

12. *The Book of Urizen*

London: The Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust, 1958

In *The Book of Urizen* Blake describes the creation of the physical world and mankind. The number of plates in surviving copies vary between 24 and 28, most of which are brilliantly color-printed, dramatic, full-page portraits of the major figures in the myth. To achieve a stunning effect close to Blake's original, this edition required an average of 29 watercolor stencils for each page, each watercolor wash applied by hand. The result of this labor can be seen in the title page, a near perfect reproduction of Blake's original.

The title page introduces the reader to the dominant biblical associations in *The Book of Urizen*. The trees which frame the plate suggest the creation and the Garden of Eden, while the tomb-like stones behind and above the long-bearded old man represent the yet unetched Ten Commandments. The scholarly patriarch in the center squatting on one book while writing, it seems, in the two others to his side is reader as well as writer. Perhaps he is reading *The Book of Urizen* (his own book?) with us; or perhaps he is writing it; or perhaps he is transcribing it; or perhaps he is drafting the commandments that will be placed on the blank tablets. And is he doing what he's doing blindly or in a visionary state? It's not unusual for Blake to offer his reader and viewer many possible interpretations and then leave the sorting up to them.

--- Rebecca Bonelli '03