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Eric Ziolkowski

VII. Visual Arts

The ascension of Christ (Acts 1:9–11), not surprisingly, is the most frequent representation of the biblical variations of this motif, while the ascensions of Elijah and the apocryphal Ascension of Elijah and Enoch are seen to prefigure Christ's ascension.

While the most important symbol in Christ's ascension is a cloud, in the ascension of other significant personages there can be a range of attributes such as angels, the fiery chariot in the case of Elijah, and the 12 stars and crescent moon associated with the ascension of the Virgin.

The scriptural episodes depicted are the taking up of Elijah to heaven in 2 Kgs 2; Enoch's transferal to heaven in the pseudepigraphical books of Enoch; and Isaiah's being taken up by an angel to the seventh heaven where he saw God, in the apocryphal Ascension of Isaiah. Elijah's ascension (see → plate 14.a) is regarded as a prototype of both the ascension of Christ and the assumption of the Virgin; it has been depicted by countless artists in compositions that often owe a great deal to the ancient classical world, specifically to the sun god Helios or Apollo. The subject was linked especially to the hagiography of the Carmelites – an order that regarded Elijah as their founder.

Important pictorial cycles directly compare the life of Christ with the life of Moses, such as the frescoes of the Sistine Chapel (1481–82) in which a parallel is drawn between the ascension of Christ and the legendary assumption of Moses. The assumption of Mary in the Eastern tradition was traditionally depicted as Christ receiving her soul presented in the form of a child while, in Western tradition, artists tended to illustrate her corporeal assumption. Like her son, Mary is resurrected three days after her death and is carried up to heaven by angels. A relief in Autun Cathedral (12th cent.) shows her, in an allusion to the resurrection of

Christ, piercing the roof of her tomb. Until the 17th century, the Virgin is normally portrayed as being carried on a cloud to God the father but from this century onwards, the nature of her assumption changes and she is shown ascending unaided by angels. Her forehead is encircled by 12 stars and a crescent moon appears under her feet; she has become, in effect, the Woman of Rev 12: 1.

The most frequent Old Testament iconographic motif is that of Elijah taken up to heaven in a whirlwind or chariot, portrayed in countless images. Besides the Virgin, John the Baptist is another biblical figure sometimes depicted as ascending to heaven, especially by artists such as Donatello and Correggio.

Works: ■ *The Ascension of Elijah:* Giotto, *Elijah on the fire chariot*; Doré, *Elisha watches as Elijah is taken up in a whirlwind*; Chagall, *Elijah carried off to heaven*. ■ *The Ascension of the Virgin:* di Giovanni, *The Assumption*; Titian, *The Assumption*, Frari Church, Venice. ■ *The Ascension of John the Evangelist:* Correggio, *The Passing away of St. John*; Donatello, *The Ascension of St. John*.

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VIII. Music

Motifs of ascension other than the ascension of Christ rarely appear in music. One exception is Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's oratorio *Elias* (1846, revised in 1847; *Elijah*) which includes the ascension of Elijah (2 Kgs 2: 11).

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Nils Holger Petersen

See also → Ascension of Christ; → Ascension of Elijah; → Ascent, Songs of; → Descent into the Netherworld/Hell; → Dormition and Assumption of Mary; → Isaiah, Martyrdom and Ascension of; → Paul, Ascension of

Ascension of Christ

- I. New Testament
- II. Christianity
- III. Islam
- IV. Literature
- V. Visual Arts
- VI. Music
- VII. Film

I. New Testament

By "the ascension of Christ" is traditionally understood Jesus being "taken up to (into heaven)," that is, his exaltation to God's right hand 40 days after his resurrection, as described in Acts 1:9–11 (also

1:2, 22; 2:33). What is often forgotten is that the Acts 1 account is unique within the New Testament.

1. How Did Ascension Relate to Resurrection?

In the Gospels there is little or no chronological separation of resurrection and ascension. Matthew does not narrate an ascension as such and gives no weight to chronological considerations in his retelling of the final episodes of his Gospel (Matt 28:16–20). In his own Gospel Luke was evidently content to leave the impression that Christ “was carried up into heaven” on the day of the resurrection itself (Luke 24:50–51). And John similarly talks of an ascension happening on the day of resurrection (John 20:17), though he also includes an appearance a week later (20:26–29), and the appendix includes a presumably subsequent appearance of Jesus in Galilee (21:1–23), though both episodes tail off without indicating what happened next to Jesus himself.

Elsewhere in the NT the somewhat different imagery implies a single movement of resurrection-exaltation. Even in Acts 2 the resurrection and exaltation are seen as two sides of the same coin (2:32–33). In the Philippian hymn exaltation likewise is the (direct) outcome of Jesus’ death (Phil 2:8–9). The whole imagery of Hebrews is of an entry into the heavenly sanctuary as a priest bearing the sacrificial blood (his own): “when he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high” (Heb 1:3; etc). And the theology of John’s Gospel is of a single act of glorification, of ascension and of being lifted up which begins with the cross and climaxes in heaven.

Luke’s own hand in framing the narrative leading up to his account of the ascension is also evident. In particular, he made some effort to limit Jesus’ resurrection appearances to Jerusalem. This is not explicit in Acts 1:1–8, but follows naturally from the explicit command for the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until Pentecost (Luke 24:49; echoed in Acts 1:4). More strikingly, Luke had already edited the angel’s reminder that the risen Christ was going ahead of them to Galilee (Mark 16:7, referring back to 14:28), to transform it into a recollection of something said while still in Galilee (Luke 24:6–8). The clear inference to be drawn is that Luke wanted to focus his narrative of resurrection appearances, and ascension, on and around Jerusalem, and so deliberately excluded traditions of resurrection appearances elsewhere.

It is also noticeable that Luke probably had to contrive the figure of 40 days separating Jesus’ resurrection and ascension. The earliest tradition of resurrection appearances seems to have covered several months, perhaps eighteen months, as in some later (gnostic) traditions (Irenaeus, *Haer.* i.3.2; i.30.14). The list of such appearances known to Paul, including to more than 500 and to “all the

apostles” (1 Cor 15:4–7), could have Paul’s own “seeing the Lord” (9:1) included (15:8), without, it would appear, the claim being ruled out by virtue of its lateness. But Paul was not converted till about eighteen months after Jesus’ death at the earliest. So part of Luke’s intention was probably to restrict the period of valid resurrection appearances (or visions of the risen Christ to be recognized as resurrection appearances), even though it put in question Paul’s own claim to have been appointed apostle in a resurrection appearance (Acts 1:21–22). Paul’s own claim that it was only by an unnaturally early birth, as an “abortion,” that he could be included in the circle of apostles thus appointed (1 Cor 15:8) before the circle closed (“last of all”), suggests that at this point Luke was simply tightening a concern already evident among the first Christian leadership.

Why forty days? It is possible that Luke simply took up the various “forty” traditions – particularly Moses’ sojourn on Mount Sinai for forty days and forty nights (Exod 24:18), Elijah’s forty days journey to Mount Horeb (1 Kgs 19:8), and Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness (Mark 1:13) – and settled on forty days for his own narrative. But it is also possible, and indeed quite likely, that the tradition of the first Pentecost was already sufficiently established – that is, of the first great experience of the Spirit in collective Christian memory, as having happened on the next pilgrim feast (Pentecost). Forty days would be the most obvious round number before fifty.

So there is a straightforward answer to the question of why Luke made such a clear distinction and separation (40 days) between resurrection and ascension. Namely, that Luke wanted to mark a definite and undisputable end to the sequence of resurrection appearances. This is presumably the reason why he went out of his way to stress the visibility of Jesus’ final departure before witnesses; no less than five times in the three verses Luke emphasizes that the disciples *saw* what was happening (Acts 1:9–11). This also accords with what some have called Luke’s “absentee christology,” the ascension marking Jesus’ departure and subsequent absence from earth, or the transition from physical presence to presence in and through his name (Acts 3–4). Presumably Luke did not concern himself with wondering where the very physical body of Jesus (Luke 24:39) was between appearances (Luke 24:31, 51; Acts 1:4). And since the appearances lasted “until the day when he was taken up” (1:2, 22), that is, “into heaven” (1:11), presumably the risen Jesus was thought of as not yet in heaven (not yet ascended), or as not disappearing to heaven between resurrection appearances.

In all this we should recall that Luke could operate only within the conceptuality possible for him, in which heaven was conceived as literally “up

there,” and departure into heaven could only be conceived in terms of “being taken up,” a literal ascension. It is not simply a matter of literary genre which Luke could choose to operate or dispense with. Rather the typical mind-set and world-view of the time *conditioned what was actually seen* and how the recording of such seeing was conceptualized. Since there is little doubt that Jesus was seen by not a few after his death, however these seeings are interpreted (1 Cor 15:4–7), and since the sequence of seeings ceased at some point, as Paul agrees (15:8 – “last of all”), we can easily envisage the last appearance ending with what was seen as a departure into heaven. Perhaps, then, “the ascension” was simply Jesus’ “farewell” resurrection appearance? And since Acts 1:11 indicates that the ascension provides a pattern for Christ’s (second) coming from heaven, there is an interesting corollary regarding the conceptualization of the *παρουσία* of Christ.

2. The Theology of the Ascension. By thus separating resurrection clearly from ascension Luke helped bring out the point that there were two distinct claims regarding Jesus to be made in all this. That Jesus had been raised from the dead, as the beginning of the end-time resurrection of the dead (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 15:20, 23), with all the eschatological corollaries entailed, was crucial enough for earliest Christian self-understanding. But from earliest days of Christianity it was also seen as of crucial importance to recognize that Jesus was not simply the first man to be raised from the dead. In addition, and as a distinct claim, the risen Jesus had also been exalted to God’s right hand.

In this case the determinative influence seems to have been Ps 110:1, “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.’” Whether or not Jesus himself made play with this text (Mark 12:35–37 par.), there can be no doubt that it played a key role in earliest Christian reflection on Jesus’ status. The prominence of the text across the NT, in explicit quotation and implicit allusion (Mark 12:36 par.; 14:62 par.; Acts 2:34–35; Rom 8:34; 1 Cor 15:25; Eph 1:20; Col 3:1; Heb 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22), is best explained on the hypothesis that it provided some of the clearest answers to the initial questions as to what Jesus’ resurrection said about his own status. It was probably this text which brought home the importance of understanding what had happened to Jesus not simply as resurrection (the beginning of the harvest of dead people) but also as *exaltation*. As risen from the dead, he had also been taken up to heaven, and not merely to be vindicated before God (like the earlier martyrs and righteous), but to assume his seat “at God’s right hand.” How could the first believers have come to such a conclusion without Ps 110:1? The *sessio ad dexteram Patris* is so long established in

Christian creedal confession that it is difficult for those well versed in Christian tradition to appreciate how stunning a conclusion and affirmation this was when it was first made, and of one who had been crucified. This is the lasting importance of Luke’s clear distinction between resurrection and ascension, that the two are not the same. And even if other early formulations blurred the distinction, in many cases it was the exalted status of the resurrected-ascended Jesus which was the main emphasis of the blurred formulation, most notably in the Philippian hymn (Phil 2:8–11).

Little is said in the NT about the role of the ascended/exalted Christ, beyond that of interceding for those who call upon his name (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25). But there are clear implications of lordship being exercised, of the exalted Christ destroying all hostile powers and exercising lordship until all his enemies have been put under his feet (Ps 8:6; 110:1), as well as finally becoming himself subject to the Lord God who first exalted him to his right hand (1 Cor 15:24–28). The implication of passages such as Col 1:19–20 and Eph 2:13–16 is that the living/reigning Christ is also a force for reconciliation and peace. And the imagery of the lamb who opens the scroll in Revelation is of one who determines the working out of destiny (Rev 5–6).

We should also note another theological consideration which may have been at work in Luke’s timing of the ascension. The gap of 10 days between ascension and Pentecost served to mark off clearly the time of Jesus from the time of the Spirit, the appearances of the risen Jesus from the outpouring of the Spirit. In a way analogous to the need to limit the period for acknowledged resurrection appearances, so there may already have been a recognition of the need to make a clear distinction between resurrection appearances and experiences of the Spirit’s inspiration or commissioning (cf. Acts 2:1–4; 4:8, 31; 10:19–20; 13:3). The reason would again be obvious: from earliest days the claim to a resurrection appearance carried with it a claim to authorisation and legitimation which far exceeded the significance that could be claimed for any Spirit experience. The cut-off point of the ascension not only prevented the uniqueness of the period of resurrection appearances and of the authority of those appointed by the risen Jesus himself from being confused or compromised. But also it clarified the relation of that unique period to the age of the Spirit which followed (after a ten day gap). On the one hand, resurrection appearance and Spirit-commissioning are shown to be different. On the other hand, by emphasizing that it is precisely the ascended/exalted Christ who pours out the Pentecostal Spirit (Acts 2:33; cf. Eph 4:8; Rom 10:6), the narrative ensures that the Spirit-experience and Spirit-authorized charism must always be in accord with the character of the exalted Christ.

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James D. G. Dunn

II. Christianity

- Greek and Latin Patristics ■ Medieval Times and Reformation Era ■ Modern Europe and America
- American History of Modern Times

A. Greek and Latin Patristics

In the post-New Testament period, as in the New Testament itself, Christ's resurrection and his session at the right hand of God (on this, see Markschies) are often intimately linked, dispensing with the idea of a visible ascension (see e.g., *T. Adam* 3:8–11; Irenaeus, *Haer.* iii.16.9 referring to Rom 8:34; Irenaeus, *Haer.* iii.18.3). A (docetic?) notion of Christ's exaltation from the cross seems to have existed parallel to this (*Gos. Pet.* 19; *Acts John* 102; Irenaeus, *Haer.* v.31; on [dubious] reflections in art see Schiller: 142–44). Yet at the same time, belief in the bodily ascension is widely attested (see the NT additions Mark 16:19; Luke 24:51; furthermore *Sib. Or.* 1:381; *T. Benj.* 9; from a gnostic perspective: Irenaeus, *Haer.* i.25.1 [Carpocrates; cf. also below]; Ebionites: Epiphanius, *Haer.* xxx.3.5). Ever since Justin, the ascension has formed part of the summaries of the incarnation (particularly 1 *Apol.* 21.1; 31.7; 42.4; 46.5; 51.6–7; *Dial.* 34.2; 36.4–6; 38.1; 63.1; 85.1–2; 126.1; 132.1 and others; the *Kerygma Petri* as quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* vi.128.1; Ign. *Magn.* 11.3 [rec. long.]; *Legend of Abgar* as found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* i.13.20) and has been incorporated in this form into the different formulations of the rule of faith as well as into the 4th-century creeds.

1. The Period between Resurrection and Ascension.

The period can be seemingly quite short (e.g., in Mark 16:3; Luke 24:51; *Barn.* 15:9; *Gos. Pet.* 13[56]; Aristides, *Apol.* 2.8; *Ep. Apos.* 51[62]; Tertullian, *Adv. Jud.* 13.23; apparently on the same day; *Acts Pil.* 15:6; 16:6; two or three days after Easter) or can be extended beyond the 40 days of Acts 1:3 (adopted e.g., by Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.23; Pseudo-Cyprian, *De mont. Sina* 4), encompassing as much as 50 days (= Pentecost; see below) or even 18 months, i.e., 540/545/550 days: *Ascen. Isa.* 9:16 (Ethiopian); from a gnostic perspective: Irenaeus, *Haer.* i.3.2; i.30.14; *Ap. Jas.* p. 2:19–20, cf. 8:1–4; 12 years: *Pistis Sophia* 1–2). Accordingly, the dates given in at-

tempts to historicize the ascension vary as well (see also *Pistis Sophia* 2).

2. Place. The New Testament mentions a variety of places in which the ascension is assumed to have taken place (see above). In Jerusalem, the summit of the Mount of Olives was later commemorated as the place of the ascension (see below); on the other hand, some sources postulate Galilee, as in *Acts Pil.* 16:6; Tertullian, *Apol.* 21.23; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (NHC III,4).

3. Details of the Ascension Event. Throughout the 2nd and the early part of the 3rd centuries, terminology regarding the ascension was very much in a state of flux. It could be interpreted as Christ "ascending," but also as God "assuming" him (A. Harnack provides an overview of terminology in: Hahn/Hahn: 382–84). Already in the 2nd century (e.g., [Pseudo-]Justin, *Res.* 9.4; Irenaeus, *Epid.* 41; 84; *Haer.* iii.16.8; v.31), but also in later periods (Tertullian, *Carn. Chr.* 24.3–4; *Res.* 51; *Prax.* 30; Novatian, *Trin.* 13.5; Victorinus of Pettau, *Apoc.* 4.1; Origen, *Fr. Ps.* 16 [LXX 15].9–10 [PG 12,1216]; Augustine, *Serm.* 263A.3; 264.4; 265D1–3 [anti-Manichaeism]; *Fid. symb.* 13; cf. *Civ.* xxii.4) apologetic intentions manifest themselves in the special emphasis placed on the bodily resurrection (rejected among others by Apelles and Hermogenes; Bauer: 242, 261, 276).

The ascension is often assumed to have taken place, in accordance with Acts 1:9, in a cloud. At times, Christ is surrounded by a retinue of angels and the just (Mark 16:4 k; *Ascen. Isa.* 9:17 [Ethiopian]; *Ep. Apos.* 51[62]; *Legend of Abgar* as found in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* i.13.20; Hippolytus, *Fr. Ps.* 20; [Pseudo-]Athanasius, *Exp. Ps.* 23.7–8 [LXX; PG 27.141CD]; Gregory of Nyssa, *In asc. Christi* [GNO ix.326.16–327.4]), on other occasions, he is accompanied by Moses and Elijah (*Apoc. Pet.* [Ethiopian] 17), or by the cross (*Gos. Pet.* 10:39). Detailed descriptions of Christ's ascension can be found e.g., in *Pistis Sophia* 2–6 (see also *Ap. Jas.* pp. 14–16) as well as in the panegyric homilies of later periods (e.g., in Narsai, see below). In *Ascen. Isa.* 11:22–32 (cf. 3:18; 9:17–18), the ascension is described as a journey to the seventh heaven.

Because of its close linkage with the resurrection and exaltation traditions (see Lohfink: 99–109), the ascension as such was not able to develop an appreciable kerygmatic or liturgical momentum of its own in the first three centuries.

4. Feast of the Ascension (Liturgy). Initially, Ascension and Pentecost were celebrated jointly on the 50th day after Easter (specific instances documented in Cabié: 126–62; see also Colpe et al.: 455–56). Clear evidence of an independent celebration of the Feast of Ascension on the 40th day after Easter (on this, see below and Cabié: 185–97) cannot be found until the last third of the 4th century for Antioch (375/400: *Apos. Con.* v.20.2; viii.33.4;

386/98: John Chrysostom [CPG 4342]) and perhaps for Cappadocia (ca. 388: Gregory of Nyssa [CPG 3178]; cf., however, Gessel: a sermon for the Easter vigil). In Constantinople, the feast was celebrated in the church of the suburb of Elaia already by 425 (Socrates Scholasticus, *Hist. eccl.* vii.26). An Ascension Feast is also documented for Jerusalem prior to 439 (*Lect. Hieros. arm.* 57 Renoux). The celebration included the reading of Scripture (Acts 1:1–14; Luke 24:41–53) and was accompanied by singing: Ps 47:6 and Ps 24 (see below and Cabié: 172–76 for later developments in Jerusalem). For Eastern Syria see Kretschmar: 229–31 and Cabié: 156–58. For the West, evidence surfaces from the 380s onwards for northern Italy (Chromatius of Aquileia, see below; Filastrius of Brescia, *Haer.* 140, cf. 149) and North Africa (Augustine, beginning in 396/397, see below; also *Ep.* 54.1). In Rome the celebration is attested for the first time in the sermons of Leo the Great (444–45, see below) and in the so-called *Sacramentarium Leontianum* of the 5th–6th centuries (see Alberich; Weinert; Colpe et al.: 456–57). The reasons for the adoption of a separate Feast of Ascension are not clear (Augustine implies in *Ep.* 54.1 that the cycle of feasts extending from Good Friday to Pentecost was introduced by way of council decrees; nothing is known apart from this); yet the tendency toward a historical-commemorative arrangement of the liturgical year can also be observed elsewhere in the 4th century (Christmas, Passion/Easter cycle).

5. Ascension Preaching. During the pre-Constantinian period, the Ascension, if at all, only acquires greater theological importance in the writings of Irenaeus (e.g., *Epid.* 83–85; an overview can be found in Colpe et al.: 448–51). Biblical references from the Old Testament find use as liturgical texts, particularly Ps 24, as well as Pss 19:7; 57:12; 68:18–19 and 110:1. Since it took a long time for an ecclesiastical feast of the Ascension to develop, festive sermons devoted to the theme “In ascensionem domini/Christi” did not appear in the early church until relatively late. Among these are, in the West, the homilies of Chromatius of Aquileia (*Serm.* 8), the Gothic bishop Maximinus (*Serm.* 4–6), Augustine (*Serm.* 261–265, 263A, 265A–F), Leo the Great (*Serm.* 73–74), Pseudo-Eusebius of Emesa (CPL 966, *Serm.* 27; cf. PL 39.2081–82), as well as the pseudo-Augustinian sermons found in PL 39.2082–2087 (further information in Cabié: 192–97). In the East there is a greater wealth of transmitted records: for Greek-speaking regions see CPG V, 150–51; for Syria e.g., Ephraem, *Hymni dispersi* 18 (Lamy iv.745–749; for Isaac of Antiochia, Narsai, Jakob von Sarug see Brock, nr. 81, 121, 178 und Mathews, nr. 51).

Most preachers seemed less interested in historicizing the Ascension than in interpreting it soteriologically. Emphasis was thus placed not on

Christ’s departure from this world, but on the resurrected Christ’s exaltation to God and on his session at the Father’s right hand, with the importance of this event being underscored for the individual believer as well as for the cosmos (often by including the entire history of the incarnation). For this purpose, preachers readily invoked the imagery provided by the Old Testament passages mentioned above. At times, the 40 days between Easter and Ascension were interpreted in a typological-allegorical way, while Acts 1:9–11, the *locus classicus* for Ascension in New Testament, played a relatively unimportant role.

6. Early Christian Architecture and Art. Already in pre-Constantinian times observance of the Ascension Feast in Jerusalem was associated with the Mount of Olives. Initially centering on a grotto (known under the name of Eleona; already mentioned in *Acts John* 97), later celebrations were conducted elsewhere (Imbomon). Constantine and his mother erected the Eleona church and perhaps an additional chapel there (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* iii.41–43, which is difficult to interpret; *Itin. Eger.* 25.11; 35.4 and further references; *Itin. Burdig.*, p. 595.4–6 Wesseling). The Imbomon church, furnished with a large cross, was founded by Poemenia (Pomnina), a wealthy Roman matron (see PLRE ii.894–95).

Unmistakable depictions of the Ascension are hard to find in early Christian art (see Schrade; Gutberlet; Wessel; Schiller: III.141–51; Colpe et al. 460–64). Whether the Recklinghausen limestone relief (2nd half of the 4th cent.) portrays the Ascension is a matter of dispute (Schiller: III.143 with illustration 447). In the East it is difficult to distinguish depictions of the Ascension from those of the Theophany (e.g., in Jerusalem pilgrim ampullae in Monza [Schiller: I, illus. 55; III, illus. 460], the Silver Plate of Perm [Schiller: II, illus. 322], a Palestinian wooden chest [Schiller: II, illus. 9], the Coptic fresco at Bawit [Schiller: III, illus. 462] and the Rabula Codex [Schiller: III, illus. 459]); in this case, we can assume influence from the decoration of the Eleona church or of the Church of the Ascension in Jerusalem. In the West, the ascending Christ places his hand in the hand of God the Father (e.g., the so-called Reider tablet in Munich from ca. 400, Schiller: III, illus. 12, 451; the Servanne sarcophagus in Arles from the end of the 4th century; Tsuji, illus. 2; marble caskets from Ravenna; Tsuji, illus. 4), or he is pulled or carried upward by angels (wooden door of S. Sabina in Rome, 432; Schiller: III, illus. 457).

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Wolfram Kinzig

B. Medieval Times and Reformation Era

The three New Testament narrations of the ascension of Christ (Mark 16:19–20; Luke 24:50–53 and Acts 1:9–11) encouraged a lively discussion in medieval theology that also became important for the doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Firstly, since the tenth-century, liturgical customs appear both to have served the popular embellishment of and facilitated understanding of the ascension. Secondly, following Luke 24:50 ("[Jesus] led them out...") processions were organized (cf. Rupert of Deutz, *De divinis officiis* 9.9). At holy mass on Ascension Day, the cross was either lifted up or positioned at an elevated place in the church to demonstrate the exaltation of Christ. It has been shown that, since the beginning of the 13th century, Christ figures were placed on the altar at Easter and hoisted into the dome of the church during Ascension to stimulate devotion on the part of the congregation.

According to the Ptolemaian-oriented imagination, Christ ascended to a definite place like outer space. Referring to John 12:2, Bernhard of Clairvaux mentions (*Sermo secundus in ascensione domini*) that Christ ascends above all heavens to rule the

universe and to prepare a place for all followers (John 14:2). Only with this, his work did come to an end. After examination of the physics and metaphysics of Aristotle, the place to which Christ had ascended could no longer be considered as a spatial category. With reference to Col 3:1, Albertus Magnus considered the heaven to which Christ ascended as the place of the Trinity (*De resurrectione* tr. 2, q. 9, a. 3). Thomas Aquinas was of the opinion that the heaven of the ascension of Christ is a place beyond creation and above all powers (*Summa theologica* III, q.57, a.2), where Christ returns to his father (*Expositio in Symbolum Apostolicum* §946). As a human being, he deserved this exaltation due to his humble obedience to his father. If one considers the background of the development of the Christian dogma, it is doubtful whether or not both natures of Christ have ascended to heaven. Thomas teaches accordingly that the human nature of Christ disappeared into heaven and takes part in the judicial power of God, but the divine nature cannot be localized (*S. th.* III, q.58). For the faithful, the ascension has a threefold effect: Christ prepares the path to the father, he appears as intercessor for the faithful, and he attracts their hearts up to him (*S. th.* III, q.57, a.6).

During the Reformation, theologians from Wittenberg and Switzerland discussed the ascension intensively in relation to Christology and to the dogma of the Lord's Supper. At the same time, traditional Catholics had no reason to discuss the ascension because they maintained scholastic dogma, especially that of Thomas Aquinas (*De coelo et mundo* D3 693–698). Ulrich Zwingli and John Calvin especially accentuated the ascension of Christ's human nature. In the *Catechismus ecclesiae Genevensis* (1545), Calvin teaches that the body of Christ is received in heaven while his power extends everywhere (c. 12, 79). Christ's sitting at the right hand of God is a symbol for the transference of the sovereignty over heaven and earth. His definitions are more succinct in the *Institutio Christianae Religionis* (IV, 17,30), where he calls the Lutheran ubiquity dogma a chimera because the body of Christ was received in heaven as a limited body, according to biblical evidence, and not as an omnipresent one. This garnered the reproach from the Lutheran side that he wished to separate the human and divine natures of Christ ("the *Extra Calvinisticum*").

On the other hand, the Wittenberg theologians emphasized that both natures of Christ are ubiquitous (omnipresent) in order to maintain the unity of his person. They developed the dogma of the bodily ubiquity, i.e., the omnipresence, of Christ to underline the possibility of his bodily presence in the Lord's Supper, which implied the presence of the divine human nature all over the world. The idea of a spatial ascension is rejected. The *sessio ad dexteram Dei*, as defined in the apostolic profession,

does not refer to a specific place but to divine authority. The sitting of Christ at the right hand of God must be regarded as the end of the limitation of his divine powers, which now extend over the entire world. In reference to Ps 110, the ascension marks the start of his rule, or his accession to the throne that is over the entire world, and the degrading of all other authorities. In his dispute with Zwingli, as well as Johannes Oekolampad and Caspar von Schwenckfeld, Luther made his interpretation very clear in the publication *Vom Abendmahl Christi, Bekenntnis*, issued in 1528. In numerous lectures he referred to the Old Testament (Ps 2:7; 8:6; 68:19; 110:1) to elaborate on the effect of the salvation “pro nobis” (e.g., WA 1:690–710; 34/1:412–30; 46:389–94). In the celebration of the Holy Supper, it is not Christ who comes into the presence of the Christians but, miraculously, Christians are brought into his presence by means of his word and sacrament. This implies that he is not present due to a movement through space and time (WA 26:336–37). The change in worldview brought about by Copernicus’ conception of the world could not affect the Lutheran interpretation, which stressed the spiritual dimension of Christ. The soteriological dimension of Lutheran Christology has been developed most concisely by Johannes Brenz in *De personali unione* (1561). Via his student Jakob Andreae, his ideas were partially accepted in “The Book of Concord VI and VIII” (*De coena domini; De persona Christi*). Brenz stressed the unity of the person of Christ with God the Father and emphasized Christ’s divine nature.

In order not to neglect the human nature of Christ, Brenz chooses a new interpretation of Luther’s doctrine of the *communicatio idiomatum*. He points out that the two entities, the deity Jesus and the man Jesus of Nazareth, participate in a mutual communication. In spite of the ascension, the human nature of Christ participates in the ubiquity of the divine nature due to real *communicatio idiomatum*. This is the reason for the possibility of God’s real presence in the Lord’s Supper. Brenz wants in this way to underline God’s community with mankind. God and mankind are not opposed to each other but are united. While the Book of Concord generally expresses such ideas only modestly (BSLK 808: Christ as a human is “omnibus creaturis praesens”), the real unity of both natures in Christ is stated distinctly. This can be a consolation for people facing temptation, because “Our flesh and blood is placed so high at the right hand of the majesty and almighty power of God.”

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Stefan Michel

C. Modern Europe and America

The ascension refers to the passage or rising of Jesus into the sphere and life of God. This metaphorical symbol of “going up” is intimately related to the resurrection, exaltation, glorification, and enthronement of Jesus. Although each has a distinctive specific meaning, they are all intended to put in words the ultimate destiny of Jesus of Nazareth and the effects of his power in history. For example, they express the way God completes the cycle of Jesus’ descent with ascent to heaven, reverses his death with life, vindicates his shame with honor and glorification, and vindicates his self-sacrifice with divine power. The following summary is one account of how modern theology, building on critical biblical scholarship, seeks to appropriate the Bible’s witness to Jesus’ ascension.

Numerous passages in the New Testament refer to Jesus’ ascension, glorification, and enthronement (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50–51; 1 Tim 3:16; 1 Pet 3:22). It’s the modern approach to religious language as symbolic in character which requires a distinction without separation between its this-worldly historical reference and its transcendent object and content. Earthly symbols and narrative draw the mind into the sphere of God’s unspeakable reality. Such a distinction allows, first, an analysis of the scriptural symbols surrounding Jesus’ ascension and, second, an appropriation of their meaning today.

1) Luke solidified the distinction of the ascension from the resurrection of Jesus by presenting Jesus’ ascension imaginatively in a narrative form. After Jesus’ resurrection he appeared to his followers over a period of 40 days. He then assembled his apostles, gave them a final testament and instruction, and ascended into the cloud of God’s glory (Acts 1:1–14; cf. 2 Kgs 2:9–13). Two angels appeared and confirmed the experience. While critical exegetes virtually concur in challenging the historical character of his story, it coherently and power-

fully represents several distinctive aspects of the apostolic faith in Jesus.

In Luke's two-volume single work the story of Jesus' ascension bridges the period of Jesus' ministry on earth and the period of the church after his death and resurrection. From one perspective Luke's narrative is a single two-part story of God as Spirit at work in Jesus and then the church. Thus, before leaving them, the risen Jesus says to his apostles: "you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you; and you will bear witness for me ... to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Whereas there were no eye-witnesses to the resurrection, Luke stresses what the disciples saw: "as they watched, he was lifted up, and a cloud removed him from their sight" (Acts 1:9). This Jesus, once ascended and exalted, sends the divine Spirit which launches the church and its mission. In Luke's grand narrative, Jesus' leaving on the clouds foreshadows his second coming at the end of time, for he "will come in the same way as you have seen him go" (Acts 1:11).

Relative to Jesus' person, whereas "resurrection" expresses God raising Jesus out of death to life, "ascension" symbolizes the sphere of God as the "where to" of Jesus' destiny: he was taken "up to heaven" (Acts 1:11). Ascended to God, Jesus was seated or "enthroned" at the right hand of God and, vested with divine power, he exercises divine authority (Acts 2:33–36; Eph 1:20–22; Heb 1:3–4). Jesus also becomes the final high priest who has passed through, not the holy of holies, but heaven itself to stand before God on our behalf (Heb 4:14; 9:24). Just as Jesus' resurrection is God's promise of our own, so too is Jesus' ascension.

2) The modern appropriation of the ascension translates the more abstract symbol of resurrection into a graphic imaginative narrative of what the apostles heard, saw, and experienced in the Spirit. This narrative icon draws Christian imagination into God's transcendence where Jesus is transformed into the heavenly Messiah or Christ. The literalness of seeing in Luke translates into the realism of the object of Christian faith today. This symbol discloses to Christian faith and hope the power of a God of life over death. It singles out Jesus as God's instrument of salvation, a savior who mediates God's power to those who have been opened up to it. The ascension also formalizes the nature and purpose or mission of the church in human history: to be the witness of the power of God reflected in Jesus. The church correctly highlights the ascension liturgically as the bridge between celebration of the new life in the resurrected Christ and the beginning and foundation of ecclesial existence in the power of the Spirit.

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Roger Haight, S.J.

D. American History of Modern Times

Jesus Christ's departure into heaven occurs 40 days after his resurrection from the dead. According to Acts 1:9 this event was witnessed by Jesus' apostles. The gospel writers earlier than Luke never mention the event although an ascension narrative was added to the end of Mark's gospel. Most biblical scholars consider Mark 16:9–20 to be a secondary addition which was influenced by Luke's account.

Since arriving in America, the Catholic Church has maintained the doctrine of Jesus' ascension as containing both historical and theological significance. The Catholic Church has affirmed the ascension was the historical act of the earthly Jesus leaving his followers and returning to his heavenly Father. Catholics have traditionally viewed this departure with metahistorical importance in that Jesus' ascension into heaven was theologically connected to his crucifixion and resurrection which made possible his exaltation at the right hand of the throne of God. Thus, the ascension is interpreted along with the Passion and the resurrection as significant moments of Jesus redemptive work. Within Catholic thought the ascension also initiates Jesus sending the Holy Spirit to empower his disciples.

Catholics in America celebrate this redemptive event with the Ascension Feast. The Ascension Feast is part of the liturgical calendar as the fortieth day of Easter. In the United States, Catholics have traditionally celebrated this day on the following Sunday which is the Sunday before Pentecost.

In America, early Puritan Reformed thought viewed the biblical accounts of Jesus' ascension as a significant aspect of their idea of Christology. Reformed ideas of Christ's work of redemption focused on Jesus as prophet, priest and king. The kingship of Jesus was taken from the biblical accounts of the resurrection and the ascension and it focused on Jesus' role in governing the church and being exalted in heaven, reigning at God's right hand.

In New England Calvinists thought the exultation of Jesus consisted in three theological moments: the resurrection, the ascension and the future second coming in judgment. These theological ideas were not hotly debated as most seventeenth-century controversy centered on the high Calvinistic doctrine of predestination verses the Arminian view of human free-will.

In the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards focused his Reformed thought on how Jesus Christ was the perfect expression of divine beauty. While he still held the traditional Reformed categories of Christ as prophet, priest and king he defined them by his idea of excellence and beauty. Therefore, Christ's incarnation was necessary for the excellence of redemption just as his ascension resulted in the beauty of his full glorification.

In the mid-18th century, Deists tended to reject the miraculous aspects of the gospel narratives. Their rejection of Christ deity included their rejection of both his resurrection and ascension.

In the 19th century most Universalists rejected the deity of Christ as understood by Reformed theology. However, most also viewed the resurrection as a symbol of God's assurance of eternal life and Christ's ascension as symbolic of humanity's future glorification in the presence of God.

In the 1830's Joseph Smith laid out the Mormon doctrine of Jesus' gradual attainment of divine sonship. In this doctrine Jesus' ascension into heaven was his final achievement of full glorification as the son of God. This same divine glorification is available to all Mormon Saints.

Most Evangelical Christians in America today hold to some variation of the Reformed doctrine of the ascension. This view of the ascension of Christ was held by the New England Puritans and was updated by Jonathan Edwards who focused on aspects of the ascension which demonstrated how Jesus Christ fully revealed God's beauty and excellence.

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Robert Britt-Mills

III. Islam

In Islamic teaching, Jesus ascended to heaven – but not after his death and resurrection as is reported in the Gospel. Rather, most Muslims believe that Jesus ascended without dying.

The scriptural prompt for this teaching is S 4: 157–58: "... they did not slay him, neither crucified him ... Rather, God raised him up (*rafa'ahu*) to him ..." Muslim exegetes have traditionally explained these verses to mean that God raised Jesus alive and projected Jesus' "likeness" onto another person, whom the Jews then crucified.

For exegetes, the first qur'anic opportunity to discuss Jesus' ascension comes at S 3: 55: "When Allah said, 'Jesus, I will cause you to die (*mutawaffika*) and will raise you (*rafa'a*) to me ...'" Another opportunity comes at S 19: 33, where the infant Jesus says, "Peace on me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am raised up alive" (S 19: 33). These verses appear to indicate the Gospel sequence, but Muslim commentators have usually interpreted them in the light of S 4: 157–58.

At S 3: 55, the early exegete Muqātil ibn Sulaymān (d. 767) reverses the order of the verbs in a *hysteron proteron*: "[God] says, 'I will raise you (*rafa'a*) to me from the earth and cause you to die (*mutawaffika*) when you descend from heaven at the time of the *dajjāl*.'" The major exegete al-Ṭabarī (d. 923)

first explains that in common usage *mutawaffika* means "to cause to die" (*mumituka*). However, he concludes that its meaning here must be "I am taking (*qabaḍa*) you from the earth" because of the traditions attributed to the prophet of Islam that Jesus will die only at the end of time.

At S 4: 157, al-Ṭabarī transmits the story that when the Jews come to seize Jesus, Jesus is in a house with seven disciples. When the Jews enter the house, God changes all the disciples to look like Jesus, who then asks his disciples which of them would like to "purchase for himself paradise today." One volunteers, claims that he is Jesus, and is taken and crucified. Both the Jews and the Christians think that Jesus has been killed, but rather, according to al-Ṭabarī, God raises Jesus on that day. Many variations of this substitution/ascension story are found in the classical commentaries. Al-Qurṭubī (d. 1273), for example, writes that when God takes Jesus up to heaven, he clothes him with feathers and light, and takes away his desire for food and drink. "Jesus thus lives in the company of the angels."

Al-Ṭabarī also writes that a week after his ascension, Jesus returns to his sorrowing mother and explains that God has raised him up. He asks her to arrange a meeting with the eleven apostles, and he talks with them.

The Muslim teaching of the ascension of Jesus without death on the cross effectively denies the Christian teaching of redemption and atonement based on his death. However, in Muslim faith it looks forward to the return of Jesus in which he would finally die after performing his role in end time events.

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Gordon Nickel

IV. Literature

The Ascension has received rather intermittent attention in literature. In Old English poetry (700–1000 CE), *Christ II* is based on a Latin sermon on the Ascension by Gregory the Great. It celebrates the Ascension as the sixth of the "leaps" of Christ. Humankind must imitate the leaps, in order to seek salvation and finally ascend to heaven. In *The Phoenix* pagan myth is transformed into Christian allegory as the ancient bird, having been consumed by fire and reborn, draws flocks of followers and finally soars beyond their reach as he returns to the heavens.

The *Golden Legend* (13th cent.) and the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* (14th cent.) elaborate on the Ascension,

with a great liturgical exchange between Christ and the angels, similar to the questions and answers in the Harrowing of Hell. In *Piers Plowman* (late 14th cent.) when the Dreamer has a vision of Piers covered in blood and with the appearance of Jesus, Conscience explains the Ascension to Piers, who himself is allowed to represent the human nature that is exalted in the Ascension.

The Ascension was a major part of medieval liturgical drama, but the accent was on ritual acts accompanying the authorized forms of worship rather than on literary embellishment, with the singing of the *Ascendo ad Patrem* accompanied by clergy raising a cross on high or ascending the pulpit. At Bamberg an image of Christ was elevated during the singing of the *Ascendo*.

Likewise the English mystery-plays mostly relied on liturgical chant for this part of the drama. In the Chester play there is more elaboration, drawing on the *Stanzaic Life of Christ* dialogue with the angels. The angels are mystified by the blood-stained figure who ascends to the heavens. "The imagery of Christ as the treader of the winepress and with the bloody drops upon him is esoteric and therefore unlike the normal style of the mystery plays, but in context suggests well the numinous quality of the event." (Woolf 1972: 284) The Cornish mystery-play *Resurrexio Domini* ends with the Emperor Tiberius (on stage for the death of Pilate) stepping out of character to describe Christ's Harrowing of Hell and Ascension.

Within 17th-century metaphysical poetry, John Donne's "Ascension" hails Christ: "O strong ram, which hast battered heaven for me..." Henry Vaughan's poems "Ascension Day" and "Ascension-Hymn" find the writer mystically soaring to heaven to share in Christ's victory, against undertones of religious and political turmoil. In the 20th century, Rilke's "Worker Letter" implies the priority of the theme of ascension over all other religious motifs in an aestheticised faith. R.S. Thomas' poem "Winged God" has Christ leaving the earth amidst merriment occasioned by human failure to live authentically on earth, while Stevie Smith's "The Airy Christ" "does not wish that men should love him more than / anything / Because he died; he only wishes they would hear him sing."

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Anthony Swindell

V. Visual Arts

Almost absent from the Gospels, except for a brief allusion (Luke 24:50–52), and with only another short appearance in the New Testament (Acts 1:9–12), the Ascension constitutes a major element of Christianity. Its representations are not anecdotal but reveal, in their iconographic variations and significant interpretations, the final episode in the narrative cycle of Jesus' life; the event that articulates the issue of his double nature, human and divine, as he is suspended between earth and heaven.

1. Descriptions of the Normative Figure of the Ascension of Christ in the Visual Arts. Traditional Ascension iconography presents Jesus in the clouds as two angels lean over the earth talking with the Apostles, while the Virgin raises her head upward, as in Jean Fouquet's *Hours of Étienne Chevalier* (1452–60). Two other frequent motifs include the image of Jesus' lower body and feet, as in Albrecht Dürer's *The Little Passion* (1510/11), and the impression of his two feet on a rock.

2. Variations of the Iconographic Formula. The meanings added to the image became more diverse in relation to the historical period. For example, initially artists, guided by the expression "this Jesus ... has been taken up into heaven" (Acts 1:11), depicted Jesus walking toward heaven, as if climbing a hill, and simultaneously reaching for the hand of God through the clouds, as in the 4th-century *Munich Ivory* and the 9th-century *Sacramentary of Drogo*.

With the 6th-century directive of Gregory the Great indicating that contrary to the ascensions of Enoch and Elijah, Jesus ascended "by his own power" (*sua virtute ferebatur*), artists of this period depicted him rising without assistance either from the angels or from the hand of God. Their imagery incorporated three elements from Acts: the Apostles and – although absent from the biblical account – the Virgin as witnesses to the event; the clouds that hid Christ from their eyes; and, near the apostles, two men dressed in white.

In Eastern and Byzantine art, Ascension iconography accentuated the glory of the event, particularly its nature as an apotheosis, by not representing the footprints but presenting instead Jesus floating in glory with the Virgin, who is depicted almost as a figure of majesty in the orans position with her head turned upward, though not as a spectator. In the *Rabbula Gospels* (586) the glory of Christ is manifested by the presence of a mandorla; meanwhile two angels talk with the Apostles and four more angels adore Christ, two of whom present him with crowns. The angels, the Tetramorphs, and the wheels of fire from Ezekiel's vision support the mandorla while the sun and the moon give the event a cosmic dimension. The dome mosaics of Agia Sophia in Thessalonika (880), where Christ is seated on a rainbow in the middle

of a mandorla held by angels, evidence a fine example of the privileged place that Byzantine art accorded this theme in ecclesiastical décor.

Even more than in Byzantine art, Western art emphasizes the narrative aspect rather than the glory of the event. Often in the form of a hill, the ground from which Christ is about to depart and which bears his footprints (a motif cited also by Jacobus da Voragine) is clearly visible. As in the biblical texts, the Virgin and the Apostles are represented with “their eyes toward the sky.” Romanesque tympanii provided a larger space for the depictions of Christ in a mandorla, almost evoking a cloud, with Christ typically standing (as at Montceaux-l'Étoile), rarely seated (as at Anzy-le-Duc), and often hidden by the clouds (as on the [left] Royal Portal at Chartres). The motif of Christ's feet visible from the clouds does not find its origins in the late medieval theatrical spectacles of the Mysteries, but was found in English manuscript illuminations dating from the millennium, as for example in the *Missal of Robert de Jumièges*. When the Ascension was rendered through a summary image, as in the successive scenes on Gothic ivories, the disappearing feet of Christ and the presence of two apostles were deemed sufficient to define the theme. While the biblical tradition situated the Ascension on the Mount of Olives, this was noted in artistic depictions only by an occasional inscription rather than a specific iconography of a site.

As there was no significant separation between Byzantine and early medieval visual formulae, illuminations in the late 12th-century *Hortus Deliciarum* incorporated the Byzantine motif of the Virgin orans between two angels while representing both artistic traditions through the dual imagery of Christ standing simultaneously in a mandorla held by four angels in the sky and on a hill that flowed into the mandorla. This subtle imagery reflects visually the combination of his human and divine natures.

Other formulae introduce stronger nuances in the symbolism of the Ascension. An 11th-century Liège ivory superimposes the Nativity, Crucifixion, and Ascension on the same axis. In the Ascension scene, the apostles are placed along the edge as the Risen Christ stands in an opening between the gates of heaven. This image is on the upper register paralleling the crucified figure in the center and the infant Jesus on the lower register. The Ascension is enabled by the “crossing of the cross,” and is revealed as the sign of heaven's promise by the hand holding the crown underneath the crucified figure. In the center of the lower register, the Nativity defines the beginning of the cycle that is climaxed by the Ascension.

Predicated on parallel episodes between the two Testaments, typological images evidence a privileged interpretative system in medieval thought. According to this system, the Ascension is rendered

simultaneously as the fulfillment of the patriarchs and as a model for Christians. Initially appearing in the 14th century and popular until the introduction of printed books in the 15th century, the *Biblia Pauperum* was a typological book which framed the Ascension between the two Old Testament figures of the patriarch Enoch elevated to heaven by God's hands and the prophet Elijah in his fiery chariot (see → plate 14.a). The message is twofold: while these two prestigious Old Testament ascensions announce that of Christ, they by comparison took place with assistance, whereas Christ ascended by his own power. One of the texts for this image goes further by signifying that Christ has opened the path behind him as the shepherd has for the ewes.

In the anonymous Flemish primitive painting *Two Donors presented by Saints Quirin and Amand* (15th cent., Museum of Lille) the later stage of the traditional iconography of the Ascension is represented. Two saints open the door for two believers who crawl up the path on the hill which Christ climbed for his Ascension. Atop this hill, the lower part of Christ's body rises over the clouds as the text below reads “to be imitated.” The Ascension becomes the representation simultaneously of Christ's ascent and of the reopening of the future path for humanity.

Finally, any representation of Christ as God and human in the Ascension cannot be separated from the connection between the Ascension and the Parousia. His glorious return at the end of time is invoked by the recitation of the angels in Acts that he “will come in the same way as you saw him go into Heaven” (Acts 1:11). This explication of the glorious nature of Christ at the Ascension is highlighted in visual programs that place it parallel to the Last Judgment, as found on the Royal Portal of Chartres Cathedral. With the Incarnation depicted on the right tympanum and the Ascension on the left, the return of Christ in majesty at the end of time is witnessed on the central tympanum under the images of the old men of the Apocalypse. The iconography of the Ascension cannot be understood apart from the biblical narrative or its symbolic position in salvation history.

Works: ■ *Benedictional of St. Aethelwold* (London, Br. Library., ms Add 49.598); Ohrid, Church St Sophia, mural paintings; Toulouse, Church St. Sernin, tympanum of the Miègeville Door. ■ *Gospel Lectionary of Henry the Lion* (Wolfenbüttel, Herzog-August-Bibl., ms Guelf. 105 Noviss. 2^o); Kurbínovo, Church St. George, mural paintings; Giotto, Padova, Scrovegni Chapel, frescoes on northern wall (see → plate 14.b). ■ *Brandenburg Gospel Lectionary* (Brandenburg, Domstiftsarchiv); *Eton Rondels* (Eton, College Library, ms 177); *Fitzwarin Psalter* (Paris, Bibl. nat. de France, ms lat. 765).

Bibliography: ■ L. Réau, *Iconographie de l'art chrétien*, vol. 2.2 (Paris 1957) 582–90. ■ M. Schapiro, “The Image of the Disappearing Christ,” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* 23 (March 1943) 145–52 = in id., *Selected Papers* 3 (New York, 1979) 266–87.

■ A. A. Schmid, "Himmelfahrt Christi," *LCI* 2 (Freiburg 1970) 268–76.

Christian Heck

VI. Music

In comparison to other biblical scenes narrating the life of Christ, the Ascension has not as frequently been the topic of musical compositions. The earliest examples are plainchants for the Mass and the Office. The introit as well as one of the current offertory antiphons for the mass of the Ascension feast, beginning with the phrase "Viri Gallilaei," quotes the biblical passage on the ascension event from Acts 1:1–11. Another text found for the offertory of the day, *Ascendit Deus*, is taken from Ps 46, which has traditionally been interpreted as prefiguring typologically the Ascension of Christ. To the main liturgical items mentioned were often added so-called tropes (musical and textual additions) which again contained further biblical quotations or allusions.

Further compositions for possible liturgical use comprise choral settings of texts in Latin and vernacular languages. Among these pieces are motets based on the offertory chant text by Jacob Handl (in *Opus Musicum* 1586–91) and Peter Philips (1610), as well as settings of further sections of Ps 46, such as *O clap your hands* by Orlando Gibbons (1622?) and Ralph Vaughan Williams (1920). Motets for ascension using non-biblical texts as a base include Tomas Luis da Victoria's *Ascendens Christus in altum* (Victoria also composed a full mass cycle with the same title), Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy's *Erhaben, O Herr, über alles Lob* (1846), and Gerald Finzi's *God is gone up*. Finally, Luca Marenzio (1553–1599) with *O Rex gloriae* and Henry Purcell (1659–1695) with *O God the King of Glory* composed musical settings of the collect for the Sunday after Ascension day.

The ascension has also been the topic of a number of oratorios, most notably in a group of 18th- and 19th-century compositions that are all based on the *Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu* (1760) by Karl Wilhelm Ramler. This highly poetic text, which includes an embellished and dramatized account of the resurrection and ascension events, has been set to music by Georg Philipp Telemann (1760), Johann Friedrich Agricola (1760), Carl Philip Emanuel Bach (1774), Johann Gottfried Krebs (1774), Johann Adolf Scheibe (1708–1776), August Eduard Grell (1822), and Friedrich Wilhelm Grund (1823).

Further oratorio compositions based on a variety of other poetic texts on the ascension include *Die Himmelfahrt Jesu Christi* by Albert Lortzing (1828), as well as the Ascension oratorios by Joseph Mainzer (1830) and Sigismund von Neukomm (1837). A special place is held by Johann Sebastian Bach's *Oratorium Festo Ascensionis Christi* (1735), which is an oratorio-like setting of a gospel har-

mony sometimes counted as a cantata and thus placed among his three ascension cantatas BWV 37, 43, and 128.

One of the few non-vocal compositions connected with the ascension is *L'Ascension* by Olivier Messiaen from 1932/33. Each of the four sections of this orchestral piece (revised for solo-organ in 1933/34) has a title programmatically linking it to the Ascension of Christ.

Bibliography: ■ G. Björkqvall et al. (eds.), *Corpus Troporum III: Tropes du propre de la messe. 2. Cycle de Pâques* (Stockholm 1982). ■ G. Massenkeil (ed.), *Oratorium und Passion*, vol. 10.1–2 of *Handbuch der musikalischen Gattungen* (Laaber 1999).

Andreas Bückler

VII. Film

The last meeting of Jesus with his disciples has been shown in Jesus-movies since the early *Passions* (e.g., dir. Zecca/Nonguet, 1902–5); the use of a simple trick allows the viewer to see Jesus literally levitating up into heaven or at least covered by a cloud (as in the animated *Miracle Maker*, dir. Sokolov/Hayes, 2000). Other filmmakers have preferred more symbolical images. In *King of Kings* (dir. Ray, 1961) the unnatural shadow of the risen Christ on the coast of the Sea of Galilee remains even after the Apostles depart – there is no Ascension. In *The Greatest Story Ever Told* (dir. Stevens, 1965) Jesus disappears among the clouds to reappear as a mosaic in a church. In *Messiah* (1975), another solution is chosen: the mother of Jesus (still young) comes to his tomb, stops in front of the empty tomb, and with a quiet smile raises her eyes to the sky; instead of showing the Risen Jesus (and the Ascension) the Italian director suggests the faith of Mary. In *Jesus of Montreal* (dir. Arcand, 1989): the last long plan-séquence shot begins in the subway station (where Daniel/Jesus was dying), and a complex movement of the camera, through the earth towards the heaven, suggests both Resurrection and Ascension.

Bibliography: ■ L. Baugh, *Imaging the Divine: Jesus and Christ-Figures in Film* (Kansas City 1997). ■ M. Tiemann, *Jesus comes from Hollywood* (Göttingen 2002). ■ R. Walsh, *Reading the Gospel in the Dark: Portrayals of Jesus in Film* (Harrisburg 2003).

Marek Lis

See also → Ascension (general)

Ascension of Elijah

- I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament
- II. Judaism
- III. New Testament and Christianity

I. Hebrew Bible/Old Testament

In 2 Kgs 2:1–12 Elisha watches as his mentor Elijah is taken and ascends from the earth. This text is often considered to be part of the so-called Deuteronomistic History, though others believe it to be