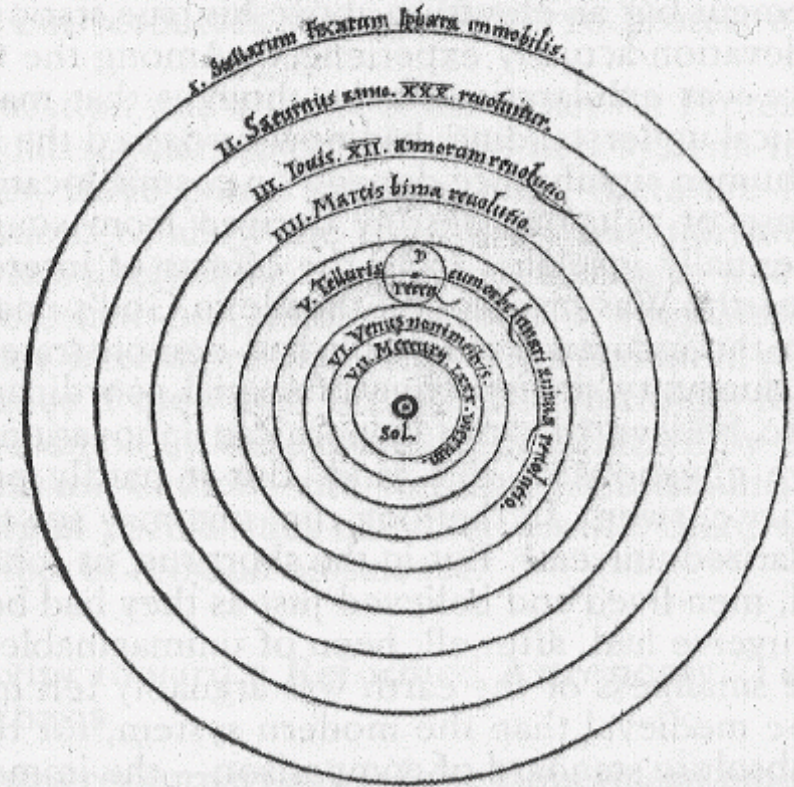
Letter to Schoenberg, 1536

- *Some years ago word reached me concerning your proficiency of which everybody constantly spoke For I had learned that you had formulated a new cosmology. In it you maintain that the earth moves; that the sun occupies the most central place in the universe...' . He goes on 'I entreat you to communicate this discovery of yours to scholars (Cardinal Schoenberg, 1536)*
- *Narratio prima, 1540*
- *Revolutions* dedicated to Pope Paul III, 1543

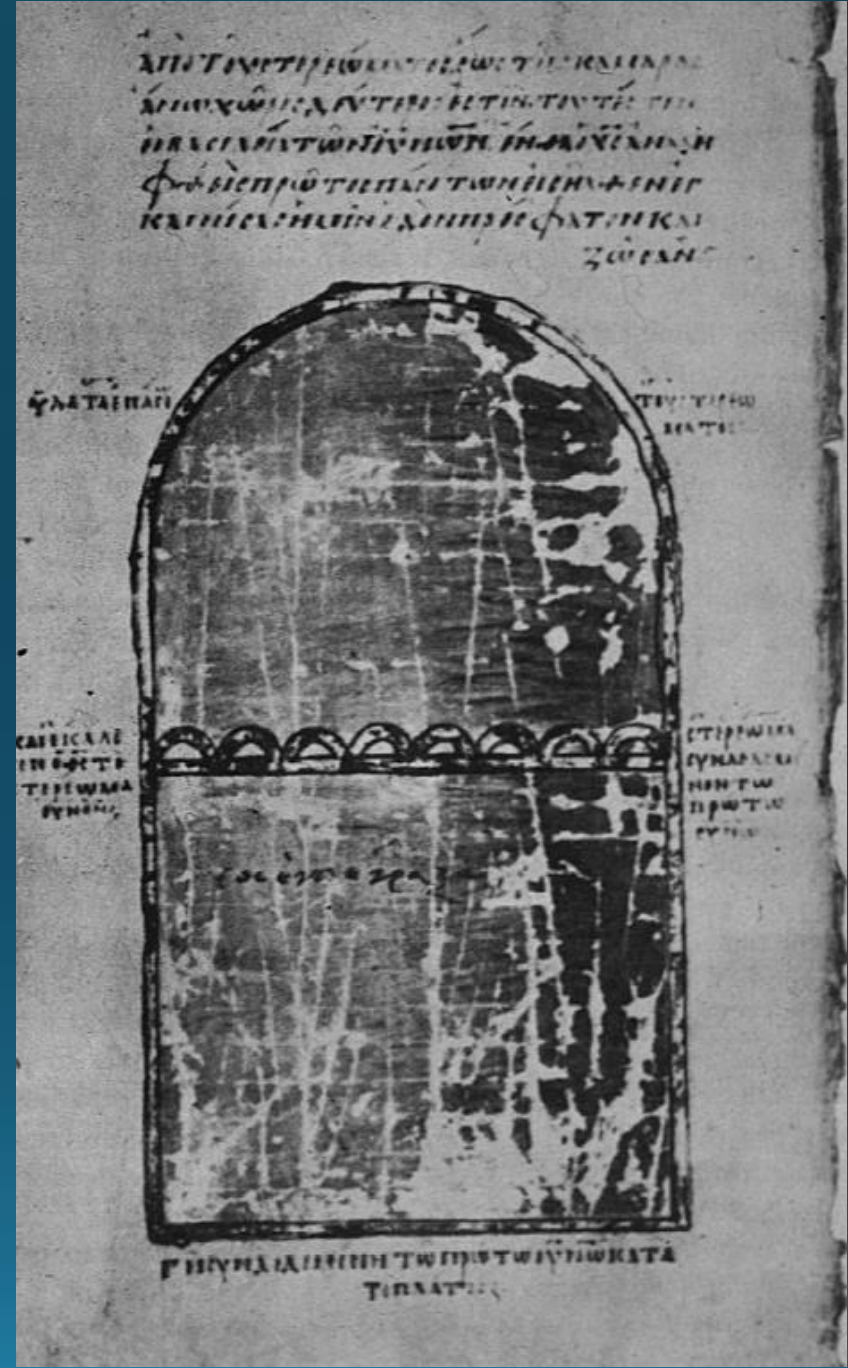
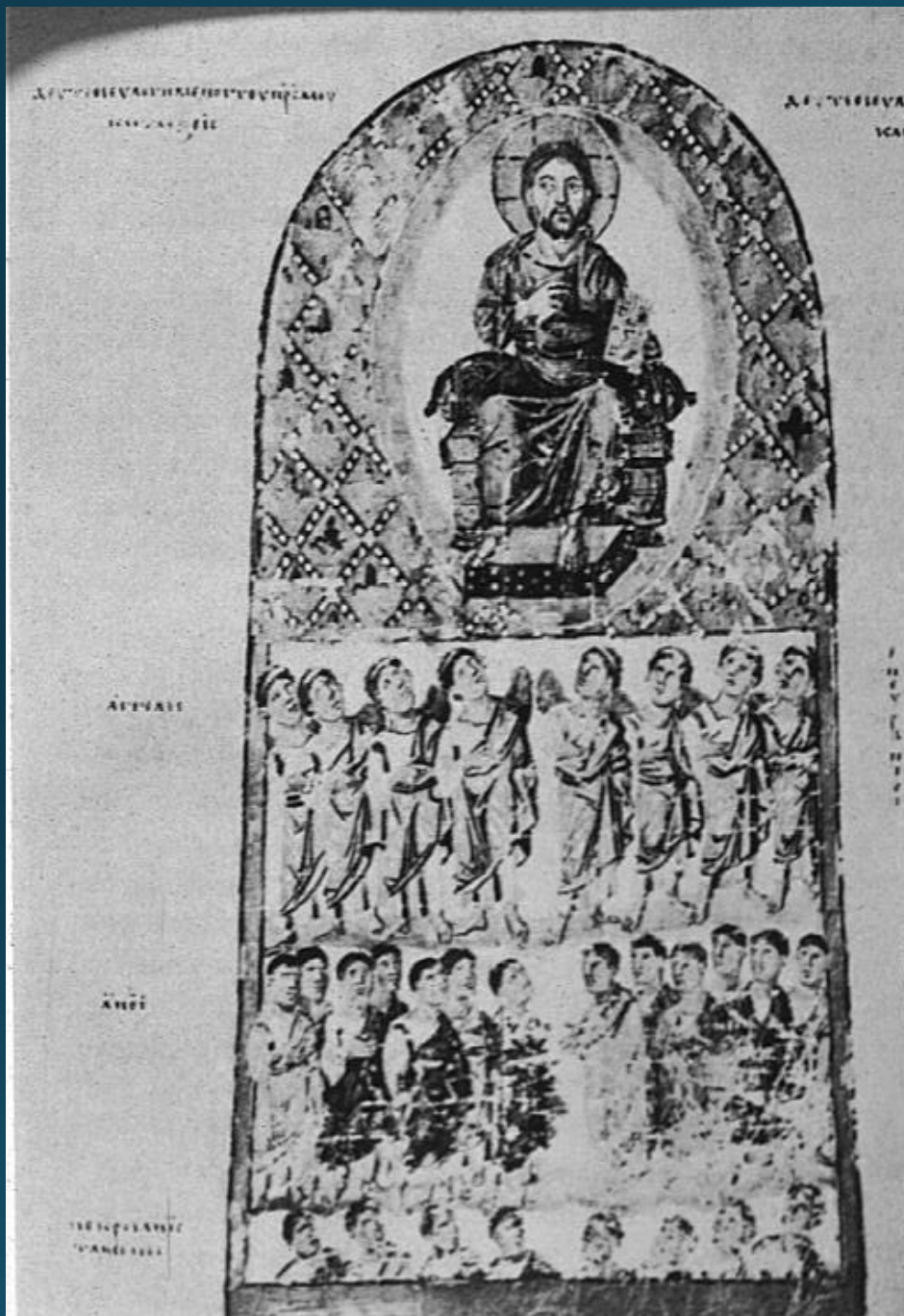


NICOLAI COPERNICI

net, in quo terram cum orbe lunari tanquam epicyclo contineri diximus. Quinto loco Venus nono mense reducitur. Sextum deniq locum Mercurius tenet, octuaginta dierum spacio circū currens. In medio uero omnium residet Sol. Quis enim in hoc



pulcherimo templo lampadem hanc in alio uel meliori loco poneret, quā unde totum simul possit illuminare? Siquidem non inepte quidam lucernam mundi, alij mentem, alij rectorem uocant. Trimegistus uisibilem Deum, Sophoclis Electra intuentē omnia. Ita profecto tanquam in solio regali Sol residens circum agentem gubernat Astorum familiam. Tellus quoq minime fraudatur lunari ministerio, sed ut Aristoteles de animalibus ait, maximā Luna cū terra cognationē habet. Concipit interea à Sole terra, & impregnatur annuo partu. Inuenimus igitur sub hac

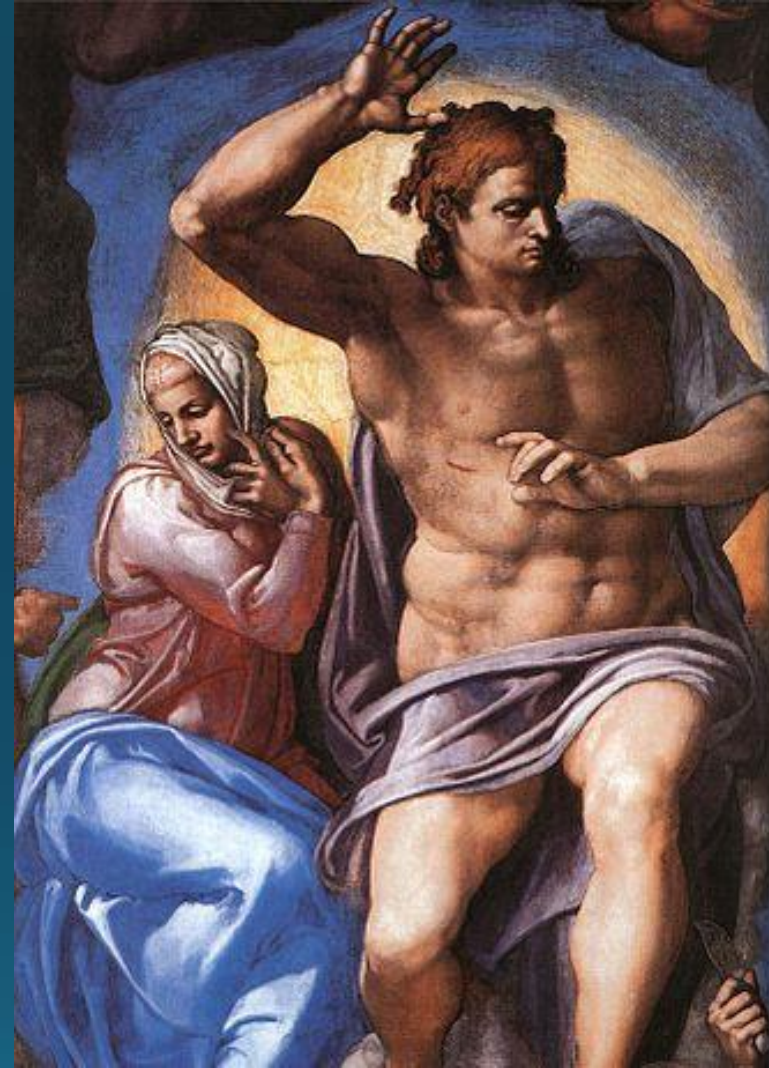


The Centre: head, or heart, or ?





The 'secret' of the fresco



....on his vesture and on his thigh a name written
Revelation 19:16-17



The 'secret' of the fresco ... 'decoded'

- And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS And I saw an angel standing in the sun...'
- ... et habet in vestimento et in femore suo scriptum Rex Regum et Dominus Dominantium
- .. καὶ ἔχει ἐπὶ τὸ ἱμάτιον καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν μηρὸν αὐτοῦ ὄνομα γεγραμμένον ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΝ ΚΑΙ ΚΥΡΙΟΣ ΚΥΡΙΩΝ....

Key dates, additional evidence

- **Copernicus, 1473-1543**

- 1491-94 Copernicus at Cracow
- 1496-1503 C in Bologna, Rome
- 1496 Copernicus in Bologna
- 1500 Copernicus in Rome
- 1514 Copernicus' *Commentariolus*
- 1514 Fifth Lateran Council
- 1524 *Letter against Werner*
- 1531 Satires on Copernicus
- 1533 Lecture in Vatican (June?)
- 1536 Schönberg's letter
- 1539 Luther against Copernicus
- 1540 *Narratio Prima*
- 1541 Second edition, *Narratio Prima*
- 1542 Revival of Inquisition
- 1543 Death, *Revolutions*
- 1544/45 Opposition commences

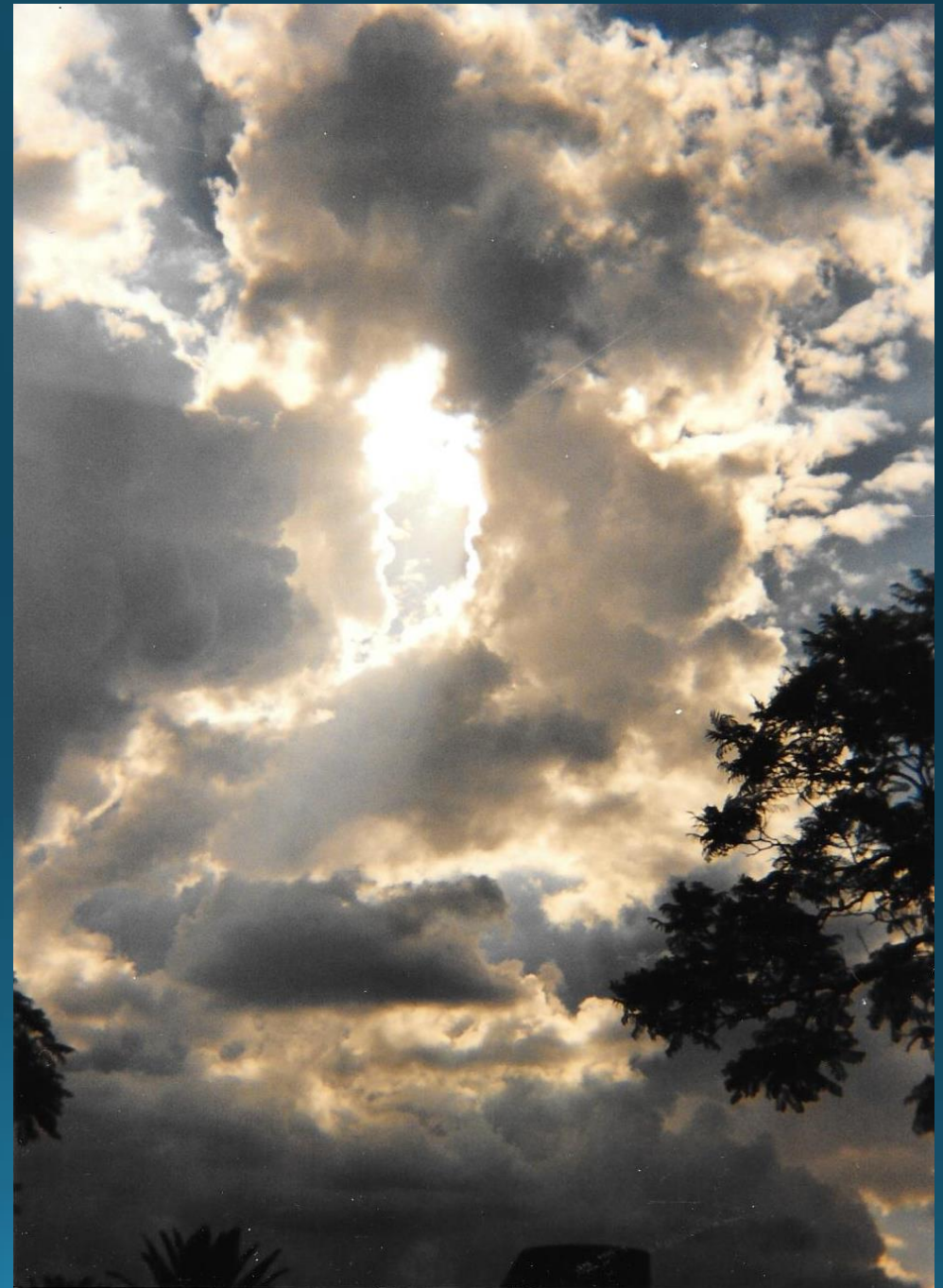
- **Michelangelo, 1475-1564**

- 1496 Michelangelo in Bologna
- 1500 Michelangelo in Rome
- 1500-34 In Rome/Florence
- 1533 17 July 'a contract for such a thing...'
- 1533 22 Sept, Michelangelo, Clement VII (and Paul Farnese) meet at S Miniato
- 1533 'Bayonne' drawing of *LJ*
- 1534 'Buonarroti' drawing of *LJ*
- 1534 Sept, Michelangelo returns to Rome; Clement dies; Paul III pope
- 1536 painting began (April/May)
- 1536 17 Nov, Papal *breve* on *LJ*
- 1541 31 Oct, completion/unveiling
- 1542 Pauline frescoes
- 1543 Superintendent for frescoes
- 1545 Opposition to *LJ* commences

Selected References

- *Sun-symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's Last Judgment* (2000), Kirksville, Mo: Truman State University Press
- Michelangelo, Copernicus and the Sistine Chapel: The Last Judgment Decoded (2013) Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing
- 'Sun-symbolism and Cosmology in Michelangelo's *Last Judgment*,' (1990) *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 21 (4), 607-643
- *Journal of the History of Astronomy* (2000) xxxi, pp 156-160
- Wikimedia Commons, for illustrations

Sun/cloud effects



SUN SYMBOLISM AND COSMOLOGY IN MICHELANGELO'S "LAST JUDGMENT"



Valerie Shrimplin



Valerie Shrimplin

Michelangelo, Copernicus and the Sistine Chapel

The Last Judgment Decoded

LAP LAMBERT
Academic Publishing