

THE PAINTED BOOK OF GENESIS IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

By W. R. LETHABY, F.S.A.

Mr. O. M. Dalton's most valuable work, *Byzantine Art and Archaeology*, in bringing together a great body of material fully documented, makes it much more possible for English students to work on Early Christian art, a field which they have strangely neglected. The use of his volume has led to my re-examining one of the treasures, now sadly dimmed, of the British Museum, and I should like to offer these notes by way of appreciation of his work.

The famous "Cotton Bible,"¹ a book of the fifth or sixth century, the charred fragments of which have been carefully mounted at the British Museum, still awaits a final study by some one who is prepared to collate all the information available, and to employ the services of an artist skilled in copying early pictures. The existing morsels have never yet been properly published, although Mr. Dalton has shown in his fine volume how clearly some of them reproduce. As is frequently the case, it is possible that the camera would bring out points which cannot be seen, and any specially clear figure, if it were enlarged two or three times in size, would give a valuable impression of the style of the original.

The manuscript was imperfect when first described, in 1696; it began at chapter i, verse 13, with the word "evening," and it consisted of 165 leaves of parchment, having 250 paintings. The book was rather square in form and not large. In Owen's edition of Grabe's collation of the text it is called a quarto. From several of the existing fragments we find that the column of text and pictures on a page is now about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches high and $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide in their present shrunken state; it also appears that full pages of text had, in several cases, 28 lines of writing, some seem to have had less and one

¹ Otho, B. 6.



NO. 1. COTTON GENESIS. THE CREATION OF TREES.
From a copy at Paris, published by M. Omont.



NO. 2. COTTON GENESIS. THE CALL OF ABRAHAM.
From a copy at Paris, published by M. Omont.



[From photograph lent by the Clarendon Press.]

COTTON GENESIS. PART OF THE PICTURE OF LOT LEAVING ABRAHAM.
ENLARGED.

or two had as many as 29 lines. The margins were small. Only a few whole lines of the writing exist, and the scraps which remain were much contracted by the heat. In the British Museum catalogue of manuscripts it is said that the shrinkage in size caused by the fire may have been about one third. According to a note in the volume itself the size of the page was about $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches by $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches, but unless there is a record of which I am ignorant this seems an excessive estimate. Astle gives a valuable engraving of more than a dozen lines of the text "made while the writing was in its original state, before the parchment was contracted by the fire." The lines were about $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long, and he shows about five lines of writing to two inches, but the lines must be too widely spaced.¹ The letters were a sixth or seventh of an inch high. In the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, there are some manuscript copies of parts of the text, as well as careful copies in colour of two of the pictures, made c. 1620, before the manuscript was injured. These two pictures have never been published in colour, nor have the three portions of text comprising 18 lines been reproduced in facsimile. According to Omont, who published photographic blocks of the two pictures (plate 1), the lines of text are 16 to 17 centimetres long (average $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches), and the letters are 4 mm. high.

Comparison with the present state of the manuscript thus indicates a shrinkage of between one sixth and one fifth. The pictures usually, indeed so far as can be known, always, ran across the column of writing. On folio 59 the full width (length) of one exists and this evidently filled the column, being about $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches long in its present state. Frequently, as shown by the existing fragments, there were two paintings on a page; in such cases they had little height and were placed one over the other, separated by a line or two of writing. Some of them had a double "register" of figures within the same border. These borders are usually about one eighth inch wide, of bright red between two black lines, with one or two gold lines on the red.

One of the two copies of the miniatures at Paris, that

¹ He shows the spaces wider than the line of letters, but the reverse is the case.

of the Call of Abraham, is $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches wide (long), and its height was $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches. The second copy, that of the Creator and three "angels," is $6\frac{3}{4}$ by $5\frac{7}{8}$ inches¹ (plate 1). Omont naturally supposes that they may be of the same size as the original, but the existing fragment of the former is now only $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches high, and a part of the latter is now only $3\frac{3}{4}$. These sizes would suggest a shrinkage of nearly one half, or say two fifths, in the pictures, and, considering that one of the copies is $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, while the writing was about 7 inches long, we may conclude that the copies are bigger than the originals.

In the first volume of *Vetusta Monumenta*, twenty-one fragments of as many pictures were engraved, when they were in a much better condition than they are at present, and their subjects were identified. The pictures seem to have directly followed the text to which they referred.

In 1889, J. J. Tikkanen, in a remarkable study comparing the pictures in this manuscript with the mosaics in the vestibule of St. Mark's church, Venice, proved that the mosaics were copied from our manuscript or from a similar book.²

The importance of this really wonderful piece of critical work in restoring to us much additional knowledge of the burnt pictures is hardly yet realised, if we may judge by recent references to the miniatures. It may be thought that he used the manuscript to compare with the mosaics, rather than the mosaics to restore the miniatures. In any case it is desirable that his results should be taken as the foundation for a thorough reconstructive study of our codex, and that every fragment that can be interpreted should be adequately illustrated. There are many points with which the Finnish scholar did not deal, and some few, perhaps, which he did not notice. Moreover his work was illustrated by poor little diagrams sufficient for the identification of compositions but without value as representations. In Paris, as has been said above, there are careful copies of two of the lost miniatures in colour, and we need colour facsimiles of these as a beginning.

Taking Tikkanen's results for granted, I wish to suggest

¹ 130 by 195 mm. and 150 by 175 mm.

² *Die Genesismosaiken, etc.*

how much there is that may still be known of the practically destroyed manuscript, and in dealing specially with two or three groups of subjects I may even pick up some crumbs which have been missed. Then I desire to set out a claim that the manuscript originated in Alexandria, and to suggest that it probably belongs to the early fifth rather than to the sixth century.



FIG. 1.

This Cotton Genesis must, before the fire, have been the most important illuminated manuscript of the early Christian period which then existed. The fragments now at the British Museum are at first almost hopelessly disappointing, but if by comparative study about forty or fifty subjects can be brought back, some with certainty and others with a high degree of probability, it will be worth the labour.

Folio 1. The first existing fragment is from the left-hand side of a picture, the bottom part of which

is filled with well-drawn foliage which is enough to identify it, as Tikkanen said, with the subject of God and three "angels" recorded in one of the two Paris copies (plate 1). Slight traces of the figure of the Creator having a gold nimbus, and of the fluttering garments of two of the "angels" can still be seen ; an enlarged photograph might bring much of it back. This fragment is sufficient to show the perfect accuracy of the Paris copy, and it is most interesting that an authentic piece of this exquisite subject actually exists.



FIG. 2.

As will be shown below, the three "angels" are impersonations of Days. This is the ultimate source of the "Days of Creation" by Burne-Jones.

Folio 1, verso. At the back of the first fragment is part of a picture which had a dark circle in the centre, on the right of which are flowing lines of drapery in gold. Reference to the Venice Creation series shows that this design agrees with the representation either of the second or the third day of the Creation (I shall show further on that it is with the third), but not with the first day, as suggested by Tikkanen. No traces of the other days now exist in the manuscript ; but the Venice series are assuredly all of one style and from one early source : the same types of Creator and "angels" are repeated throughout.

Folio 3. In the next extant fragment we again pick up the Venice Creation series. On the recto and verso of the same fragment we have two parts of two pictures relating to Eve. In the first the Creator stands on the left behind Eve, who is being presented to Adam. ("And brought her to the man.") (fig. 1). The lines on the drapery of the Creator are gold on white.

The following subject, the Temptation, is lost. It was probably beneath the other on the same page.

Folio 3, verso. This fragment at the back of the last shows Eve in the middle of the picture facing to the right, her arm lifted and extended towards Adam, of whom hardly a trace remains (fig. 2). These two subjects relating to Eve are exactly like the Venice representations of the giving of Eve to Adam and of her offering him the fruit. In the manuscript the figure of Eve in the former subject is beautifully drawn, but unfortunately the head is destroyed. In the second, however, it is quite perfect, and it would be a good work to have a careful restored drawing made of the Creator and of Eve, based on a photographic enlargement.

So exactly did the Venice mosaic repeat the manuscript that slight traces of a cruciform sceptre can be seen in the hand of the Creator, when looked for, which has been missed by Westwood in his engraving of this figure and by Tikkanen.

From this point in the Venice Creation series there are seven more subjects, the last being the expulsion and the digging of the ground. There are twenty-six mosaic subjects in all. As the extant fragments of the manuscript pictures, representing four subjects, two from the beginning of the series and two from near the end, agree with four of the mosaics exactly, we may safely conclude that the whole of the Creation pictures in our book were accurately copied into mosaic. A question now arises as to the order of the manuscript fragments. At Venice the inscription "In principio," etc. begins nearly over the scene which was on the first existing fragment, in which, when perfect, the Creator and three "angels" appeared against a background of trees (plate 1). As a matter of fact, the inscription begins to the left of it, but Tikkanen takes the words as a title to the picture which he supposes to represent the Creation of the Earth on the first day. Omont in describing the Paris copies supposes that this subject represents the placing of the cherubim "eastwards in Eden," and in this he is followed by Leclercq in Cabrol's Dictionary (s.v. *Ange*). Garrucchi had supposed that the subject was a fancy of the artist's. This same subject, however, has at Venice generally been read as the third day, as in Dr. A. Robertson's *Bible of St. Mark's*, and there cannot be a doubt that in fact it does represent the bringing

forth of herbs and trees. If it were not so, the creation of trees is not represented in the mosaics. The break in the several zones of the mosaics occurs at one meridian line of the dome, if this counts as the third subject, but not if it is the first. In this subject the varieties of trees and herbs is insisted on, and under a tree is a short inscription *LIGNUM POMI*. If we follow the whole scheme of days as represented in the mosaics, we find that the first day has one "angel," the second has two, the fourth has four, the fifth five, the sixth six, and the seventh has a seventh who is being blessed. The "angels" are evidently impersonations of the days, and the picture with three "angels" is thus necessarily the third day. In this scene they are even crowned with leaf garlands. In the manuscript this picture comes directly after the verse "and the evening and the morning were the third day," that is the 13th verse of chapter i, of which the earlier part as we saw, was lost. Thus one of the two Paris copies was from the first page of the manuscript as it existed when the copies were made (plate 1). A mosaic from Halicarnassus on the north-west staircase of the British Museum has impersonations of the four seasons, winged figures clothed in tunics leaving bare arms, similar to the figures which we may now say are proved to be Days.

The picture on the verso with a dark globe and traces of golden-draped "angels" to the right comes directly after the words "and the evening and the morning were the fourth day." This then was the fourth day and not the division of light from dark as Tikkanen supposed. It agrees perfectly with the fourth day of the mosaics, which had a globe bearing the light of heaven and four "angels" to the right of it.

It is evident that at least one leaf has entirely disappeared. In fact it is practically certain that two leaves are lost, for one would not contain the first eleven verses of Genesis together with two or four pictures. That there were indeed four miniatures on two lost leaves is shown by the fact that on the Venice dome two of the three first days each have two scenes or acts. In the first day, act 1 shows the dove above the waters and act 2 the separation of light from darkness. In the

third day, act 1 is the appearance of dry ground and act 2 the creation of trees and herbs.

That this was also the arrangement in the manuscript is made sure by the fact that the first fragment which now exists gives the second act of the third day (creation of trees) as a *separate* picture.

Hence we reach the conclusion that leaf i had on the recto the dove over the waters, and on the verso the separation of light from darkness. Leaf ii had on the recto the creation of the firmament in the second day. On its verso was the first act of the third day, leaving the second act of that day to come opposite on the recto of leaf iii (existing now as folio 1). This was high up on a page, and the following picture which shows on the verso was low down, leaving a longer interval than usual for text between the two.

We have a check that we are right up to this point, for, as we have seen, we possess another fragment further on, showing Eve being given to Adam, which is the seventeenth scene in the Venice dome. Now if we mark in the first two chapters of Genesis the approximate positions of the seventeen mosaic pictures we shall find that they all come at about similar intervals to those just suggested for the first six pages of the manuscript book.

Again, the mosaic pictures are twenty-six in all, ending with the expulsion and digging of the ground. Following the same spacing, this number would carry us to the right place in the text and to the end of the third chapter of Genesis.

The Creation series, I conclude, occupied thirteen folios of the manuscript, one being on each page. There seems to be no possibility of doubt that the first 26 miniatures in the manuscript were all accurately copied in proper order into mosaic, and that the book may so far be restored. These Creation pictures are compositions of extraordinary beauty. The seven days are all magnificent types. In the Creation of Man he is first modelled out of dark earth; then the breath of life enters him as a winged Psyche. Adam is now placed in Eden where four impersonations of rivers recline. The creation of Eve is exquisite: first Adam sleeps; then Eve is seen erect, the Creator still supporting her by the wrist; then Eve

is presented to Adam. The forbidden tree is the fig. The serpent speaks from a cypress near by. In some of the mosaic scenes the Creator is seated on a jewelled throne; this I have no doubt was so in the manuscript: compare the jewel decoration in the mosaic at Sta. Pudentiana in Rome.

The cursing of the serpent is also a beautiful design, showing Adam and Eve kneeling before the Creator. Then follow the clothing of them and the expulsion. On this last the tree of life is seen with the cross rising above it.

It should be mentioned that the Creator is throughout represented in the form of Christ, the head beardless, with a nimbus having cruciform projections. He is shod, and in some cases carries a cruciform sceptre. It may be questioned if God the Father was ever figured in ancient art. There is said to be a case in Sta. Costanza, where the giving of the law seems to be contrasted with the giving of the Gospel, but here too the figure was doubtless designed in the form of Christ.

In the other mosaics of the vestibule at St. Mark's, which represent the stories of Abel, Noah, Abraham, Lot and Joseph, there are obviously many other borrowings from the same book. In some cases, however, as in the deluge series, there are variations and adaptations to limited spaces, while many subjects were evidently omitted.

Beyond the Creation series, therefore, comparisons can only be made one by one. On fragment 4, recto, is the birth of Abel (two pictures) and on the verso was the sacrifice of Cain and Abel; these are represented at Venice. Just enough of the Cain remains to show that the action was like his figure in the mosaic, where the hand of God pointing to Abel, is like others in the manuscript, and the altar was of an antique type which is found on an early ivory and in a catacomb picture.¹ The same general composition is followed on the bronze door at Hildesheim; Abel on the left has a lamb, Cain on the right a sheaf; the altar is omitted, but the hand of God is here. These three compositions, then, can be restored by reference to the mosaics.

¹ Dalton, fig. 115; Peratè, fig. 63.

Folio 6, verso, shows a woman dressed in green at the door of a house. Apparently this is part of "the sons of God and the daughters of men."¹ Several pictures representing the births of the patriarchs followed, and one is possibly the death of Adam. A fragment now out of place towards the end of the volume has a fine woman's figure standing in front of a curtained door. It related to Arphaxad, son of Shem (fig. 3). Several pictures of the deluge story followed. The deluge series at Venice, while evidently founded on the miniatures, do not follow them so



FIG. 3.

accurately as did the Creation set. On folio 10, verso, there is a large part of the Ark high up in the picture, and below seem to be traces of people or beasts; it must be the entry of animals. Folio 11, recto, has the Ark in the background, with the family of Noah in front, alternately male and female. "And Noah went in with his sons." This was accurately copied at Venice, and the picture may consequently be restored.

Folio 12, verso, has the Ark floating on the waters; it was a square box-like thing, and the picture probably

¹ Cf. Tikkanen, xiv, 110.

showed it entirely closed, a simple oblong on the flood: "and the waters prevailed upon the earth" (fig. 4). There were at least two other Ark pictures, fragments of which are engraved in *Vetusta Monumenta*. One probably showed the release of the raven, and the other had the sending forth of the dove: compare the Venice mosaics. In the mosaics, the chief alteration from the manuscript pictures appears to be in the form of the Ark, which has a roof instead of the flat lid of the manuscript. At Venice is a sacrifice of Noah, with an antique form of altar, and this doubtless was taken from the manuscript.

On fragment 13, verso, is part of the drunkenness of Noah: this is an instance of a double "register" in one frame; see also 5 and 41. This subject was repeated very accurately in the mosaic. At Venice there is the burial of Noah, the body being wrapped like a mummy; this too must have come from the manuscript. On 14 came the building of the Tower of Babel; it seems that external scaffolding was shown. Folio 15 is a small part of the Confusion of Speech; it may be noted that the upper part of this, as engraved in *Vetusta Monumenta*, is inserted towards the end of the book on folio 130.

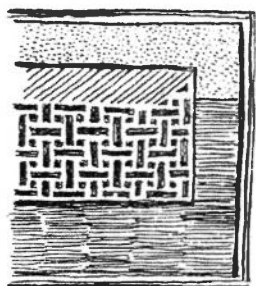


FIG. 4. THE ARK.

The history of Abraham was given with great fulness. One of the engraved scenes shows the marriage with Sarah. This may be compared with a mosaic at Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome, described below.

On folio 18 is part of a miniature in which a great hand issues from the left corner of the sky, and rays from it stream across the picture. This is part of the Call of Abraham, a copy of which, in colour, is in Paris (plate 1). The destroyed right hand part had the well-drawn standing figure of Abraham in a rose-coloured mantle held across the breast by the left hand. On the back of this folio (18, verso) the subject was Abraham giving instructions for the march, which is shown in folio 19. Then on the back of the last was the parting of Abraham and Lot.

The fragment of this, which is one of the clearest now existing, has been reproduced photographically by Mr. Dalton. It shows a group of armed men on the right of the picture, and an awning above. This, too, can be restored on comparing it with the similar subject in Sta. Maria Maggiore (see below). Plate II is an enlargement of a photograph made for Mr. Dalton's work; here it is slightly restored. See also fig. 5, which is a *restoration* of the composition.

Folio 21 was the meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek. Fig. 6 is part of this (compare Sta. Maria Maggiore below). On the back is the king of Sodom.

Folio 22 was the promise to Abraham; the patriarch lies on a mantle spread on the ground, and the hand of God again appears above.

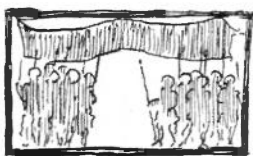


FIG. 5.



FIG. 6.

Three scenes followed which were accurately copied at Venice. In the first of these, folio 23, verso, Abraham led Hagar into his house while Sarah followed behind on the left. The next is represented by a beautiful figure of Sarah, now, with other fragments, at Bristol. The subject was the complaint of Sarah, as is shown by the fragment of text below it. Tikkanen supposed this figure to have belonged to the first mentioned subject, but this cannot be, for Dr. Gotch's photograph¹ shows that it is from the recto of a leaf. The engraving of it in *Vetusta Monumenta* proves that it must be from the scene suggested. It was a dignified and beautiful figure, the light-coloured drapery "shaded" in gold, the head is very fine, with much dark hair and a gold fillet. Since the photograph was pub-

¹ In his *Supplement to Tischendorf*.

lished, it has unhappily been broken in two. I may say that I have been most kindly allowed to see the fragments at the Baptist College, Bristol, which are very carefully guarded, but I trust it would not be improper for me to express a hope that the British Museum may some day be enabled, by gift or purchase, to reunite them to the main body of the manuscript.

The third subject, folio 24, recto, shows the outcast Hagar sitting by "the fountain in the way to Shur," and in front



FIG. 7.

of her the angel. In Westwood's reproduction of the fragment, and Tikkanen's sketch, the well is omitted, but on referring back from the mosaic it is easy to find it. The completion of the subject, on the right, was probably, as at Venice, the birth of Ishmael. A group of subjects relating to Abraham and the angels follows. Folio 25, recto, had three angels with rose-coloured mantles having squares of gold work. Fig. 7 is one of the angels. A fragment engraved in *Vetusta*

Monumenta showed Abraham entertaining the angels at Mamre; this was repeated exactly at Venice (see below, Sta. Maria Maggiore).

Folio 26, verso, is a very perfect fragment. A man on right, on left angels in military costume of purple with gold squares. The background is of hills with sea beyond. This must be by a hand different from the former (see below, Sta. Maria Maggiore).

Folio 27, recto: The same man on the left and angels moving to the right.

Folio 27, verso: Gateway of Sodom with Lot welcoming angels. At Venice this seems to have been taken as the type for Abraham and the angels. The architectural background here is interesting (fig. 8).

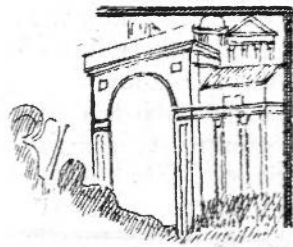


FIG. 8.

Folio 28, recto: Two angels entering through the gateway with Lot.

Folio 29-31: Lot continued.

Folio 32, recto: The birth of Isaac.

Folio 34, verso: Hagar and Ishmael cast out; the hand of God again.

Folio 36, recto: The proving of Abraham; here for the fourth time the hand of God issues from the sky.

Folio 38: Abraham and the children of Heth.

Folios 42, etc: The story of Rebecca.

From this point little can be recovered until we come to the miniatures of the story of Joseph, some of which were closely copied at Venice. One mosaic in which there are well-drawn camels comes from folio 74 of the manuscript; it shows the meal of the brothers after they had put Joseph into the pit: they recline in a half-circle in the antique way. The necks of the camels and other details can still be seen in the manuscript. Several interiors are expressed



FIG. 9.

by a pair of doors in the centre. Potiphar's wife on the Venice mosaics¹ seems to be copied from folio 76, recto (see fig. 9), which appears to relate to the story of Tamar, but slight traces on folio 81, recto, show that this was very similar. Folio 83, verso, seems to be the chief butler's dream. Folio 86, recto, with traces of vegetation, must be Pharaoh's dream. The most interesting of these pictures are two which represent Joseph's granaries as the great pyramids. Folio 91 shows Jacob sending his sons to Egypt.



FIG. 10.

Folio 95: The sons of Jacob emptying their sacks, is comparatively plain (fig. 10). Several of these were copied at Venice very accurately: indeed it is quite clear that the manuscript source was carefully copied up to this point.

I have not gone over all Tikkanen's identifications and comparisons, but enough has been said to show how complete the parallel between the mosaics and the manuscript must have been. All, or practically all, the Venice subjects from Genesis must have been taken from the manu-

¹ Tikkanen, vi, 45.

script. In the Venice narthex there are seven domes, six of these contain subjects from Genesis treated very fully. One, which appears to be the latest as well as the last, has a few subjects from the life of Moses, which seem to be in a different style. This suggests that the source for the six domes was a book of Genesis and not a longer work like an octateuch. Some additional light on the pictures in the manuscript may be gained by a comparison of them with the mosaics in Sta. Maria Maggiore, Rome (c. 435), which follow similar types and were probably themselves adapted from some painted book of Genesis:

(a) The meeting of Abraham and Melchizedek; the former with his companions are armed and horsed and the priest-king advances to meet him. In the Cottonian picture Abraham has alighted from his horse which is held by an armed man (fig. 6); Melchizedek evidently came from the right with the wine and the bread as in the Venice mosaic.

(b) The meeting of Abraham and the angels varies from the Venice mosaic where the type of Lot welcoming the angels is followed instead. In the Roman mosaic the central angel has a "glory" around the whole figure. In the Cotton Genesis there are some slight indications that this may have been the case in the manuscript also. Possibly the manuscript scene on folio 25 was not the meeting but the angels waiting while Abraham told Sarah, a subject given in Sta. Maria Maggiore.

(c) In the mosaic of the angel's meal there is again close agreement with the manuscript picture. The oak of Mamre is here, which is lost in the manuscript; this goes to prove that the whole of the manuscript picture was accurately copied at Venice.

(d) In the scene of the parting of Abraham and Lot we have a still more valuable similarity, for at Venice, owing to this subject being treated on a narrow space, it is cut down to Abraham on one side and Lot with a second figure on the other side. In Sta. Maria, however, there are two groups with an open space between them, and this was clearly the case in the manuscript where we have still the right-hand group nearly complete.¹ The

¹ Plate II, enlarged from Mr. Dalton's fig. 263.

upper part of the picture was occupied by a rose-coloured awning hanging from side to side over both groups. Two or three other subjects had similar hangings in the manuscript. From the parallel with the mosaic at Sta. Maria it is possible to restore the whole composition (fig. 5).

(e) The marriage of Jacob and Rachel at Sta. Maria must have been very like the marriage of Abraham and Sarah in the manuscript, indeed they were both treated according to a regular marriage "formula," for the marriage of Moses at Sta. Maria is again similar. From this comparison we can see that the complete manuscript picture had the group of Jacob, Rachel and the priest in front of a four-pillared portico on the left of the picture (fig. 11), while the right was filled by spectators.

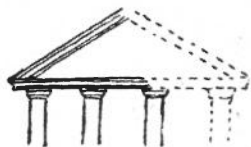


FIG. 11.

(f) There is some resemblance in the two designs of Jacob sending his sons to Egypt.

From these coincidences in what is now a small number of mosaic subjects, it appears that when both series were complete there must have been many parallels between them and that both must belong to a common cycle. The treatment and backgrounds are very similar in both sets of designs. The mosaics also had banded borders mostly red. The Sta. Maria Maggiore mosaics were not *executed* later than 440, but most critics are agreed that the style of the *designs* is still earlier, probably of the fourth century (Richter even says c. 200), and most agree that the mosaics probably followed a pictured Bible.

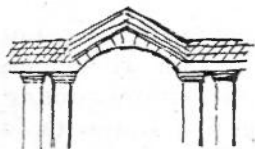


FIG. 12.

Of course there is no necessity that the Venice mosaics should be taken from the actual Cottonian manuscript, but it is certain that if they were not, a manuscript which must have been practically its counterpart was used, and this comes to much the same thing. As Tikkanen says of the scene of the Creation of Trees, "it is copied in a much stiffer style, but nevertheless so exactly that only trifling points like the right hands of the angels make

any difference." When we consider the great influence that these Genesis types have exercised over the whole field of early mediaeval art, it would seem that these pictures had an almost canonical authority, and that probably many copies were published. Venturi says, "the Cotton Bible was painted by some one who followed the movement of Christian ideas and art, and several scenes like that of Abraham and the angels find parallels at Rome and Ravenna." Rather it would appear that these miniatures were the authoritative Bible types to which mosaics and other works of art conformed. The text, of course, was supervised by a scholar, and the miniatures would not be the work of an artist inventing freely, but of one embodying the ideas of a theologian.

I would enter a plea for the adequate publication of this wonderful book. A tradition of Bible illustration going back to the days of St. Augustine is surely important, and the Cotton Genesis must be the most remarkable example of Christian art in England. It would be a step on the way if the Museum would obtain coloured facsimiles of the copies in Paris. The method of grouping the figures in some of these compositions seems very familiar and sometimes recalls designs of Raphael. There is no doubt that artists of the renaissance turned for inspiration to such sources as the mosaics of Sta. Maria Maggiore, and it has been proved that Raphael actually used the Virgil manuscript. In the Bible pictures of the Loggia of the Vatican the presentation of Eve, Adam digging, Noah and his family, with others, seem to echo the ancient Genesis canon.

Many of the manuscript pictures were of great beauty, and much of classical tradition was preserved in the figures which had not yet been hardened into Byzantinism. The poses were free and graceful, the nude was well drawn. Leclercq speaks of "the charming grace of which the classical inspiration may not be doubted." According to the British Museum catalogue, "the figures are semi-classical in style." The colour of the pictures was evidently very fair and gay, some of the blues are a clear ultramarine colour, and a rosy crimson is used as well as a darker purple. Some of the ruined pictures look like the "rubbing in" of a picture by Watts. Over all

the colour gold was worked with the brush as modelling to the robes, much like Italian primitive pictures, as indicating rays on a nimbus, flat on Noah's Ark, or as single lines on the buildings and the borders.



FIG. 13.

In the use of gold the method is curiously like that of the mosaic of Sta. Pudentiana, Rome, c. 395. Contrary to what might be supposed this lighting up of the painting with gold was an early fashion. Some fragments found at Quedlinburg and now at Berlin (c. 400) are thus heightened with gold and have red borders.¹ The Virgil of the Vatican (fourth century) has similar working over with gold, also borders of red with black and white lines and gold spots. The fourth-century Iliad has yellow high lights instead of gold, but used in such a way as to suggest derivation from gold; this too has red borders. The use of borders of plain bands is a classical tradition which was continued in the catacombs. The execution of the manuscript pictures is very minute; see especially the angels on folio 26, verso, where they are very different from those of the Vienna Genesis, where they are bold, rapid sketches. There is evidence that the designs were drawn with a brown line before they were painted. At least two artists were engaged, there are two types of borders which recur alternately in groups; the first has one gold line on the red band, the second two.

The subjects had landscape or architectural backgrounds; the latter were more or less symbolical, thus houses were usually indicated by little more than a door. There is enough, however, to show that the architecture was classical rather than Byzantine. The costume is also classical; the "angels" of the seven days have sleeveless tunics like classical Victories. They are very much like figures painted within a tomb at Palmyra, said to be of the third century, which are doubtless of Alexandrian origin.² Compare a similar figure in Cabrol's Dictionary, p. 2115, fig. 633. Some of the figures have mantles which were a

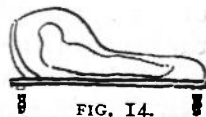


FIG. 14.

¹ See Middleton's volume on Illumination. The Dioscorides, c. 512, already has the later form of gilding.

² Dalton, fig. 168.

simple square enveloping the left side and leaving the right side open and free; usually the left arm and hand are covered by the mantle. The purple mantles frequently have a panel (*tablion*) of gold work on them. Some of the men have short tunics and trousers. The landscape backgrounds were usually a plain green tint edged above into the form of mountains, some of which passed into a pale violet colour; behind some peaks is bright blue water and then a strip of lighter blue sky. A few of the pictures had larger mountain forms, others had backgrounds broken by a piece of architecture, if only a column or two. One interior had an arcaded background with a curtain hanging at the springing of the arches. Still others had an awning breaking the sky (fig. 10), and one of these had a tree in front of it. Figs. 12 and 13 are from backgrounds, fig. 14 is a bed.

There is no general consensus as to the date of our manuscript, but the recent tendency has, I believe, been to put it too late. Thus Diehl gives the date of the Vienna Genesis as the fifth century, of the Joshua roll as the fifth or sixth, and of the Cottonian book as the sixth. J. P. Richter assigns the Vienna Genesis to the fourth or fifth century. On the other hand, according to Westwood and to the British Museum catalogue of manuscripts (1881), the writing of our Genesis is older than that of Vienna. Tikkanen, Omont, Leclercq and others content themselves with assigning our manuscript to the fifth or sixth century.

Pératé, who is a sound critic, puts both books in the fifth century, although he would make the Vienna book the earlier. The pictures in the two books of Genesis have little in common although there are some relations. It has been shown, however, that there are very close resemblances between the Cotton book and the mosaics of Sta. Maria Maggiore, executed about 435. Further, the style of the manuscript miniatures with the draperies shaded in gold resembles the style of the mosaics of Sta. Pudentiana, Rome, c. 395.

The Vienna book of Genesis is more remote than is the Cottonian manuscript from the mosaics of Sta. Maria Maggiore, executed c. 435. Our miniatures differ very much from those in manuscripts which are known to

be of the sixth century, such as the Dioscorides (A.D. 512) and the Cosmas (c. 547) which are much more Byzantine in style.¹

According to Sir E. Maund Thompson, codices of vellum of the third century and earlier have been found in Egypt, "the codex form of manuscript was gradually thrusting its way into use in the first centuries of our era . . . the book form was favoured by the early Christians. In the fourth century the struggle between the roll and the codex was finished." Recently some fine book bindings, not later than the sixth century, have been found in Egypt.

From many of its characteristics I feel convinced that this precious manuscript originated in the east, and most probably in Alexandria. It has a general likeness to several other books which, with high probability, have been ascribed to this school, such as the Dioscorides, the Joshua roll, and the Cosmas. The writing is like that of a great number of papyrus fragments. The red borders of the miniatures of our manuscript, with gold lines on them, are found again in the Cosmas. The Virgil also has similar borders, so has the Paris Notitia (a copy). The able drawing of the nude, the graceful poses and classical drapery, the architectural and landscape backgrounds, all show near contact with Hellenistic art. So do the personifications, like the seven days, the four rivers, and the Soul as Psyche. The costume of the "Days," a girded sleeveless tunic, seems to have been an Alexandrian fashion for women in the early centuries of our era.

The shapely heads of the figures with their big dark eyes resemble the funereal portraits brought from Egypt. The Christ figure representing the Creator is very like a figure from a pagan papyrus illustrated by Strzygowski in *Eine Alexandrinische Weltchronik*, figure 10. The favourite pose for the figures is the Praxitelean one, with one leg firm and the other bent. In the draping notice the left hand enveloped by the mantle; this is a

¹ I find that Mr. Herbert in his recent volume on manuscripts, while he still dates our Genesis as fifth or sixth century, puts it earlier than the Vienna book. I believe that one reason for the feeling that the manuscript may be of the sixth century

is a supposition that the codex form of book did not come into general use at an early time. Many recent discoveries in Egypt, however, are bringing new facts to light with regard to this point.

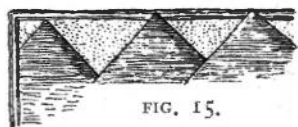
common attitude of the figures on the blue dyed linens from Egypt in the South Kensington Museum. The costume is eastern, not Roman. A shawl-like mantle, which covers the left side and leaves the right open and free is found also in the Vienna Genesis and in the codex of Rossano, both eastern books. Beneath the mantle is a tunic which at times has discs on the shoulders like the Coptic tunics at South Kensington. We find in the manuscript four instances of the presence of God being indicated by a hand issuing from the clouds. This also occurs on the blue dyed linens from Egypt at the Victoria and Albert Museum and in the Cosmas manuscript,¹ also on a large silver dish from Cyprus in the Pierpont-Morgan collection. On another of these silver dishes the marriage of David is represented, just like the marriage of Abraham in our manuscript, even to the temple with four columns behind the figures, which stands as a sign that the scene was indoors.² These silver dishes were probably made in Alexandria. The type of beardless Christ carrying a sceptre-like cross is found on early ivories: e.g. the panels from a small casket, c. 400, in the British Museum. The group of a seated ruler guarded by two soldiers having round shields resting on the ground, found in other ivories and in our manuscript, is probably of eastern origin. The jewelled decoration of the thrones appears to have been an Alexandrine fashion; jewelled crosses are common on Coptic textiles.

In the manuscript, as on the Coptic linens, we have panelled doors shown (fig. 9). Notice also figures reclining on cushion-like beds, and compare the group of soldiers in the miniature of the Farewell of Lot with others on the Cyprus silver dishes. On one of the mosaics at Venice, which there is every reason to think was copied from the Cottonian book, a burial is shown of a body closely wrapped like a mummy, with the face showing in the Egyptian manner. That the tree of life should bear a cross would be specially significant in Egypt where a cross meant "life." A much more striking piece of evidence is found in the fact that two of the existing

¹ Dalton, fig. 269.

² Dalton, fig. 358.

pictures which show Joseph's provision for the years of famine have a group of three pyramids in the background, drawn with remarkably correct angles. (In the Venice copy five instead of three were shown; they were made much too steep, and windows were inserted in them.) It seems that the artist of the manuscript must have known the three great pyramids well (fig. 15). The author of "Sir John Mandeville" recorded the legend that the great pyramids were the store-houses of Joseph. "By the Nile towards the desert are the granaries of Joseph, well made by mason-craft, marvellous great and high. Some say that they are the sepulchres of great lords, but the common rumour is that they are the granaries of Joseph, and so find they in their writings." This story, it is evident from the Cotton manuscript, must go back to early in our era.



Another curious point is suggested by the pattern on the side of Noah's Ark in our manuscript (fig. 4). It shows a form of panelling which became common in Cairene work, and it occurs on several pieces of woodwork in the South Kensington Museum. In its origin it seems to have depended on forms of the Greek fret which are frequently found as patterns on Coptic textiles. This form of panelling was doubtless used because it only required small pieces of timber:¹ compare figs. 4 and 16, the latter is from the Victoria and Albert Museum: see also *cancel* in Chabrol's *Dictionary*.



If the Venice mosaics were copied from an Alexandrian picture book we get a suggestion as to what may have happened at Ravenna and other places where eastern ideas seem to appear.

I may give in concluding, my general impressions, regarding the date of early Christian book paintings, arrived at in the result of this study.

If we may assign the pictured Homer and Virgil to

¹ This type of framing gives us the origin of the "puzzle floor" which is figured by Villars d'Honnecourt, by Leonardo da Vinci, by Serlio and others.

the end of the fourth century (see Venturi), I would place the Cotton Genesis at the beginning of the fifth. The Vienna Genesis may then be dated at the end of the fifth century. Its pictures seem to be considerably later in character than those of the Cottonian book. Most of them are without backgrounds, the figures are more Byzantine, the Ark is no longer a plain box, but has a roof in stages. Cities are shown as on the Joshua roll. The general style is much remoter from that of the Sta. Maria Maggiore mosaics than is the style of our book, which agrees very closely indeed with the mosaics.¹

The Vienna Genesis is on purple vellum, and in this as well as in artistic style it agrees with the codex of Rossano and the codex of Sinope, which are clearly Byzantine and can hardly be earlier than c. 500.²

The Dioscorides manuscript is dated c. 512. It has been said that it may be copied from a still earlier original, except the page with the portraits, which it is thought may have been added in Constantinople. Now these portraits are within a knotwork border of a pattern very characteristic of Coptic work. I reach the conclusion, therefore, that this manuscript is all of one date and all Coptic. The Joshua roll seems full Byzantine in style; the figures, costume, and representations of cities are much like those on the Cyprus silver dishes. I do not think that it can have had an earlier origin than the sixth century.

I may here also summarise my main conclusions regarding the Cotton Genesis: (1) The book was written and painted at Alexandria. (2) The close affinity with the mosaics of Sta. Pudenziana, A.D. 395, and of Sta. Maria Maggiore, which latter were probably derived from a book painted not later than the fourth century, show that we may date our book c. 400. (3) It evidently formed

¹For Sta. Maria Maggiore, see the photographic plates of P. Sisto Scaglia. If it should be urged that the resemblance between the mosaics and the miniatures militates against the view that the Cotton Genesis is an Alexandrian work, it is to be answered that not only were these mosaics almost certainly taken from another pictured book, but that the mosaic artists themselves may have come from the east.

This indeed is Richter's view. More and more it becomes apparent how large an eastern element there is in Roman Christian art.

²Since writing the above I see that Mr. Herbert closely associates these three purple books and dates them in the first half of the sixth century, an opinion with which I have nearly been in agreement.

quite a canon of Old Testament imagery. (4) More than one painter worked at it, probably two, taking alternate groups of leaves; this is indicated by differences of workmanship and by two types of borders which occur in groups alternately. (5) This book or its *duplicate* was the source for all the mosaics in the narthex of St. Mark's, with some adaptations, and excepting the seventh, or Moses dome. The Creation series in the first dome are all accurate transcripts from the miniatures. (6) The manuscript was complete as a book of Genesis, and did not form part of a larger work.

One or two last observations may be set down. In the mosaic of the Creation of birds a row of lotus rising from water is obviously an eastern, probably an Egyptian motive.¹ Two or three of the mosaics relating to the building of the ark must certainly come from our manuscript. God's command to Noah resembles the Call of Abraham. The shoes of the builders of the ark are like others in the manuscript: the wood arranged in the form of a cross, evidently a "type," should be noticed, also the saw and plane. The Deluge and Creation subjects in the manuscript should be compared with a series of mosaics at Monreale: here and on some ivories the "angels" of the Seven Days appear as a group. The subjects from the story of Joseph on the ivory throne at Ravenna, which is almost certainly an Alexandrian work, also resemble those of our manuscript. A comparison of Jacob's attitude of grief on the throne with a similar figure of Jacob in the Venice mosaics shows that the latter is derived from an ancient source, that is, from our Cotton Genesis.

¹ Compare Strzygowski's *Der Dom zu Aachen*, fig. 32.