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FANTASY OR A TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE?
STUDY OF THE PAINTING *ASCENT INTO HEAVEN*
BY JHERONIMUS BOSCH
FROM THE PALAZZO DUCALE IN VENICE*

Ascent into Heaven (Venice, Palazzo Ducale) is one of four panels of eschatological subjects, which were most likely in the 1520s in the collection of Domenico Grimani (1461–1523), a Venetian cardinal, an eminent art collector (ill. 1).¹ The panels are unsigned, and their attribution to Jheronimus

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¹ Patriarch of Aquileia, bishop of the diocese of Ceneda, administrator of the diocese of Urbino, was an avid collector of ancient statues, coins, medals, precious stones, illuminated codices, books, tapestries, and paintings. The cardinal's collecting passion was continued by his nephew Giovanni Grimani (1506–1593), also a clergyman, who collected mainly ancient monuments, which he handed over to the state in 1587; now in possession of the Museo Archeologico Nazionale in Venice. In 1897, the death of the last member of the Grimani family marked an end of both the abundant collection and of the Palazzo Grimani, which was bought by the state from a private owner in 1981 and began restoration three years later. The palace (<http://www.palazzogrimani.org>) managed since 2001 by the Polo Museale Veneziano, was reopened in 2008. See Theobald FREUDENBERGER, "Die Bibliothek des Kardinals Domenico Grimani," *Historisches Jahrbuch* 56 (1936): 15–45; Pio PASCHINI, *Domenico Grimani cardinale di S. Marco* (Roma: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1943); Rodolfo GALLO, "Le donazioni alla Serenissima di Domenico e Giovanni Grimani," *Archivio Veneto* 50–51 (1952): 34–77; Marilyn PERRY, "The Statuario pubblico of the Venetian Republic," *Saggi e memorie di storia dell'arte* 8 (1972): 76–85; IDEM, "Cardinal Domenico Grimani's Legacy of Ancient Art to Venice," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 41 (1978): 215–244; Irene FAVARETTO, *Arte antica e cultura antiquaria nelle collezioni venete al tempo della Serenissima* (Roma: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1990), 63–99; Giuliano TAMANI, "I libri ebraici del cardinal Domenico Grimani," *Annali di Ca' Foscari* 34 (1995): 5–52; Girolamo BENZONI, Lando BORTOLOTTI, "Grimani, Domenico," in Mario Caravale (ed.), *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani (DBI)*, vol. LIX, Roma 2003; <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia> (access: 15.05.2014).

Bosch is mainly due to stylistic affinities. Apart from the four paintings, the cardinal, as is commonly conjectured, was in possession of at least two other works by the painter from 's-Hertogenbosch, currently held in the Doges' Palace, namely *The Triptych of the Hermits* and *The Saint Wilgefortis Triptych* (St. Julia). One could moreover find in Grimani's palace paintings by Hans Memling (ca. 1435–1494), Joachim Patinir (ca. 1485–1524) and Herri met de Bles (ca. 1510–1555/60).²

The most fundamental and at the same time earliest reference linking the figures of Domenico Grimani and Jheronimus Bosch, used by art historians, is an account of Marcantonio Michiel (1484–1552), a Venetian humanist, author of the manuscript of *Notizia d'opere di disegno*,³ who in 1521 paid a visit to the cardinal. The passage related to Bosch's works reads as follows: "La tela dell'Inferno con la gran diversita de mostri fu de mano de Ieronimo Bosch. La tela delli Sogni fu de man de l'istesso. La tela della fortuna con el ceto che inghiotte Giona fu de man de l'istesso" (*In casa del cardinal Grimano*).⁴ Michiel described three paintings: *Hell (inferno)*, *Dreams (sogni)* and *Fortuna with a Whale Devouring Jonas (fortuna con el ceto che inghiotte Giona)*.⁵ Two panels from the Palazzo Ducale may be easily

² Keith CHRISTIANSEN, *The View from Italy*, in Maryan W. AINSWORTH, Keith CHRISTIANSEN (ed.), *From Van Eyck to Bruegel. Early Netherlandish Painting in the Metropolitan Museum of Art* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1998, 45); Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch. Malerei als Vision. Lehrbild und Kunstwerk* (Köln: Böhlau, 2009), 101. On works by Netherlandish painters in the Venetian collections, see Lorne CAMPBELL, "Notes on Netherlandish pictures in the Veneto in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries," *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981): 467–473; Caterina LIMENTANI VIRDIS, "Artisti della 'Nazione fiamenga'," in *La pittura fiamminga nel Veneto e nell'Emilia*, ed. Caterina Limentani Viridis (Verona: Banca popolare di Verona: Banco S. Geminiano e S. Prospero, 1997), 33–72; Bernard AIKEMA, "Il gusto dei fiamminghi. Opere "ponentine" nelle collezioni veneziane del Rinascimento," in Bernard AIKEMA, Beverly L. BROWN (ed.), *Il Rinascimento a Venezia e la pittura del Nord ai tempi di Bellini, Dürer, Tiziano* (Venezia: Bompiani, 1999), 83–91.

³ The manuscript, acquired by the Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana in Venice (Ms. Ital., cl. XI, 67 [7351]), came out in print only in 1800. The real author was identified in 1864. Earlier it was believed that the text was penned by an anonymous writer Morelliano (Abate Morelli). On Marcantonio Michiel and his manuscript see Jennifer FLETCHER, "Marcantonio Michiel. His Friends and Collection," *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981): 452–466; IDEM, "Marcantonio Michiel, 'che ha veduto assai'," *The Burlington Magazine* 123 (1981): 602–609; Gino BENZONI, "Michiel, Marcantonio," in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (DBI), vol. LXXIV (Roma: Istituto della enciclopedia italiana, 2010); <http://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia> (access: 17.05.2014).

⁴ *Notizia d'opere di disegno nella prima metà del secolo XVI, esistenti in Padova, Cremona, Milano, Pavia, Bergamo, Crema e Venezia, scritta da un anonimo di quel tempo, pubblicata e illustrata da d. Iacopo Morelli, custode della Regia biblioteca di S. Marco di Venezia* (Bassano 1800), 77.

⁵ Probably the Italian term *tela*—canvas—should be understood here as a general term, meaning simply a painting, regardless of the type of the ground on which it was painted. See Erik LARSEN, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Smithmark, 1998), 121.

related to the expression “la tela dell’inferno,” since they actually depict the *Fall of the Damned* and *Hell*. The account does not provide any information on the two other panels—*Ascent into Heaven* and *Earthly Paradise*, which makes their provenance dubious. Possibly, Michiel did not mention them as he regarded them as rather typical representations of the hereafter. What did attract his attention was the “gran diversita de mostri,” linked to ideas such as *novita, invenzione, fantasia, bizarro*, held in high esteem by Venetian *amatori d’arte* in the upper echelons of society.⁶ Possibly, too, Michiel was not familiar with the panels with the visions of Paradise. Upon the cardinal’s death, some of the paintings were transferred to the monastery of Santa Chiara on Murano Island, while eight sealed chests with paintings—“casse otto [...] piene de quadri”⁷ were moved to the basement of the Palazzo Ducale. Another documented information comes from ca. 1528, when Domenico Grimani’s nephew, Marino Grimani (1489–1546),⁸ himself a Catholic hierarch, sent twenty one paintings to Rome, leaving in Venice among others *The Last Judgement Altar* and the depiction of *Hell*: “uno quadro con due sportelli fiandrese iudecio di Christo,” and “uno quadro con lo inferno a oglio.”⁹ In light of the above records, questions posed below must remain unanswered. Was the painting representing *Hell (inferno)* described by Marcantonio Michiel the same which Marino Grimani decided to preserve? Were these visions of the afterlife once part of *The Last Judgement Altar (iudecio di Christo)*?

Leonard J. Slatkes,¹⁰ referring to the date attributed by Dirk Bax¹¹ and Mia Cinotti¹² to two works: *The Triptych of the Hermits* and *The Saint*

⁶ Bernard AIKEMA, “Hieronymus Bosch and Italy?,” in: Jos KOLDEWEIJ, Bernard VERMET, Barbara VAN KOOIJ (ed.), *Hieronymus Bosch. New Insights Into His Life and Work*, transl. Beth O’Brien et alii (Rotterdam: Ludion, 2001), 31; Antoni ZIEMBA, *Sztuka Burgundii i Niderlandw1380–1500* [The Burgundian and Early Netherlandish Art 1380–1500], vol. II (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo UW, 2011), 603. See also Bernard AIKEMA, ““Stravaganze e bizzarie de chimere, de mostri e d’animali”. Over het beeld van Hieronymus Bosch in de italiaanse kunst,” *Desipientia* 8, no 2 (2001): 48–57.

⁷ “Casse otto de quadri bollade, et sigillate, piene de quadri cum li sui numeri mezo danteschi da uno sino a otto, in el palazzo del Serenissimo principe poste in una camera da basso”; quoted after: Cesare A. LEVI, *Le collezioni veneziane d’arte e d’antichità dal secolo XIV ai nostri giorni* (Venezia: Ongania, 1900), 4.

⁸ Marino was Giovanni’s elder brother; see footnote 1.

⁹ Quoted after: Pio PASCHINI, “Le collezioni archeologiche dei Prelati Grimani del Cinquecento,” *Rendiconti Pontificia Accademia Romana di Archeologia* 5 (1926–1927): 182.

¹⁰ Leonard J. SLATKES, “Hieronymus Bosch and Italy,” *The Art Bulletin* 57 (1975): 339.

¹¹ Dirk BAX, “Jeroen Bosch’ Drieluik met de Gekruisigde Martelares,” *Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen* (1961): 49.

¹² Dino BUZZATI, Mia CINOTTI, *L’opera completa di Bosch* (Milano: Rizzoli, 1966), 96 and 104.

Wilgefortis Triptych—ca. 1500, suspected that the oeuvre of Jheronimus Bosch was to some extent recognised in Italy as early as the beginning of the 16th century. The fact that there are no documents confirming the painter's journey to the Apennine Peninsula limits us to conjure only as to his stay abroad. No documents have been preserved to prove the acquisition by Cardinal Domenico Grimani of Bosch's works. It is also unknown how the paintings made their way to Venice. Bernard Aikema¹³ and Stefan Fischer¹⁴ imply that this occurred via a publisher Daniel van Bomberghen, who in the period 1515–1549 was a merchant in Venice, selling luxury goods shipped from Flanders,¹⁵ or via Lodewijk Beys, a merchant from Bosch's hometown, travelling to (and doing business in) Jerusalem in the years 1500, 1504 and 1513. The former was to buy the paintings after the artist's death and soon sell them to the cardinal.

Contemporary art historians, like the first authors of Jheronimus Bosch's monograph, Charles de Tolnay¹⁶ and Ludwig von Baldass¹⁷, are of the opinion that the panels from Venice in the vertical arrangement (2 + 2) were originally wings of a triptych which has not survived, and whose central section was to represent *The Last Judgement*,¹⁸ or that this is a separate case, of *Fortuna*.¹⁹ Isidro Bango Torviso and Fernando Marías²⁰ put forth

¹³ Bernard AIKEMA, "Hieronymus Bosch and Italy?," 29.

¹⁴ Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (2009) 102. See Godfried Christian Maria VAN DIJCK, *Op zoek naar Jheronimus van Aken alias Bosch. De feiten, familie, vrienden en opdrachtgevers, ca. 1400–ca. 1635* (Zaltbommel: Europese Bibliotheek, 2001), 54–55.

¹⁵ See Peter STABEL, "Venezia e i Paesi Bassi. Contatti commerciali e stimoli intellettuali," in Bernard AIKEMA, Beverly L. BROWN (ed.), *Il Rinascimento a Venezia*, 31–43; Maartje VAN GELDER, *Netherlandish Merchants in Early Modern Venice* (Leiden: Brill, 2009).

¹⁶ Charles DE TOLNAY, *Hieronymus Bosch*, transl. n.d. (New York: Reynal, 1966 (Basel 1937)), 353–354.

¹⁷ Ludwig VON BALDASS, *Hieronymus Bosch*, transl. n.d., (New York: H.N. Abrams, 1960) (Wien: A. Schroll., 1941), 27–28, 224.

¹⁸ E.g. Roger H. MARIJNISSEN, Peter RUYFFELAERE, *Hieronymus Bosch. Das vollständige Werk*, transl. Hugo Beyer (Antwerpen: Mercatorfonds, 2002), 302; Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch. La question de la chronologie* (Genève: Droz, 2004), 52–53; Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Abbeville Press, 2006), 348. Stefan Fischer proposes a horizontal arrangement of the wings; IDEM, *Hieronymus Bosch. The Complete Works*, transl. Karen Williams (Köln: Taschen, 2013), 254. Scholars from the Bosch Research and Conservation Project (BRCP) date the series of four visionary paintings ca. 1505–1515. The original configuration of the "Afterlife Panels" remains unknown. See. Matthijs ILSINK, Jos KOLDEWELJ, Ron SPRONK, Luuk HOOGSTEDE, Robert G. ERDMANN, Rik KLEIN GOTINK, Hanneke NAP, Daan VELDHIJZEN, *Hieronymus Bosch, Painter and Draughtsman. Catalogue Raisonné*, tr. T. Alkins, (Brussels: Mercatorfonds, 2016), 308–315 [added by the author of the article in 2019].

¹⁹ José Manuel CRUZ VALDOVINOS, "La clientela del El Bosco," in Victoria MALET (ed.), *El*

a hypothesis that the paintings used to be wings of two triptychs: *The Last Judgement* and *The Resurrection*. Charles de Tolnay²¹ implied that the work may have been a polyptych. The paintings were seen as a single whole by Patrik Reuterswård,²² who suggested that they were a triptych with the central panel made up of *The Fall of the Damned* (which panel is interpreted by the scholar as *Purgatory*) and *Earthly Paradise*. Walter S. Gibson²³ believed that the four panels were made by the painter to illustrate awards and punishments resultant from individual judgement of the deceased.

As to their iconography, the panels from the Palazzo Ducale are said to show affinities with two wings of *The Last Judgement Altar* (Lille, Palais des Beaux Arts; the central panel partially preserved—*Christ's Head*, Stockholm, Nationalmuseum; 1468/69), painted by Dieric Bouts (1410/20–1475) and commissioned by the city council of Leuven,²⁴ as well as some miniatures by Simon Marmion (ca. 1425–1489) in the manuscript *Les Visions du chevalier Tondal* (Los Angeles, The J. Paul Getty Museum, MS. 30, ca. 1470; fol. 14v, 30v), made for Princess of Burgundy Margaret of York (1446–1503).²⁵ As to *Ascent into Heaven*, apart from the left wing of *The*

Bosco y la tradición pictórica de lo fantástico (Barcelona–Madrid: Galaxia Gutenberg–Círculo de Lectores, 2006), 124.

²⁰ Isidro B. TORVISO; Fernando MARÍAS, *Bosch. Realidad, símbolo y fantasía* (Vitoria: Ediciones Sílex, 1982), 172.

²¹ Charles DE TOLNAY, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 353.

²² Patrik REUTERSWÅRD, “Hieronymus Bosch’s Four ‘Afterlife’ Panels in Venice,” *Artibus et Historiae* 24 (1991): 30.

²³ Walter S. GIBSON, *Hieronymus Bosch* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1973) (repr. 2001), 62. As for various hypotheses of the “lost” central section and the form of the work, see Beverly L. BROWN, “Dall’inferno al paradiso. Paesaggio e figure a Venezia agli inizi del XVI secolo,” in Bernard AIKEMA, Beverly L. BROWN (ed.), *Il Rinascimento a Venezia*, 432–435. See also the catalogue of the exhibition: Caterina LIMENTANI VIRDIS (ed.), *Le Delizie dell’inferno. Dipinti di Jheronimus Bosch e altri fiamminghi restaurati* (Venezia: Il cardo, 1992).

²⁴ Ludwig VON BALDASS, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 224; Walter S. GIBSON, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 61–62; Laurinda DIXON, *Hieronymus Bosch* (New York: Phaidon, 2003) (repr. 2006), 306; Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch*, 52–53; Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 348–356; Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (2013), 184. See Albert CHATELET, “Sur un jugement dernier de Dieric Bouts,” *Nederlands Kunsthistorisch Jaarboek* 16 (1965), 17–42.

²⁵ Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch*, 53; Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 348–350. See Thomas KREN, Roger S. WIECK, *Visions of Tondal from the library of Margaret of York* (Malibu, CA: J. Paul Getty Museum, 1990). On the impact of book paintings on panel paintings of Jheronimus Bosch see Suzanne SULZBERGER, “Jérôme Bosch et les maîtres de l’enluminure,” *Scriptorium* 16 (1962): 46–9; Thomas KREN, Maryan W. AINSWORTH, “Illuminators and Painters. Artistic Exchanges and Interrelationships,” in Thomas KREN, Scot MCKENDRICK (ed.), *Illuminating the Renaissance. The Triumph of Flemish Manuscript Painting in Europe* (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2003), 44–47; Erwin POKORNY, “Bosch and the Influence of Flemish Book

Last Judgement Altar by Bouts (ill. 2), two other most probable sources of inspiration for Jheronimus Bosch are Marmion's miniatures in *Le livre des sept âges du monde* (Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Ms. 9047, ca. 1455; fol. IV, fol. 12r) (ill. 3) and texts by Jan van Ruysbroeck (1293–1381).²⁶

Four panels (*Ascent into Heaven* [88.8 x 39.9 cm], *Earthly Paradise* [88.5 x 39.8 cm], *The Fall of the Damned* [88.8 x 39.6 cm], *Hell* [88.8 x 39.6 cm]²⁷) from the Palazzo Ducale are dated dendrochronologically to the 1480s (1482–1490)²⁸. The dating of the paintings proposed in 1966 by Mia Cinotti²⁹ is currently sustained by Frédéric Elsig³⁰, who implied that the paintings were made in the 1502–1503 period. Stefan Fischer³¹ assumes a later timeframe: ca. 1505–1515. Erik Larsen³² believed that the works were painted ca. 1480–1482.

* * *

In this text, which attempts to answer the question posed by the title of the study, I situate panel representing *Ascent into Heaven* primarily in two contexts fundamental for the iconographic research of this work: eschatological writings and Netherlandish/Flemish painting, and in the context of

Illumination,” in Eric DE BRUYN, Jos KOLDEWEIJ (ed.), *Jheronimus Bosch. His Sources. 2nd International Jheronimus Bosch Conference, May 22-25, 2007* ('s-Hertogenbosch: The Netherlands, Jheronimus Bosch Art Center, 2010), 281–292.

²⁶ Jacques COMBE, *Hieronymus Bosch*, transl. Ethel Duncan (London: B.T. Batsford (printed in France), 1946), 23; Walter S. GIBSON, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 64–65; Roger H. MARIJNISSEN, Peter RUYFFELAERE, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 302–304; Laurinda DIXON, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 307; Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch*, 53; Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 356–357.

²⁷ Panel sizes after: The Bosch Research and Conservation Project (BRCP): <http://boschproject.org> (access: 04.06.2014).

²⁸ Bernard VERMET, “Hieronymus Bosch. Painter, workshop or style?,” in Jos KOLDEWEIJ, Paul VANDENBROECK, Bernard VERMET, *Hieronymus Bosch. The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, transl. Ted Alkins (Rotterdam: Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2001), table p. 88; Peter KLEIN, “Dendrochronological Analysis of Works by Hieronymus Bosch and His Followers,” in Jos KOLDEWEIJ, Bernard VERMET, Barbera VAN KOOLJ, *Hieronymus Bosch. New Insights Into His Life and Work*, table p. 124. See also BRCP: <http://boschproject.org>.

²⁹ Dino BUZZATI, Mia CINOTTI, *L'opera completa di Bosch*, 98. Mia Cinotti dates the panels to 1500–1504.

³⁰ Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch*, 52–60.

³¹ Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (2013), 184, 254.

³² Erik LARSEN, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 121.

near-death experiences. Aware of the limitations and pitfalls it brings, using the term coined by Jan Białostocki—*interpretative iconography*,³³ I remain on the outskirts of the rhetoric of certainty,³⁴ within a critical discourse which is not the mainstream in the art-historical literature. My reflections focus on four motifs: the human soul, angel, tunnel, and light. Due to the impossibility of a credible reconstruction of the alleged triptych or polyptych, the wings of which were supposed to depict the afterlife, I accept, like Walter S. Gibson, the four-part form of the work created by the aforementioned Venetian panels.

The originality of Jheronimus Bosch's vision lies in a realistic rendition of the tunnel.³⁵ The "link" leading towards another reality, shown in the form of light, is traversed by naked human souls on their own. Against the background of a light circle, we see an outline of two (three?) figures; another one is introduced into the tunnel by an angel. Four representatives of the saved, presented below, are accompanied by winged angels wearing albs and coats. Each human soul, with the exception of the one shown at the highest point, assisted by one pure being, is carried by a pair of angels towards the entrance to the tunnel. The background of the journey to the afterlife is a layer of dark clouds.

The basis for an exceptionally negative statement on the moral condition of the earth's inhabitants and, consequently, the infernal finale of almost all humanity—as this is the spirit in which some paintings by Jheronimus Bosch are interpreted—is provided by two triptychs of *The Last Judgement* ascribed to the painter from 's-Hertogenbosch: *The Altar* at the Akademie der Bildenden Künste in Vienna (ca. 1482 or later) and *The Altar* from the Groeningemuseum in Bruges (ca. 1486 or later),³⁶ seen as either made by Bosch himself and/or his workshop. Some little hope for a symbolic participation in the paradise reality, which remains a mystery which St. Paul

³³ Jan BIALOSTOCKI, "Iconography," in Philip P. WIENER, *The Dictionary of the History of Ideas. Studies of Selected Pivotal Ideas*, vol. II (New York, NY: Scribner, 1973), 524.

³⁴ See Georges DIDI-HUBERMAN, *Devant l'image. Questions posées aux fins d'une histoire de l'art* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1990).

³⁵ Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch*, ill. 277, p. 353. A high-resolution illustration is available on the BRCP website: <http://boschproject.org>. Ludwig von Baldass claimed that the entrance to paradise through the tunnel was familiar to 15th-century miniature painting, however, his monograph provides no specific example of such depictions; IDEM, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 224.

³⁶ Source of the illustration: <http://www.akademiegalerie.at>; <http://vlaamseprimitieven.vlaamse.kunstcol-lectie.be> (access: 21.06.2014).

could not or would not reveal (1 Cor 2,9),³⁷ is offered by the figures of angels painted in the upper left corner of the central section of *The Altar* from Vienna, which carry the souls of the deceased towards a luminous crevice in heaven, as well as by winged human souls in the left wing of the other *Altar*. The handful of saved individuals seems to illustrate Christ's words: "For many are invited, but not all are chosen" (Mt 22,14). In his theory of predestination, St. Augustine (354–430) assumed that the number of saved will correspond to that of the fallen angels (*City of God*, 22,1).³⁸ In the panels from Venice, relative to both *Altars* which did not depict paradise, sometimes shown on the left wing, with a gate leading to heavenly Jerusalem,³⁹ Bosch preserved the balance in the representation of two dimensions of eternity—heaven and hell. Both "realms" are peopled by saved and damned in almost equal proportions. The medallions representing *Hell* and *Paradise* from the panel *Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things* (Madrid, Museo Nacional del Prado; 1500–1525),⁴⁰ considered to be a work by Bosch or his imitator, due to links with the ideas espoused in the treatises *Speculum humanae salvationis* (prior to 1324), *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* by Guillaume de Digulleville (ca. 1295–ca. 1380?), *Cordiale de quatuor novissimis*, most probably by Gerard van Vliederhoven (ca. 1340–1402) and *De quattuor novissimis* by Denis the Carthusian (1402–1471), do not allow their evaluation in the context of the painter's personal views on the ultimate matters. Still, we may notice that in the community living in paradise (the medallion from *Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*), in which the central position is occupied by Christ surrounded by angels, there are God-fearing Old Testament men and Christians.

Christian thought knows the concept of earthly pilgrimage. This state, the *status viae*, ends with death, which theology does not see as an exclusively biological fact. Treating the panels of Palazzo Ducale as a quadriptych, in

³⁷ The relevant passage reads as follows: "What no eye has seen and no ear has heard (...) all that God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor 2,9). The Latin text after *Biblia Sacra Vulgata*, ed. Robert Weber, Roger Gryson, 5th edition, Stuttgart 2007, or at the website of Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: <http://www.academic-bible.com>.

³⁸ ST. AUGUSTINE, *City of God*, transl. William Babcock (New York: New City Pr, 2012). The treatise, known at Jheronimus Bosch's time, *Van der Vorsienigheit Godes* determines that up to 2 souls out of every 30 000 ones can get to heaven. After: Dirk BAX, *Ontcijfering van Jeroen Bosch* (Den Haag: Martinus Nijhoff, 1949), 277.

³⁹ See for example the *Last Judgement* polyptych (Beaune, Hôtel-Dieu; between 1443 and 1451) by Rogier van der Weyden (1399/1400–1464), the *Last Judgement* triptych (Gdańsk, National Museum; ca. 1471) by Hans Memling.

⁴⁰ Source of the illustration: <https://www.museodelprado.es> (access: 21.06.2014).

the context of the teaching of two judgements, one individual and the other universal,⁴¹ I link Jheronimus Bosch's vision with the first of the aforementioned ideas, with an important question of an intermediary state (*status intermedius*), which refers to the manner of existence of the soul (*anima separata*) between death and the resurrection of the body at the end of time. Words offering hope for reaching heaven before the last judgement were uttered by Christ on the cross, to the contrite thief: "Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk 23,43). During the time of the painter was in force the constitution *Benedictus Deus*, announced in 1336 by Pope Benedict XII (1280/85–1342). It was a response to the statements of his predecessor, John XXII (ca. 1245–1334), who implied that souls were to see God only after last judgement and the resurrection of bodies (sermons for All Saints' Day of 1331).⁴² We read there:

By this Constitution which is to remain in force for ever, we, with apostolic authority, define the following: According to the general disposition of God, the souls of all the saints who departed from this world before the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ and also of the holy apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins and other faithful who died after receiving the holy baptism of Christ—provided they were not in need of any purification when they died, or will not be in need of any when they die in the future, or else, if they then needed or will need some purification, after they have been purified after death—and again the souls of children who have been reborn by the same baptism of Christ or will be when baptism is conferred on them, if they die before attaining the use of free will: all these souls, immediately (*mox*) after death and, in the case of those in need of purification, after the purification mentioned above, since the ascension of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ into heaven, already before they take up their bodies again and before the general judgment, have been, are and will be with Christ in heaven, in the heavenly kingdom and paradise, joined to the company of the holy angels (BF 263; DS 1000).⁴³

⁴¹ The issues of individual judgement and of an intermediary state are addressed e.g. by Josef FINKENZELLER, "Eschatologia" [Eschatology], in Wolfgang BEINERT (ed.), *Podręcznik Teologii Dogmatycznej* [A handbook of dogmatic theology], transl. Wiesław Szymona, vol. XI (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2000), 81–120; Czesław S. BARTNIK, "Traktat XI. O rzeczach ostatecznych (Eschatologia)" [Treatise XI. On the last things (eschatology)], in Czesław S. BARTNIK, *Dogmatyka katolicka* [Catholic Dogmatics], vol. II (Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2003), 838–841; Tadeusz D. ŁUKASZUK, *Ostateczny los człowieka i świata w świetle wiary katolickiej. Zarys eschatologii katolickiej* [The ultimate fate of man and the world in the light of the Catholic faith. An outline of Catholic eschatology] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PAT, 2006), 105–119; Zbigniew DANIELEWICZ, "Traktat o rzeczywistości ostatecznej" [A treatise on the ultimate reality], in Elżbieta ADAMIAK, Andrzej CZAJA, Józef MAJEWSKI (ed.), *Dogmatyka* [Dogmatics], vol. VI (Warszawa: Więź, 2007), 349–366.

⁴² See Zbigniew DANIELEWICZ, "Traktat o rzeczywistości ostatecznej," 483–487.

⁴³ Quoted after: *Breviarium fidei. Wybór doktrynalnych wypowiedzi Kościoła*, ed. Ignacy Bokwa, 3rd edition (Poznań: Księgarnia św. Wojciecha, 2007), 156. For the Latin text see Henricus

In the painting from Venice, naked souls, as we can surmise referring to the Bible and the 1336 papal constitution, upon individual judgement, if they did not require purification or upon earlier stay in purgatory,⁴⁴ are bound to heaven. *Ascent into Heaven* seems to continue the narrative begun in the *Earthly Paradise*, where the souls are most probably purified and prepare for the very last stage of the extraterrestrial journey.

Eight representatives of the universe of pure beings shown in the painting from Venice are no guardian angels (as their care over people concludes at the moment of death),⁴⁵ but rather angels—guides of souls, whose tasks relate to the activities of ancient *psychopompoi* (*ψυχοπόμοι*).⁴⁶ In biblical terms, the grounds for this identification is the passage: “The poor man died and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s embrace” (Lk 16,22).⁴⁷ The function of *psychopompos*, as testified by ancient apocrypha, is performed by angels with unique names: the angel of peace (*Testament of Asher* 6, 6),⁴⁸

DENZINGER (ed.), *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum quae de rebus fidei et morum a Conciliis Oecumenicis et summis Pontificibus emanarunt*, 3rd edition (Wirceburgi: *Sumptibus Stahelianis*, 1856), 182.

⁴⁴ See Jacques LE GOFF, *The Birth of Purgatory*, transl. Arthur Goldhammer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

⁴⁵ Referring to the biblical foundation (Tb 5,17; Hi 33,23; Ps 91,11; Mt 18,10; Acts 12,16), the Fathers of the Church taught that each man has their guardian angel, who take care of them during their earthly peregrination. See Stanisław LONGOSZ, “Opiekuńcza funkcja Aniołów w nauce Ojców Kościoła” [The guardianship of angels in the teaching of the Fathers of the Church], in Herbert OLESCHKO (ed.), *Księga o aniołach* [Book on angels] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2002), 177–192.

⁴⁶ Franz CUMONT, “Les vents et les anges psychopompes,” in Theodor KLAUSER, Adolf RÜCKER (ed.), *Pisciculi. Studien zur Religion und Kultur des Altertums* (Münster: Aschendorff, 1939), 70–75; Emanuele TESTA, “L’Angelologia dei Giudeo-Cristiani,” *Liber Annuus* 33 (1983): 286–289; Mieczysław C. PACZKOWSKI, “Aniołowie w starożytnej literaturze chrześcijańskiej (II–IV wiek)” [Angels in old Christian literature (2nd–4th c.)], in Jolanta ŁUGOWSKA, Jacek SKAWIŃSKI (ed.), *Anioł w literaturze i w kulturze* [Angels in literature and culture], vol. I (Wrocław: Wrocławskie Wydawnictwo Oświatowe, 2004), 33; Jean DANIELOU, *Aniołowie i ich misja* [Angels and their mission], transl. Katarzyna Kubaszczyk (Warszawa–Ząbki, Apostolicum, 2006), 141–154. On Hermes-Psychopompos see Pierre GRIMAL, *Słownik mitologii greckiej i rzymskiej* [Dictionary of Greek and Roman mythology] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1987), 142; Mark P.O. MORFORD, Robert J. LENARDON, *Classical Mythology*, 7th edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 267, 269, 349; Robin HARD, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology, based on H. J. Rose’s Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London–New York: Routledge, 2004), 113, 161; Amber FISCHER, “Hermes,” in Michael GAGARIN (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome*, vol. III (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 412. See also Károly KERENYI, *Hermes przewodnik dusz. Mitologem źródła życia mężczyzny* [Hermes: guide of souls], transl. Jerzy Prokopiuk (Warszawa: Sen, 1993).

⁴⁷ See Ex 23,20.

⁴⁸ *Apokryfy Starego Testamentu* [Apocrypha of the Old Testament], ed. and introductions Ryszard Rubinkiewicz, 2nd edition (Warszawa: Vocatio, 2000), 73. The text, part of the *Testaments of Twelve Patriarchs* dates back to: 134–104 BC–early 2nd AD.

angel of the covenant (*Apocalypse of Paul* 14,1–9);⁴⁹ the last text mentions moreover archangel Michael. The *topos* of an angel guide was later taken over by the middle ages. It appears e.g. in sermons (e.g. *Sermons for the Day of St. Michael* by St. Bonaventura [ca. 1217–1274])⁵⁰ and prayers.⁵¹ Every believer was strongly impacted by the message of the famous antiphon *In paradisum* (*May the angels lead you into paradise*), included e.g. in the Gelasian Sacramentary from the 8th century (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Vat. Reg. lat. 316), sung at the end of the requiem mass, during the procession towards the cemetery.⁵²

In Netherlandish panel painting, the motif of an angel carrying a soul/figure was used by, among others, Robert Campin (ca. 1375–1444)⁵³ and Petrus Christus (1415/201475/76) (ill. 4),⁵⁴ in the rendition of the theme from the cycle: *The Glory of Mary—Dormition of Mary*. Another theme of this cycle, *The Assumption of Mary*, with a prominent motif of an angel, is represented by paintings by the Master of the Legend of St. Lucy (active ca. 1475–1505)⁵⁵ and Michiel Sittow (ca. 1469–1525/26).⁵⁶ In the years ca.

⁴⁹ *Apokryfy Nowego Testamentu. Listy i Apokalipsy chrześcijańskie* [Apocrypha of the New Testament. Christian letters and apocalypses], ed. Marek Starowieyski (Kraków: WAM, 2001) (repr. 2007), 251. *Apocalypse of Paul* was penned between mid-2nd and mid-3rd century; it is one of the most popular apocrypha.

⁵⁰ David KECK, *Angels and Angelology in the Middle Ages* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 204.

⁵¹ André WILMART, *Auteurs spirituels et textes dévots du moyen âge latin* (Paris: Bloud et Gay, 1932), 544.

⁵² David HILEY, *Western Plainchant. A Handbook* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 45. Initially, the antiphon *In paradisum* was recited during the washing of the deceased person's body, only later was it used during the procession. Bogusław NADOLSKI, *Liturgika* [Liturgics], vol. III: *Sakramenty, sakramentalia, błogosławieństwa* (Poznań: Pallottinum, 1992), 278. The text in this reading: "In paradisum deducant te Angeli; in tuo adventu suscipiant te martyres, et perducant te in civitatem sanctam Ierusalem. Chorus angelorum te suscipiat, et cum Lazaro quondam paupere aeternam habeas requiem," was a merger of two antiphons *In paradisum* and *Chorus angelorum*. The document which confirmed the joint wording of both within one text is the Franciscan Breviary of 1260. See Richard RUTHERFORD, Tony BARR, *The Death of a Christian. The Order of Christian Funerals*, 2nd edition (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 100.

⁵³ The painting is known only from replicas and a copy. One of them (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Gemäldegalerie) is by Bartolomé Bermejo (ca. 1440—after 1495). See Till-Holger BORCHERT (ed.), *The Age of Van Eyck. The Mediterranean World and Early Netherlandish Painting 1430–1530*, transl. Ted Alkins, et al. (Ghent–Amsterdam: Ludion, 2002), 264 (information in the catalogue, no. 110).

⁵⁴ The painting (San Diego, The Timken Museum of Art) dates to 1460–1465. Source of the illustration: <http://www.timkenmuseum.org> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁵⁵ The painting (Washington, The National Gallery of Art) dates to 1485–1500. Source of the illustration: <http://www.nga.gov> (access: 21.06.2014).

1455–1460, Simon Marmion made paintings for the *Altar of St. Bertin*; The National Gallery in London holds two upper panels of the wings. In the painting *The Soul of St. Bertin carried up to God*⁵⁷ two angels accompany the seventh-century monk in his eschatological journey (ill. 5). The winged creatures as guides of souls were painted by Dieric Bouts in the aforementioned left wing of *The Last Judgement Altar—Ascent into Heaven*.⁵⁸ Each of the five groups of the saved is guided by an angel. One of the representatives of the immaterial world, after breaking away from the top of the mountain, introduces the soul of a man into the illuminated ring of clouds, which is a gateway to another reality. An attempt to prove a direct dependence of the type: pattern—its imitation, between the wing of *The Last Judgement Altar* by Bouts and Jheronimus Bosch's painting (see the central panel of *The Last Judgement* triptych from Vienna) is not the intention of the author here, even if iconographic affinities are unquestionable. The motif is exemplified in book painting, e.g. in *Arenberg Hours* (Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, Ms. Ludwig IX 8; fol. 221r)⁵⁹ from the early 1460s executed in Bruges and in *William Hastings Hours* (London, The British Library, Add. MS 54782; fol. 230r),⁶⁰ from between 1475 and 1483, made probably in Ghent or Bruges. Iconographic analogies between a miniature from the second codex and the panel from Venice include the motif of an angel carrying a naked soul and the visualisation of heaven shown as a “space” in a golden hue, with two circles surrounding Christ.

The *topos* of the tunnel, a single-direction “connection” between the earthly world and the heavenly one, was known to ancient cultures; it features, among others in the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Table IX).⁶¹ The symbolism of the tunnel involves the hardships of the transition to a new life. The tunnel plays an important role in the initiation rites. It is a permanent element of architecture, which appears in medieval literature

⁵⁶ The painting (Washington, The National Gallery of Art) dates to ca. 1500. Source of the illustration: <http://www.nga.gov> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁵⁷ Source of the illustration: <http://nationalgallery.org.uk> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁵⁸ Source of the illustration: <http://www.pba-lille.fr> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁵⁹ Source of the illustration: <http://www.getty.edu> (access: 21.06.2014). The miniature is by Willem Vrelant (active ca. 1454–1481).

⁶⁰ Scot MCKENDRICK, *Flemish Illuminated Manuscripts 1400–1550* (London: British Library, 2003), ill. 41, p. 56. The illuminations are ascribed to Master of the First Prayer Book of Maximilian I (active ca. 1475–1520).

⁶¹ *The Epic of Gilgamesh. The Babylonian Epic Poem and Other Texts in Akkadian and Sumerian*, transl. Andrew George (London: Penguin Books, 2003).

(*La Prise d'Orange*, 12th century; *Sir Orfeo*, 14th century), but not in visionary writings, where a bridge is the most common element.⁶² As Manfred Lurker wrote apropos of Jheronimus Bosch's painting from the Doges' Palace "In myths, sagas and tales, the intermediary realm, the no one's land may take the form of a forest, highland, river, or sea."⁶³ In reference to the rites of "passage," Mircea Eliade pointed to two motifs: a dangerous bridge and a narrow gate.⁶⁴ When discussing myths and rites of initiation, he invoked three other motifs: tree, line and ladder.⁶⁵ In Christian culture, a ladder is a significant connector between two worlds. Patriarch Jacob saw in his dream "God's angels were going up and down on it" (Gn 28,12). The Gospel according to Matthew mentions in two passages a narrow gate (Mt 7,13–14) and a needle's eye (Mt 19,24). Let us bear in mind that Charles de Tolnay⁶⁶ saw the tunnel in Bosch's paintings as a Manichean "column of glory," symbol of the journey of a soul to heaven. Prayers are also supposed to be conveyed through this transmission channel.

The question of Jheronimus Bosch's knowledge of two miniatures (fol. IV and fol. 12r)⁶⁷ with astral elements, showing God in the centre of the universe, made by Simon Marmion in the manuscript of *Le livre des sept âges du monde*, remains undecided. Although the representation of God (fol. 12r) surrounded by eight celestial spheres (in the first, external, the moon dominates, while the last one is occupied by seraphim) is closer to the picture of the tunnel from the Venetian painting, the spatial qualities of this illumination are far from the "three-dimensional" vision of the Brabant painter. Probably both artists had some knowledge of astronomy from before Copernicus,⁶⁸ and were versed in astrology.⁶⁹ Following ancient authors, the

⁶² See Jean CHEVALIER, Alain GHEERBRANT, *The Penguin Dictionary of Symbols*, transl. John Buchanan-Brown (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1996), 1040–1041. On visionary literature, see footnote 103.

⁶³ Manfred LURKER, *Przesłanie symboli w mitach, kulturach i religiach* [The message of symbols in myths, cultures and religions], transl. Ryszard Wojnakowski (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2011), 365.

⁶⁴ Mircea ELIADE, *Sacrum a profanum. O istocie sfery religijnej* [The sacred and the profane. The nature of religion], transl. Bogdan Baran (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2008), 194–196.

⁶⁵ Mircea ELIADE, *Traktat o historii religii* [A history of religious ideas], transl. Jan Wierusz Kowalski (Warszawa: Aletheia, 2000), 117–122.

⁶⁶ Charles DE TOLNAY, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 354.

⁶⁷ Source of the illustration: <http://balat.kikirpa.be> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁶⁸ See Rudolf SIMEK, *Erde und Kosmos im Mittelalter. Das Weltbild vor Kolumbus* (München: Beck, 1992); Edward GRANT, *Planets, Stars, and Orbs. The Medieval Cosmos, 1200–1687* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Michel-Pierre LERNER, *Le monde des sphères*, vol. I–II

following succession of heavenly bodies was adopted: Earth, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. They were followed by the sphere of permanent stars—*Primum Mobile*, followed by *Empyreum*. Unlike Marmion, Bosch gave up the division of the tunnel into eight parts and astrological references (signs of the zodiac). While both approaches do not conclusively prove alleged affinities, they are arguments in their contestation. Five circles of the tunnel in *Ascent into Heaven* do not correspond to the first five heavenly zones (Earth—Sun), because only the compatibility of the sun's sphere with the light closing the tunnel would give rise to such an assumption.

In the search for the iconographic sources of the Venice panel one should take into account late medieval illustrations of the cosmos, which, however, is usually presented in the form of concentric spheres with centrally located earth (e.g. *L'Image du monde* by Gossuin de Metz, 13th century, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 14964; fol. 117r), never as a tunnel, a very rare motif in religious late medieval painting. The manuscript *Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine* (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 376) contains an unusual illumination (fol. 160r), which shows the solar circle in the centre of the universe; the manuscript was made in Rennes ca. 1425–1450 (ill. 6).⁷⁰ As a literary source of inspiration for Jheronimus Bosch, one can point to St. Paul's account of the ascending of a man "still in the body? (...) or out of the body" to heaven; its structure, while it does not have five parts, demonstrates a complex composition and is tripartite (2 Cor 12,2).⁷¹ Certain indications for interpretation are to be found in the specula-

(Paris: Belles Lettres, 1996–1997); Stephen C. McCLUSKEY, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) (repr. 2000); John NORTH, *Cosmos. An Illustrated History of Astronomy and Cosmology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 232–301.

⁶⁹ On Jheronimus Bosch see e.g.: Anna BOCZKOWSKA, "The Lunar Symbolism of the 'Ship of Fools' by Hieronymus Bosch," *Oud Holland* 86 (1971): 47–69; EADEM, "Lunar and Christian symbolism of the painting 'The marriage at Cana' by Hieronymus Bosch," *Studia Muzealne* 11 (1975): 7–24; EADEM, "The Crab, the Sun, the Moon and Venus. Studies in the Iconology of Hieronymus Bosch's Triptych 'The Garden of Earthly Delights'," *Oud Holland* 91 (1977): 197–231; EADEM, *Hieronim Bosch. Astrologiczna symbolika jego dzieł* [Hieronymus Bosch. Astrological symbolism of his works] (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy Imienia Ossolinskich, 1977); EADEM, *Tryumf Luny i Wenus. Pasja Hieronima Boscha* [Triumph of Luna and Venus. The passion of Hieronymus Bosch] (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1980).

⁷⁰ Source of the illustration: <http://mandragore.bnf.fr> (access: 21.06.2014).

⁷¹ The idea of a complex construction of heaven can be found in the *Slav Book of Henoah* (1–36), most probably harking back to the Byzantine source from the 9th c. AD. The heavenly reality was revealed to Henoah, accompanied by two angels.

tive thought of ancient Greece and its later resonance in the Bible. Namely, in the Pythagorean system, the number five as a result of addition of a prime even number and an odd number, a male and a female element, was symbolic of a wedding.⁷² In this context, the number appears in the eschatological parable of five foolish and five wise virgins, who went out to meet the groom (Mt 25,1–13). The figure of the groom facilitates a parallel with the Song of Songs, a book which is read in literal as well as figurative terms, as an image of the relationship of Christ with His Church, or even in the mystical way, as a union of souls with God.⁷³ Given the interest of Lynda Harris in Manichean and Cathar elements in Bosch's oeuvre (the number five is of key importance⁷⁴), it is interesting to note her opinion that the painting from Venice as far from heretical, but actually exceptional and mystical.⁷⁵

It cannot be ruled out that Jheronimus Bosch, referring to his astronomical knowledge and his own optical-visual experience,⁷⁶ visualised a simplified cosmos, whose individual zones must be traversed by a human soul upon leaving the body on its way to heavenly Jerusalem. Can the painter's hypothetical reflection on the Pythagorean tradition and biblical texts be linked to the representation of a five-part tunnel in *Ascent into Heaven*? Note that the number of tunnel rings corresponds to the number of souls carried by angels. It is impossible to unequivocally state whether this analogy is intended and whether the five-part structure of the tunnel has symbolic meaning.

⁷² Christoph RIEDWEG, *Pythagoras. Leben, Lehre, Nachwirkung. Eine Einführung* (München: C.H. Beck, 2002), 109, 170; Christiane L. JOOST-GAUGIER, *Measuring Heaven. Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 106, 170; Leonid ZHMUD, *Pythagoras and the Early Pythagoreans*, transl. Kevin Windle, Rosh Ireland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 448. See also Vincent FOSTER HOPPER, *Medieval Number Symbolism. Its Sources, Meaning, and Influence on Thought and Expression* (New York: Dover, 1938) (repr. Mineola 2000), 43; Eli MAOR, *The Pythagorean Theorem. A 4,000-year History* (Princeton, NJ: Oxford: University Press, 2007), 20–21.

⁷³ See e.g. *Sermones super Cantica Cantorum of Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153)*.

⁷⁴ Annemarie SCHIMMEL, *The Mystery of Numbers*, transl. Franz C. Enders, Annemarie Schimmel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 110.

⁷⁵ Lynda HARRIS, *The Secret Heresy of Hieronymus Bosch*, 2nd edition (Edinburgh: Floris Books, 2002), 205.

⁷⁶ The exploration of the Binnendieze canal system fed by the river Dieze in the centre of 's Hertogenbosch, with its numerous bridges and tunnels created by the construction of individual waterways as a result of urban expansion within the city walls, provides an interesting experience. We should also pay attention to a certain element of sacred architecture. Namely, some rosettes in the facades or other gable walls of Gothic churches filled with decoration (stained-glass window) with a concentric arrangement, are adorned with the central image of Christ, *sol salutis*.

Heaven, as numerous passages from the New Testament attest,⁷⁷ is a state of personal human existence, rather than a tangible, physical place; it is a metaphorical “space”⁷⁸ of co-existence with Christ-God (Jn 14,3; Phil 1,23; 1 Thes 4,17). Although we are to see Him “as He is” (1 J 3,2), “face to face” (1 Cor 13,12), in accordance with the testimony of St. Paul, the Lord of Lords “whose home is in inaccessible light, whom no human being has seen or is able to see” (1 Tim 6,16).⁷⁹ The mystery of theophany was indicated moreover by St. John the Evangelist (Jn 1,18; 6,46). The image of heaven, which essence is *visio Dei / visio beatificans*, inscribed in these few passages from the New Testament, leaves us in cognitively ambiguous situation. The key statement concerning the “heavenly kingdom” (Mt 7,21), found in the aforementioned constitution *Benedictus Deus, is as follows*: “the souls of all the saints [...] have seen and see the divine essence with an intuitive vision, and even face to face, without the mediation of any creature by way of object of vision; rather the divine essence immediately manifests itself to them, plainly, clearly and openly” (BF 263; DS 1000).⁸⁰

A radiographic examination of the panel from Venice indicated in the luminous circle a presence of a silhouette of God.⁸¹ The preserved state of the painting, then, would prove a change of the painter’s original idea, closer to the official interpretation of the Church and medieval iconography of heaven with anthropomorphic representations of Christ-God. In light of the above, an attempt to prove correlations between the panel by Jheronimus Bosch and the oeuvre of Jan van Ruysbroeck, which the painter could have known through the religious movement called *devotio moderna*,⁸² originating

⁷⁷ See Augustyn JANKOWSKI, *Eschatologia Nowego Testamentu* [Eschatology of the New Testament] (Kraków: WAM, 2007), 137–145.

⁷⁸ On various biblical images of heaven, see Josef FINKENZELLER, *Eschatologia*, 227–235.

⁷⁹ See 1 Tim 1,17.

⁸⁰ Quoted after: Ignacy Bokwa (ed.), *Breviarium fidei*, 156–157. Latin text: *Enchiridion Symbolorum et Definitionum*, 182. At the Council of Florence of 1439 it was added that the blessed will enjoy vision proportionate to their merits (DS 1305).

⁸¹ Frédéric ELSIG, *Jheronimus Bosch*, 53. See BRCP: <http://boschproject.org>.

⁸² This implication is to be found in Roger H. MARIJNISSEN, Peter RUYFFELAERE, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 303. In the treatise *The Imitation of Christ* [*De imitatione Christi*], ascribed to the German mystic Thomas à Kempis (ca. 1379–1471), we read about the eschatological light: “Peace will come on a day that is known only to the Lord, and it will not be a day or night such as we know now, but it will be everlasting light, infinite brightness, steadfast peace, and secure rest” (3,47). Thomas à Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, transl. William C. Creasy (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2007), 107. Latin text see Tiburzio LUPO (ed.), *De imitatione Christi libri quattuor* (Citta del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1982). On the subject of *devotio moderna* see Regnerus R. POST, *De Moderne Devotie. Geert Groote en zijn stichtingen* (Amsterdam: Kampen, 1940);

in the 14th century in the Netherlands, seems justified. By far the most prominent work by the Brabant theologian and mystic that conveys the *topos* of light seen symbolically and metaphorically is *The Realm of Lovers* (*Dat rike der ghelieven*).

Light, which remains undoubtedly a physical phenomenon, belongs to the permanent repertoire of linguistic means of religious art.⁸³ Different categories of light, brightness, and luminosity appear very often in the accounts of mystics referring to God.⁸⁴ The concepts of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (5th/6th century), who invokes in the aspect discussed here *The Republic* (VI, 509B) by Plato (ca. 427–347 B.C.), was known in the West thanks to a translation by John Scotus Eriugena (ca. 800–ca. 877).⁸⁵ The

Emile BROUETTE, Reinhold MOKROSCH, *Devotio moderna*, in Gerhard MÜLLER, Horst BALZ, Gerhard KRAUSE (ed.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. VIII (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1981), 605–616; John H. VAN ENGEN, *Devotio Moderna. Basic Writings* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1988), 5–61; Margaret ASTON, *Faith and Fire. Popular and Unpopular Religion 1350–1600* (London–Rio Grande, OH: Hambledon Press, 1993), 169–177; Hein BLOMMESTIJN, Charles CASPERS, Rijklof HOFMAN (ed.), *Spirituality Renewed. Studies on Significant Representatives of the Modern Devotion* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003); Otto GRÜNDLER, “Devotio moderna,” in Jill RAITT (ed.), *Duchowość chrześcijańska. Późne średniowiecze i reformacja* [Christian spirituality. High Middle Ages and Reformation], transl. Piotr Blumczyński, vol. II (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2011), 181–197.

⁸³ On the subject of light in Christian culture see Otto Böcher, *Licht und Feuer*, in Gerhard MÜLLER, Horst BALZ, Gerhard KRAUSE (ed.), *Theologische Realenzyklopädie*, vol. XXI (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1991), 83–119; Klaus HEDWIG, *Licht, Lichtmetapher*, in Robert-Henri BAUTIER, Robert AUTY (ed.), *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, vol. V (München–Zürich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1991), column 1959–1962; Agostino PARAVICINI BAGLIANI, *Light*, in André VAUCHEZ, Barrie DOBSON, Michael LAPIDGE (ed.), *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages*, transl. Adrian Walford, vol. II (Cambridge–Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 2000), 849–850; Dorothea FORSTNER, *Świat symboliki chrześcijańskiej. Leksykon* [The world of Christian symbols. Lexicon], transl. Wanda Zakrzewska, Paweł Pachciarek, Ryszard Turzyński, 2nd edition (Warszawa: PAX, 2001), 92–97; C. Ewa SCHÜTZINGER, *Light (metaphysics of)*, in Berard L. MARTHALER (ed.), *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, vol. VIII, 2nd edition (Farmington Hills: Cengage Learning cop., 2003), 583–584. The subject of light in medieval art is raised by among others Graziella Federici Vescovini, *Luce*, in Angiola Maria ROMANINI (ed.), *Enciclopedia dell'Arte Medievale*, vol. VIII (Roma: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 1997), 25–35.

⁸⁴ See Kurt RUH, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. I–III (München: Beck, 1990–1996); Bernard MCGINN, *The Presence of God. A History of Western Mysticism*, vol. I–V (New York: Crossroad, 1991–2007); Paul L. GAVRILYUK, Sarah COAKLEY (ed.), *The Spiritual Senses. Perceiving God in Western Christianity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1–223. On mysticism in the Netherlands see Kurt RUH, *Geschichte der abendländischen Mystik*, vol. IV (*Die niederländische Mystik des 14. bis 16. Jahrhunderts*) (München: Beck, 1999); Rik Van Nieuwenhove, Robert FAESEN, Helen ROLFSON (ed.), *Late Medieval Mysticism of the Low Countries* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008).

⁸⁵ See Paul ROREM, “The Early Latin Dionysius. Eriugena and Hugh of St. Victor,” in Sarah COAKLEY, Charles M. STANG (ed.), *Re-thinking Dionysius the Areopagite* (Chichester: Wiley-

popularity of *Corpus Dionysiacum* is proven by the comments made e.g. by St. Albert the Great (ca. 1193–1280), St. Bonaventura and St. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225–1274). In the treatise *On the Divine Names* (*De divinis nominibus*) Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite wrote: “After all, light comes from goodness and is an image of goodness. Hence goodness is praised under the name of light; and so the original is revealed in its reflection” (IV, 4).⁸⁶ A little further, at the end of the argument, he added: “In accordance with its characteristics—the visible image of goodness—light gathers and attracts to itself all that one sees, what moves, and what is able to receive light and warmth” (IV, 4).⁸⁷ Light is a recurrent element of the description of heaven.⁸⁸ Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) in *The Divine Comedy* (*Divina Commedia*) in very expressive yet simple terms showed the Empyrean as “Heaven which is itself pure Light; Light intellectual which is full of Love, Love of true Goodness which is full of Joy; Joy which transcendeth every kind of Pleasure” (*Paradise*, 30,39–41).⁸⁹

Jan van Ruysbroeck, whose texts demonstrate identifiable traces of impact of the Neo-Platonians, the mysticism of Cistercians, Victorines, Franciscans, and Rhine authors, begins the first chapter of *The Realm of Lovers* with an analysis of the word “Lord”, which implies creative powers. This is what he thought of angels, with whom God adorned heaven, beings to own “the infinite kingdom of eternal immutability” (I): “Spirits turning to God are happy since the turn of each power takes place in the light of glory, and

Blackwell, 2009), 71–84. The theologian referred to the world as follows: “Omnia quae sunt lumina sunt” (*In Ierarchiam Caelestem*, 1.1). Jeanne BARBET (ed.), *Iohannis Scoti Eriugena. Expositiones in Ierarchiam Caelestem* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1975), 3.

⁸⁶ PSEUDO-DIONIZY AREOPAGITA, *Pisma teologiczne. Imiona Boskie, Teologia Mistyczna, Listy* [Theological writings, On the Divine Names, Mystical Theology, Letters], transl. Maria Dzielska (Kraków: Znak, 1997), 80. For the Greek text see Beate R. SUCHLA (ed.), *Corpus Dionysiacum Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, De divinis nominibus* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1990). See commentary in Sarah KLITENIC WEAR, John M. DILLON, *Dionysius the Areopagite and the Neoplatonist Tradition. Despoiling the Hellenes* (Aldershot–Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 17–18.

⁸⁷ PSEUDO-DIONIZY AREOPAGITA, *Pisma teologiczne. Imiona Boskie*, 81.

⁸⁸ See Jeffrey B. Russell, *A History of Heaven. The Singing Silence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Jan S. EMERSON; Hugh FEISS (ed.), *Imagining Heaven in the Middle Ages. A Book of Essays* (New York: Garland Pub, 2000); Carolyn MUESSIG, Ad PUTTER, Gareth GRIFFITH, Judith JEFFERSON (ed.), *Envisaging Heaven in the Middle Ages* (Abingdon–New York: Routledge, 2007).

⁸⁹ Alighieri DANTE, *The Divine Comedy*, transl. Courtney Langdon (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1921), 353. The Italian text: “ciel ch’è pura luce:/ luce intellettuale, piena d’amore/ amor di vero ben, pien di letizia” (*Paradise*, 30, 39–41). Giorgio PETROCCHI (ed.), *La Commedia secondo l’antica vulgata*, vol. IV (Milano: Mondadori, 1967), 406. See comment on light: Christian MOEVS, *The Metaphysics of Dante’s Comedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 17–21.

they find pleasure and essential brightness in the Divine unity” (I).⁹⁰ Using the antonym of brightness, he observed that the intellect of spirits turned to one another which are unhappy “was obscured by sin and removed from Divine brightness” (I).⁹¹ The notions such as *lumen gloriae* and *lux gratiae*, seen as the gift of “the light of glory”, a precondition for fathoming God, who is in His essence unfathomable, had already developed in patristic theology.⁹² Jan van Ruysbroeck saw this gift as indispensable on the path of moving closer towards the Creator, upon man’s reaching the end of their own capabilities. It is then that, according to the mystic “God comes with supernatural light and illuminates intellect” (IV, 3).⁹³ Through the gift of counsel (actually its higher degree) with the aid of the Holy Trinity it is possible to come closer to the Divine being:

Divine Persons concentrate in unity and naturally turn to the essence with delight. The gulf [between creation and God] behaves like a simple light—it is the very Being itself, shining in the unity of Persons and in the unity of every concentrated spirit created, at its peak seeking pleasure. This incomprehensible light enlightens the concentrated intellect of the spirits, for it is the eternal Wisdom born in the soul. In this light you can see the simplicity from which light is born—the nature of God. Only in this light, which is Christ,⁹⁴ can one blissfully see an incomprehensible being. He, in his human and divine nature, is the gate through which one has to pass. Only he can enter the palace of eternal pleasure, whoever lives according to the model of Christ the man, who contemplates and returns to himself in His immeasurable clarity. The simple light of this being is inexhaustible, immeasurable and infinite. It embraces the unity of the Divine Persons, the unity of the soul and of all its powers, it embraces and permeates the natural fundamental aspiration and delightful adherence to God and to all those whom He has united with Himself in this light. Thus arises the delightful unity of God and loving spirits, for all spirits above themselves, in an immeasurable light, in a divine way are immersed in delightful unity. In this incomprehensible light in which they immerse themselves, the work of God and creatures ceases (...) Here God and all those united with Him are transformed by simple light” (IV, 4e).⁹⁵

⁹⁰ *Królestwo miłujących* [The realm of lovers], in *Bl. Jan van Ruysbroec. Dzieła*, transl. Maria Lew-Dylewski, vol. I (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Karmelitów Bosych, 2000), 54. Original text see Jean B. DAVID (ed.), *Werken van Jan van Ruysbroec*, vol. IV (*Dat rike der ghelieven, Vanden vier becoringhen, Vanden seven sloten, Van seven trappen*) (Gent: Maetschappij der Vlaemsche Bibliophilien, 1861). The text of the work is available also on the website of the Digitale Bibliotheek voor de Nederlandse Letteren: <http://www.dbnl.org>.

⁹¹ *Królestwo miłujących*, 54.

⁹² See Czesław S. BARTNIK, *Traktat XI. O rzeczach ostatecznych*, 899–900.

⁹³ *Królestwo miłujących*, 72.

⁹⁴ *The Spiritual Espousals (Die gheestelike brulocht)* define Christ as “an eternal sun,” “glorious Sun,” “Divine brightness” (II, BC, 1a); *Zasłubiny duchowe*, in *Bl. Jan van Ruysbroec. Dzieła*, vol. I, 180.

⁹⁵ *Królestwo miłujących*, 106–107.

The Realm of Lovers treatise concludes with reflections on the five meanings of the term kingdom of God: “For the fifth time, it is shown to the lover of the kingdom of God in an immeasurable, divine light, above reason, in a spirit focused on the existence of God. There man receives a threefold fruit: immeasurable brightness, incomprehensible love and divine delight” (V, E). This is how Jan van Ruysbroeck described their interplay: “Immeasurable brightness and incomprehensible love permeate the soul to such an extent that it experiences the third fruit, i.e. bliss. This delight is so great that God, all the saints and major people are immersed and dissolved in infinity—in ignorance and eternal loss, but they find the utmost taste in this immersion and dissolution” (V, E). The man whom he describes as “common” is to remain essentially in God, “so that he may be transformed into an immense clarity, as the divine Persons at any moment immerse themselves in an immense being and overflow with delight” (V, E)⁹⁶.

Bosch’s vision of the encounter of human souls with God no doubt corresponds with the mystical vision of Jan van Ruysbroeck, a vision of heaven as man’s coexistence in the unity of the three Divine Persons, whose nature is light.⁹⁷ However, the fundamental difficulty in accepting this correlation lies in the assumption of the painter’s knowledge of the theologian’s texts.⁹⁸

Interestingly, generally literature related to Bosch leaves out the Bible when seeking ideological sources of the painting from Venice.⁹⁹ Although

⁹⁶ *Królestwo miłujących*, 130.

⁹⁷ The image of heaven in *The Realm of Lovers* is not the only one left by Jan van Ruysbroeck. In *Christian Faith (Vanden kerstenen ghelove)* he implied, just like St. Augustin in *The City of God* (22, 19) that the saved in the heavenly kingdom will use both inner and outer eyes and ears (2, 1). *Wiara chrześcijańska* [Christian faith], in *Bl. Jan van Ruusbroec. Dzieła*, vol. III, 67.

⁹⁸ See Antoni Ziemia’s criticism of the concept of theological program in Netherlandish painting; IDEM, *Sztuka Burgundii i Niderlandów*, 658–694. See the extant contract for the execution of the *Last Supper Altar* for the Brotherhood of the Most Blessed Sacrament at the Sint-Pieterskerk in Louvain, signed in 1464 by Dieric Bouts. While the consultations gathered theologians, the contract does not have phrases of clearly dogmatic nature. The content of the contract see Wolfgang STECHOW, *Northern Renaissance art, 1400–1600. Sources and documents*, 3rd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Northwestern University Press, 1999), 10–11.

⁹⁹ See Beryl SMALLEY, *The Study of the Bible in the Middle Ages* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1964); Katherine WALSH, Diana WOOD; (ed.), *The Bible in the Medieval World. Essays in Memory of Beryl Smalley* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); Bernard S. LEVY (ed.), *The Bible in the Middle Ages. Its Influence on Literature and Art* (Binghamton, NY: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1992); Giuseppe CREMASCOLI, Claudio LEONARDI (ed.), *La Bibbia nel Medioevo* (Bologna: Edizioni dehoniane, 1996); Robert E. LERNER, Elisabeth MÜLLER-LUCKNER (ed.), *Neue Richtungen in der hoch- und spätmittelalterlichen Bibelexegese* (München: Oldenbourg, 1996); Susan BOYNTON, Diane J. REILLY (ed.), *The Practice of the Bible in the Middle Ages. Production,*

Jacques Le Goff wrote that: “*Doctrina christiana*—is first of all and instead of all Holy Scripture. *Sacra pagina* will be the foundation of all medieval culture—yet the reader is separated from the text by a double pillar,”¹⁰⁰ which according to the scholar is both the difficult text that calls for exegesis and the substantial length of the Book itself. However, works by Jheronimus Bosch prove a substantial level of the painter’s familiarity with both the Old and the New Testament (themes, motifs, quotations). Jeanne van Waadenoijen, when interpreting the painter’s *oeuvre* in the context of late medieval Christian thought, indicates in particular the Bible.¹⁰¹ In the Book of Psalms, the God of Israel is called the sun (Ps 84,12). His attribute is light, with which He is “clothed with majesty and glory” (Ps 104,2), “light lives with Him” (Dt 2,22). God is light, and “there is no darkness in Him at all” (1 Jn 1,5). The transcendent character of light is indicated in the Book of Wisdom: “[Wisdom] is the reflection of the eternal light, untarnished mirror of God’s active power” (Wis 7,26). The metaphor of a reflection of light demonstrates the tenet of the faith concerning the identity of two persons of the Holy Trinity. Christ—*Lumen de Lumine* is “the reflection of God’s glory and bears the impress of God’s own being” (Hbr 1,3).¹⁰² “The Ruler of all, King of kings, and Lord of lords” has His home in “inaccessible light,” beyond the impact of death (1 Tim 6,15–16). Christ spoke about himself as follows: “I am the light of the world; anyone who follows me will not be walking in the dark, but will have the light of life” (Jn 8,12), and called those who follow Him “children of light” (Jn 12,36). Heavenly Jerusalem needs no sun and no moon since it is illuminated by the glory of God, with the Lamb as its lamp; “the nations will come to its light” (Rev 21,24). Shouldn’t the source research of Bosch’s image include the rich symbolism of light in relation to God-Christ and heaven¹⁰³ which emerges from the Bible, the fundamental and universally available source text?

Reception, & Performance in Western Christianity (New York–Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2011).

¹⁰⁰ Jacques LE GOFF, *Kultura średniowiecznej Europy* [Culture of medieval Europe], transl. Hanna Szumańska-Grossowa, 3rd ed. (Gdańsk–Warszawa: Marabut–Volumen, 2002), 151–152.

¹⁰¹ Jeanne VAN WAADENOIJEN, “The Bible and Bosch,” in Eric DE BRUYN, Jos KOLDEWEIJ (ed.), *Jheronimus Bosch. His Sources*, 334–345. See also EADEM, *De ‘geheimtaal’ van Jheronimus Bosch. Een interpretatie van zijn werk* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2007); Dick HEESEN, *De geheime boodschap van Jeroen Bosch* (‘s-Hertogenbosch: Jheronimus Bosch Art Center, 2010).

¹⁰² See Jn 1,1.

¹⁰³ See Manfred LURKER, *Słownik obrazów i symboli biblijnych* [Dictionary of Biblical Terms and Symbols], transl. Kazimierz Romaniuk (Poznań: Pallotinum, 1989), 237–239; André FEUILLET, Pierre GRELOT, *Światło i ciemności* [Light and the dark], in Xavier LÉON-DUFOUR (ed.), *Słownik*

Medieval visionary literature (the protagonist of the vision is guided either by an angel or archangel)¹⁰⁴ offers accounts of travels to the afterlife made *in corpore*, in one's dreams and in a state which we call today near-death experience (NDE). The latter is addressed in the analysis of the panel from Venice by Patrik Reuterswård.¹⁰⁵ In his opinion, the content of the painting does not dramatically differ from the accounts of people who "were brought back to life". A short allusion to near-death experience was made by Paul Vandenbroeck¹⁰⁶ in the margin of his reflections on the depictions of paradise in Jheronimus Bosch's painting. This phenomenon was likewise mentioned by Stefan Fischer.¹⁰⁷ Of major importance in the debate at hand is the opinion of the medieval scholar Peter Dinzelbacher, who also links Bosch's painting to NDE.¹⁰⁸ An increased interest in NDE was undoubtedly

teologii biblijnej [Dictionary of biblical theology], transl. Kazimierz Romaniuk, 4th edition (Poznań: Pallotinum, 1990), 958–963; "Światło" [Light], in Leland RYKEN, Jim WILHOIT, Tremper LONGMAN III (ed.), *Słownik symboliki biblijnej. Obrazy, symbole, motywy, metafory, figury stylistyczne i gatunki literackie w Piśmie Świętym* [Dictionary of biblical symbols. Images, symbols, motifs, metaphors, stylistic devices, and literary genres in the Holy Bible], transl. Zbigniew Kościuk (Warszawa: *Vocatio*, 2003), 984–988.

¹⁰⁴ The core medieval set of source texts related to trips to the afterlife composed of twelve texts, from the Vision of *Barontus* through Dante's *Divine Comedy* was offered by Jacques Le Goff; IDEM, *Świat średniowiecznej wyobraźni* [The world of medieval imagination], transl. Maria Radożycka-Paoletti (Warszawa: Dom Wydawniczy Bellona, 1997), 112–113. See Peter DINZELBACHER, *Vision und Visionsliteratur im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1981); Jacqueline AMAT, *Songes et visions. L'au-delà dans la littérature latine tardive* (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1985); Maria P. CICCARESE, *Visioni dell'aldilà in Occidente. Fonti, modelli, testi* (Firenze: Nardini, 1987); Peter DINZELBACHER, *Mittelalterliche Visionsliteratur. Eine Anthologie* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1989); Eileen GARDINER (ed.), *Visions of Heaven and Hell Before Dante* (New York: Italica Press, 1989); Peter DINZELBACHER, *Revelationes* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1991); Eileen GARDINER, *Medieval Visions of Heaven and Hell. A Sourcebook* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993); Claude CAROZZI, *Le voyage de l'âme dans l'au-delà d'après la littérature latine (Ve–XIIIe siècles)* (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 1994); Jacek SOKOLSKI, *Pielgrzymi do piekła i raju. Świat średniowiecznych łacińskich wizji eschatologicznych* [Pilgrims to hell and paradise. The world of medieval Latin eschatological visions], vol. I (Wrocław: Tow. Przyjaciół Polonistyki Wrocławskiej, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ Patrik REUTERSWÅRD, *Hieronymus Bosch's Four 'Afterlife' Panels*, 31.

¹⁰⁶ Paul VANDENBROECK, "Hieronymus Bosch. The wisdom of the riddle," in Jos KOLDEWEIJ, Paul VANDENBROECK, Bernard VERMET, *Hieronymus Bosch. The Complete Paintings and Drawings*, 187.

¹⁰⁷ Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (2013), 184.

¹⁰⁸ Peter DINZELBACHER, *Himmel, Hölle, Heilige. Visionen und Kunst im Mittelalter* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002), 106–107.

due to the books by Raymond A. Moody Jr.,¹⁰⁹ published in the 1970s. NDEs are currently examined by representatives of various scholarly disciplines.¹¹⁰ The degree of polarisation of opinions on NDE in the scientific community is reflected in two research positions outlined below. While the psychologists Dean Mobbs and Caroline Watt¹¹¹ attempt to explain NDE in rational terms, cardiologist Pim van Lommel¹¹² sees NDE as genuine experience which cannot be explained by references to the power of imagination, psychoses or disorders in brain operation.

There are certain recurrent elements in accounts of Westerners who have experienced near-death experience; the core set includes as many as ten of them.¹¹³ They include those present in Jheronimus Bosch's painting, namely a luminous figure sometimes interpreted as an angel, tunnel and light.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Raymond A. MOODY JR., *Life After Life. The Investigation of a Phenomenon-Survival of Bodily Death*, (Atlanta: Mockingbird Books, 1975) (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 1980); IDEM, *Reflections on Life After Life* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 1977).

¹¹⁰ Below find a list of major texts from the 21st century P.M.H. ATWATER, *The Big Book of Near-Death Experiences. The Ultimate Guide to What Happens When We Die* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads, 2007); Ornella CORAZZA, *Near-Death Experiences. Exploring the Mind-Body Connectio* (Oxford–New York: Routledge, 2008); Janice M. HOLDEN, Bruce GREYSON, Debbie JAMES, (ed.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences. Thirty Years of Investigation* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2009); Jeffrey LONG, Paul PERRY, *Evidence of the Afterlife. The Science of Near-Death Experiences* (New York: HarperOne, 2010); Michael N. MARSH, *Out-of-Body and Near-Death Experiences. Brain-State Phenomena Or Glimpses of Immortality?* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); Mahendra PERERA, Karuppiah JAGADHEESAN, Anthony PEAKE (ed.), *Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences. A Handbook of Clinicians* (London–Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2012); Duncan A. MCKENZIE, *The Near Death Experience. A Clinical Investigation* (Raleigh, NC, 2014). See also International Association for Near-Death Studies: <http://iands.org>; Horizon Research Foundation: <http://www.horizonresearch.org>.

¹¹¹ Dean MOBBS, Caroline WATT, "There is nothing paranormal about near-death experiences. How neuroscience can explain seeing bright lights, meeting the dead, or being convinced you are one of them," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 15, no 10 (2011): 447–449.

¹¹² Pim VAN LOMMEL, *Consciousness Beyond Life. The Science of the Near-Death Experience*, transl. Laura Vroomen (New York: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2010). See an article co-authored by the aforementioned physician, which text is the first fully scholarly attempt to interpret NDE: Pim van LOMMEL, Ruud van WEES, Vincent MEYERS, Ingrid ELFFERICH, "Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest. A prospective study in the Netherlands," *The Lancet* 15 (2001): 2039–2045. See also Bruce GREYSON, Emily W. KELLY, Edward F. KELLY, "Explanatory models for near-death Experiences," in Janice M. HOLDEN, Bruce GREYSON, Debbie JAMES (ed.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, 213–234. Interesting in the context of the opinion of Pim van Lommel, due to the author, a US neurosurgeon, who described out of body experience and NDE, when he was in a coma, is a controversial book by Eben Alexander: *Proof of Heaven. A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2012).

¹¹³ Christian AGRILLO, "Near-Death Experience. Out-of-Body and Out-of-Brain?," *Review of General Psychology* 15 (2011), table 1, p. 2. See Janice M. HOLDEN, Jeff LONG, Jason MACLURG,

Near-death experience is known to many cultures and religions.¹¹⁵ In the West, the first reference to NDE is Plato's story about a soldier by the name of Er, which the philosopher contained in *The Republic* (X, 614B–621D).¹¹⁶ Attempts to link medieval visions with contemporary records of NDE were made by Carol Zaleski,¹¹⁷ who pointed out numerous analogies. Nevertheless, the fundamental difference between what medieval authors recorded and contemporary studies is in the nature of these "revelations" belonging to different cultural backgrounds. While the medieval visions are dominated by eschatological aspects, their modern counterparts are dominated by psychological aspects. The fact remains that NDE, due to its partly non-empirical character, despite interdisciplinary attempts to capture the nature of this phenomenon, eludes unambiguous evaluation. In the discourse, in the context of identifying sources of the Palazzo Ducale painting, the issue of the essence of NDE is irrelevant. In other words, both near-death experience

Characteristics of Western near-death experiences," in Janice M. HOLDEN, Bruce GREYSON, Debbie JAMES (ed.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, 109–134.

¹¹⁴ The question of angels and tunnel in a reviewed periodical are addressed by: Craig R. LUNDAHL, "Angels in near-death experiences," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no 1 (1992): 49–56; Susane J. BLACKMORE, Tom S. TROŚCIANKO, "The physiology of the tunnel," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 8, no 1 (1989): 15–28; See also Anthony PEAKE, "Light and Near-Death Experiences," in Mahendra PERERA, Karuppiah JAGADHEESAN, Anthony PEAKE (ed.), *Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences*, 103–116.

¹¹⁵ Allan KELLEHEAR, "Census of Non-Western Near-Death Experiences to 2005. Observations and Critical Reflections," in Janice M. HOLDEN, Bruce GREYSON, Debbie JAMES (ed.), *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences*, 135–158; Farnáz MASUMIAN, "World Religions and Near-Death Experiences," in IBIDEM, 159–184; Christopher M. MOREMAN, *Beyond the Threshold. Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); Ornella CORRAZZA, K.A.L.A. KURUPPUARACHCHI, "Dealing with Diversity. Cross-Cultural Aspects of Near-Death Experiences," in Mahendra PERERA, Karuppiah JAGADHEESAN, Anthony PEAKE (ed.), *Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences*, 51–62.

¹¹⁶ PLATO, *The Republic*, transl. George M.B. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992). Jan N. Bremmer mentions five examples from antiquity, starting with Plato; IDEM, *The Rise and Fall of the Afterlife* (London–New York: Routledge, 2002), 90–96.

¹¹⁷ Carol ZALESKI, *Otherworld Journeys. Accounts of Near-death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987). See Peter DINZELBACHER, *An der Schwelle zum Jenseits. Sterbevisionen im interkulturellen Vergleich* (Freiburg: Herder Taschenbuch Verl., 1989); Marc van UYTFANGHE, "Les Visiones du très haut Moyen Age et les récentes 'expériences de mort temporaire'. Sens ou non-sens d'une comparaison. I," *Instrumenta Patristica* 23 (1991): 447–481; IDEM, "Les Visiones du très haut Moyen Age et les récentes 'expériences de mort temporaire'. Sens ou non-sens d'une comparaison. II," *Sacris Erudiri* 33 (1992–1993): 135–182. See also a joint work by a psychiatrist and a medieval scholar: Jerome KROLL, Bernard BACHRACH, *The Mystic Mind. The Psychology of Medieval Mystics And Ascetics* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

interpreted as exclusively religious experience,¹¹⁸ and phenomena outside of the field of scholarly research have the same value.

Three iconographic elements of the Venetian painting inevitably beg questions about the painter's relationship with NDE. Did Jheronimus Bosch know any contemporary or earlier stories about journeys to the afterlife? It cannot be completely ruled out that the painter had a vision of the ultimate reality; after all, he was a member of the Marian Brotherhood called *Illustre Lieve Vrouwe Broederschap* from 's-Hertogenbosch. Devout prayer of profound meditation might have acted as a kind of window.

As to late medieval eschatological iconography, *Ascent into Heaven* remains, using a vivid phrase from the Gospel according to Matthew—"a voice calling in the desert" (Mt 3,3).¹¹⁹ As a religious image of the highest degree, with mystical power of expression,¹²⁰ it does not conform to the model theories of Hans Belting and Keith Moxey (anthropological theory and poststructuralist theory) and comes closer to the kind of thinking of Jeanne van Waadenoijen (biblical approach). The answer to the question whether Jheronimus Bosch's vision is a phantasm, or a religious imagination, or whether it is backed up by an experience of extra-historical reality, is in fact double. On the basis of data gathered in the study, the content of *Ascent into Heaven* can be ascertained by references to sources of inspiration the most frequently quoted in relevant literature: a painting by Dieric Bouts, miniatures by of Simon Marmion and texts by Jan van Ruysbroeck. Its content can be equally well captured, let me stress once more, through the reference to

¹¹⁸ The interpretation of NDE from the Christian perspective is provided by the following authors: Carol ZALESKI, *The Life of the World to Come. Near-Death Experience and Christian Hope* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996); Mark Fox, *Religion, Spirituality, and the Near-death Experience* (London–New York: Routledge, 2003). See also Elisabeth W. FENSKE, "The Near-Death Experience. An Ancient Truth, A Modern Mystery," *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 8, no 3 (1990): 129–149; Paul BADHAM, "Religious Significance of Near-Death Experiences," in Mahendra PERERA, Karuppiah JAGADHEESAN, Anthony PEAKE (ed.), *Making Sense of Near-Death Experiences*, 117–121.

¹¹⁹ On the reception of Jheronimus Bosch's painting see Gerd UNVERFEHRT, *Hieronymus Bosch. Die Rezeption seiner Kunst im frühen 16. Jahrhundert* (Berlin: Mann, 1980); Larry SILVER, *Hieronymus Bosch*, 361–398; Stefan FISCHER, *Hieronymus Bosch* (2013), 234–235.

¹²⁰ I would venture to say that there is some kind of correspondence between the image of Jheronimus Bosch from the Palazzo Ducale and the apophatic theology, which assumes the impossibility to comprehend God.

the role of the artist's imagination (categories of *inventio* and *fantasia*), which cannot be left out in the first interpretation, harking back to his knowledge of theology, nature and his own optical and visual experiments. The above interpretation, stressing the impact of biblical logosphere (Ps 84,12; 104,2; Dn 2,22; Lk 16,22; 23,43; Jn 8,12; 12,36; 2 Cor 12,2; 1 Tim 6,15-16; 1 Jn 1,5; Acts 21,24), takes into account the unquestionable religious experience of the painter from 's-Hertogenbosch, arising from his being a Church member (liturgy, sermons, prayers). The factor of an epistemological importance which influences the form of the answer to the title question is hypothetical non-verifiable Bosch's personal transcendental experience, thus it becomes impossible to evaluate the translation of what is spiritual (experience) into visual (image). Due to the elusive, not fully scientific nature of NDE this phenomenon must be excluded from the final conclusion, despite identifiable similarities between NDE and the panel from the Palazzo Ducale.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Jheronimus Bosch, *Ascent into Heaven*, oil on panel, ca. 1502-1515, Venice, Palazzo Ducale.
2. Dieric Bouts, left wing of The Last judgement Altar, oil, panel, 1468/ 69, Lille, Palais des Beaux Arts.
3. Simon Marmion, *God Amidst Heavenly Spheres, Le livre des sept âges du monde*, ca. 1455, Brussels, Koninklijke Bibliotheek van België, Ms. 9047, fol. 12r.
4. Petrus Christus, *The Dormition of Mary*, oil on panel, ca. 1460-1465, San Diego, The Timken Museum of Art.
5. Simon Marmion, *The Soul of St. Bertin Carried up to God*—wing of the *Altar of St. Bertin*, oil on panel, ca. 1455-1460, London, The National Gallery.
6. *Heavenly Spheres, Le Pèlerinage de la vie humaine*, ca. 1425-1450, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. fr. 376, fol. 160r.

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FANTASY OR A TRANSCENDENT EXPERIENCE?
STUDY OF THE PAINTING *ASCENT INTO HEAVEN*
BY JHERONIMUS BOSCH FROM THE PALAZZO DUCALE IN VENICE

Summary

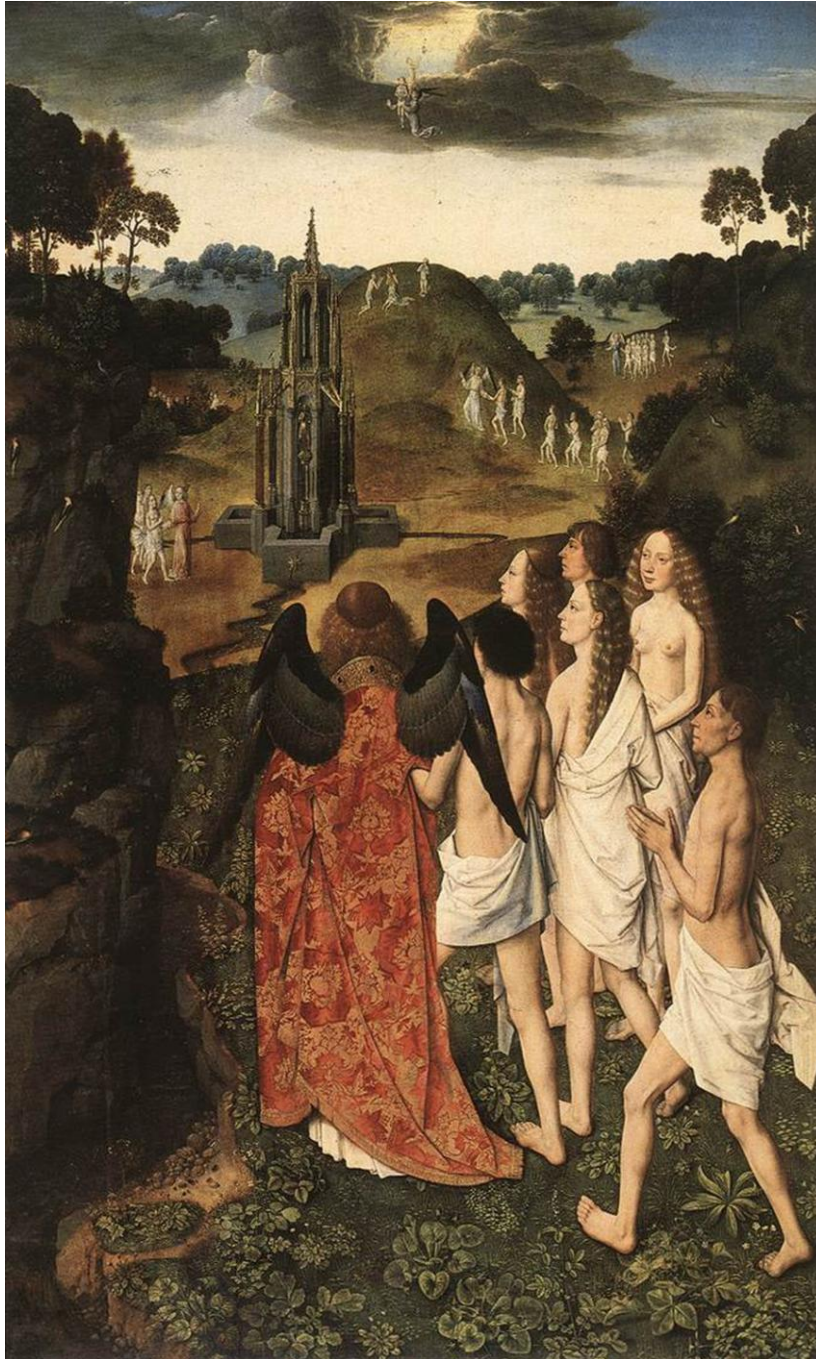
The painting *Ascent into Heaven* (88.8 x 39.9 cm; *dendrochronological dating*: 1482–1490) kept in the Palazzo Ducale in Venice is one of the four eschatological panels (the other three are: *Earthly Paradise*, *Fall of the Damned*, *Hell*) which probably were in the collection of the Venetian Cardinal Domenico Grimani in the 1520s. The panels' original arrangement and function are unknown. The paintings are not signed and their attribution to Jheronimus Bosch (c. 1450–1516) is based largely on the grounds of stylistic criteria. In the study, I put *Ascent into Heaven* into two fundamental contexts for the iconographic analysis of this work: eschatological literature and Netherlandish/ Flemish painting and in the context of near-death experiences (NDE) as well. The answer to the question posed in the title of the study must remain twofold. On the basis of the data gathered in the study, the content of the painting can be comprehended by references to the most frequently quoted sources of inspiration for Bosch: one painting by Dieric Bouts (left wing of the *Last Judgement Altarpiece*; Lille, Palais des Beaux Arts), two illuminations by Simon Marmion (*Le livre des sept Ages du monde*; Brussels, Bibliothèque royale de Belgique, Ms. 9047, fols. IV & 12r) and a literary work *Dat rike der ghelieven* by Jan van Ruusbroec. Its content can be equally understood by reference to the role of the painter's imagination (categories of *inventio* and *fantasia*), using his theological and astronomical knowledge. The above line of interpretation that emphasizes the influence of biblical logosphere, takes into account undeniable religious experience of the painter from 's-Hertogenbosch resulting from being a member of the Church. The factor of an epistemological importance which influences the form of the answer to the title question is hypothetical non-verifiable Bosch's personal transcendental experience, thus it becomes impossible to evaluate the translation of what is spiritual (experience) into visual (image). Due to the elusive, not fully scientific nature of NDE this phenomenon must be excluded from the final conclusion.

Key words: Jheronimus Bosch; Netherlandish painting; medieval eschatology; angels; tunnel; light.

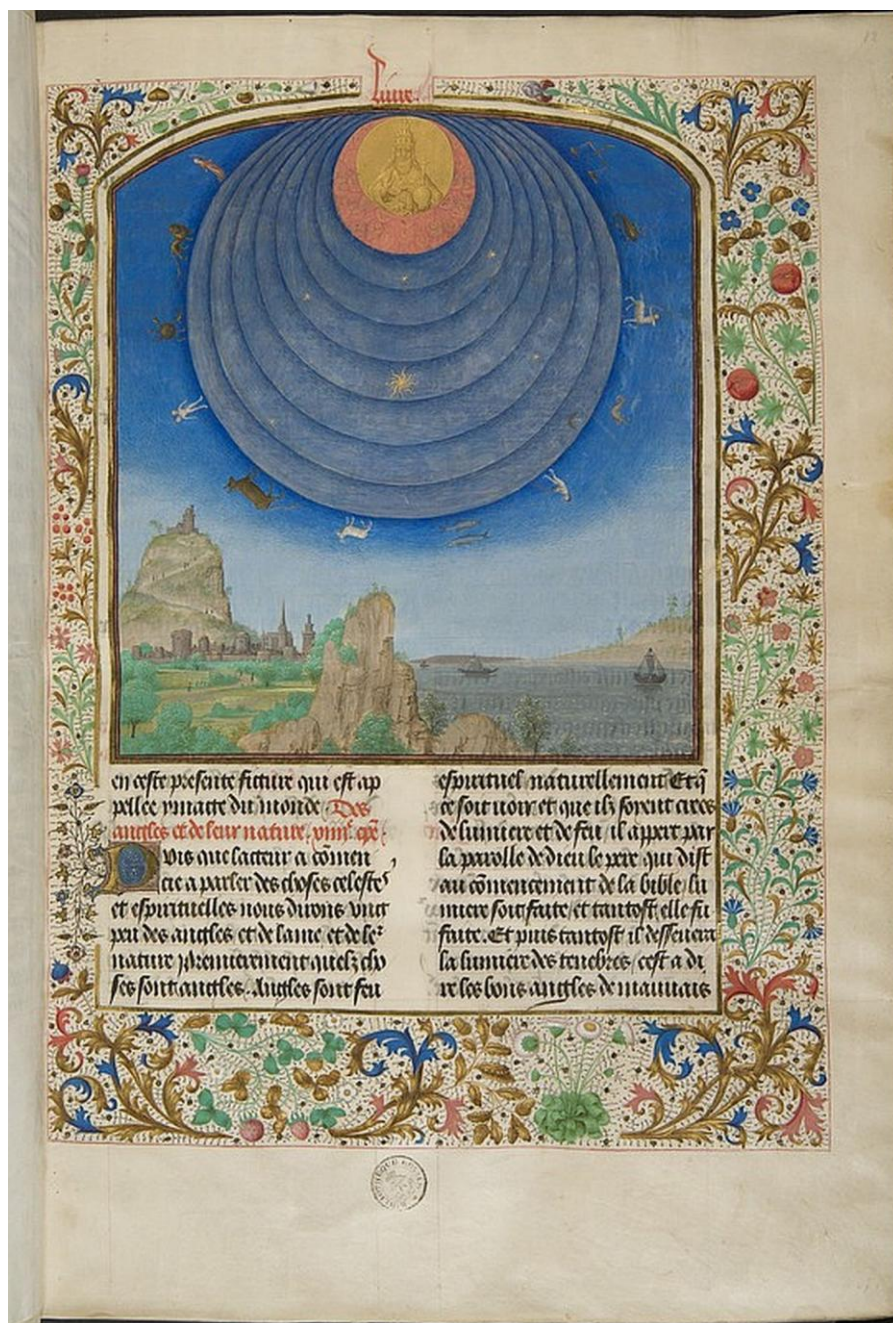
Translated by Marcin Turski



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