Between the Fig and the Apple: Forbidden Fruit in Romanesque Iconography

Long monopolized by art history, iconographic sources have only recently begun to reveal their explanatory potential for other fields of history, including the history of religions. They can indeed inspire interesting reflections, whether on questions of scholarly exegesis or on matters of popular belief. This article seeks to illustrate this using Romanesque iconographies of forbidden fruit. The analysis of a vast corpus of some three hundred images has indicated that when the fig is used in such contexts, there is an analogical relation with the liver, similar to that existing between the apple and the heart. The relations thus brought to light reveal a deep-seated aspect of medieval collective sensibility.

The myth of original sin strongly seduced the Christians of Western Europe in the Central Middle Ages. Like all myths, it owed this strength of seduction to its explanatory power, and the answer that it provided to many existential questions. The men of the Middle Ages perceived in it the root of all the limitations and weaknesses of human nature, whether physical (shortness, menstruation, baldness, diseases, or death) or moral (pride, dishonesty, concupiscence, or desire). At the same time, it explained and justified an essential social phenomenon of the time: the inferiority of women. Whereas the representation of original sin during the first ten centuries of Christianity concentrated on sarcophagi (especially in the fourth and fifth centuries) and crosses in cemeteries (particularly in the ninth and tenth centuries), which probably derived from the pessimistic vision of Christianity at the time, the situation changed after AD 1000.
Parallel to the known social reorganization under feudality, Western Christianity transferred its focus from God the Father towards God the Son. The Incarnation became the central historical event, thus accentuating the story of Adam, the character who had made the sacrifice of Christ necessary. The theme of Adam thus gained much importance in theology, literature, and especially, iconography. According to our inventory, which is inevitably provisional, Western Europe houses approximately four hundred images of the *primi parentes* from the early period of Christianity until the end of tenth century, and more than two thousand from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Considering only the Romanesque representations found in the territories of modern Spain, France, and Italy, more than eight hundred images may be counted, a third of which relate to original sin. These images are a very rich source for historians, because a whole range of statutory, cultural, theological, and psychological values from the time emerge from this corpus, even when the object of study is restricted: for example, forbidden fruit.\(^1\)

The consumption of forbidden fruit was the founding act of human exile on Earth. Its identification was thus an important stake for the men of the Middle Ages. Its exact nature was the subject of much speculation, and the iconography did not steer away from the issue. Often, an undefined fruit was represented, as in the Bible.\(^2\) Sometimes, this imprecision led to a blending of characteristics: in the sculptures found in Girona Cathedral and the Church of Notre-Dame-du-Port in Clermont-Ferrand (figure 1), the leaves of the forbidden tree are those of a fig tree, while the fruit is grapes; the famous Eve of Autun concealed her nudity with a vine leaf, while picking an apple, with the same relationship between the vine and apple being found in Amandi (Asturias); on a capital in Corbie, Adam seems to be holding an apple, while bunches of grapes hang from the tree; on a capital in Cluny, which represents the rivers of Paradise, the eastern side represents a vine, the western side a fig tree, and the northern side an apple tree. As the west (the direction of the sunset and place of the dead; the term “occidental” is derived

---

1. On the methodological issues affecting the construction and analysis of an iconographic corpus, some good comments have been made by Jérôme Baschet in “Inventivité et sérialité des images médiévales. Pour une approche iconographique élargie,” *Annales HSS* 51 (1996): 93–133.
as we know, from *occidere*: “to fall,” “to die”) and the north (the unknown, the cold, the source of Evil\(^{3}\)) had negative symbolic connotations, the forbidden tree could here be a fig or apple tree.

Iconography generally fulfilled its exegetical role and proposed a solution to the enigma. Sometimes it was an ear of wheat, as on a capital in San Pedro de Roda (today in the Museum of Cluny) following a rabbinical interpretation,\(^{4}\) and sometimes an olive, as on the fresco at Saint-Plancard,\(^{5}\) which was nevertheless a much rarer possibility, as the olive tree was frequently considered the tree of life by Jews and Christians.\(^{6}\) More often, the vine appears in


Spain (a capital in Girona Cathedral) as it does in France (capitals from Deuil, Sainte-Geneviève in Paris, Saint-Sernin in Toulouse, Vézelay, and Notre-Dame-du-Port: figure 1). In order to understand the reasons behind the choice of the vine, it would be necessary to analyze each individual case, although it seems to generally be based on a widespread Hebrew tradition. Take the example of Girona, a city where Jewish influence is undeniable. We know that since at least 1160, there existed a “Street of the Jews,” and that the most important part of the cathedral’s treasure, the famous tapestry of Creation, also seems to refer to the Jewish people. It is thus very probable that the relief portraying original sin, dated to the second half of the twelfth century and located in the western gallery of the cathedral cloister, was inspired by Jewish accounts circulating in the region.

In Italian Romanesque art, there is, to my knowledge, no known example of the vine as the forbidden fruit of the Bible. The absence


7. In this instance, the capital over the door of Miègeville, dated to around 1100–1118, does not depict the scene of the sin, but rather that of the expulsion from Paradise, where the fruit behind Adam and Eve (the couple being situated between God on one side and an angel on the other) is the grapevine.


of this iconographic interpretation was perhaps a reaction against the presence of Gnostic heretics in this region, who interpreted the Bible in this manner. In fact, from the second half of second century, the syncretic character of Gnosticism led to the association of the myths of Adam and Eros: when Yaldabaoth, the Demiurge, cast his sperm on the ground to create terrestrial Adam, his wife, Pronoia, withdrew the blood/light from the “true man,” the Adam-Light of the first day of creation, thus creating Eros, who emerged together with wine, a blend of fire and blood that awakens voluptuous desires.

There was thus general indecision as to the identity of the forbidden fruit. This can reveal interesting socioeconomic and cultural transformations, as can be seen in Vézelay. In this basilica, two capitals represent original sin. On the oldest, dated to the eleventh century and located in the northern nave, Adam and Eve are shown eating grapes, while on that of the central nave, which was carved during the second quarter of the twelfth century after a fire had devastated a significant part of the building, the apple had become the fruit of the sin. This attests to a change in the symbolism of the fruit, which can probably be attributed to the value placed both on the Eucharist in the entire Christian West and on viticulture in


Burgundy\textsuperscript{15} in the twelfth century. Thus, the importance of grapevines in both the religion and the local economy was incompatible with the negative character of the forbidden fruit.

In the twelfth century, theological interpretations of original sin were “a fierce and varied idea, a great curiosity of the spirit that aroused many issues, sometimes a daring freedom that proposed new solutions.”\textsuperscript{16} As to the forbidden fruit, on the other hand, theological reflection almost always avoided providing a definition. Iconography, depending on the language used and the public addressed, could be more objective. However, it still hesitated, especially between the fig and the apple. Traditional legacy did not facilitate this choice, because it considered both the fig (which was linked to Cronus and Dionysus) and the apple (which was associated with Hera and Aphrodite) to be ambiguous, dangerous, and sexual fruits contrary to the olive, which was chaste like its creator Athena.\textsuperscript{17}

\section*{The Fig and the Liver}

In any event, the fig appears in the iconography of the three territories under consideration in this article. In Spain, it is found on the frescos of San Justo in Segovia and Maderuelo (figure 2), on the woodwork painting in Sagàs, and on the sculptures in Barrio Santa María and Butrera. In France, it is illustrated on the capitals in Barret, Lavaudieu, and Sauve-Majeure, and on the archivolt of Saint-Martin church in Besse. In Italy, it is found in the mosaics in Otranto, Monreale, and Trani, in the stone and metal sculptures of San Zeno in Verona, as well as in the illumination of the \textit{Exultet 3} of Troia (figure 5). At the abbey of Sainte-Marie in Cruas (Ardèche), the mosaïc in the choir area, dating to the first quarter of the twelfth century, represents the patriarch Enoch and the prophet Elijah under the hands of God, with Elijah being placed to the left of the observer and thus below the divine right hand. Between the two men are two

\textsuperscript{15} Roger Dion, \textit{Histoire de la vigne et du vin en France des origines au XIX\textsuperscript{e} siècle} (Paris: author publication, 1959), 245–247.

\textsuperscript{16} Auguste Gaudel, “Pêché originel,” in \textit{Dictionnaire de théologie catholique}, vol. XII-1, col. 441 [quotation back-translated from the French].

\textsuperscript{17} Jacques Brosse, \textit{Mythologie des arbres} (Paris: Plon, 1989), 299–300. The purity attributed to the olive rendered the olive tree the tree of life par excellence, as seen above, n.5.
trees with the inscriptions, *Lignum* on the side of Elijah, and *Ficus* on that of Enoch, which allows us to identify the former as the tree of life and the latter as that of the knowledge of good and evil.  

![Image of fresco on the western wall of the chapel of Vera Cruz de Maderuelo (Segovia, currently held in the museum of Prado), Castile, circa 1125. Museum photo](image)

This iconographic solution to the problem of identifying the fruit is suggested by the same account in Genesis, according to which shortly after committing the sin, Adam and Eve, being ashamed, covered themselves with “fig leaves.”  

Another biblical reference reinforces this idea: presenting the tree as a place of meditation, it is associated with knowledge and thus proposed to be the forbidden tree. Such an interpretation was still based on the fact that Christ had cursed the fig tree, the tree under which, according to popular traditions, John the Baptist was decapitated and on whose branch

---

20. John, 1:48. This relationship between the fig and knowledge can be traced back to classical paganism: Plato, for example, called this fruit “the friend of philosophers,” according to Éloïse Mozzani, *Le Livre des superstitions: mythes, croyances et légendes* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1995), 746.
Judas hanged himself,\(^{21}\) as depicted by a German illumination from the ninth century.\(^{22}\) This association between the tree of Adam’s sin and the tree of punishment for Judas’s sin—both being traitors of the Lord—is found in Autun Cathedral: a sculpture shows Judas hanging from a tree similar to that covering the genitals of Eve in the famous scene of the lintel over the northern doorway, which is currently located in the Rolin Museum.

From these elements, we see that the fig was on numerous occasions considered the forbidden fruit of Eden. At least, this is how a rabbinical commentary interprets it.\(^{23}\) The same approach appears in some Christian apocryphal books. The Greek version of the *Vita Adae et Eave*, for example, states that immediately after the sin, all of the leaves fell from the trees of Paradise, with the exception, as Eve says, of those “from the plant that I ate:” the fig tree.\(^{24}\) In another text, Adam, in answering a question by his son Seth, affirms that the forbidden fruit was the fig.\(^{25}\) Another text suggests likewise, stating that after their expulsion from Paradise, the *primi parentes* initially ate figs sent by God, fruits with the taste “of bread and blood.”\(^{26}\) Some Eastern Christian authors expressed a similar idea: for example, Theodoret of Cyrus\(^{27}\) (verses 393–458). Among the Western theologians who similarly glossed the Bible, we may note Tertullian, Hugh of Saint Victor, and Petrus Comestor.\(^{28}\) The literary


\(^{22}\) Stuttgart Psalter, around 810 (Stuttgart: Württembergische Landes-bibliothek, Cod. Bibl. 172•23, fol. 8).


examples are rare, but they do exist, even in later times, as with Gottfried von Strassburg.29

The exegesis identifying the fig as the forbidden fruit clearly had archaic features.30 Indeed, despite its nutritional importance in the Mediterranean region, the fig tree was regarded as an impure tree by the Greeks and Romans.31 At least since the twelfth century, the cross of Christ has been thought to have been made from the wood of the forbidden tree;32 this in turn reinforced the idea that it was the fig tree, considered by the Ancients to be the tree of Dionysus, the divinity who presented clear analogies with Christ (both are the son of a divinity and a mortal woman; both die and resurrect; the blood-wine is ritually consumed by their believers; both descend to Hell).

More probably, the identification of the fig with the forbidden fruit was associated with the symbolism of the liver. For the Hebrews, this organ had sacred connotations: hence the instruction to burn an animal’s liver and kidneys along with the surrounding fat on the altar during sacrifices to Yahveh;33 hence also the belief that the smoke from burning the liver of a fish had the power to expel the


devil. For the Greeks, this organ was the vital center of the human body. This is exactly what is recalled, as an example, in the myth of Prometheus, whose punishment for having given fire to men was to have his “immortal liver” (the symbol of the god) devoured each day by an eagle (the symbol of the Olympian world). In the myth of Eros, in order to seduce humans, the god targeted their livers with his arrows, hence Horace’s belief that the liver motivates love.

Plato draws a close relationship between the heart and the liver, perceiving in the latter a divine creation that renders it possible for the former to practice divination. It is only in the late versions of the myth of Eros (painted murals at Pompeii, for example), as expressions of a broader cultural change, that the arrows touch the heart. Even in the thirteenth century, the liver had not definitively lost its prior significance: the best-known hagiographical account of the time, although it almost always attributed the principal role to the heart, still rendered the liver, at least in one passage, the vital center of the human being.

34. Tobit, VI, 7.
39. In the Romanesque period, there was at least one allusion to the Latin Cupid (called only Amores) sending an arrow to the heart: Chrétien de Troyes, Cligès, v. 455, trans. Alexandre Micha (Paris: Honoré Champion, 1982) [Cligés, trans. W. W. Comfort (London: Everyman’s Library, 1914)]. A medieval collection of classical mythology, written between 875 and 1075, says that the gods sent an eagle to punish Prometheus by attacking his heart (not the liver, as Hesiod declared): Premier Mythographe du Vatican, I, 1, 3, ed. Nevio Zorzetti, trans. Jacques Berlioz (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1995), 2. The transposition of the symbolic role of the liver to the heart became so ingrained that modern scholars have more than once taken one for the other, as, for example, the translator of Horace, Odes, ed. and trans. Villeneuve, n.36 or that of Anacreon, Odes, trans. Frédéric Matthews (Paris: Presses Universitaires, 1927), 91.
This interpretation remained in the Romance languages, which were forming at the time, as shown in the figurative meaning of “courage” that the word retains in Italian, Castilian, Catalan, and Galician (here in the plural, livers), as well as in the meaning of “intimate,” “deep,” “entrails,” and “visceral” found in the Portuguese word figadal (derived from figado, “liver”). In French, similar significations appear by inversion, namely the figurative absence of the liver meaning fear: the classical word ficatum was rendered in popular Latin as feticare “to have the appearance of the liver,” which became fegier in the twelfth century, and then figer in the sense of “coagulating [blood]” in about 1225; in 1592, while the heart had long replaced the liver in the role of the central organ, this word gained the meaning “to render motionless.”

In the Germanic languages, the word also preserved this double meaning, denoting part of the human body and a positive moral value. This is the case in the English word liver (attested since the end of the ninth century), the initial written form of which, lifer, leaves no doubt as to its derivation from life. Hence the fact that liver also signifies “living” (and, by extension, “inhabitant”). As the liver has a dark color, a white liver signifies a coward. In addition to indicating the liver, the German word Leber also preserved its positive sense, with the meaning of “courage,” “character,” and “sincerity,” as in the expression frei von der Leber reden (“to speak frankly”). The same root and main significations appear in Lebewesen, “living being.”

In Classical Latin, “liver” was known as iecur until the appearance of the term ficatum (“liver full of figs”) in the first century: based on the Greek model (sykon, hence heper sykoton), this latter term designated the result of an ancient practice—the fattening of certain poultry with figs. Around 3000 BC, the Egyptians would have been the first to notice that prior to migrating, geese and ducks underwent a period of excessive eating, during which they built

41. Pierre Guiraud, Dictionnaire des étymologies obscures (Paris: Payot, 1982), s.v.; Alain Rey, ed., Dictionnaire historique de la langue française (Paris: Le Robert, 1992), vol. 1, s.v. Similarly, in the nineteenth century, there emerged expressions, such as “avoir les foies blancs” (to have white livers) “se ronger les foies” (to bite one’s liver) and “avoir les foies” (to have the livers).

up an energy reserve for their journey, which made their livers particularly tasty. To reproduce the phenomenon artificially, the Egyptians supposedly force fed poultry with dried figs, a practice that the Hebrews would have certainly been familiar with and then spread. The original medical or culinary term, *ficatum*, came to mean “liver of an animal” and, after the third century, “liver” in general. From this slightly Christianized Latin word, its correspondents in various Romance dialects were derived a few centuries later: French *foie*, Italian *fegato*, Castilian *hígado*, Portuguese *figado*, Romanian *ficat*, Provençal and Catalan *ferge*, Gascon *hitge*, Picard *fie*, Walloon *fête*, Venetian *figa*, Friulian *fiyat*, Piedmontese *fidegh*, Abruzzian *feteche*, Campanian *figau*, Sardinian *figadu*, Sicilian *ficatu*, Galician *figado*, and Asturian *fegadu*. None of these words has any relation to original sin. A vestige is nevertheless found in vernacular Italian: *fica* (“vagina” and, by metonymy, “attractive woman”), the meaning being derived from *fica*, the vernacular form of the Classical Latin *ficus* (“fig”); this word, which is already feminine in the classical language, seems to denote the consequence of the original sin in female physiology; its masculine correspondent is the *Adam’s apple*, the thyroid cartilage that recalls the forbidden fruit stuck in the throat of the first man and later his descendants.

43. According to Innocenzo Mazzini, it was Galen (*De alimentarum facultatibus*) in the second century who first attributed healing properties to certain dishes, such as the liver of animals fed with figs (“L’alimentation et la médecine dans le monde antique,” in *Histoire de l’alimentation*, ed. Jean-Louis Flandrin and Massimo Montanari (Paris: Fayard, 1996), 253–264). This idea spread throughout the Middle Ages, when this dish was only served as a form of medicine according to Silvano Serventi, *La Grande Histoire du foie gras* (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), 73. Throughout its long history, the fig-liver-medicine relationship appeared in Brazilian folklore in the figure of *papa-figo*, who killed children in order to eat their livers, hoping to be cured of leprosy, according to Gilberto Freyre, *Casa-Grande e senzala* (1933; reprint, Rio de Janeiro: Record, 1996), 328; Luis da Camara Cascudo, *Dicionário do folclore brasileiro*, sixth ed. (1954; reprint, Belo-Horizonte, São Paulo: Itatiaia, Edusp, 1988), 576–577.

The Apple and the Heart

Romanesque iconography more frequently used the apple as the forbidden fruit. The lengthy list of images in the three studied countries represents a significant part of our corpus. Among them, one can cite in Spain, Amandi, Añes, Avilés, the Bible of Burgos, the Bible of San Isidoro, Covet, Estany, Estibaliz, Frómista, Loarre, Mahamud, Peralada (figure 6), Porqueras, Rebolledo de la Torre, San Pablo del Campo, Sangüesa, Santillana del Mar, and Uncastillo. In France, Airvault, Andlau, Arles, Aulnay, the Bible of Corbie, the Bible of Marchiennes, the Bible of Souvigny, Cahors, Chalon-sur-Saône, Chauvigny (Figure 3), Cluny, Courpiac, Esclottes, Guarbecque, Hastingues-Arthous, the Hortus Deliciarum, Lescure, Mauriac (in the Auvergne), Melay, Moirax, Montpezat, Neuilly-en-Donjon, Nîmes, Poitiers (Sainte-Radegonde Church), Provins, Saint-Benoit-sur-Loire, Saint-Gaudens, the Sauve-Majeure, Targon, Tavant, Thuret, Toirac, Varax, Verdun, and Vézelay. In Italy, Galliano, Modena (figure 4), Parma, Pisa, Sant’Angelo in Formis, and Sovana.

Figure 3. Capital at the entranceway to the choir of the church Notre-Dame in Chauvigny (Poitou), twelfth century.
Author’s photo
Over subsequent centuries, the apple was continually present in the iconography of the original sin.\textsuperscript{45} It was frequently used as the forbidden fruit in literature, particularly in the twelfth century by Marie de France,\textsuperscript{46} in the thirteenth century by Robert de Boron,\textsuperscript{47} and in the fifteenth century by Sebastian Brandt.\textsuperscript{48} In paroemiology, this seems to be the meaning of a proverb from the beginning of the thirteenth century: “\textit{mieux vaut pomme donnée que mangée}” (better an apple given than eaten).\textsuperscript{49} In hagiography, the apple is the forbidden fruit in, for example, the \textit{Cantigas de Santa María}.\textsuperscript{50} An interesting case also appears in the breviary: the \textit{Hail Mary}—appearing in the twelfth century from a passage in the New Testament\textsuperscript{51}—refers only to a “fruit,” but an anonymous commentator from Northern France specifies at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the fourteenth century that it concerns the “fruit of the apple tree.”\textsuperscript{52} Anchored in Western imaginations ever since, the apple has even replaced the fig among modern scholars, in parallel to the cultural process that saw the heart where previously there had been the liver.\textsuperscript{53}

\textsuperscript{45} For illustrative purposes, note that in the Gothic period, the apple appeared in almost every representation. In Renaissance art, it was chosen, among others, by Tintoret, Dürer, Lucas Cranach, Lucas van Leyden, Jan Sadeler, and Jean de Gourmont; in Classical art by Rembrandt, Simone Cantarini, and Laurent Cars; in Romantic art, by Hyacinthe-Jean-Baptiste Aubry-Lecomte, and Joseph-Urbain Melin.


\textsuperscript{48} Sebastian Brandt, \textit{La Nef des fous [Das Narrenschiff]}, 12, adapt. Madeleine Horst (Strasbourg: Éd. de la Nuée bleue, 1989), 46.

\textsuperscript{49} Joseph Morawski, ed., \textit{Proverbes français antérieurs au XV siècle} (Paris: Édouard Champion, 1925), 47: \textit{Meuz valt puné duné que mangé}.


\textsuperscript{53} See Hasenohr, \textit{Prier au Moyen Âge}: n. 38. Regarding the apple, one of the many examples appears in the translation of Gottfried von Strassburg (Bernd Dietz, \textit{Tristán e Isolda} (Madrid: Nacional, 1982), 339) who translates the High Middle German \textit{vîge} as \textit{manzana}. 
The reasons behind this almost unanimous choice are unclear, however. We may allude to the more or less widespread presence of the apple throughout all of Western Europe. We may observe the old Celtic symbolism of the apple as the fruit of knowledge. We may recall its symbolic capital as a sign of power, wealth, lies, lust, discord, and transgression. We may suppose that just as the garden of Hesperides recalls the Garden of Eden (both sheltering a snake that defends the sacred tree), the apple tree “with fruits of gold” in the Greek myth influenced the medieval interpretation of the biblical account. We may thus argue the ancient association between this tree and Eden, which led to naming the carob the “apple of Paradise” in Hebrew. We may also consider the authority of Saint Augustine, who hesitantly accepted the possibility of the apple being the fruit of sin, perhaps influenced by the existence of thirty different varieties of apples in the Roman world at the time. We may wonder especially whether in popular medieval etymology there was not certain confusion between the words malum “badly” and malum “apple” as well as between malus “malicious” and malus “apple tree;” these phonetic identities may have had semantic implications indicating the evil character of the fruit.

The increasing popularity of the apple in this role was perhaps also related to its round shape and red color, which drew it closer to the heart, being the organ that was linked to the blood of Christ

55. L. Ginzberg, Les Légendes des juifs, 219, n. 70.
57. Among the transformations affecting the Roman world after the crisis of the third century, we may note a change in the pronunciation of Latin, with the progressive disappearance of the distinction between long and short syllables (Väänänen, Introduction, 29–74). This led to wordplays, such as the proverb Mala mali malo mala contulit omnia mundo, meaning “the mandible brought all the misfortunes of the world through the apple of the Malign” (Hans Walther, Proverbia sententiaeque latinitatis mediī aevi. Lateinische Sprichwörter und Sentenzen des Mittelalters (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1963), vol. I, n° 14301) and its later variant, Mala mali malo mutuit mala maxima mundo (Walther, Proverbia sententiaeque, vol. II-8, n° 38062 c1).
and that Christianity and its doctrine perceived as the center of the human being. In this sense, the precedents were strong; the doubt surrounding the identity of the forbidden fruit reflected another, more ancient doubt regarding the central organ of the body in the diverse cultures that, in a more or less direct way, provided the foundations for medieval Christian culture. Whereas the Egyptians perceived the heart as the center of the human being, the Hebrews attributed sacred powers to the liver, while regarding the heart as the seat of feelings and wisdom, and the source of life. The two organs fought for the role of the principle of life among the Babylonians and Greeks.

In the third century BC, the medical school in Alexandria established the physiological model that went on to prevail throughout the following two millennia: the brain was attributed with neurological sensitivity, movement, and functions, the heart with enthusiasm and the vital spirit.

Isidore of Seville affirmed that in the heart “lies all concern and the source of knowledge, [as] with the heart we understand, and with the liver we love.” Sharing his opinion, more than five centuries later, Hildegard of Bingen considered the attribute of the heart to be knowledge and that of the liver to be sensitivity. For her, the heart was the point of contact between the body and the soul, the terrestrial and the divine; it was “almost the essence of the body.

59. See, for example, Genesis, 20:5; Job, 9:4; Proverbs, 4:23.
61. In mythology, the liver is the central element in the story of Prometheus, while in that of Dionysus it is the heart. In the medical domain, the principal role is played by the liver for several authors and by the heart for others, especially from the time of Aristotle onwards: C. S. Harris, The Heart and the Vascular System in Ancient Greek Medicine (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
husbands of his mistresses, who tore off these two organs and gave them to their adulterous wives to eat.\textsuperscript{75}

The new collective feeling in relation to the heart was present in the idioms that were forming. From the Classical Latin cor, synonymous with “memory” (also with “thought,” “intelligence,” and “heart”\textsuperscript{76}) were derived “recorder” in French, ricordare in Italian, and recordar in Castilian and Portuguese. Although the heart as the center of memory appears in the root of the Castilian and Portuguese words decorar, this link is even more explicit in the phrases par cœur in French (appearing in around 1200), de cor in Portuguese (dating to the thirteenth century), and by heart in English (attested around 1374 and based on the acceptance of herte as “memory,” which existed from the start of the twelfth century\textsuperscript{77}). However, the heart was not only regarded as the seat of memory. In English, it was associated with courage (towards 825), emotions (1050), love (about 1175), and character (1225).\textsuperscript{78} In medieval Italian, the heart (core prior to 1250, then cuore) was reputed as being the center of feelings, emotions, and thoughts.\textsuperscript{79}

Most often, the association occurred between the organ and a feeling, thought to derive from it directly, as attested in various Western languages: courage in French (appearing in 1080, then written as courage and used as a synonym of cœur “heart” until the seventeenth century), coraggio (prior to 1257) in Italian, coraje in

\textsuperscript{75} Lai d'Ignauré, trans. Danielle Régnier-Bohler, in Le Cœur mangé: récits érotiques et courtois des XIIe et XIIIe siècles (Paris: Stock, 1979), 221–239. Of course, as indicated by Milad Doueihi (Histoire perverse du cœur humain, trans. Pierre-Antoine Fabre (Paris: Ed. du Seuil, 1996), 38–55), the scene of the devoured heart is a parody of the Last Supper (the lovers number twelve, and after realizing what they have just eaten, they never again eat) and the Eucharist (through the macabre meal, they met the desired and absent lover, became fusedional with him, and were finally reunited with him in death, which they sought by their refusal of other food). See also Luciano Rossi, “Suggestion métaphorique et réalité historique dans la légende du cœur mangé,” Micrologus 11 (2003): 469–500.

\textsuperscript{76} This is still the meaning of the word for Saint Augustine according to Edgado de la Peza, El Significado de “cor” en San Agustín (Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1962).

\textsuperscript{77} Rey, Dictionnaire historique, 1:442; José Pedro Machado, Dicionário etimológico da língua portuguesa (Lisbon: Horizonte, 1990), 2:288; The Oxford English Dictionary, 5:161.

\textsuperscript{78} The Oxford English Dictionary, 5:159.

\textsuperscript{79} Manlio Cortelazzo and Paolo Zolli, Dizionario etimologico della lingua italiana (Bologna: Zanchielli, 1980), 1:305. By the same process, in Romanian, the word is inima, derived from the Latin anima.
Castilian and coragem in Portuguese (both from the fourteenth century), herzhaftigkeit in German (from the fifteenth century derived from herz “heart,” written herza in the eighth century), and courage in English (around 1500, written as corage in around 1300). English presents an interesting case, showing the psychocultural hesitation between the liver and heart as the seat of positive feelings: the compound liver-heartedness, literally “without liver or heart,” designates the idea of “cowardly.” Further evidence of the moral importance attached to this organ is found in the word cordial, which initially carried the neutral meaning of “relative to the heart” and later acquired the positive sense of “nice” and “pleasant,” not only in French, English, Castilian, and Portuguese, but also in Italian (cordial) and in German (herzlich).

The symbolic value of the heart in the twelfth century was also seen in Jewish culture. Whereas the Pirkei Rabbi Nathan, a text predating the tenth century, establishes several comparisons between the parts of the universe and parts of the human body without even citing the heart, in the second half of the twelfth century, Maimonides considered it the center of the human body. He was probably influenced by Aristotle, for whom the human body developed from the heart, which was a very influential idea after the Christian rediscovery of the Stagirite. Thus, some Romanesque representations of the creation of Adam depict him coming to life not by a “breath on the face” (in faciem eius spiraculum vitae) as the Bible states, but by the hand of God touching his heart. This is the case, for example, in a manuscript from the abbey of Saint-Martial de Limoges, which was illuminated in around the year 1100, as well as in a relief carved a few years later on the northern facade of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.

The importance of the heart in Romanesque culture also transpires in its growing metaphorical use. On the political level, it became the “king” of the human body in the same way as the king is the “heart” of the social body. On the literary level, the rhetorical figure

---

82. Breviarium ad usum S. Martialis Lemovicensis (Paris: BNF), lat. 743, fol. 112 v.
of the heart spread like a book in which an ordinary individual, saint, or even Christ could write their amorous (including erotic) and spiritual emotions.\textsuperscript{84} On the architectural level, the cruciform design of churches situated the altar—the place where the mystery of the incarnation was reproduced—in the position occupied by the heart.\textsuperscript{85} On the liturgical level, the Christianization of the Holy Grail rendered it the receptacle holding the blood of Christ, symbolically transforming it into a heart.\textsuperscript{86} On the geographical level, in the same way as the heart was the center of the human body, the sepulcher of the Lord was the heart of the world, according to a sermon by Peter the Venerable.\textsuperscript{87} On the linguistic level, from the thirteenth century, the word designated the center of something in French and Italian, as it did later in English (beginning of the fourteenth century) and Castilian (sixteenth century).\textsuperscript{88} In this cultural context, when the Abbess of Bingen declared that Adam made of clay was merely an empty body before being filled with a heart, liver, lungs, stomach, and internal organs by God,\textsuperscript{89} she seemingly established a hierarchy of organs. Thus, the growing importance of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in spirituality from the twelfth century seems to have been the


\textsuperscript{85} It is no coincidence that in Medieval French, the same word designates both this part of the church and the heart: \textit{cuer}, a word appearing in 1080 in its anatomical sense and around 1150 in this architectural sense. The cultural and subsequent orthographical change—\textit{chœur} (choir) is attested in 1568—did not conceal this common origin, since the language conserved the homonymy of the words.


\textsuperscript{88} This meaning was applied to the city by Aristotle in his \textit{De motu animalium} (trans. Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 50–52) and used at the end of the Middle Ages, according to Roberto Lambertini, “Il cuore e l’anima della città. Osservazioni a margine sull’uso di metaphore organicistiche in testi politici bassomedievali,” in \textit{Anima e corpo nella cultura medievale}, ed. Carla Casagrande and Silvana Vecchio (Florence: Galluzzo, 1999), 289–304.

\textsuperscript{89} Hildegard of Bingen, \textit{Causae et curae}, II, 20, ed. Kaiser, 42.
conclusion of a long process in which this organ gained in medical and symbolic value.  

Exegetical Doubt

An interesting example of the rivalry between the fig and the apple in terms of the symbolic function of forbidden fruit is seen in the sculptures on the western facade of the small rural Castilian church of San Quirce, close to Burgos, which was completed in 1147. Here, eleven modillions illustrate several episodes of the myth of Adam, from the creation of protoplasm to the judgment of Cain, while in between them, ten metopes depict scenes that are sometimes difficult to relate to those of the modillions, although each stage of the cycle is identified by inscriptions. The ensemble forms an iconographic discourse with two aspects: the subject is evil, as much at its origin (original sin) as in some of its manifestations (sex, death, and bodily impurity).

This latter topic is visible on the two metopes at each end, where the artist depicts a man defecating. This was not a simple curiosity or obscenity, as the placement of these scenes is significant: the first being compared with the sin of Adam and the second with that of Cain. In fact, an inscription close to the representation of the original sin illuminates the link between the events depicted on the metope and modillion: MALA CAGO. No doubt, the man who speaks and acts in this way is both the paradisiacal Adam who has just eaten the forbidden fruits as well as the symbol of all human beings, his “posthumous sons,” as defined in a contemporaneous sermon. However, the exact interpretation of the inscription poses an important problem.

90. Jean-Vincent Bainvel, “Cœur sacré de Jésus (dévotion au),” Dictionnaire de théologie catholique, vol. 3, col. 305ff. One wonders whether the “new phase” of this devotion in the seventeenth century (Bainvel, “Cœur sacré de Jésus,” col. 313–314) was not the mystical consequence of the discoveries made by William Harvey on blood circulation and the heart (De motu cordis et sanguinis in animalibus, 1628).

91. These inscriptions are now almost illegible, but they were identified by Justo Pérez de Urbel and Walter M. Whitehill Jr., “La iglesia románica de San Quirce,” Boletín de la Real Academia de Historia 98 (1931): 795–812.

A few decades ago, historiography considered this a pun, as the individual excretes both “apples” and “evils.” This interpretation is based on three elements: the facade’s inscription, a capital inside the church on the same subject that undoubtedly depicts an apple, and finally, the ancient roots of the tradition perceiving the forbidden food of Paradise in this fruit. However, on the modillion’s scene, the forbidden fruits rather resemble figs, an impression reinforced by a nonformalistic reasoning. Indeed, the fig traditionally had an explicitly sexual character, while the apple, though related to Aphrodite, the goddess of love, had a more sensual, rather than explicitly sexual connotation. This is shown, for example, in an Icelandic saga from the thirteenth century in which the love philter is an apple, or even in some mythologies, where the rejuvenating and beautifying virtues attributed to the fruit remain in the etymology of “pomade,” a scented, cosmetic, and curative substance with apple.

The fig’s association with sexuality is seemingly expressed during the third quarter of the twelfth century in the iconographic design of the doorway of Barret Church in Poitou. Here, the three capitals on each side establish a spatial and symbolic relationship, which was very common in the Romanesque imagination. Looking at them, starting with the capital closest to the entry on the left-hand side, the first represents the original sin with the fig as the fruit, the second depicts a character in a very obscene pose, and the third, which is double, shows an eagle on one side and a monster devouring a sheep on the other. Symmetrically, on the right-hand side, the first capital depicts lions leaning against each other, the second, two doves embracing, and the final one, a centaur and a dove. The message seems rather evident: sin (that is to say, the fig and sex) leads to unnatural and erotic acts, thus to the death of the soul, which is devoured by the demon (eagle and monster); on the other hand, those who join Christ (the lion) will be innocent (doves), embracing peace and purity, thus calming the animal that exists in every human being (centaurs).

Indeed, the sexual meaning of the fig was accepted within traditional culture and did not disappear with its Christianization.


94. See Pastoureau, “Bonum, malum, pomum;” Rey, Dictionnaire historique, s.v.
Throughout the centuries, the fig tree was associated with Dionysus, and, at least in its Roman version, Bacchus. The image of the god was always carved in the wood of the fig tree, with a basket of figs being the most sacred object at the festivals that celebrated him, the Bacchanalia. As the protector of orchards, particularly of the fig tree, Dionysus was confused with his son, Priapus, born of Aphrodite. In the processions paying homage to this god of fertility, who was endowed with a disproportionately large penis, there was a large phallus carved in the wood of the fig tree, the leaves of which were also seen as an ithyphallic symbol.\(^{95}\) This notion of sexual exuberance is also found in a version of an episode of the Dionysus myth by the Christian apologist Clement of Alexandria (around 150–250).\(^{96}\) In a similar manner, although he calls the liver iecur and not ficatum, Isidore of Seville implicitly makes this link by affirming that in this organ “lies pleasure and concupiscence.”\(^{97}\)

The popular gesture of “making the fig” should also be mentioned here, associated with the fruit through its name and shape. This association is observed in Castilian, in which two words (higo/higa) appeared at the same time, in around 1140.\(^{98}\) This gesture assumed “an obvious sexual connotation”\(^{99}\) in the popular tradition of several societies, and even in the medieval West, where it can either denote the female sex organ (predominant meaning), its state of excitation (in this case, the tip of the thumb between the

---

95. Brosse, Mythologie des arbres, 290–291. The fig’s sexual connotation is found even today in northern Africa, where it is a synonym for the testicles; see Mozzani, Le Livre des superstitions, 747.

96. Clement of Alexandria, Protreptique, II, 34, 3–4, ed. and trans. Claude Mondésert and André Plassart (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, 1976), 90–91: “Dionysus was eager to go to down to see Hades, but he did not know how to get there; a certain Prosymnus promised to show him the way for a price, a price that was steep for Dionysus: she asked him to give himself to the pleasures of love. The god willingly agreed to the demand, promising to fulfill it should he return and swearing to it upon oath. Having been told how to get there, he left and later returned, but did not find Prosymnus (who was dead); to fulfill his lover’s wish, Dionysus, full of impure desires, went to her tomb. He cut at random a fig-tree branch, gave it the desired form, and used it to fulfill his promise with regard to the deceased” [back-translated from the French].

97. Isidore of Seville, Seville’s Etymologies, XI, 1, 125, trans. Throop.


index and middle fingers imitates a swollen clitoris), copulation (the thumb is the penis between the vaginal lips), or a phallus (rarer meaning). It is probably with this latter meaning that formerly, in Bavaria, a young man confirmed his intention to marry by sending a silver or gold fig to his lover, who could refuse the demand by returning the gift or accept it by returning a silver heart. The far la fica was an aggressive and derogatory gesture frequently used by Italians in the Middle Ages, not only on a daily basis, but also in emotionally charged situations. In 1162, angry with the Milanese who had forced his wife to mount a mule backwards, thus facing the tail of the animal—a very ancient position signifying contempt—Frederick I Barbarossa seized the city and, on penalty of death, forced the prisoners to remove a fig from the anus of a mule with their teeth. The inhabitants of Pistoia had carved into their castle of Carmignano two large arms with hands making the sign of the fig towards the enemy city of Florence—which, humiliated, went on to conquer the place in 1228. In Dante, a robber condemned to Hell makes the sign of the fig against God Himself. The gesture and expression fica facere are found, with the same derisory meaning, in all Romanesque cultures, and even outside of them. Although this gesture has a talismanic function, that of casting off the evil eye

100. Desmond Morris et al., Os gestos: suas origens e significado (1979; Lisbon: Publ. Europa-América, 1984), 191–195. The survey conducted in Europe by these authors between 1975 and 1977 showed that of 1,200 people interviewed, 440 still attributed a certain sexual connotation to the fig, that is, almost 37 percent of the total. If all the people who saw a sense in this gesture were considered, the proportion exceeded 66 percent (Morris et al., Os gestos, 190).

101. José Leite de Vasconcelos, A figa (Porto: Araújo e Sobrinho, 1925), 81–82. According to this ethnographer, it was common to associate the fig and the phallus in the Roman world (Leite de Vasconcelos, A figa, 86).


104. Dante Alighieri, Divina Commeda, Inferno, XXV, 1–3, ed. Giuseppe Vandelli (Milan: Hoepli, 1979), 202. This blasphemous connotation is the reason why a converted Jew was denounced in the Inquisition in 1553 for having “made figs at Saint-Sacrement;” see Leite de Vasconcelos, A figa, 48.

105. Leite de Vasconcelos, A figa, 42–56, 72, 76–81, and 90. He makes the same observation for German-speaking Switzerland (77–78), Greece (81), Bohemia, and Norway (82).
and other dangers, this seems to be precisely due to its sexual connotation, that of warding off sterility in life.\textsuperscript{106}

In this sense, the scene of the paramount sin depicted on the third modillion at San Quirce, in addition to adopting the ancient interpretation of the original sin as a sexual sin,\textsuperscript{107} prepared the observer to encounter, three metopes along and just after the expulsion from Paradise, a representation of the carnal relationship of protoplasm.\textsuperscript{108} Thus, according to our hypothesis, the word \textit{malum} would not have been used here with its specific meaning of “apple,” but rather in the broader sense of “fruit with pulp” (as opposed to \textit{nux}, “fruit with hard skin”),\textsuperscript{109} so that the pun of the inscription would signify “to expel evils and fruits.” Whether conscious or not of the inscription’s ambiguity, the sculptor at San Quirce thus revealed the interesting

108. Pérez de Urbel and Whitehill (“La iglesia románica de San Quirce,” 801) believe that the modillion represents the divine reproach against Adam and Eve and that, in reality, the metope on the genitals portrays the scene of the sin without the serpent. As such a reading of the cycle of San Quirce implies a subversion of the chronological order of biblical events, these two scholars maintained, albeit not very convincingly, that an “ignorant mason incorporated the fragments of the story in a very disorganized manner.”
109. Although the former meaning was eventually enforced in medieval Latin, it did not eliminate the latter, as observed in the usage of \textit{malum} followed by a qualifier. Such is the case, for example, in \textit{malum armeniacum} signifying an apricot. Or even \textit{malum granatum}, also called \textit{malum romana}, with the fruit taking its French name from the first expression (grenade) and its Portuguese name from the second (romã). It is even the case of \textit{malum terrae} denoting the various edible roots (like the mandrake) or cropped vegetables (like the leek). Translated into French in the middle of the seventeenth century, the expression “pomme de terre” was eventually used to designate the American tuber, whose usage then spread and replaced the former word (“patate”) from the end of the sixteenth century. In Romance dialects, the indefinite term generally disappeared: for example, \textit{malum persicum} became the French \textit{pêche}, Italian \textit{pesca}, Castilian \textit{prisco} (which lost its place in favor of \textit{melocotón}, derived from \textit{malum colonii}), Portuguese \textit{pêsego}, Romanian \textit{piersica}, Provençal \textit{persega}, and Catalan \textit{pressec}. In this case, the term indicating the geographical origin prevailed, similarly to “apple” in Germanic languages, which derives from the name of the city of Abella near Naples, renowned in Antiquity for producing this fruit: \textit{aphul} in Low German, \textit{appel} in Modern German, \textit{apple} in English, \textit{appel} in Dutch, \textit{eple} in Norwegian, \textit{æble} in Danish, and \textit{epli} in Icelandic.
coexistence of two exegetical traditions, that of the apple, present in the representation of the original sin inside the church, and that of the fig, visible on its facade. An even more meaningful coexistence if it is accepted that a single artist carved both the capital and the modillion.\textsuperscript{110}

This exegetical doubt is not an isolated case appearing in a monastic community in the center of Castile. The formation of the French word “pomme” provides an interesting indication in this context. Although, from the beginning of the fifth century, the Latin word \textit{pomum} (“fruit” in a generic sense) gained the specific meaning of “fruit of the apple tree” in Northern Italy and the majority of the Ibero-Romance area—a meaning preserved in the Provençal and Catalan \textit{poma}—Italian, Castilian, Portuguese, and Galician eventually favored the traditional form \textit{malum}, from which they derived \textit{mela}, \textit{manzana}, \textit{maçã} and \textit{mazá}, respectively.\textsuperscript{111} \textit{Pomum} preserved its broad sense in these four languages in the form \textit{pomo} (\textit{poma} in the case of Galician). By the same evolution, the collective forms \textit{pomario} in Italian and \textit{pomar} in Castilian, Portuguese, Provençal, and Galician derived from the Classical Latin \textit{pomarium}.

In contrast, the medieval Latin of Gaul had used, from the end of the eighth century, the word \textit{pomarius} to denote the apple tree, from which derived the vernacular name of this specific fruit (\textit{pume}) from the generic term (\textit{pomum}) in 1080.\textsuperscript{112} At the same date

\textsuperscript{110}. A situation that de Lojendio (\textit{Castilla I}) regards as possible, while Pérez de Úrbel and Whitehill (“La iglesia románica de San Quirce”) consider different artists to be involved. Irrespective, the three authors believe that the capital and modillion were sculptured over a short period, thus confirming the coexistence of two exegeses.

\textsuperscript{111}. Both the Spanish word \textit{manzana} (attested in 1112 as \textit{mazana}) and Portuguese \textit{maçã} (attested as a toponym in 1187: \textit{Maçãas}) derive from \textit{mala mattiana}, a fruit from the region of Mattium (present-day Marburg); see Corominas, \textit{Diccionario critico etimológico}, 3:248; Machado, \textit{Dicionário etimológico}, 2:1450; Antenor Nascentes, \textit{Dicionário etimológico da língua portuguesa} (Rio de Janeiro: Francisco Alves, 1932), 307. The Romanian language witnesses a similar evolution with \textit{mar} “apple” and \textit{poama} “fruit.”

\textsuperscript{112}. The word appeared in the \textit{Chanson de Roland} as \textit{pume}; in 1155, it became \textit{pome} before taking its modern form of \textit{pomme} in 1273; see Rey, \textit{Dictionnaire historique}, s.v. The uncertainty surrounding the word is seen in the expression \textit{pommes maciennes}: Frédéric Godefroy, \textit{Dictionnaire de l’ancienne langue française et tous ses dialectes du IX\textsuperscript{e} au XV\textsuperscript{e} siècle} (Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1938), 5:60; Antoine Thomas, “Mots obscurs et rares de l’ancienne langue française,” \textit{Romania} 36 (1907): 252–442.
appeared the French word *verger* (orchard), denoting land planted with various fruit trees, taken from the Latin *viridiarum* (from *viridis*, “green”). Faced with these facts, it is not absurd to assume that the French linguistic evolution unconsciously avoided the supposedly negative character of this fruit, as expressed through the word *malum*. Furthermore, the apple is a positive symbol in Celtic culture,113 which was heavily present in the territory of the future France, particularly in the context of the “folkloric reaction” of the twelfth century.114

In accordance with its archetypical character as the fruit par excellence, the word was used in the formation of many syntagms, and even, around 1256, in the curious expression “pomme de paradis” (apple of paradise) denoting the banana.115 Although in terms of vocabulary, we note a French resistance to the association of the apple with the fruit of sin, in terms of iconography, as seen above, such identification was established without problem. This was also the case in popular literary works, such as the first French theatrical text from the middle of the twelfth century or a sermon from the same time.116 Similarly, in this and the subsequent century, there were various love stories generally beginning with a betrayal (hearts metaphorically devoured) and ending with the death of the two protagonists (one of them literally devouring the other’s heart without realizing it117). To a certain extent, these stories consciously or unconsciously rewrote the drama of the original demise: betraying


115. Rey, *Dictionnaire historique*. It is interesting to note that in the seventeenth century, a Portuguese heretic who had been living in Brazil for several years regarded the short banana to be the forbidden fruit: *Processo da Inquisição contra Pedro Rates Hanequin*, II, 7, ed. and quoted by Plinio Freire Gomes, *Um herege vai ao Paraíso* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1997), 166.


the confidence of the Creator (“from the tree . . . you will not eat”) by eating the apple/heart (“the knowledge of good and evil”), the human being was the cause of his own perdition (“the day you eat of it, you will surely die”), as Adam and Eve had hearts full of arrogance (“you will be like gods”).

The Tree and Androgyny

This search for the identity of the Romanesque forbidden fruit must still consider the tree in relation to the primordial couple. The position of these three elements provides some important information. One of the symbolic and physical solutions used was to portray the primi parentes on the same side of the tree, with Eve always being closer to it (figure 4). The most common composition placed the tree between Adam and Eve, as already found on the sarcophagus of San Justo de la Vega in Leon, dated to the end of third century or the beginning of the fourth century and currently held in the archaeological museum of Madrid. It would be simplistic to think that this position on both sides of the tree simply responded to the desire for symmetry in Romanesque art, because the form is almost always a fragment of the contents that emerged. In the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, this scheme probably referred to two very pressing questions related to the contemporary phenomenon of the sacralization of marriage.

119. As considered Guerra, Simbología románica, 107.
Figure 4. Relief on the western façade of Modena Cathedral (Emilia-Romagna), circa 1100. 
Author’s photo

Figure 5. Illumination from the Exultet 3 in Troia (Puglia), Archivio Capitolare, middle of the eleventh century. 
Photo extract from G. Cavallo, Rotoli di Exultet dell’Italia meridionale (Bari: Adriatico, 1973), pl. 54.
On the one hand, by placing Adam and Eve at an equal distance from the tree, the iconography referred to a certain social egalitarianism and moral leveling between man and woman, even if the snake is almost always turned towards the woman. The side occupied by each character varied. We have already considered the position of Eve on the right-hand side of the tree as an “iconographic tradition,” a scheme with only three exceptions, in Saint-Antonin, Bruniquel, and Lescure. In fact, the woman appears on the left in several other cases: for example on the sculptures in Anzy-le-Duc, Airvault, Butrera, Cergy, Cervatos, Covet, Embrun, Gémil,

Girona, Lavaudieu, Lescar, Loarre, Luc-de-Béarn, Mahamud, Manresa, Moirax, Montcaret, Peralada (figure 6), Saint-Étienne-de-Grès, Saint-Gaudens, Sangüesa, San Juan de la Peña, Toirac, Verona, and Vézelay. Similarly, on the frescos in Aimé, Fossa, and San Justo in Segovia, on the illuminations of the Bible of Burgos, the Exultet 3 of Troia, and the Hortus Deliciarum, on a metal medallion from the Archbasilica of St. John Lateran, and on the mosaics in Monreale and Trani.

In addition, the central position of the tree, separating Adam and Eve, insinuated a rupture of the initial unity, at least on the psychological level. The tree, that is to say knowledge, revealed the existence of contradictory traits in human beings, made in the image and resemblance of God, the androgyne par excellence. “God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female created he them:” this is why the human being was initially double, and thus, inherently complete and microcosmic. Removing Eve from the rib of Adam was a surgery of separation, because they were formed from the same bones, they were “one flesh.” In this manner, the sacred text was interpreted from first half of the first century, initially by the Jew, Philo of Alexandria, and subsequently by Ambroise, Augustine, Gregory the Great, Isidore, the pseudo-Remigius of Auxerre, Guibert of Nogent, Pierre Lombard, Bernard, and others, who all regarded Eve as the image of the woman from within man.

Augustine, in particular, implicitly recognized the androgyny of the first man when he said that the devil “cannot tempt us only by the means of this animal part, which appears in a single man as an image or a model of woman.” Following a reasoning based on that

122. Genesis, 1:27.
of Saint Paul, he saw Adam-Eve as the complementarity of spirit and flesh, a comparison that was adopted by many thinkers in the Romanesque period. Since in the Bible, “Adam” was originally the generic name denoting a human being (Genesis, 1:19) and only later became the name of a person (Genesis, 3:17), Augustine interpreted the word “man” (Genesis, 1:26) as “human nature.”

Saint Anselme, who was very influential in the twelfth century, agreed that “Adam” should initially include Adam and Eve. While trying to explain how Adam’s prohibition of the fruit also implied Eve, Petrus Comestor stated that it was transmitted to the woman through man; thus implicitly suggesting the unity of the two individuals, and the androgyny of the being to whom it was forbidden to eat the fruit.

While the medieval Church did not formally accept the divine and the androgyny of Adam, it was still familiar with it. It is thus found in a text from the New Testament: “There is neither male nor female: for you are all one in Jesus Christ.” This appeared in an apocryphal text: “When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female one and the same, so that the male not be male nor female . . . then will you enter the kingdom [of God].”

This was a noncontemptible part of the thought of Clement of Alexandria (around 150–215), Origen (185–254), Gregory of Nyssa (around 330–390) and,


132. In a piece of literature that is today lost, Hypotyposes, according to Pierre Batiffol, Ancienne littérature chrétienne (Paris: Lecoffre, 1906), 162.


through them, of Johannes Scotus Eriugena\(^\text{135}\) (around 810–870). It undoubtedly belonged to the cultural and psychological milieu of the first Christian centuries.\(^\text{136}\)

While the androgyne of Eden had disappeared, it was because of sin. For some thinkers, the human being henceforth became aware of its duplicity, since that time it was broken and characterized by the genitals, which was visible proof of the original sin: \textit{sexus} comes from \textit{sectio} (“cut,” “separation”), a term derived from \textit{secare} “to cross,” which only assumed a specifically sexual meaning in the Middle Ages.\(^\text{137}\) It is thus not by chance that Adam said “\textit{me}” for the first time after the sin.\(^\text{138}\) Although, undeniably, the original sin and sex were closely linked, the way in which events had transpired was the subject of debate.\(^\text{139}\) One stream of thought interpreted the sin as a sexual offence: for example, the Jew Philo and some Church fathers, including Clement of Alexandria and Saint Ambrose.\(^\text{140}\) In the Romance period, the majority of theologists from the school of William of Champeaux (1070–1121) also considered that this sin involved concupiscence, although Guillaume himself saw it as an act of disobedience in which \textit{sensualitas} managed to dominate \textit{ratio}.\(^\text{141}\)


\(^\text{137.}\) Du Cange, \textit{Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis}, ed. L. Favre, (1678; reprint, Paris: Librairie des Sciences et des Arts, 1938), s.v. In Classical Latin, the verb group \textit{secare} has no sexual signification, according to Ernout and Meillet, \textit{Dictionnaire étymologique}, 622. The verb \textit{castrare} was used to denote the amputation of the genitals (or even, however nonspecifically, \textit{subducere}, \textit{exsecare}, or \textit{excidere}), but in Christian Latin, \textit{sectus}, the past participle of \textit{secare}, took on the meaning of “eunuch” and “castrate,” see Albert Blaise, \textit{Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens} (Strasbourg: Le Latin chrétien, 1954), 747.

\(^\text{138.}\) “\textit{Mulier, quam dedisti mihi sociam, dedit mihi de ligno, et comedi:}” Genesis, III, 12.


Another group reversed the question, seeing sex rather as a consequence of the sin. The Physiologus, an influential allegorical, zoological treatise translated into Latin in the fifth century, stated that the elephant and its partner, which “personified” Adam and Eve, were unaware of intercourse until the female had eaten the fruit of the Mandragora officinarum and given it to the male: “because of that, they had to leave Paradise.”142 The main proponent of this train of thought was Saint Augustine, according to whom the human being before the sin practiced sex without concupiscence.143 The error of the first couple would then have been one of pride, which led to the error of disobedience and then to carnal error.144 Another proponent of this idea was Johannes Scotus Eriugena in the eighth century, who considered that before the sin, the human being was only one, and that the resulting division of the sexes would cease in the eternal life.145 His thought continued to exert a certain influence; in the fourteenth century, it led Meister Eckhart to regard “any division” to be “bad as such,” thus perceiving the number two as the

142. El Fisiólogo: bestiario medieval, 20, ed. Francis J. Carmody, trans. Marino Ayerra Redín and Nilda Guglielmi (Buenos Aires: Eudeba, 1971), 61–62. The mandrake was considered an aphrodisiac in the Bible (Genesis, 14:14–17), and this assumed trait was reinforced in medieval culture by its form, which is somewhat reminiscent of the human body. In the twelfth century, Hildegard of Bingen observed that the plant “was born of the earth with which Adam was created” and that “due to its similarity to man, the presence of the devil and its cunning are felt more in it than other [plants]” (Le Livre des subtilités des créatures divines (Physique), 56, trans. Pierre Monat, third ed. (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, 1996), 72 [quotation back-translated from the French]).


144. In the first part of his interpretation, Augustine refers to both Genesis, 3, where the sin is one of pride and Romans, 5:19, where it is a sin of disobedience (De Genesi ad litteram in duodecim, XI, 14–15, ed. Zycha, trans. Agaësse and Solignac, 2:256–263), but several years later, he regards sex to be the consequence and not the cause of the sin: “nam corruptio corporis, quae adgravat animam, non pecciati primi est causa, sed poena; nec caro corruptibilis animam peccatricem, sed anima peccatrix flect esse corruptibilem carnem” (La Cité de Dieu, XIV, III, 2, ed. Dombart and Kalb, trans. Combès, 358).

The Romanesque representations of the initial sin hesitated in choosing between these theological positions. Showing a preference for the second, several images accorded sexual attributes to Adam and Eve just after the ingestion of the fruit: for Adam, generally a beard (figures 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5), seldom a penis (figure 5), and for Eve, usually breasts (figures 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6). A minority of images seem to attribute the initial sin to a sexual act, an iconographic and theological concept that was perhaps expressed for the first time on the bronze door of Hildesheim Cathedral in Germany between 1011 and 1015. Here, Adam appears to the left of the tree and behind him is another tree on which a small dragon is standing. Eve is to the right, close to another tree with the snake. The fruit is the apple, one in right hand of Adam and the other in the right hand of Eve, being stretched out towards Adam. There is another apple in the left hand of Eve, whose folded arm merges with her vagina. A similar illustration was used in Rebolledo de la Torre in 1186. In the Alardus Bible, the snake that gives the fruit to Eve is at the height of her vagina, recalling a male sexual organ about to penetrate her. The southernmost façade of the Church of Santa María in Sangüesa in Navarre, which dates from the second half of the twelfth century, seems to portray the same design. Here, the scene of sin is situated immediately below the personification of Lust, showing a woman whose naked breasts are attacked by toads and snakes.

146. Meister Eckhart, *Commentaire de la Genèse*, 88 and 90, ed. and trans. Brunner et al., 346 and 352. In fact, the idea of unity as perfection (see, for example, Bernard of Clairvaux, *De consideratione*, II, 8, 15, in “Obras Completas de San Bernardo,” 2:104) and thus division as bad (studied by Gerschom Scholem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit: Studien zu Grundbegriffen der Kabbala* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1962)) seem to be an anthropological reality rather than an element specific to Judeo-Christian culture. Thus, the Timbiris, an Indian group from inland Brazil, does not conceive the mathematical calculation $1 + 1$, since they consider male-female, sun-moon, fire-water, and so forth, to be unities or totalities.

147. For Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, II, 5–7, ed. Kaiser, 90, a man with hair who did not have a long beard was frigid and infertile, with feeble masculinity.


149. Despite the great diversity of iconographical material on this doorway, which reminds us of the later reuse of items from other parts of the church, Luis Maria de Lojendio believes that this work possesses an “admirable unity:” *Navarra* (Madrid: Encuentros, 1978), 167. On the development of the medieval representation of lust, see Jacqueline Leclercq-Kadaner, “De la Terre-Mère à la Luxure,” *Cahiers de civilisation médiévale* 18 (1975): 37–43.
This association between lust and the original sin was not uncommon; as Sangüesa was on St. James’s Way, the most travelled road by Occitans and Italians, we may hypothesize that its iconographic message expressed the opinion of many pilgrims on the subject. In this sense, this image from Navarre ratified at least two other images known to these pilgrims.

The first image from Provence, dated to the second quarter of the twelfth century, is located a few kilometers from Tarascon in Saint-Etienne-du-Grès, on the tympanum of Saint-Gabriel’s chapel, where Daniel appears next to the original sin (prefiguration of Christ, the new Adam) with lions (a common symbol of lust): an opposition of scenes suggesting the sexual signification of the sin. As already mentioned, it is true that the contrast between the two scenes did not necessarily mean that the artist interpreted the sin “as a vulgar sin of lust, but its consequence was to introduce turmoil and even shame into a domain that had emerged wholly pure from the hands of the Creator.”\(^{150}\) However, the authors of this comment—a longstanding phenomenon in medieval art studies—seem inclined towards adapting the intentions of the Romanesque artist to the theologically correct reading, rather than considering other interpretative possibilities beyond the domain of ecclesiastical culture. It is significant, for example, that on the same area of the tympanum, the two scenes are chronologically inversed, first portraying Daniel and then the sin.

The second image from Italy figures on the mosaic of Otranto (1163–1165). The branches of the forbidden tree pass between the legs of the characters, insinuating the sexual nature of the sin. This seems all the more evident given that Adam and Eve are each situated in a circle, rendering the characters isolated, separated, and autonomous entities in their respective domains, domains most certainly resulting from the primordial androgyne being cut in two. This assumption is reinforced by the fact that the forbidden fruit is represented as the fig (with its strong sexual connotation, as already seen) and illustrated in a suggestive way by the mosaic artist, the priest Pantaleon: the thinner part of the fig held by Eve is

SIRENS: FROM THE DEADLY SONG TO THE MUSIC OF THE SPHERES  XXXVII

facing downwards and placed between her breasts, as though forming a third breast; the fig in Adam’s hand is in the inverse position, reminding us of the male genitals.¹⁵¹

Taking the geographical distribution of the Romanesque images into account, we see that the function attributed to the fig as the forbidden fruit was mainly expressed in the cultural milieu related to the Greco-Judaic world, while the apple appeared in association with the Romano-Christian world. This is perhaps due to the specific links established in these cultural areas between each fruit and a bodily organ. In the images where the fig is used, Eve is often portrayed with the fruit on the right-hand side of the tree, like the liver in the human body.¹⁵² In the images with the apple, the tendency is for Eve and the fruit to appear on the left-hand side, just like the heart in the body (figures 3 and 6). In both instances, the forbidden fruit was the symbol of the rupture of the unity of Eden and the birth of the disjointed humanity that characterizes history.

¹⁵¹ The same sexual presentation appeared towards the end of the tenth century in Spain in a manuscript of the Beatus (Madrid: Biblioteca del Escorial, Ms. 11.5, fol. 18). It is true that this representation shows the leaves of the fig tree rather than its fruit, but the leaf carried by Adam has a clear phallic character, while the one hiding Eve’s genitals is triangular like a vulva.

¹⁵² In this regard, I evidently mean a statistical trend, not an overall rule, since contrary cases are not rare, as illustrated in figures 2 and 5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 1. Capital in the ambulatory of the church Notre-Dame-du-Port, Clermont-Ferrand (Auvergne), circa 1120.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Notre-Dame-du-Port, Clermont-Ferrand (Auvergne), circa 1120.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Author’s photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-1.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-1.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 124k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 2. Fresco on the western wall of the chapel of Vera Cruz de Maderuelo (Segovia, currently held in the museum of Prado), Castile, circa 1125.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Vera Cruz de Maderuelo (Segovia, currently held in the museum of Prado), Castile, circa 1125.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Museum photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-2.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-2.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 112k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 3. Capital at the entranceway to the choir of the church Notre-Dame in Chauvigny (Poitou), twelfth century.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Notre-Dame in Chauvigny (Poitou), twelfth century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Author’s photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-3.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-3.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 76k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 4. Relief on the western façade of Modena Cathedral (Emilia-Romagna), circa 1100.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Author’s photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-4.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-4.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 84k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 5. Illumination from the <em>Exultet</em> 3 in Troia (Puglia), Archivio Capitolario, middle of the eleventh century.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Photo extract from G. Cavallo, <em>Rotoli di Exultet dell’Italia meridionale</em> (Bari: Adriatico, 1973), pl. 54.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-5.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-5.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 76k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Figure 6. Capital in the western gallery of the monastery cloister Santo Domingo, Peralada (Catalonia), thirteenth century.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Legend</td>
<td>Santo Domingo, Peralada (Catalonia), thirteenth century.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credits</td>
<td>Author’s photo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URL</td>
<td><a href="http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-6.jpg">http://rhr.revues.org/docannexe/image/4621/img-6.jpg</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>File</td>
<td>image/jpeg, 110k</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>