

Resurrecting God (2)

The Apocalyptic Beatus Pointing to the Side Gestures

What we have in the Baroque and Renaissance Masonic portraiture is something streaming forth already from the earlier Christian art, but artistically transformed and given new form. As far as the masonic pointing to the side gestures are concerned, we find them widespread in almost all their forms of appearance already in the art of the Mozarabs (from *musta'rab* - "Arabised") in Spain before the year 1000. To all appearances, in relation to the fears that that would be the time for the Apocalyptic Beast's manifestation, these christian inhabitants of Spain living under the Muslim Moorish kings created a group of about thirty illustrated commentaries on the Book of Apocalypse by their "colleague", the eighth-century Spanish monk and theologian *Beatus of Liébana*. Born around 730 during the Islamic occupation of southern Spain he moved north and settled in the monastery of St Martin at Liébana in Cantabria where around 776 he wrote a twelve volume exposition on the Book of Revelation which essentially describes how the world will end and the visionary writings of the Old Testament prophet, Daniel.

Any of the illuminated manuscript copies of his work that have survived today are referred to as "Beatus manuscripts". They were produced by different artists (monks) between the last quarter of the ninth century through the first half of the thirteenth century. They provided a number of illustrations concerning what was to become *widespread* as West European iconographic type of pointing to the side gesticulation. Fundamental was Saint John's apocalyptic vision:

*"Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, **a throne set in heaven**, and One sat on the throne. And He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, in appearance like an emerald. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes; and they had crowns of gold on their heads. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices. Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.*

Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal. And in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back. The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. The four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" (Rev. 4)

Well-known Beatus copies include the Morgan, the Saint-Sever, the Urgel and the Facundus Beatus codices, the first of which, Morgan Beatus (New York, Morgan

Library & Museum, MS 644) is one of the earliest. Some scholars believe the Morgan Beatus must have been complete before 945 while others date it at ca. 950. It is signed by an artist who called himself Magius. The motives expressed by Magius were, namely “wise may fear the coming of the future judgment of the world's end.” Among other things, however, it consists of a number brilliantly painted images of **God the Father in the guise of celestial ruler sitting on a throne**. Surrounded by stars or heavenly beings, they depict him strictly as *young man*, beardless and non-patriarchal in appearance as in the moment of opening of the Apocalyptic Sixth Seal illustrated on fig. 71 – 71 A:

“And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood.” (Revelation, 6.12)



Fig. 71 – 71 A

Here God is depicted in the upper, heavenly zone beardless sitting on an asymmetrical throne inside a torus of glory in a vibrant red shape. The inscription “TRO-NUS” indicates that he belongs to the celestial hierarchy of the **Thrones**, which, interestingly, in traditional Christian angelology is only the third-highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy. Outlined by a green-coloured section filled with stars, the torus is carried by two creatures inscribed “CERUBIN” and “SERAFIN”. They are regarded in the traditional Christian angelology as the second and the first highest order of the ninefold celestial hierarchy that together with the Thrones constitute the highest *God the Father* Seraphim-Cherubim-Thrones triad of the celestial hierarchy. Below this triad is the *God the Son* triad to which Christ belongs!

Putting aside for the moment the question of what is meant by this classification, notable are the four apocalyptic Elders by whom God's throne is flanked, inscribed "SENIORES". Below are the Sun, inscribed Sol, and the darkened Moon, inscribed Luna. Still below is the Earth where the author aimed to reflect the Apocalypse references through the inclusion of the stars falling from heaven, trees and groups of men hiding in three rocky mountains.

In reality, this illustration depicts the confrontation between the two zones: the heavenly one that is above and the human one below, and God who is as if between them. He is sitting on a throne in an active pose pointing to the side via the horizontal plane, revealing two important kinds of gestures that appear deeply symbolic to him. These are, first, the holding book gesture which in the later centuries is to be borrowed by the Freemasons of old, and second, the middle fingers pointing to the side *which also is to be borrowed in the later centuries by the Freemasons of old*.

Thus the Morgan Beatus contains one of the earliest medieval examples of pointing to the side gesticulation via the horizontal, and **among the earliest artistic representations - perhaps the first - of middle fingers pointing to the side gesticulation**. They may be the first depictions in existence of this kind, another example of which is shown on fig. 72 – 72 A, depicting different scene (see below). Again, here we have the inscription TRONUS, signifying the presence of God, who, however, is not carried by his partners, the cerubin and the serafin, but by eighteen "seniores" most of whom are readily repeating his pointing to the side gesture going out of the halo.



Fig. 72 – 72 A

Furthermore, the Magius's inspiration from John's visions is made evident by the use of other motives as shown on the Morgan Beatus on fig. 73 - 73 A. Here, again, God is sitting on a throne holding a book in his left hand while the right hand is actively open in a hand gesturing showing the middle fingers configuration. This is reflecting the moment when "in the midst of the throne, and around the throne, were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back" which here are dynamically kneeling and as if indeed not resting day or night, saying: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!" Below are the twenty four apocalyptic elders dramatically kneeling before God. The bottom scene represents the Angel and another kneeling figure: John.

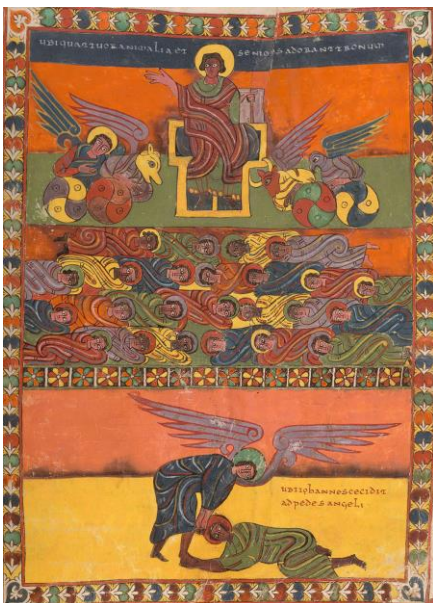


Fig. 73 - 73 A

The Morgan Beatus is particularly interesting for the distinctive middle fingers pointing to the side motive. Identifying it helps reveal the deeper meaning connecting it more directly with the work's message. In these particular cases we have one of the oldest surviving forms of this gesticulation regardless the fact of the missing relation between the motif and the sacred text. What is most intriguing about this motif is that **there is no specific apocalyptic event that provides the basis for such depiction and no written historical or modern document can confirm its meaning.** To all appearances it is a unique element that was designed by the author of the Morgan Beatus, about two centuries after Beatus of Liébana produced the original manuscript. Apparently, Magius was the one who invented it regardless the fact that a similar hand gesture can be found in the Etruscan funerary art of the seventh and sixth centuries BCE (see further below). This middle fingers Beatus pointing to the side gesticulation can be seen along with the two-fingers (index and

middle finger close together) pointing to the side gesticulation which the long cycles of pictures accompanying Morgan's commentary also contain (fig. 74 and 75).



Fig. 74 - 75

The Saint-Sever Beatus (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS lat. 8878) is another example of illuminated book with miniatures, dated this time from the eleventh century. It also contains commentary on the Apocalypse of Beatus of Liébana as well as depictions of God the Father pointing to the side. For instance, in the image on fig. 76 God is in the highest of three zones, symbolical to Heaven, where he is sitting on a throne. Holding book with his left hand, he is looking deeply into viewer's eyes as if wanting to send message. With the other hand he is pointing diagonally to the side showing a distinctive wide open middle fingers gesture. Notably, his throne recalls a building that is perhaps the New Jerusalem emblematic for the Book of Apocalypse. Down below is its author, Saint John, standing before the Seven Churches of the Apocalypse: Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and

Laodicea, each represented symbolically within the intricate details of the illuminated manuscript.



Fig. 76 – 77

The illustration on fig. 77 from the same Saint-Sever Beatus is even more significant in regard to God's gesticulation. It is painted on two horizontal zones, in the lower of which John's angel is transmitting him the revelation of the apocalypse. Deeply looking in his eyes, he is pointing up while showing him the Book to which John is responding by giving a *middle fingers sign*, or *gesture*. This eventually allows him to receive the Book!

The upper scene reveals identical features: the angel is half kneeling while giving God the middle fingers gesture as a kind of sign in order to receive the Book. This recalls the Gabanon's illustration on fig. 4 in which the laying on the floor would-be Master mason, who has to be resurrected into Masonry by the Master, is giving his Master the same sign. It seems that it is the key element that opens the door to the resurrection and initiation into the spiritual world. **In this case it seems that God the Father is the Supreme Master who is giving the Book to the angel only**

after receiving the Sign! He is pointing up with his index finger which is a commanding gesture and to all appearances a sign of warning. His eyes glint angrily which indicates the importance of the Sign and the Book. The angel behind him is reinforcing the meaning of the scene by showing the same middle fingers open hand gesture. This is filling the composition with elements that are linked together and symbolic to the Father: the Throne, the Book and the Gesture.

In these representations the horizontally banded composition is present indicative for the symbolic positions in Heaven, on Earth, or in Hell, and God is mostly in the upper one. Sitting on a throne inside a halo often carried by “CERUBIN” and “SERAFIN” as is also the case in the tenth century Beato de Gerona illustration on fig. 78. It is depicting the opening of the Apocalyptic Sixth Seal in which *without any relation between the motif and the biblical text* he is pointing horizontally to the side while holding book.



Fig. 78

God and the River of Life are shown in the Beatus de Facundus illuminated page on fig. 79. Distinguished is the presence of God who sits on a throne within a curved mandorla surrounding him. He is in the centre dressed in black, with a crown of black

light around his head, adored by a group of sixteen “seniores”, some of which dressed in black. His head is slightly turned, his eyes are wide open, anxious in expression. Below is the middle zone in which is the angel whose wings are black and John. The vision relates:

“He took me up a high mountain and showed me the river of the water of life, shining like crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the midst of its main street, and on both sides of the river, was the Tree of Life, bearing twelve fruits, offering one for each month, and the leaves are for the health of the nations. But the throne of God and the Lamb will be in it, and his servants shall serve him. They shall see his face and his name shall be on their foreheads. Night shall be no more, and they will need neither lamp nor sun because the Lord God will illuminate them. And they shall reign forever and ever.” (Rev. 22:1–5)



Fig. 79 - 80

In this picture, however, God is *alone* without the Lamb. The picture doesn't bear any traces of the Lamb. The River of Life is springing from God's throne alone - black in appearance as the God's black throne merging with his whirls-shaped black garment. The River is streaming down beside the black mountain on which the angel with black wings and John are standing. These black elements seem to be interconnected hinting at a deeper meaning most impressive of which is God's right arm that has **an outflow two fingers pistol like pointing to the side hand gesture, going out of the halo via the horizontal plane!** It is one of the most distinguished gestures in Beatus art.

Gazing at the side, God is holding the Book surrounded by his servants that shall serve him and with whom he will live and who will "reign forever and ever". God is pointing decisively off to the side with his two fingers shooting gesture that seems crucial to a comprehensive understanding of the work. Similar, or even more distinguished is this gesticulation represented in the Beato de Facundus on fig. 80 in which as if even the throne is "following" the gesture of God, as well as in the selection of images from different Beatus manuscripts on figures 81 – 86 (cropped). In all of them God is showing the "two-finger" gesticulation surrounded by different symbols of his work: book; the four living; round earth he steps on; the CERUBIN and SERAFIN; throne; and the last, but by no means least, his thought-provoking youthful appearance.



Fig. 81 - 82



Fig. 83 - 84



Fig. 85 - 86