

11. *The Song of Los*

London: The Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust, 1975

In 1795 Blake etched *The Song of Los*. Only six known copies are recorded and it is a relatively short work containing only eight plates, four of which are full-page designs with no text. Covering the continents of Africa and Asia, this prophecy completes Blake's continental foursome started with *America a Prophecy* and continued with *Europe a Prophecy*.

The frontispiece sets the stage for *The Song of Los* by depicting a priest bowed in submission before an unclear sun. This symbolically introduces the religious and political oppression Blake wishes to address, expose, and critique in the poem. By dividing the work into two sections--- "Africa" and "Asia"--- Blake was able to focus on the origins of religious and political tyranny, and on the relationship between them and sexual repression distinct to each continent. In "Africa" he tells the story of man's enslavement to religion and the repressive natures of many faiths. The focus in "Asia" is the political oppression that Urizen created by fearing and rejecting "the joys of love." The story of Urizen is told in *The Book of Urizen*, his appearance here being a brief continuation of that horrific drama. The important character added to Blake's cosmic cast in *The Song of Los* is Los, an immortal like Urizen, but an artist with great powers of imagination. As the singer of this song, Los dramatizes the Fall of Man that leads to the establishment of nations who hate and destroy each other because of their misperceived differences. In later illuminated books, Los has his work cut out for him as he tries to gather all his strength and energy to counter these destructive forces.

--- Anna Sluzar '03