



Vitruvian Cogitationes - RVC

ASTRONOMY IN RENAISSANCE ART

ASTRONOMIA NA ARTE DO RENASCIMENTO

LA ASTRONOMÍA EN EL ARTE DEL RENACIMIENTO

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Abstract: What is the importance of presenting, explaining and conceptualizing the sky as a phenomenon of nature in the midst of Renaissance works of art? In this study are presented some artistic constructs of the Renaissance that are described in detail. This was necessary to build a set of knowledge that can be used dialogically in the middle of processes of knowledge transmission related to Astronomy.

Keywords: Astronomy; Arts; Renaissance.

Resumo: Qual a importância de apresentar, explicar e conceituar o céu – enquanto um fenômeno da natureza – em meio a obras de arte renascentistas? Neste estudo são apresentados alguns constructos artísticos do Renascimento que detalhadamente são descritos, constituindo assim, um conjunto de saberes para que os leitores possam utilizá-los dialogicamente em meio a processos de transmissão de conhecimentos ligados à Astronomia.

Palavras-chave: Astronomia; Artes; Renascimento.

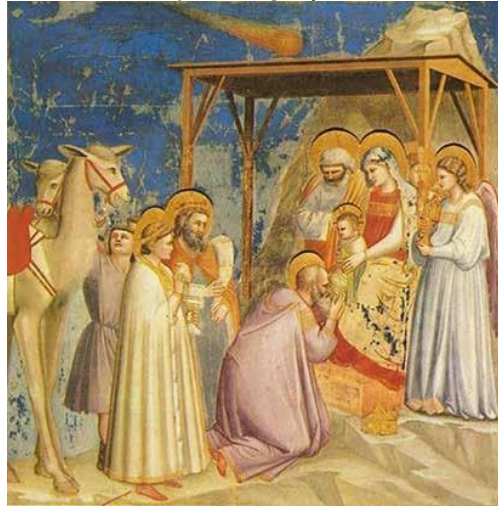
Resumen: ¿Cuál es la importancia de presentar, explicar y conceptualizar el cielo como fenómeno de la naturaleza en las obras de arte del Renacimiento? En este estudio se presentan y describen en detalle algunos constructos artísticos del Renacimiento, constituyendo así un conjunto de conocimientos para que los lectores puedan utilizarlos dialógicamente en medio de procesos de transmisión de conocimientos relacionados con la Astronomía.

Palabras clave: Astronomía; Arte; Renacimiento.

The heavens have always been a source of inspiration for poetry, music, and the visual arts. The first chapter of the biblical book of Genesis already talks about the creation of the Sun, Moon and the stars. The ancient Babylonian, Chinese, North European and Central American cultures all left records and artifacts related to various astronomical observations. It was only natural then, that at the end of Medieval times, with the first signs of the Renaissance (in the 14th and early 15th centuries), the heavens would start making an appearance in important works of art. One impressive demonstration of the interest in astronomy was in the great, Italian painter Giotto di Bondone's fresco *Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 1). The fresco was painted around 1305–06, and it features a very realistic depiction of a comet, representing the «Star of

Bethlehem. It is thought that the comet's image was inspired by Giotto's observations of Halley's comet in 1301.

Figure 1 The *Adoration of the Magi* by Giotto di Bondone (1305)



FROM: Wikimedia Commons, 2020.

A second beautiful example of astronomy in art is provided by a famous illuminated manuscript. The three Dutch miniature painters known as the Limburg brothers created the *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* book of prayers (Book of Hours), and it is currently considered to be one of the most valuable books in the world. The book was unfinished at the time of the death of the three brothers in 1416, and the work on it was completed by the painters Barthélemy van Eyck (possibly) and Jean Colombe (certainly). As Figure 2 shows, an attempt was clearly made to give an accurate representation of the night's sky, even including meteors.

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Figure 2 *Très Riches Heures du Duc de Berry* by the Limburg Brothers (1410)



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A third magnificent painting, the *The Battle of Issus*, by the German painter Albrecht Altdorfer (Figure 3), may be the first painting in which the curvature of the Earth is shown as seen from above, from a great height.

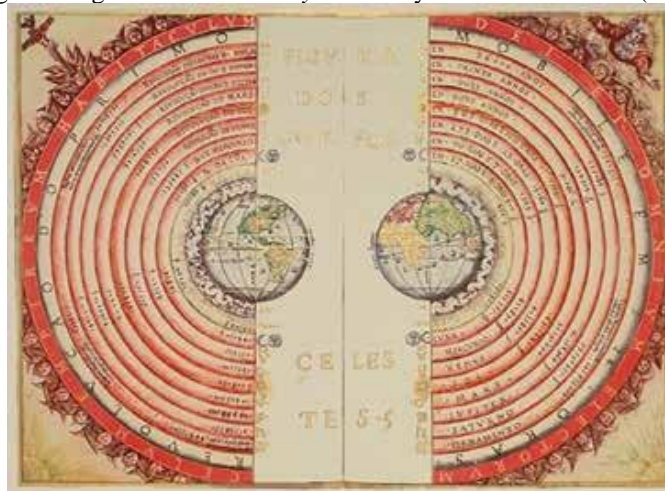
Figure 3 *The Battle of Issus* by Albrecht Altdorfer (1529)



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Finally, I find the illustration of the Ptolemaic geocentric model by the Portuguese cosmographer Bartolomeo Velho (Figure 4) extremely attractive. The illuminated illustration, Figure of the *Heavenly Bodies*, was created in France in 1568.

Figure 4 Figure of the *Heavenly Bodies* by Bartolomeo Velho (1568)



FROM: Wikimedia Commons, 2020.

All of these works of art were being created shortly before or at a time when the Copernican revolution was about to forever change the view humans had of the cosmos and on their place within it. Far from being perfect and immutable, the heavens turned out to be part of an ever-evolving universe.

REFERENCE

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