

CODART NEGENTIEN Madrid

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Attribution session at Museo Lázaro Galdiano

***Visio Tondali*, formerly attributed to a follower of Hieronymus Bosch**

The key to understand this piece argument can be found in the gothic letters situated in the left inferior corner, *Visio Tondali*, which refers to the incunable published in 1478 in the city of Hertogenbosch, a religious text by Marcus of Regeinsenberg. This text speaks about an Irish knight of the 13th century, Tondalus, whom in a three day long dream travels to the other world and after this journey, decides to become a monk. This was the most elaborated and popular text of the infernal visionary medieval literature, being translated 43 times in 15 languages in the 15 century. This text was very popular in Germany where 10 different translations were made to German and another four translations to dutch. The Guetty Foundation preserves a manuscript with Simon Marmion illustrations. It looks like between 1478-79 this text was published in Hertogenbosch, so would be possible that The Bosch could know it.

On top of the letters with the title *Visio Tondali* there is the figure of a lethargic middle aged man, being guided through his mystic journey by an angel of effulgent wings, usual in The Bosch repertoire. During this three day dream, Tondal has the chance to visit the Purgatory, to learn about the goodness of Heaven, meanness of Hell and to go over the seven capital sins in which man can fall, preventing him from salvation.

The entire piece participates in the moralizing iconographic repertory and the compositive form of Jerome Bosch. The representation of the dream is quite complex: the central spatiotemporal, framed by a curved horizon, where the capital sins are represented, is separating the scenes of heaven on the left, and hell on the right. This reminds of the composition of the doors of Garden of delights where a conception of flat earth is framed by a transparent sphere.

In the center of the composition, a figure of a man emerges, center of the Renaissance universe, whose scale is different from the other figures in the painting. The face appears to be part of the landscape, maybe a mountain, like an animalist reference, so frequent in the period. Through his shoulders, a river passes by, also identified like a *capellina*. This human mountain is situated in the center of the moral and paisajistic universe, where the mayor speech of the painting takes place, used also to organize the general lecture of the piece.

In the empty eye sockets and ears of his giant face, black rats emerges, medieval symbol of lust, as a representation that temptation penetrates through the senses, in line with the message of *vanitas*. On top of this head, a slothful Eve lies with a snake coiled to her neck, getting settled over a cushion that a monkey is getting ready for her, symbol of skittishness, lies and pride. This figures are accompanied by an owl symbol of wisdom, and a fish that opens his own mouth with his hands. Again the insistence of the fall into sin appears to be obvious, as well as the reference to the original sin represented by Eve.

Over this scene, a white cloth hangs like Christ's shroud in between two trees that have grown through the "mountain man". This can be an allusion to the death of the Savior and the need to redeem the original sin through the cross.

Some coins fall out of the man's nose, into a tub, a clear reference to the sin of greed, where the sin of lust is represented. Inside this tub monks and naked women romp, beside a figure with a crossbow and another cadaverous figure dressed with a white robe. All these representations are a reminiscence of the dance macabre in which the souls await for the final judgement, as a reminder to the living of their mortal life and their vulnerability to face sins.

Gluttony and rage inhabit the interior of what could be the helmet of the mountain man, situated in the right of the spectator. On top of it, there is a scene that reminds of The Bosch painting *Death and the Miser*, in which Death visits a man who has been tempted by diabolic monkeys that want to take him to hell, shown behind him, as it is also represented in the *Garden of Delights*.

The counterpoint of this infernal scene can be seen in the opposite side: over the bodies of a couple where a snake has coiled itself around them and attacked by strange demonic creatures, maybe as the representation of envy, as it is the cause of the original sin. Over them, another cadaveric figure shows a mirror to a naked woman, who is turning down the offer by looking away from the mirror, alluding to the capital sin of pride.

Behind this scene Eden is shown as a bright lake of delights in which some souls are enjoying themselves, crowned by a steaming white sphere, which seems like an illusion of Christ as Prometheus, carrier of fire, leading to a speech of redemption, supported also by the representation of a snail and a corvidae.

The message is completed with the representation of a character that lies over a dice which shows the number three, referring to the three sure things that will happen after death: judgment, glory or hell. To the right, a man rides a bird; accompanied by a demonic creature with fire wings referring to the initiation journey that Tondal is experiencing. Towards this scene to the left, there is a creature whose nose has turned into a flute, which is also a very common type of creature in The Bosch fantasy world, in fact a similar creature can be found in the *Temptations of Saint Anthony* of Lisbon. In this painting of the Museo Lázaro Galdiano we think that this character can be the announcer of the Last Judgment, a message so clearly represented in this painting.

Besides the general iconographic speech, which is clearly comprehensible inside The Bosch world, there are also several iconic and technical coincidences that I consider to be of major importance for the correct attribution of the painting which I would have the opportunity to explain at the Museo Lázaro Galdiano the 19th of June at 17:15.

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