Le Simplegadi ISSN 1824-5226

Vol. XXIV-No. 26 November 2026 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-263

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"Naked Beauty Display'd". Bodies, Souls, and Sexuality in William Blake's Composite Art (*Part II*)

Abstract I: Le due parti di questo saggio si soffermano su alcuni aspetti della poetica e dell'arte verbale e figurativa di William Blake, entrambe dominate dal significato e dal ruolo del corpo umano. Mentre la Parte I analizza il profondo rapporto tra uomo e mondo naturale (sezione 1), l'idea 'radicale' di una società democratica, egalitaria e sessualmente libera (sezione 2) e il sentimento fondamentale di Blake nei confronti del corpo umano (sezione 3), questa seconda Parte studia come l'umano e il divino si compenetrano (sezione 4) e come Blake concepisce un modello ideale e assai originale di sessualità androgina – la *coincidentia oppositorum* alchemica – attraverso la rappresentazione visiva di corpi caratterizzati da torsioni 'serpentinate' che evocano l'arte di Michelangelo (sezione 5).

Abstract II: The two parts of this essay dwell on some aspects of William Blake's poetics and of his verbal and figurative art, both dominated by the meaning and role of the human body. Whereas Part I investigates the profound relationship between man and the natural world (section 1), the idea of a radically democratic, egalitarian, and sexually free society (section 2), and Blake's fundamental attitude towards the human body (section 3), this second Part studies how the human and the divine interpenetrate (section 4) and how Blake conceives of an ideal and highly personal model of an androgynous sexuality – the alchemic *coincidentia oppositorum* – by visually representing bodies endowed with a writhing movement and a serpentine pattern that evoke Michelangelo's art (section 5).

Keywords: Panism, Word and Image, Socio-political Radicalism, the Human and the Divine, Body Language.

4. *"All deities reside in the human breast"*. Humanity as the "likeness & similitude" of Divinity

Longing for the union, or, better, for the re-union of the human and the divine, Blake merges Christian culture with two tightly intertwined alchemical principles and goals: the idea of the *coincidentia oppositorum* and the need to recover the original perfection of humanity, i.e.

[*] Continuation of *Part I*, Romero Allué (2025).

its divine dimension. The conviction that there is a connection between the universe and humanity, above and below, and macrocosm and microcosm is one of the main tenets of the *Tabula smaragdina*, the sacred text of alchemists and, more generally, of Hermetic culture. According to legend, the *Tabula smaragdina* is an emerald tablet found in a cave in the hands of the statue of Hermes Trismegistus, the father of alchemy.

The second postulate of "the Smaragdine Table of Hermes", as Blake calls it (*Jerusalem*, plate 91. K. 738), solemnly decrees that "quod est inferius, est sicut quod est superius, et quod est superius, est sicut quod est inferius" (Manget 1702, vol. I: 385): "That which is below is like that which is above, and that which is above is like that which is below"[1]. Its tenth postulate reiterates the identification between above and below, or, in Blakean terms, the idea that "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (*There is No Natural Religion - second series*, plate 12. K. 98), by proclaiming that "Ascendit a terra in coelum, iterumque descendit in terram, et recipit vim superiorum et inferiorum" (Manget 1702, vol. I: 386), a formula generally translated as "The structure of the microcosm is in accordance with the structure of the macrocosm". Blake derives the theory of the identity of *quod est inferius* and *quod est superius* both from alchemic culture and from the doctrine of correspondences expounded by Böhme and Swedenborg (Böhme 1651; Swedenborg 1784).

On plate 76 of *Jerusalem*, Blake visually represents the specular identification of Los, his alter ego, with Jesus crucified on an oak tree (see plate 9)[2]: in more general terms, with this plate the poet illustrates the mirroring identification between humanity – in "naked beauty" – and divinity. Highlighting the correspondence of above and below and drawing inspiration from Platonic theories, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810), Blake proclaims:

> There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All Things are comprehended […] in the divine body of the Saviour, […] The Human Imagination (69-70. K. 605-606).

If we consider that the design of plate 76 of *Jerusalem* can be regarded as the visual illustration of the text of plate 96, "the divine body of the Saviour" is interpretable as Los and the figure before the cross is interpretable as Albion, the archetype of humanity:

> Then Jesus appeared standing by Albion as the Good Shepherd
> […] And the Divine Appearance was the likeness & similitude of Los
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 96, ll. 3, 7. K. 743).

This full-plate design can also be regarded as another example of Blake's visual self-representation because the man before the cross in a pose echoing that of Christ is also identifiable with the very author. A couple of lines already mentioned depict Jesus-Los – overtly associated with poetic and creative power – as he was seen by the author of the poem:

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[1] Hermes's tablet was translated from Arabic into Latin in the twelfth century. See, among others, Jung (1977), Burckhardt (1972).

[2] As in *Part I* of this essay, the illustrations are at the end of these pages, before the Bibliography.

> […] I see the Saviour over me
> Spreading his beams of love & dictating the words of this mild song
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 4, ll. 4-5. K. 622).

The identification Los-Jesus presented in this design is anticipated, in a specular position, by plate 18 of *The Book of Urizen*, a plate that depicts Los as a poet, as a smith holding his hammer, as an alchemist surrounded by the fire of his furnace, and as Christ on the cross (see plate 10). Naked and in a Christological frontal pose, on this plate Blake's alter ego is busy creating and giving life to his female counterpart, Enitharmon, an endeavour that can be read as a reference to one of the central goals of alchemy: the creation of a human being, the *homunculus*. The "globe of life blood" Los is holding in his right hand is an allusion to his creative and quasi-divine power and to the product of his work at the furnace, i.e. Enitharmon's birth. The first lines of this plate explain that

> The globe of life blood trembled
> Branching out into roots,
> Fibrous, writhing upon the winds,
> Fibres of blood, milk and tears,
> In pangs, eternity on eternity
> (*The Book of Urizen*, plate 18, ll. 1-5. K. 231).

Plate 5 of *The Gates of Paradise* represents the element of Fire, the symbol and basic force of the blacksmith and alchemist Los, in anthropomorphic terms and in the same pose as Los on plate 18 of *The Book of Urizen* and on plate 76 of *Jerusalem* (see plate 11): instead of Los's globe and hammer, here Fire is holding a spear and a shield. It is worth observing that plate 2 of *The Gates of Paradise* illustrates Water, its opposite, by displaying a contracted and crouching man with a tragic expression, as if to reinforce the idea that the two main Blakean postures – expansion and contraction – are to be united in a sort of *coincidentia oppositorum* since, as already noticed, every living form derives from the union of fire and water, the two contraries par excellence: according to Ovid "though fire and water are naturally at enmity, still heat and moisture / produce all things, and this inharmonious harmony is fitted to the growth of life" (*Met.*, I: 432-433. Ovid 1951, vol. I: 32-33). The principle that fire and water are necessary opposites is also highlighted by Thomas Aquinas, and by alchemists in general. In an influential treatise of alchemy, St Thomas states that minerals are made of water and are generated by the heat of the sun and fire: "Mineralia dividuntur in lapides et metalla: […] Materia autem lapidum est aqua […], sicut videmus generari lapides […] per calorem solis et ignis" (Tommaso d'Aquino 1996: 28). Embracing Aquinas's train of thought, in a study on water, minerals, and grots, the French architect of gardens, alchemist, naturalist, and ceramist Bernard Palissy demonstrates that all metals derive from water and are purified by fire (see Palissy 1580).

Fire, represented on the fifth plate of *The Gates of Paradise* as a *miles Christi*, as a naked man within burning flames in an expanded Christological posture (see plate 11 again), alludes to the never-ending labours implied in creation, as highlighted by the words that describe the design: "Fire. That end in endless Strife". The "endless Strife" implied in the process of creation alludes both to Los's labours and to the *opus alchymicum*, a work defined *rota* because

of its cyclical and infinite symbolical deaths and rebirths, "continually building & continually decaying" (*Jerusalem*, plate 53. K. 684). It should be noticed that, since etching implies writing and drawing on the copperplates in a reversed way, Blake engraves the name Los as *sol*, therefore obliquely alluding to the identification of Los with the sun, with the sacred fire, with God, and with Jesus: God says of himself "I am Alpha and Omega"[3] to highlight his circular, perfect, and infinite essence, while Jesus's crucifixion and resurrection reflect the never-ending process of births, deaths, and rebirths implied in the *rota* of the *opus alchymicum*.

If alchemists identify themselves with Jesus and with God because of their ability to create human beings and to cure, heal, and redeem the world, Blake interprets Jesus and God as the creative power: according to the poet, "The Eternal Body of Man is The Imagination, that is, God himself The Divine Body, Jesus" and "All Things are comprehended […] in the divine body of the Saviour, The Human Imagination" (*The Laocoön* K. 776; *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 70. K. 605-606).

In a colour-printed line engraving known as *Albion Rose*, as *The Dance of Albion*, and as *Glad Day*[4] (see plate 12), the naked man surrounded by sunbeams in the centre of the plate is the almost exact complementary image of Los on plate 76 of *Jerusalem*. This naked figure, moreover, can be connected to Blake's abolitionist theories if we consider that below an uncoloured impression of this line engraving dated 1780 appears the following inscription[5]:

> Albion rose from where he labour'd at the Mill with Slaves:
> Giving himself for the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death (K. 160).

Although Anthony Blunt maintains that Blake based this portrayal of Albion on illustrations of a Roman bronze of a dancing faun from Herculaneum (Blunt 1959: 34-35), I am convinced that the poet has drawn inspiration from the classical proportion diagrams, also known as Vitruvian diagrams, representing the human body inscribed in a circle and a square. In his influential treatise *De Architectura* (III, 1: i), Vitruvius explains that the human body is a model of perfection that mirrors the macrocosm because with arms and legs extended it fits in the two perfect geometrical forms that constitute the whole world: the circle and the square. By referring to Vitruvius, I think Blake is obliquely paying homage both to the Renaissance graphic tradition and to John Dee, Elizabeth I's alchemist: strenuously supporting a spiritual reform imbued with alchemy, Hermeticism, and Vitruvian Neoplatonism[6], in his most influential *Preface to Euclid* Dee proclaims that arts and sciences should be based on number, proportion, music, painting, mechanics, perspective, i.e. on the principles that reflect the geometric structure of man and the world (Dee 1570).

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[3] "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending […] I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last […]. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end […] I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last" (*Rev.*, 1: 8, 11; 21: 6; 22: 13).

[4] A version of *The Dance of Albion* created by Blake in 1794-1796 circa and finished in pen and watercolour (27.2 x 19.9 cm) is in the British Museum, London. Lister (1991: plate 10).

[5] As reported by Keynes, the print with the inscription is in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, National Gallery, Washington D. C. (K. 888).

[6] For Dee's Vitruvian and Neoplatonic theories, see French (1972); Hart (1994); Yates (2002).

The earliest Vitruvian diagram of the "homo ad circulum et ad quadratum" we know is contained in *Trattato di architettura civile e militare*, a manuscript with numerous illustrations composed by the Vitruvian architect Francesco di Giorgio Martini between 1470 and 1490 and now preserved in the Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana[7] (see plate 13). Today the most popular Vitruvian diagram is undoubtedly the one made by Leonardo da Vinci in 1490, precisely after he got to know Francesco di Giorgio Martini: thanks to this meeting, Leonardo started studying Vitruvius's *De architectura*, a treatise that Martini was translating in that period. Leonardo, who later was to become the owner of Martini's manuscript, in the years 1504-1505 wrote twelve marginal glosses on some of its pages: Martini's *Trattato* is allegedly the only text annotated by Leonardo and the only surviving book among those he possessed[8].

Luca Pacioli, a mathematician and a friend of Leonardo's, explicitly aligns the Vitruvian diagram with Platonic theories in *Della mesura e poportioni del corpo humano della testa e altri suoi membri simulacro delarchitectura*, a chapter included in his important treatise *Divina Proportione*, published in 1509:

> li antichi considerata la debita dispositione del corpo umano tutte le loro opere maxime li templi sacri ala sua proportione le disponivano. Peroche in quello trovavano le doi principalissime figure senza le quali non e possibile nessuna cosa operare cioe la circular perfectissima […] Laltra la quadrata equilatera (Pacioli 1509: Pars III, cap. I: 17r)[9].

Two years later, Giovanni Giocondo da Verona devotes one plate of his illustrated edition of Vitruvius's *De Architectura* to the graphic representation of "homo ad quadratum" and one to "homo ad circulum et ad quadratum"[10] (see plate 14). The first Italian version of Vitruvius's treatise, edited by Cesare Cesariano and illustrated by 117 woodcuts, also contains a drawing of "homo ad quadratum" and one of "homo ad circulum et ad quadratum"[11].

> In a chapter entitled *Dell'eccellenza delle forme naturali, e proportioni del corpo humano […]* contained in his volume *L'idea della architettura universale*, Vincenzo Scamozzi dedicates a full-page design to "homo ad circulum et ad quadratum" (see plate 15), a design that can be regarded as the precise source of inspiration for Blake's *Albion Rose*[12]. Quoting Plato, Aristotle, Vitruvius, and Hermes Trismegistus, Scamozzi argues that the human body is a *Microcosmos* because it has a perfect spherical and square form:

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[7] Cod. Ashburnham 361: the Vitruvian drawing is on f. 5r. Martini's treatise was first published in 1841: see *Trattato di architettura* (1841).

[8] According to a recent study, however, the marginal glosses attributed to Leonardo were written by Guglielmo Libri, a famous nineteenth-century Italian scientist, scholar, bibliophile, and forger. See Becchi & Biffi (2024).

[9] In this edition Pars III is wrongly indicated as Pars I. The above-quoted passage is reported with modern spelling in Bruschi, Maltese, Tafuri & Bonelli (1978: 96-97).

[10] *M. Vitruvius per Iocundum solito castigatior factus cum figuris et tabula ut iam legi et intelligi possit* 1511: Liber III: 22, 23.

[11] *Di Lucio Vitruvio Pollione De Architectura Libri Dece traducti de latino in Vulgare, affigurati, Cõmentati, & con mirando ordine Insigniti […]* 1521: XLIXr, Lr.

[12] For Blake and Scamozzi's Vitruvian man see Lister (1975).

> E perche abbiamo tocco più volte del corpo dell'huomo, il quale da' Savij con voce Greca fù chiamato Microcosmos, cioè picciol mondo […] per la forma sferica in tutte le sue parti perfettissima; e per la proportione, e corrispondenza di tutte le sue parti, e membra interne, & esterne […]; oltre a ciò tenendo aperte le gambe e parimente le braccia in modo, che l'estremità delle dita delle mani stiano à perpendicolo dell'estremità delle dita de' piedi; allhora formerà un quadrato perfetto; perciò Aristotele disse: *Quadratus homo*; & anco un cerchio (Scamozzi 1615: Parte I, Libro I, capitolo XII: 38).

Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, the most renowned alchemist of the Renaissance, draws specifically on the Vitruvian theories to demonstrate the links between *maior mundus* and *minor mundus*. In his treatise *De occulta philosophia*, the sacred text of alchemy, Agrippa defines the human being as "dei opus & imago, & minor mundus" (Agrippa 1533, Book II, Ch. XXVII: 160). A chapter contained in the second book of *De occulta philosophia*, entitled *De humani corporis proportione & mensura harmoniaque*, is illustrated by three drawings displaying a man inscribed in a circle and three others displaying a man inscribed in a square in order to concretely demonstrate the relationship between man and macrocosm (Agrippa 1533, Book II, Ch. XXVII: 161-166).

The title page to Robert Fludd's *Utriusque […] Cosmi historia* visually represents a man named *Microcosmus* inscribed in a circle named *Macrocosmus*, explicitly alluding to the identification above-below (Fludd 1617-1619). I am convinced that the rope held by the human figure walking in the clouds – a creature with wings and goat legs bearing an hourglass and a hooked cross on his head (see plate 16) – is a reference to the so-called *aurea catena Homeri*, a chain that links heaven and earth, heaven and hell (wings and goat legs), time and eternity (hourglass and hooked cross). Milton refers to this neo-Platonic concept when claiming that the earth is hung from heaven by means of a golden chain:

> […] another world
> Hung o'er my realm, linked in a golden chain
> To that side heav'n from whence your legions fell
> (*Paradise Lost*, II: 1004-1006).

In the watercolour *Ezekiel's Wheels*, accomplished in 1803-1805[13], Blake manages to represent the square and the circle implied in the human body by visually illustrating Ezekiel's "four living creatures":

> the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. […]. Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man. And every one had four faces, and every one had four wings. […] and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel in the middle of a wheel (*Ez.*, 1: 1, 5-6, 16).

Blake interprets Ezekiel's vision as a four-faced, winged, and naked man inscribed

[13] *Ezekiel's Wheels* (black chalk, pen and watercolour over pencil, 39.5 x 29.5 cm) is in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts. Lister (1991: plate 30).

within a series of wheels that are decorated with eyes inscribed in stars (see plate 17). Besides being a Petrarchan conceit – "et gli occhi eran due stelle"[14] –, Blake's eyes-stars can be read as a witty reference to the alchemic *coincidentia oppositorum* if we consider that in his *Eroici furori* Giordano Bruno associates two eyes shaped as stars with the motto *Mors et vita* (Bruno 2002: 664). Blake's fourfold "living creature" opens his arms and legs in a posture that evokes and goes beyond the Vitruvian diagram: whereas the arms are extended frontally, parallel to the two-dimensional plane of the plate, his right leg extends before his body and his left one extends behind it, thus creating a three-dimensional depth and movement that evoke a square and, at the same time, a spherical form.

Since Blake reproduces this posture in a watercolour created in 1805 entitled *Satan in his Original Glory*[15] (see plate 18), it is inferable that for him Ezekiel's "visions of God" and Milton's Satan can be identified and represent the dualisms inherent in every living form, including divinity. Besides being endowed with numerous wings and besides being surrounded by a myriad of stars, Blake's Satan holds in his left hand a sceptre and in his right hand the *globus cruciger*, the globe and cross generally held by Christ – traditionally in his left hand – when represented as the *Salvator mundi* or as Christ Pantocrator: it is worth noticing that above the "fourfold creature" depicted in *Ezekiel's Wheels* appears God as a heavily dressed and crouched old man in the pose of the Pantocrator (see plate 17 again). *Satan in his Original Glory* illustrates both Milton's Satan[16] and, further evoking Blake's "fourfold man", Ezekiel's words:

> Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee (*Ez*., 28: 14-15).

In *Jerusalem*, Blake expounds the circular and fourfold substance of both humanity and the whole world quoting Ezekiel's vision and making explicit the classical relationship between architecture and the human body, or, in other terms, between body and soul, the human and the divine, the square, and the circle[17]:

> Fourfold the Sons of Los in their divisions, and fourfold
> The great City of Golgonooza: fourfold toward the north,
> And toward the south fourfold, & fourfold toward the east & west,

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[14] "La testa òr fino, et calda neve il volto, / hebeno I cigli, et gli occhi eran due stelle, / onde Amor l'arco non tendeva in fallo" (Petrarca, sonnet 157, ll. 9-11).

[15] This pen and watercolour design (42.9 x 33.9 cm) is in the Tate Gallery. Lister (1991: plate 40).

[16] "[…] He above the rest / In shape and gesture proudly eminent / Stood like a tow'r; his form had yet not lost / All her original brightness […]", Milton (1993: I, 589-592).

[17] Basing his influential essay of architecture on Vitruvian principles, Henry Wotton considers the house as "an Epitomie of the whole World" (1624: 82) and establishes a link among house, human body, and universe: "Now the exact *Circle* is in truth a Figure, which for our purpose hath many fit and eminent properties; as fitnesse, for Commodity and Receit, being the most capable; fitnesse for strength and duration, being the most united in his parts; Fitnesse for beautie and delight as imitating the celestiall *Orbes*, and the universall *Forme*" (1624: 17).

> Each within other toward the four points […].
> And the Four Points are thus beheld in Great Eternity:
> West, the Circumference: South, the Zenith: North,
> The Nadir: East, the Center, unapproachable for ever.
> These are the four Faces towards the Four Worlds of Humanity
> In every Man. Ezekiel saw them by Chebar's flood
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 12, ll. 45-48, 54-58. K. 632).

Besides distorting the commonly recognised three dimensions, Blake alters the conventional notion of the four points and of the mental and spatial organisation of reality by presenting man and cities as a circle and a square[18]. I am convinced that the design on plate 76 of *Jerusalem* (see plate 9 again) can be interpreted as another witty representation of the square and circular essence of humanity and of the universe if we consider Los's cross-posture and his identification with the sun. Los as a *sol* is highlighted by the "beams of love"[19] of the sun behind and around Christ-Los's head and by the sunrise on the left horizon, close to Los-Blake. Associated with divinity in all cultures, in the Western world the sun implies both the circle and the square since it is traditionally regarded as number four because it was created on the fourth day (*Gen*., 1: 14-19) and its movement follows a never-ending circular path, a continuous cycle of birth-death-rebirth close to the everlasting process of creation and of the *rota alchymica*, "continually building & continually decaying". The idea that Los, as the sun, concentrates a circle and a square is corroborated by the reference to a cross and by the organisation of this full-plate design. The cross represents the central phase of the alchemic *quinta essentia* and symbolises both the square and the circle: if the intersection of the arms of the cross coincides with the centre of the circle in which it is inscribed, the line that unites its extremities forms a circle that, in its turn, is divided into four sections.

5. *"The Female-male & the Male-female"*. The Primeval Condition of Humankind

Plate 99, the page that concludes *Jerusalem*[20], presents the union, fusion, and identification of the human – portrayed in a Christological pose and in a slightly imperfect Vitruvian posture – with the divine (see plate 19): by representing God-Albion as a bearded old man in a crouched posture wearing a white tunic and humanity-Jerusalem as a naked young woman in an expanded pose and with androgynous features, here Blake is also displaying, twice, the identification and union of the male and the female dimensions as well as the alchemic concept of *puer et senex*, i.e. the union of youth and age, beginning and end, and Alpha and Omega. The Latin-cross position of humanity and the circular halo with rays of light on God's head, moreover, underline the square and circular essence of microcosm and macrocosm, of *quod est inferius* and *quod est superius*.

This plate evokes the frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise*, a plate showing a contracted

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[18] For Blake's maps and networks see Ritchie (2025).

[19] "[…] I see the Saviour over me / Spreading his beams of love […]" (*Jerusalem*, plate 4, ll. 4-5. K. 622).

[20] The text of the poem ends on plate 99 but the conclusion of *Jerusalem* is plate 100, a full-page design displaying Los in a Christological posture and Enitharmon – his wife – in a Vitruvian pose.

worm-body and an extended chrysalis-soul (see plate 1 again) in complementary poses to visually testify that, just as body and soul are inseparable, the two Blakean contrasting postures and all the other oppositions – such as male and female, the human and the divine, and water and fire – are necessary and have to be united. The "reclaimed" slave and the tortured slave depicted in *The Execution of Breaking on the Rack*, one of Blake's illustrations for Stedman's *Narrative*, are also represented in a complementary posture (see plate 2 again): as stated in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (plate 3. K. 149). As already noticed, Blake also represents the "inharmonious harmony" (*discors concordia*) of Fire and Water, the two elements "naturally at enmity" (*cumque sit ignis aquae pugnax*) that are at the basis of any living form, respectively as a man in an expanded and Christological posture and as a man in a crouched pose (*The Gates of Paradise*, plates 5 and 2, respectively).

Plate 99 of *Jerusalem* alludes to the goal of alchemy, i.e. the union of opposites, defined *coniunctio* and "marriage of king and queen": the fire of Los's alchemic furnace wrapping both God and humanity is undoubtedly a reference to the object of the *opus alchymicum*. If in his *Annotations to Swedenborg* Blake argues that "Good & Evil are […] both Good & the two contraries married" and that "Heaven & Hell are born together" (K. 91, 92), in *Jerusalem* he represents the eponymous character as an androgyne. On plates 4 and 99, for example, Jerusalem is visually depicted as an athletic, naked and explicitly androgynous figure in an expanded posture (see plates 3 and 19 again) and in the text of plate 54 she is described as "Jerusalem in every Man, Male & Female Clothings":

> […] This is Jerusalem in every Man,
> A Tent & Tabernacle of Mutual Forgiveness, Male & Female Clothings
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 54, ll. 3-4. K. 684).

One of the main unions that Blake, as the alchemists, strives to recover is the original union of man and woman – or king and queen – since he is convinced that the condition of humanity in its primeval and perfect state was androgynous[21]. Although he criticises the visual arts after Raphael, thus anticipating Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics by many decades, Blake endows his bodies with a writhing, serpentine movement and with androgynous features that reveal a Mannerist taste referable to Michelangelo's art[22]. Despising the colourism of Titian and of the Venetians[23], of Correggio, Rubens, Rembrandt, and Van Dyck, Blake appreciates classical, Medieval, and Renaissance artists – in particular Raphael, Michelangelo, Dürer, and Giulio Romano – because they devote more attention to form and outline than to colour: at the beginning of his *Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures*[24], he argues that "Colouring does not depend on where the Colours are put, but on where the lights and darks are put,

[21] For Blake and androgyny see Hayes (2004).

[22] For Blake's debt to Michelangelo see Blunt (1959); Hagstrum (1964); Mellor (2020).

[23] It should be noticed, however, that Blake's *Ezekiel's Wheels* (see plate 17 again) is explicitly indebted to Titian's *Allegory of Prudence* (National Gallery, London).

[24] *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Painted by William Blake in Water Colours […]*, 1809.

and all depends on Form or Outline, on where that is put" (K. 563). He is even convinced that "Both Raphael and Michael Angelo knew the Venetian [Titian], and contemned and rejected all he did with the utmost disdain, as that which is fabricated for the purpose to destroy art" and concludes that "Till we get rid of Titian and Correggio, Rubens and Rembrandt, We never shall equal Rafael and Albert Durer, Michael Angelo and Julio Romano" (K. 563, 564).

Sincerely admiring Michelangelo's art, Blake then declares that he wishes his drawings "were in Fresco on an enlarged scale to ornament the altars of churches, and to make England, like Italy, respected by respectable men of other countries on account of Art" (*A Descriptive Catalogue.* K. 584): with his watercolour *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, a subject he paints in several versions, Blake attests his profound interest in Italian religious paintings and, above all, in the majestic frescoes created by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel, particularly the *Last Judgment*. In *Description to A Vision of the Last Judgment*, written on the eighteenth of January 1808 and addressed to the miniaturist Ozias Humphry[25], Blake explains that he has included Ezekiel's "Four Living Creatures" in his version of Michelangelo's fresco:

> The whole upper part of the Design is a view of Heaven opened: around the Throne of Christ, in the cloud which rolls away are the Four Living Creatures filled with Eyes, attended by seven Angels (K. 444).

As observed when surveying plate 4 of *Jerusalem* (see plate 3 again), Blake is also interested in the five grandiose Sibyls that decorate the Sistine Chapel. The Libyan Sibyl, accomplished in 1512 (see plate 20), is a stately example of Michelangelo's *figura serpentinata*, a pattern that would be in vogue among Mannerist painters and sculptors and adopted by Blake, especially in his mature works: the muscles, the athletic and twisted pose, and the evident androgynous features of the powerful Libyan Sibyl can be regarded as Blake's source of inspiration for his human bodies. Besides being another source of inspiration for Blake, the imposing Cumaean Sibyl (1508-1510), an old muscled woman also represented in a twisting pose and with unequivocal masculine traits (see plate 21), visually anticipates the milkwoman with "old shrunken paps" described by Joyce and the androgynous prophet Tiresias, presented by Eliot as an "old man with wrinkled dugs" (Eliot 2004: I, 228): Stephen Dedalus "watched [the milkwoman] pour into the measure and thence into the jug rich white milk, not hers. Old shrunken paps. […] Old and secret she had entered from a morning world, maybe a messenger" (Joyce 1992: 15).

If "the soft soul of America" Oothon, represented as a muscled and androgynous classical statue on the frontispiece to *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and the "Male-female" blond angel in the watercolour design *The Good and Evil Angels struggling for Possession of a*

[25] The version of *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (pen and watercolour over pencil, 51 x 39.5 cm) Blake refers to in his letter is commissioned by the Countess of Egremont and accomplished in 1808. Today it is in The National Trust of Petworth House, Sussex.

Child can be regarded as the embryo of Blake's "Double-sexed"[26] bodies (see plates 4 and 8 again), Jerusalem on plate 4 of the eponymous poem (see plate 3 again) and Albion, Vala, and two women in serpentine athletic poses and with masculine muscles and features on plate 25 of the same prophetic work are majestic examples of his mature Michelangiolesque designs (see plate 22): the crouched woman on the left is an interesting blend of classical statuary, Dürer's *Melencolia I*, and Michelangelo's androgynous Sibyls. The sun and the moon depicted in Albion's thighs are an explicit reference to the alchemic *coincidentia oppositorum* since the two planets symbolise Apollo and Diana, the male and the female dimension, night and day, silver and gold, and mercury and sulphur.

Like most drawings by Blake, this plate can be read both from a negative and from a positive perspective: it is not clear whether the goddess of Nature is hiding under her veil Albion, victim of a Druid sacrifice, or if she is guarding and protecting him with motherly care, as if she were a benevolent *Madonna della misericordia*. On the last plate of *The Marriage*, below the crouched figure of Nebuchadnezzar, appear the words "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (see plate 6 again), a Sibylline message conceivably inspired by an illuminated Catalan Bible[27] meaning that everything implies multi-perspectival significances and interpretations, not unique and absolute truths: one of the *Proverbs of Hell* – "A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees" (*Marriage*, plate 7. K. 151) – and the couplet that describes the frontispiece to *The Gates of Paradise* – "The Sun's Light when he unfolds it / Depends on the Organ that beholds it" (see plate 1 again) – explicitly expound Blake's relativistic standpoint.

Blake regards onefold interpretation or "single vision" ("Single vision & Newton's sleep") as not properly vision at all since it is seeing *with* and not *through* the eye; "twofold vision" is seeing *through* the eye, is the perception of the human values in all things; "threefold vision" is a sexual and creative state, where thought appears in emotional form, whereas "fourfold vision" means mystical ecstasy and is true vision, as he explains in a poem:

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[26] "The Twofold form Hermaphroditic and the Double-sexed, / The Female-male & the Male-female […]" (*Milton*, plate 19. K. 501).

[27] I am convinced that a design contained in the *Biblia Sancti Petri Rodensis*, a large illuminated manuscript also known as *Roda Bible*, can be regarded as Blake's source of inspiration for the words "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" placed below his Nebuchadnezzar: in the lower part of a full-design page of this Bible, a naked and squatting Nebuchadnezzar on his fours is portrayed precisely between an ox and a lion. Considering Blake's profound appreciation of medieval art – and considering that he started his early artistic career studying and copying medieval manuscripts and sculptures –, engravings of this Catalan Bible were probably known to him. Accomplished in the Monastery of Ripoll (Girona, Spain) in the eleventh century, the Roda Bible is now preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (ms. Latin 6, 1-4): the design in question is on folio 65v of tome 3. The lion and the ox are often linked in the iconographic tradition related to Nebuchadnezzar's dream, but only the Roda Bible does depict these two animals when representing Nebuchadnezzar's madness. In the tenth-century illuminated Mozarabic Bible of San Isidoro de León (León, Spain), for example, Nebuchadnezzar's dream is visually represented as an ox and a lion under a tree (*Codex Biblicus Legionensis* f. 319v): an ox and a lion close to each other under a tree are also depicted in the upper part of the mentioned folio of the Roda Bible (tome 3, f. 65v), but they are among other animals. A naked and squatted man in the background of *The Penance of St. John Chrysostom*, an engraving by Albrecht Dürer, one of Blake's favourite artists, may be another source for the poet's Nebuchadnezzar. I will further develop elsewhere this interesting net of iconological references.

> Now I a fourfold vision see,
> And a fourfold vision is given to me;
> 'Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
> And threefold in soft Beulah's night
> And twofold Always. May God us keep
> From Single vision & Newton's sleep!
> (ll. 83-88 from a poem included in a letter to Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802. K. 818).

Plate 47 of *Jerusalem* combines again the *figura serpentinata* and androgyny (see plate 23). Here Albion is with Vala, his natural counterpart, and with Jerusalem, his spiritual spouse. The three androgynous and heavily muscled figures are writhing in a serpentine dance, a sort of tragic dance of the spheres in which their naked bodies, explicitly evoking Michelangelo's art, are intertwining: since Blake links number three with the sexual dimension, it is no wonder that Vala treads down Jerusalem, who – anticipating plate 99 (see plate 19 again) – stretches out her arms as Christ on the cross in a desperate search of Albion-God. Albion, in his turn, recalls the twisted and triangulated posture of Michelangelo's Libyan Sibyl (see plate 20 again).

The presence of three characters and the triangulated pattern of this design visually expound Blake's conviction that the natural and sexual aspect of womankind is a threefold power ("A triple Female Tabernacle") that tries to subdue mankind[28], as declared by Enitharmon, Los's female counterpart:

> Enitharmon answer'd: "This is Woman's World, nor need she any
> Spectre to defend her from Man. I will Create secret places,
> And the masculine names of the places, Merlin & Arthur.
> A triple Female Tabernacle for Moral Law I weave,
> That he who loves Jesus may loathe, terrified, Female love,
> Till God himself become a Male subservient to the Female"
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 88, ll. 16-21. K. 733).

Considering that Blake's main goal is to recover the original union of body and soul, above and below, macrocosm and microcosm, and male and female, androgyny is a recurring theme throughout his macrotext, both visually and verbally. With the choice of merging text and image Blake makes explicit and concrete his conviction that "Without Contraries is no progression", that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul" and the need to recover the original androgynous condition of humanity. Respecting the emblem tradition, Blake identifies words, outlines, and time with man and with the soul, whereas he associates images, colour, and space with woman and with the body: as is well known, Lessing argues that the subject of poetry is action and the peculiar object of painting is the body (Lessing 1766). For the emblem tradition, the verses that verbally describe the design are called *significatio* and are defined the 'soul' of the emblem, whereas the image that visually illustrates the poem is called *pictura* and is traditionally defined the 'body' of the emblem: the *anima* of the emblem, moreover, is associ-

[28] For Blake's representation of women see Mellor (1982-1983).

ated with the male dimension and the *corpus* with the female gender[29]. Blake's *Gates of Paradise* is a tiny example of a traditional emblem book (see plates 1 and 11 again).

Besides projecting himself onto Los, Blake identifies his wife Catherine with Enitharmon, Los's spouse. A couple of lines from *Vala, or the Four Zoas*, an incomplete prophetic poem written and revised between 1795 and 1804, unequivocally allude to the poet's household artistic activity. He writes, draws, and etches whereas Catherine paints with watercolours the printed plates:

> And first he [Los] drew a line upon the walls of shining heaven,
> And Enitharmon tinctur'd it with beams of blushing love
> (*Vala, or the Four Zoas*, "Night the Seventh", ll. 467-468. K. 332).

Los and Enitharmon represent the male and female principles of creation and symbolise time and space, line and colour, word and image, and body and soul, i.e. the indivisible aspects of Blake's own illuminated works. Los is a blacksmith busy creating within the flames of his alchemic furnace and Enitharmon is a weaver working at her looms, tools of creation and generation regarded by Blake as female furnaces and as metaphors for the womb: at the beginning and end of *Jerusalem* the poet repeats that "the Male is a Furnace of beryll; the Female is a golden Loom" (plates 5, 90. K. 623, 736) and on plate 67 declares that "every Female is a Golden Loom" (K. 704). Words and outlines are associated with nakedness whereas design and colour are linked with garments. Moving from the principle that "Art & Science cannot exist but by Naked Beauty display'd" (*Jerusalem*, plate 36. K. 663) and that "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed" (*The Laocoön*. K. 776), Blake always opposes nakedness and transparent garments to long and heavy clothes, as attested by the vestments generally worn by his crouched figures and by a letter he sends to George Cumberland: "I cannot paint Dirty rags & old shoes where I ought to place Naked Beauty or simple ornament" (26 August 1799. K. 795).

By means of his composite art Blake tangibly demonstrates that man and woman, body and soul, time and space, word and image, line and colour, and above and below must be reunited, as they were before the Fall. Profoundly indebted to Neoplatonism, Gnosticism, alchemy, Böhme's theories, and Swedenborg's philosophy, Blake believes that in the original state of eternity the sexes were not divided and, thus, the essence of humanity was androgynous, complete, and perfect. As announced by Los, in Eden – or "in Eternity" – the Human Form Divine is "Four-fold" and "both Male & Female":

> When in Eternity Man converses with Man, they enter
> Into each other's Bosom (which are Universes of delight)
> In mutual interchange […]
> […] if they embrace & comingle,
> The Human Four-fold Forms mingle also in thunders of Intellect
> […] For Man cannot unite with Man but by their Emanations

[29] See Innocenti (1983); Bath (1994).

> Which stand both Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity
> (*Jerusalem*, plate 88, ll. 3-5, 6-7, 10-11. K. 733).

Further highlighting the androgynous substance of humanity and rejecting the conventional division into genders[30], Blake believes that "Humanity knows not of sex" and that "Sexes must vanish & cease / To be when Albion arises from his dread repose" (*Jerusalem*, plates 30, 92. K. 656, 739). With an almost literal reference to St. Matthew[31], he also argues that "In Eternity they neither marry nor are given in marriage" (*Jerusalem*, plate 34. K. 660) and, quoting Matthew's words, evokes Marlowe's Mephistopheles ("Marriage is but a ceremoniall toy")[32] and Hamlet ("I say we will have no more marriages")[33] and anticipates the idea of androgyny that pervades Joyce's *Ulysses*: according to Stephen Dedalus, "in the economy of heaven, foretold by Hamlet, there are no more marriages, glorified man, an androgynous angel, being a wife unto himself" (Joyce 1992: 274).

Blake is close to Neoplatonic, Gnostic, and alchemic readings of the Bible and believes that the holy book testifies to the original androgyny of the first human being created in the image of God:

> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. […] Male and female created he them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam (*Gen.*, 1: 27; 5: 2).

Reading the Bible "in its infernal or diabolical sense", the lines "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (*Ps.*, 133: 1) and "Two are better than one; […] how can one be warm alone?" (*Eccl.*, 4: 9, 11) are often associated with the above-mentioned lines of *Genesis* and are regarded as further evidence of the original and perfect androgynous substance of humanity, or, as Blake would say, of "both Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity". Most significantly, Blake's Satan is represented as an androgynous being and is perfectly identifiable with the "Male & Female" Jerusalem: in the watercolour *Satan in his Original Glory* and on plate 4 of *Jerusalem*, the fallen angel and the spiritual dimension of humanity have the same face, hair, body, and wings and are depicted in a similar Christological posture (see plates 3 and 18 again). Moving from the standpoint that "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence" (*Marriage*, plate 3. K. 149), for the poet restoring the identity of microcosm and macrocosm and the unity of man and woman, of "Good & Evil" and of "Heaven and Hell" means recovering the primeval condition of completeness of the human being, i.e. the circular, square, androgynous, and perfect "Human Form Divine".

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[30] For Blake's unconventional ideas on gender and sexuality see Matthews (2019); Kim (2024); Bruder & Connolly (2010).

[31] "In resurrectione enim neque nubent neque nubentur"; "For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (*Matt*. 22: 30).

[32] Marlowe, *The Tragicall History of Doctor Faustus*, l. 535.

[33] Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III, i: 149.

ILLUSTRATIONS



Plate 9. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, plate 76.



Plate 10. William Blake, *The Book of Urizen*, 1794, plate 18.

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Plate 11. William Blake, *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, 1793, plate 5.

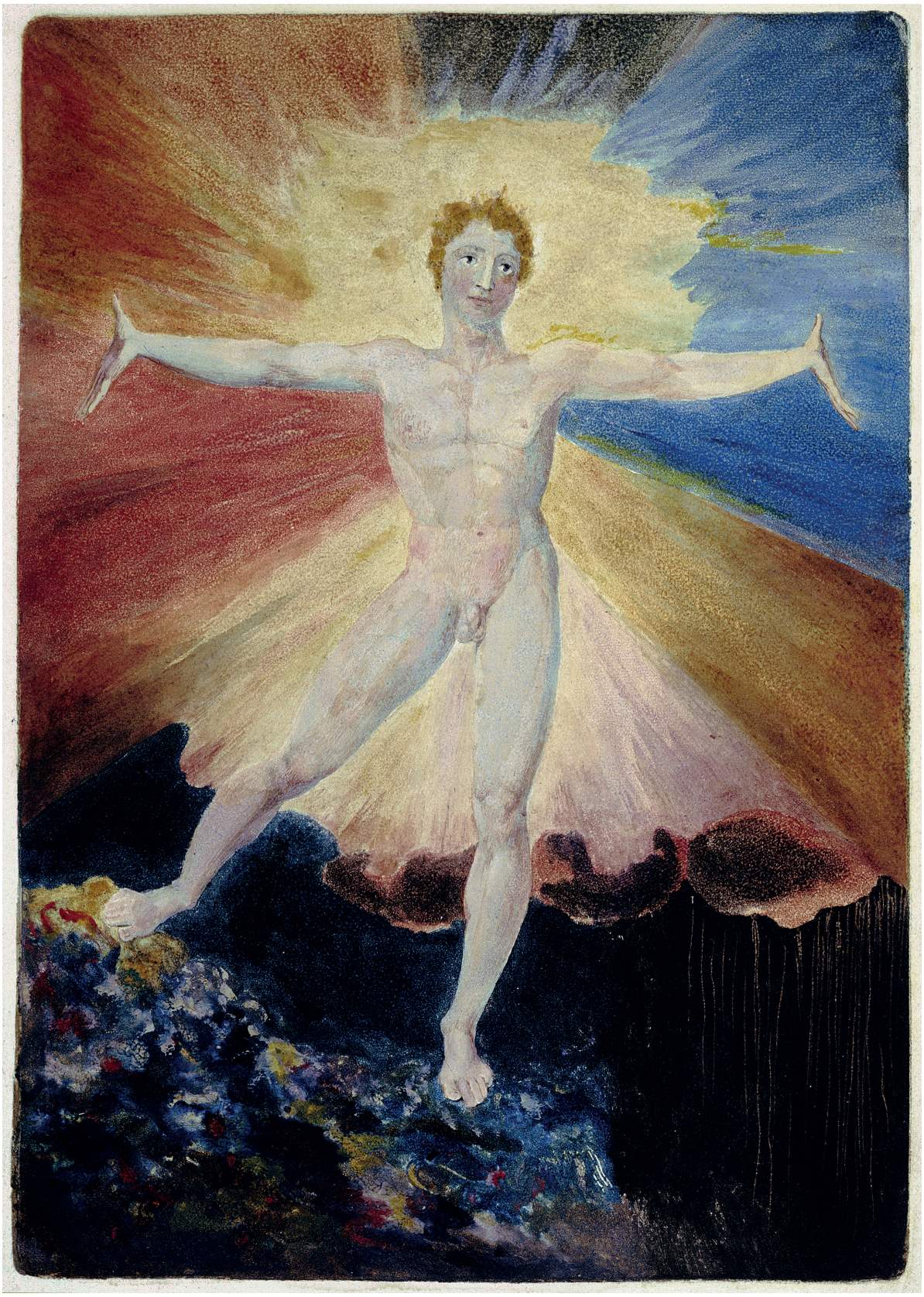
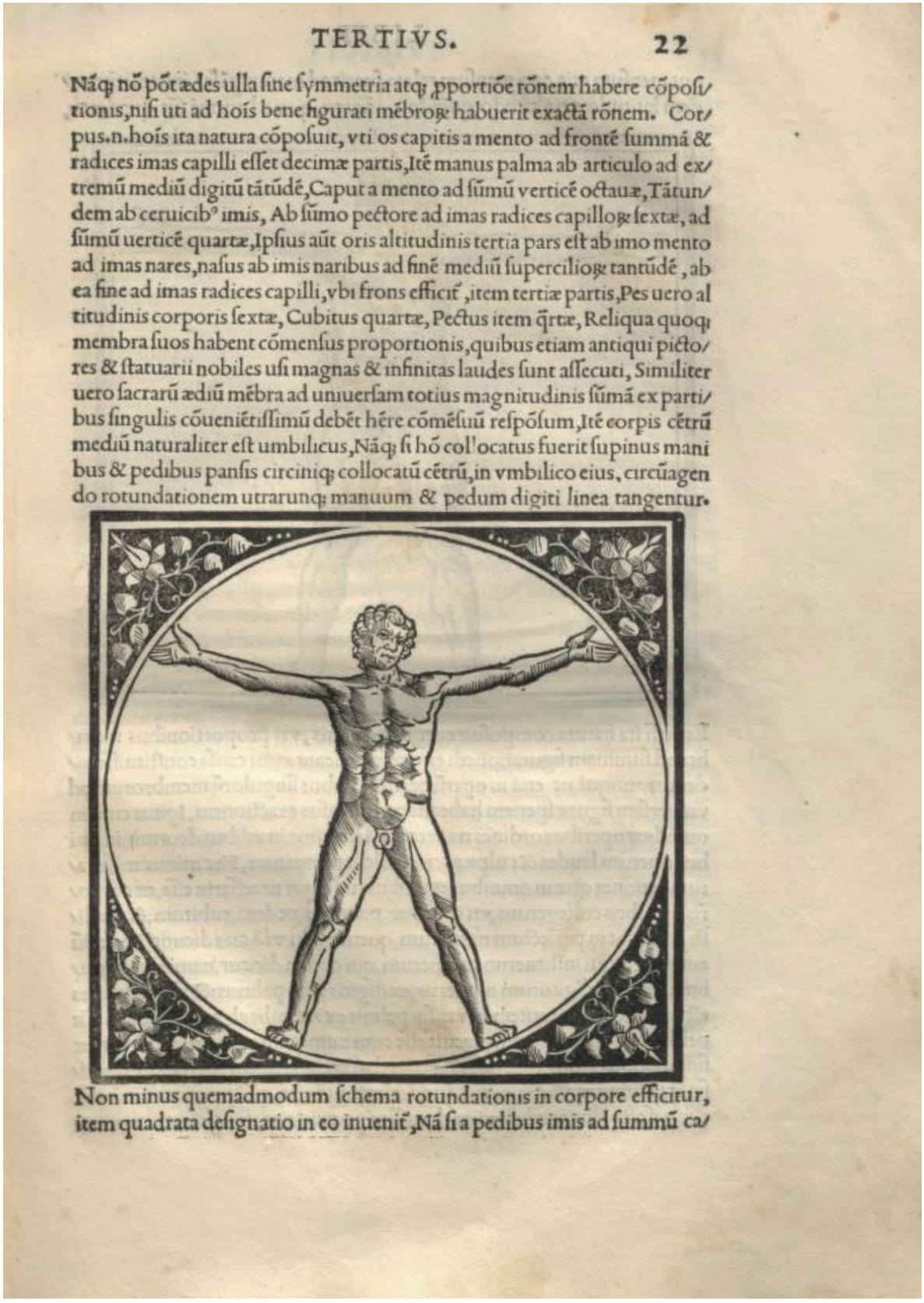


Plate 12. William Blake, *Albion Rose*, 1794-1796.



Plate 13. Francesco di Giorgio Martini, *Trattato di architettura civile e militare*, 1470-1490, f. 5r.



TERTIVS. 22

Nãq; nõ põt ædes ulla ſine ſymmetria atq; ꝓportiõe rõnem habere cõpoſi/ tionis, niſi uti ad hoís bene figurati mẽbroꝝ habuerit exactã rõnem. Cor/ pus.n.hoís ita natura cõpoſuit, vti os capitis a mento ad frontẽ ſummã & radices imas capilli eſſet decimæ partis, Itẽ manus palma ab articulo ad ex/ tremũ mediũ digitũ tãtũdẽ, Caput a mento ad ſũmũ verticẽ octauæ, Tãtun/ dem ab ceruicibꝰ imis, Ab ſũmo pectore ad imas radices capilloꝝ ſextæ, ad ſũmũ uerticẽ quartæ, Ipſius aũt oris altitudinis tertia pars eſt ab imo mento ad imas nares, naſus ab imis naribus ad finẽ mediũ ſupercilioꝝ tantũdẽ, ab ea fine ad imas radices capilli, vbi frons efficit, item tertiæ partis, Pes uero al titudinis corporis ſextæ, Cubitus quartæ, Pectus item q̃rtæ, Reliqua quoq; membra ſuos habent cõmenſus proportionis, quibus etiam antiqui picto/ res & ſtatuarii nobiles uſi magnas & infinitas laudes ſunt aſſecuti, Similiter uero ſacrarũ ædiũ mẽbra ad uniuerſam totius magnitudinis ſũmã ex parti/ bus ſingulis cõueniẽtiſſimũ debẽt hẽre cõmẽſuũ reſpõſum, Itẽ corpis cẽtrũ mediũ naturaliter eſt umbilicus, Nãq; ſi hõ collocatus fuerit ſupinus mani bus & pedibus panſis circiniq; collocatũ cẽtrũ, in vmbilico eius, circũagen do rotundationem utrarunq; manuum & pedum digiti linea tangentur.

Non minus quemadmodum ſchema rotundationis in corpore efficitur, item quadrata deſignatio in eo inueniẽ, Nã ſi a pedibus imis ad ſummũ ca/

Plate 14. Giovanni Giocondo da Verona, *M. Vitruvius per Iocundum […]*, 1511, Liber III, p. 22.

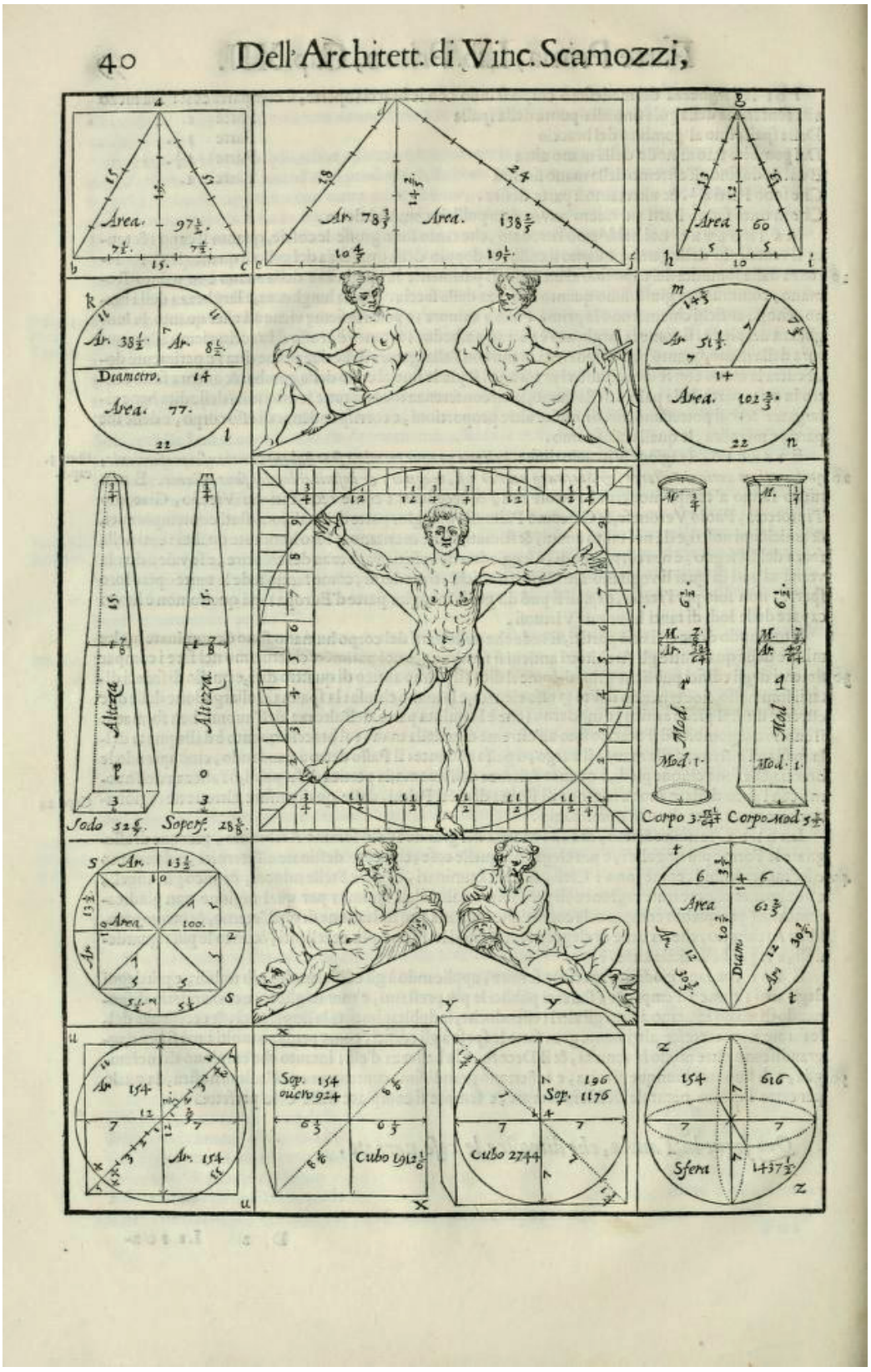


Plate 15. Vincenzo Scamozzi, *L'idea della architettura universale*, 1615, Parte I, Libro I, cap. XII, p. 40.

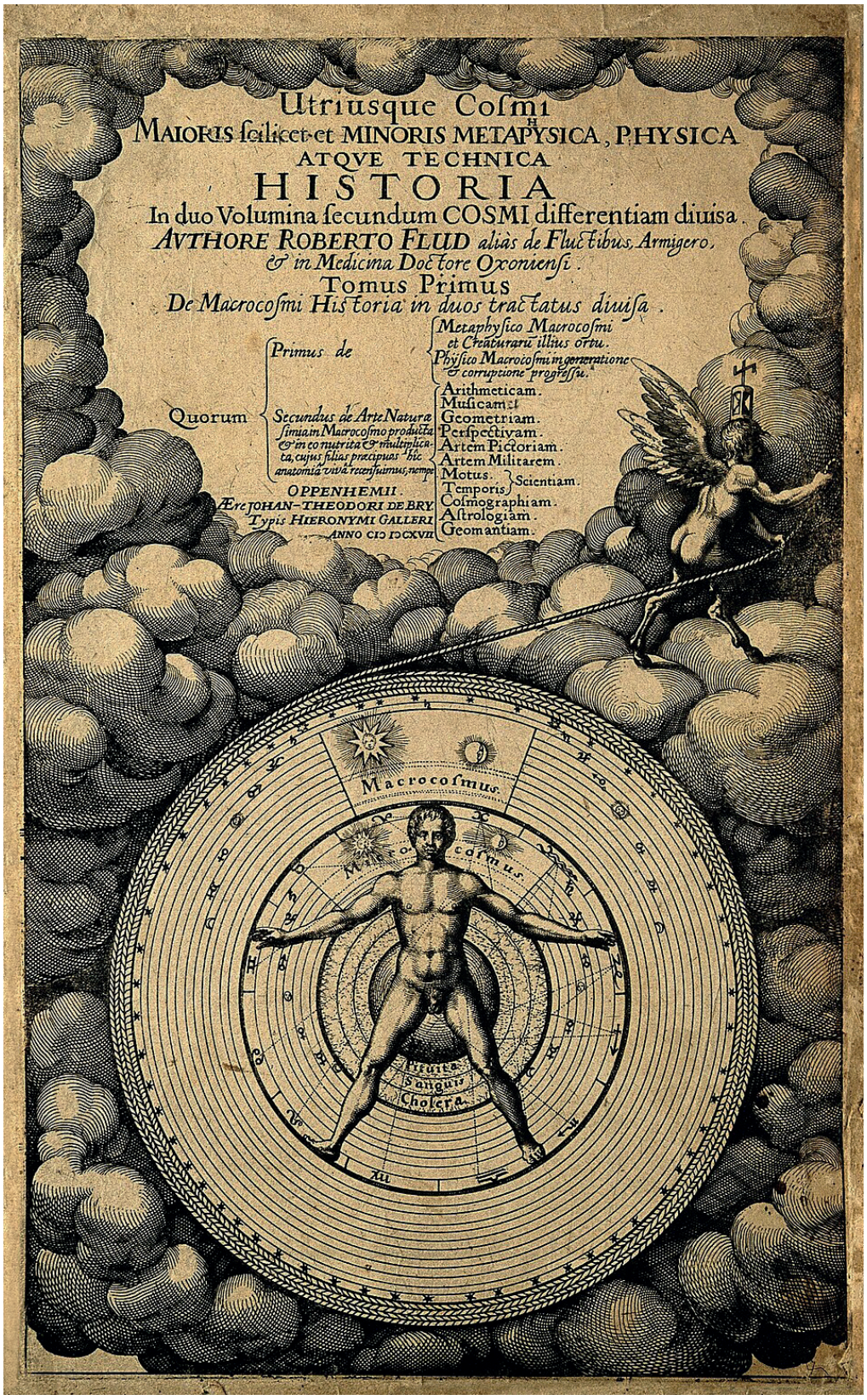


Plate 16. Robert Fludd, *Utriusque Cosmi Maioris scilicet et Minoris, Metaphysica, Physica atque Technica Historia […]*, 1617-1619, title page.

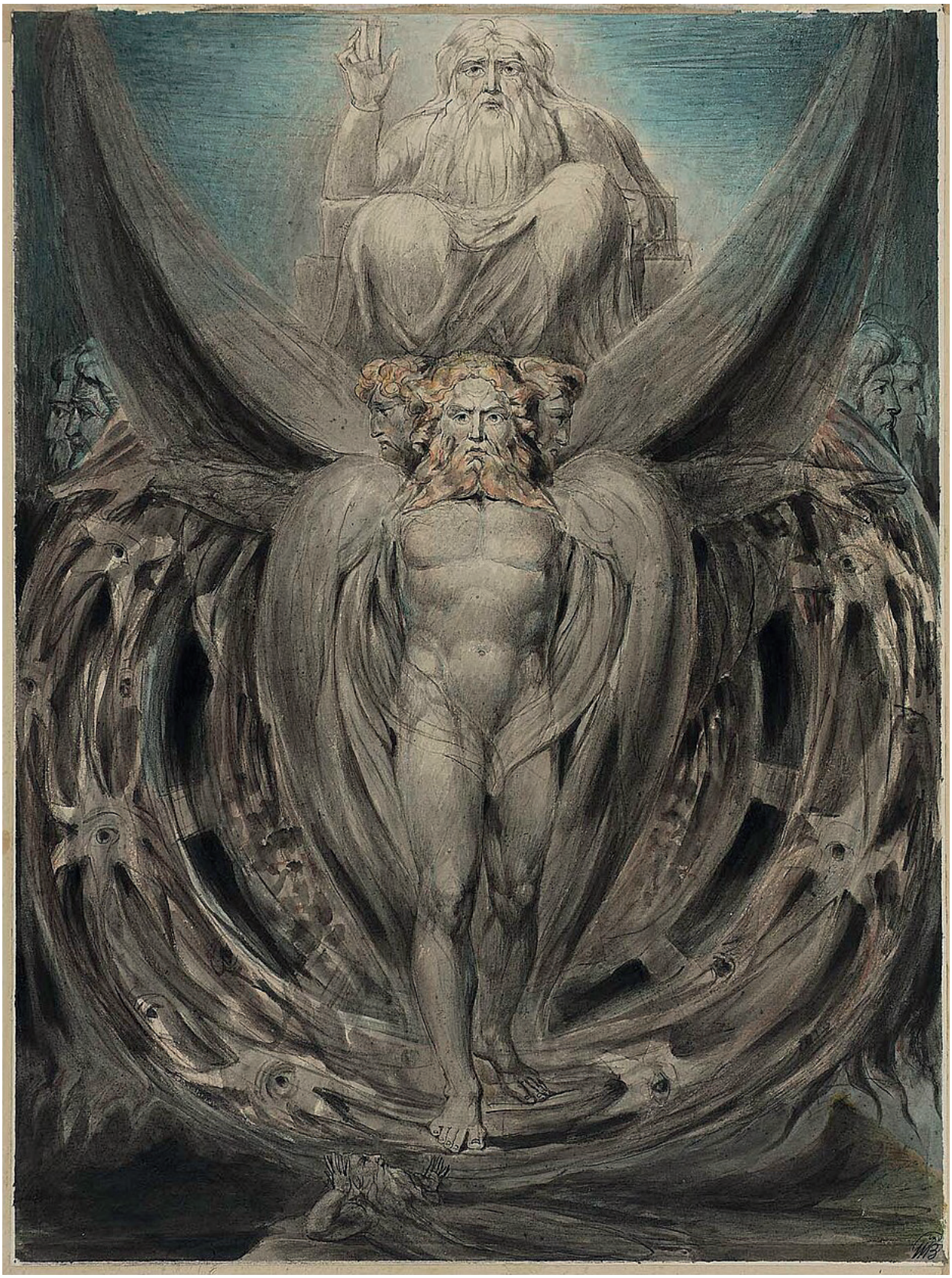


Plate 17. William Blake, *Ezekiel's Wheels*, 1803-1805.



Plate 18. William Blake, *Satan in his Original Glory*, 1805 circa.



Plate 19. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, plate 99.

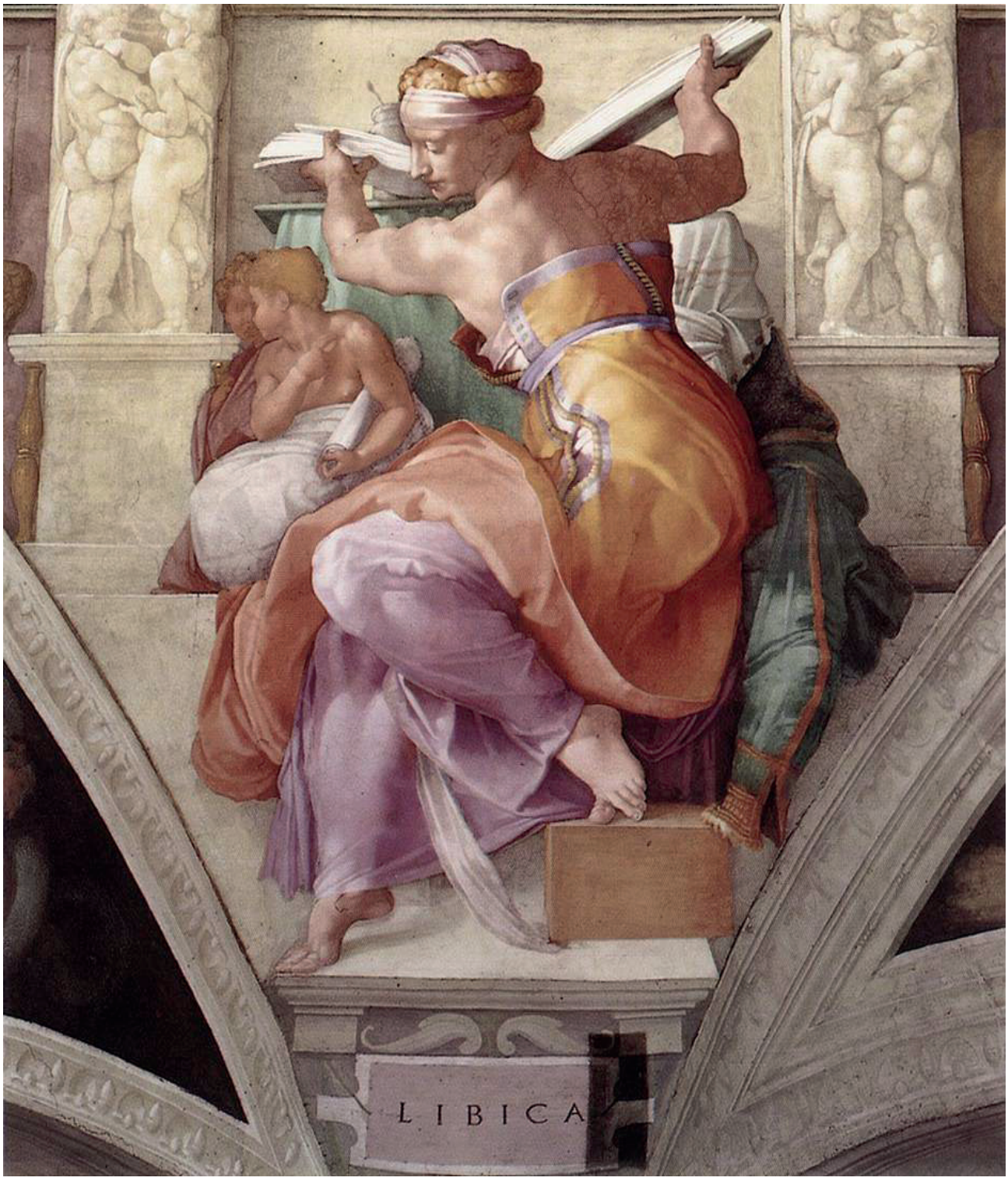


Plate 20. Michelangelo, *Libyan Sibyl,* fresco, 1512 circa. Vault of the Sistine Chapel, Musei Vaticani, Rome.



Plate 21. Michelangelo, *Cumaean Sibyl*, fresco, 1511. Vault of the Sistine Chapel, Musei Vaticani, Rome.



Plate 22. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, plate 25.



Plate 23. William Blake, *Jerusalem*, 1804-1820, plate 47.

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Vol. XXIV-No. 26 November 2026 DOI: 10.17456/SIMPLE-263

In ricordo di Milena Romero Allué

Ricordiamo con affetto e stima la collega e amica Milena Romero Allué. La sua ricerca, originale e di spessore, ha esplorato le relazioni tra parola e immagine dalla prima età moderna alla contemporaneità, con studi su autori quali Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, Blake e Virginia Woolf.

Nel corso degli anni, Milena ha partecipato ai progetti di ricerca coordinati dalla Prof. Antonella Riem, tra cui i PRIN del 2005, 2007, 2009 e 2022 e il progetto PRID del 2019, condividendo un percorso di collaborazione segnato da armonia e amicizia. Questo contributo, consegnato prima della sua scomparsa e qui pubblicato postumo, costituisce la seconda parte del saggio apparso su *Le Simplegadi* nel 2025. Di Milena desideriamo ricordare l'impegno scientifico, la raffinata sensibilità e il profondo amore per la parola poetica.

Prof.ssa Antonella Riem e il Comitato di Redazione

In Memory of Milena Romero Allué

We remember our colleague and friend Milena Romero Allué with affection and esteem. Her original and insightful research explored the relationships between word and image from the early modern period to the present, with studies of authors including Shakespeare, Milton, Marvell, Blake, and Virginia Woolf.

Over the years, Milena participated in the national and University research projects coordinated by Professor Antonella Riem, including the PRIN projects of 2005, 2007, 2009, and 2022 and the PRID project of 2019, in a spirit of friendship and shared endeavour. This contribution, submitted before her passing and published here posthumously, forms the second part of her essay published in *Le Simplegadi* in 2025. We honour Milena's scholarly dedication, refined sensibility, and profound love of the poetic word.

Professor Antonella Riem and the Editorial Board

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