

CHAPTER V

The Florentine Hierotopy of
the Holy Land:
Lo Scoppio del Carro and
Re-Enactments of the Jerusalem
Miracle of the Paschal Fire



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A mong several phenomena related to the concept of Florence as a/the New Jerusalem, urban sacred performances played a significant role, recreating in the city the spatial imagery of the Holy Land.¹ Very important in this sense is the ritual of the *Scoppio del Carro*, or “Explosion of the Cart,” staged up to the present day every Easter Sunday in the square between the Baptistry and Cathedral, to which a volume of historical and theological analysis has recently been devoted (frontispiece).² This Paschal event is well known but has until now been perceived as a mere folk celebration and popular entertainment for the Florentines. Its historical origins and symbolic concept remain unclear. Yet, in my view, it had a crucial meaning for medieval and Renaissance Florence, as the most important spatial icon of Jerusalem, related to the more general phenomenon of the recurring annual miracle of the Holy Fire, which, as I have shown in earlier studies, had a significant impact on Christian culture in both the East and West.³

It will be useful here to recall some peculiarities of the Florence Easter rite as performed today. On Easter Sunday morning an elaborate *Carro* (cart or wagon), three stories high, built in 1622, is drawn by a pair of oxen

decorated with garlands through the streets of Florence to the Duomo. The day before, Holy Saturday, a priest undertakes the ritual of rubbing together flints (believed to come from the Holy Sepulcher) until they spark; this flame is then used to light the Paschal Candle at the Vigil Mass on the Saturday evening, and some of the coals from the fire are placed in a container. On Sunday morning a procession delivers the Holy Fire to the archbishop of Florence in front of the cathedral.

The Cart enters the square accompanied by drummers, flag bearers, and figures dressed in historical costume as well as city officials and Florentine clerics. Loaded with fireworks, it stands in front of the cathedral, and a wire is stretched from its pinnacle to a pole placed in front of the high altar within the church. When the “Gloria” is sung inside the church, the archbishop uses the prepared fire to light a dove-shaped rocket (called the “*Colombina*” and symbolizing the Holy Spirit), which shoots along the wire from the altar to the Cart outside of the church, setting off the Cart’s “explosion” in the square, a spectacular pyrotechnic display for the gathered public.

We are sure that the rite has existed in this form at least since the sixteenth century. Its origins appear to be partly historic and at the same time semi-legendary. According to the fifteenth-century *De illustratione Urbis Florentiae* by Ugolino Verini,⁴ and certain other chronicles,⁵ a young nobleman named “Pazzino” (a member of the famous Florentine Pazzi family) took part in the first Crusade in the Holy Land in 1099, where he became a hero, being the first to scale the walls of Jerusalem and to raise the Christian banner. Pazzino was rewarded with important relics:

1 This paper was prepared as part of my research project at the Villa I Tatti (The Harvard University Center for Italian Renaissance Studies) where I was invited as a visiting professor in the autumn of 2018. I take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to all the friends and colleagues there who created a most stimulating atmosphere for my research.

2 See R. Gulino, *Il rito dello Scoppio del Carro della chiesa Fiorentina nella solennità di Pasqua* (Florence: Pubblicazioni dell'Archivio arcivescovile di Firenze, 2018) (with a description of the modern ceremony). Also available at: http://www.duomofirenze.it/feste/pasqua_eng.htm. See also D. Neri, *Il Santo Sepolcro. Riprodotto in Occidente* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971), pp. 74–80. In its present form, the ritual took shape no later than in the fifteenth century.

3 A. Lidov, “Sviatoi Ogon’ i perenesenie Novykh Ierusalimov: ierotopicheskie i iskusstvovedcheskie aspekty” (“The Holy Fire and the Translation of New Jerusalem: Hierotopic and Art-Historical Aspects”), in *New Jerusalem. Translation of Sacred Spaces in Byzantium and Medieval Russia*, ed. by A. Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2006), pp. 277–312. *Idem*, “The Holy Fire and Visual Constructs of Jerusalem, East and West,” in *Visual Constructs of Jerusalem*, ed. by B. Kühnel, G. Noga-Banai, and H. Vorholt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2014), pp. 241–252.

4 Verino d’Ugolino, *De illustratione Urbis Florentiae* (Florence: Apud Mamertum Patissonium Typographum 1583), p. 26; Gulino, *Il rito dello Scoppio del Carro*, p. 105.

5 Ghinozzo de Pazzi, *Ricordanze* (Florence: n.p., 1535); Gulino, *Il rito dello Scoppio del Carro*, p. 106.



1 The stones of the Holy Sepulcher, SS. Apostoli e Biagio, Florence.

three stones from Christ’s Sepulcher, which he brought back to Florence in 1001, and was glorified by his fellow citizens.⁶ The stones of the Holy Sepulcher were originally kept in the Florentine church of Santa Maria sopra Porta, also called San Biagio, but were later translated to the church of Santi Apostoli e Biagio where they are still preserved today (Fig. 1).

The three stones of the Holy Sepulcher were divided in the church, one of the stones placed in the center of the glazed ceramic altar (“*tabernacolo*”) made by Andrea della Robbia in 1507 (Fig. 2). It was deliberately displayed over the space reserved for the presanctified Eucharistic gifts, decorated with a painting of the Resurrection of Christ, becoming part of a vertical series of symbolic images of God the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Eucharistic chalice.



2 Andrea della Robbia, Eucharistic tabernacle, 1507, SS. Apostoli e Biagio, Florence.

Two other stones were inserted into a special instrument for the kindling of the Easter fire on Holy Saturday as the first ritual of the *Scoppio del Carro*, which (as noted above) takes place on Sunday.⁷ These stones are displayed

6 S. Raveggi, “Storia di una leggenda: Pazzo dei Pazzi e le pietre del Santo Sepolcro,” in *Toscana e Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, ed. by F. Cardini (Florence: Alinea, 1982), pp. 299–315.

7 Today the fire generated by the holy stones is kindled by the archbishop of Florence himself in the Duomo before the ceremony.



3 14th-century Florentine goldsmith, circle of Pasquino da Montepulciano (15th century) and 16th-century Florentine goldsmith, Processional lamp for the *Scoppio del Carro*, SS. Apostoli e Biagio, Florence.

in the church of Santi Apostoli e Biagio for public veneration in a special niche with other instruments of the ceremony, including a lamp used in the processional transfer of the Paschal Fire to the Duomo (Fig. 3).

The special wooden cart, resembling a moveable aedicula, replicates in Baroque style the forms of the chapel constructed over the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The present cart was made in 1622, but most probably it replaced earlier prototypes.

It seems quite probable that the rite of kindling the fire with the holy relics—the stones from the Holy Sepulcher—was introduced in the twelfth century, though we do not have any direct evidence for this dating. As far as can be determined, the rite already existed in the fifteenth century, when it may have been elaborated in conjunction with the



4 Luciano Minestrella, Replica of the Ascension in Santa Maria del Carmine, scale 1:20, church of San Michele (Magliano Sabina, RI), permanent exhibition *Artes Mechanicae*.

new fashion for scenographic “special effects” employed in Florentine *sacre rappresentazioni*, or “mystery plays.”⁸ Thanks to a Russian bishop, Avraamij (Abraham) of Suzdal, who left detailed descriptions of these mysteries in 1439, we know what they were like in visual terms, especially those for the feast of the Annunciation in SS. Annunziata, and the feast of the Ascension in Santa Maria del Carmine (Fig. 4). It is interesting in our context that fireworks and imagery of the divine fire coming

8 The most recent study of this phenomenon, with principal references and important citations, is C. Zanetti, “A Hierotopy ex Machina in Renaissance Florence. The Machine in the Representation of Aerial Journeys in Liturgical Dramas,” in *Air and Heavens in the Hierotopy and Iconography of the Christian World*, acts of the conference, Moscow, 11–13 September 2019, ed. by A. Lidov (Moscow: Theoria, 2019), pp. 148–167. See also N. Newbigin, *Feste d’Oltrarno: Plays in Churches in Fifteenth-Century Florence* (Florence: Olschki, 1996).

down from the heavens played a significant role in these performances, which were conceived by Filippo Brunelleschi himself.⁹ I would not exclude his participation in the new fifteenth-century scenography of the *Scoppio del Carro*.

The tradition of such mysteries, however, existed in Italy before Brunelleschi, who probably merely elaborated the existing scenography and machinery of these performances. The Festa della Palombina in Orvieto, which took shape at the very beginning of the fifteenth century and still takes place today, offers an eloquent example. The protagonist of this religious feast on the Sunday of Pentecost is a white dove, whose flight symbolizes the descent of the Holy Spirit (Fig. 5).

This feast was established by Giovanna della Cervara, a member of the Monaldeschi family—the most powerful and important clan in Orvieto. She left all her property to the cathedral for the annual and eternal celebration of the rite of the Palombina. Initially, this celebration took place inside the cathedral but in recent years it has been moved to Piazza Duomo. The flight of the white dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, is performed using an overhead wire that extends from the roof of a neighboring church to the historic baldachin erected in front of the cathedral; six ancient, life-size, painted wooden figures are placed inside the Neo-Gothic aedicule of the baldachin to represent the Virgin Mary and the Apostles. The ensemble produces a recognizable iconographic representation of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. The Bishop of Orvieto signals the dove’s departure at exactly noon, waving a white linen cloth from the balcony of the Palazzo dell’Opera

del Duomo. In the context of our discussion of the *Scoppio del Carro* the most impressive detail of the *sacra rappresentazione* in Orvieto is not the living white dove that descends from the roof in a special glass vessel but the small explosion in the baldachin that initiates a series of fireworks.¹⁰

There is another argument that the rite of the *Scoppio del Carro* dates back much further than the fifteenth century. Atop the processional lamp for the Paschal Fire is a silver image of the dove holding in its beak a silver imitation of the stone of the Holy Sepulcher, a detail of the object that finds mention in the inventory of Santa Maria sopra Porta in 1378—evidence that at least the solemn procession with the Holy Fire and the performance with the dove already existed by that date.

It seems important to understand the connection between the *Scoppio* and the Easter rituals, and to explain why the fire played such a great role in them. One testimony in particular appears to be highly significant, though it is rarely mentioned. In a sixteenth-century *Vita* of Savonarola we read that, together with the three stones of the Holy Sepulcher, Pazzino Pazzi brought another relic back from the Crusade: the miraculous fire from Jerusalem, carried, of course, in a special lantern. I quote: “*Fuoco benedetto che venne dal sepolchro di Christo, el quale fu portato da Iherusalem dalla nobil famiglia de’ Pazzi.*”¹¹ This miraculous fire in a special lantern naturally and inevitably burned out, but the strange relic offers the key to the origins of the *Scoppio* rite, which to all appearances was a re-enactment of the recurring annual miracle of the Holy Fire that took place at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem

9 G. Pochat, “Filippo Brunelleschi and the ‘Ascension’ of 1422,” *The Art Bulletin* 60:2 (1978), pp. 232–233; N. Newbigin, “Greasing the Wheels of Heaven: Recycling, Innovation and the Question of ‘Brunelleschi’s’ Stage Machinery,” *I Tatti Studies in the Italian Renaissance* 11 (2007), pp. 201–241.

10 Upon the arrival of the dove, flames are lit on the heads of the Virgin and the Apostles and a round of fireworks explodes, amidst the cheers of the faithful and the flight of balloons the children have loosed into the air.

11 *Vita del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola scritta da un Anonimo del sec. XVI e già attribuita a fra Pacifico Burlamacchi*, ed. by P. Ginori Conti (Florence: Olschki, 1937), p. 233.



Feast of the “Palombella,” Orvieto.

every year on Holy Saturday. The *Scoppio del Carro* thus served to create a spatial image of Florence as the New Jerusalem.

In this context I would like to address the phenomenon of the Holy Fire and the hierotopical and art historical aspects of this great miracle of the Christian world.¹² According to the belief of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Fire descends every Holy Saturday upon Christ’s Sepulcher in Jerusalem (Fig. 6). The miracle has been well documented since the ninth century.¹³ The earliest testimonies belong to the Latin pilgrim and monk Bernard, ca. 865, and the Arabic writer Al Djahis (d. 869). According to the monk Bernard’s account:

It is worth saying what happens on Holy Saturday, the Vigil of Easter. In the morning, the office begins in this church [i.e., the Anastasis, where Christ’s Sepulcher stands]. Then, when it is over, they go on singing *Kyrie Eleison* till an angel comes and kindles light in the lamps which hang above the Sepulcher. The patriarch distributes some of this light to the bishops and the rest of the people, and thus each one has light where he is standing.¹⁴

As to the origins of this rite, some scholars suggest the Jewish ritual *Kebot Yahweh*, practiced in the Temples of the First and Second Old Testament.¹⁵ This was the rekindling of the sacred fire on the altar in the eastern courtyard of the Temple, on the annual solar New Year’s Day, by the first ray of the rising sun passing through the outer eastern gate of the Temple. After the closing of this gate the ceremony was terminated completely and the fire upon the altar became the inextinguishable, eternal fire created by the miraculous flame at the dedication of the first Temple by Solomon. As in certain other cases, the Christian practice of the Holy Fire could be an adaptation and reinterpretation of the ancient Jewish tradition.

The idea of the Holy Fire was adopted by Christians as early as the fourth century AD. There is evidence of a special light over the Tomb of Christ, which played a significant role in the daily evening service known as the *lucinicon*. As the late fourth-century pilgrim Egeria informs us, the focal point of the commemorative ceremony was the kindling of lights in the Holy Sepulcher Church: the fire was taken not from outside but from the inextinguishable lamp hanging in the cave above the Tomb of Christ—the fire that was the source of light for all other churches in Jerusalem.

We do not know when the rite of the Holy Fire was finally established in Jerusalem as a special and quite elaborate ceremony including the annual miracle every Holy Saturday. Most probably, this occurred in the second half of the ninth century, since the testimonies are frequent in number from that period onward. It is interesting that the miraculous rite has continued practically unchanged over the centuries up to the

12 There is considerable literature on the subject of the miracle; among the main publications are: G. Klameth, *Das Karsamstags-Feuerwunder der Heiligen Grabeskirche* (Vienna: Mayer & Comp., 1913); K. Schmaltz, “Das heilige Feuer in der Grabeskirche im Zusammenhang mit der kirchlichen Liturgie und den antiken Lichtriten,” *Palästina-Jahrbuch* 13 (1917), pp. 53–99; O. Meinardus, “The Ceremony of the Holy Fire in the Middle-Ages and Today,” *Bulletin de la Societe d’Archeologie Copte* 16 (1962), pp. 243–252; M. Canard, “La destruction de l’église de la Resurrection par le calife Hakime et l’histoire de la descente du feu sacré,” *Byzantion* 35:1 (1965), pp. 16–43.

13 For a recent survey of the sources, see: Bishop Auxentios of Photiki, *The Paschal Fire in Jerusalem: A Study of the Rite of the Holy Fire in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre* (House Springs, MO: Chrysostom Press, 1999). For a collection of the principal medieval sources from the ninth to the sixteenth century, see Ch. Skarlakidis, *Holy Fire. The Miracle of Holy Saturday at the Tomb of Christ. Forty-two Historical Accounts* (Athens: Elaia, 2011).

14 J. Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusaders* (Warminster:

Aris & Phillips, 2002), p. 266. The miracle was mentioned a century before in the “Life of Theodore the Sabaite.”

15 J. Morgenstern, *The Fire upon the Altar* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1963), pp. 87–101.



Feast of the Holy Fire, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jerusalem.

present day (in fact, in the Christian Orthodox community millions of people can now watch coverage of this miracle on TV as it takes place in Jerusalem). The miracle is venerated by all believers of the Eastern Orthodox churches, including the Armenians, Copts, and Syrian Jacobites. Yet only the Greeks, in the person of their Jerusalem Patriarch, had the honor of receiving the miraculous fire and distributing it to other Christians.

Up to the thirteenth century, Latin Catholics celebrated the miracle along with others. But in 1238 the pope issued a bull in which he accused the Greeks of fraud and mystification, and officially rejected belief in the miracle. (This division became all the more obvious after the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the sixteenth century, because the miracle took place only during Orthodox Easter). However, some Catholic groups, especially the Franciscans—Custodians of the Holy Land—, for centuries continued to believe and venerate the miracle, which was well known in medieval Europe.

The most interesting visual document that has come down to us is a fourteenth-century drawing from the Vatican Library (Codex Urbinatense Latino 1362, f. 1v) which seems to be a precise illustration of some Franciscan testimonies of the same period (Fig. 7).¹⁶ It depicts the principal structural elements of the rite. The miracle lay in the descent of the divine fire from Heaven to the Tomb of Christ through the openings in the dome of the Rotunda of the Resurrection and of

the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher (also called the *kouvouklion* in Greek), which bore a special baldachin-shaped construction above the dome for this purpose. The fire “not made by human hands”—a material embodiment of the Holy Spirit—represented as a dove in the Vatican drawing, kindled lights in the lamps that hung above the Sepulcher. The appearance of the fire was perceived as a miraculous revelation, a powerful sign of the Resurrection, the promise of the Second Coming and of eternal life in the Heavenly Jerusalem. The miracle could only take place after a long collective penitence, with the faithful moving around the Sepulcher and repeating the Church’s great penitential petition: “*Kyrie eleison*” (God, have mercy).

The Greek patriarch of Jerusalem could receive the Holy Fire inside or outside the Aedicule, but from the ninth to the fourteenth century the chapel was usually empty at the time of the miracle and its door was sealed by Muslim guardians. In these centuries the Muslims, governing in Jerusalem, strictly controlled the ceremony and many times tried to expose the fraudulent tricks of the Greeks, without success.¹⁷ The patriarch distributed the Holy Fire to the congregation, who arrived at the rotunda of the Church of the Resurrection from all over the world, individual members of the congregation then taking it back to their places of origin. In this way the miraculous fire became the major source of light for Jerusalem and for other Christian cities. It was a kind of practical outcome of the miracle.

The Holy Fire was perceived as an important relic that could be preserved and transferred from Jerusalem to any other place.¹⁸ In the localities to which it was transferred,

16 Fra’ Niccolò of Poggibonsi left an eloquent testimony: “[...] All crying at the top of their voices: *Kyrie eleison*, *Christe eleison*, and gathering aloft to the windows above to see the holy fire; and this continues for a space of two hours. The lamps within the Holy Sepulcher are all extinguished, and the Saracens stand before the door and allow no Christian to enter. And, through the above-mentioned window, I saw a dove coming, which alighted upon the chapel of the Holy Sepulcher: and then a great light appeared within the Holy Sepulcher, with a great brilliance, and then he holds himself a happier who can first get hold of that light.” Fra’ Niccolò of Poggibonsi, *A Voyage beyond the Seas (1346-1350)*, trans. by T. Bellorini and E. Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1993), pp. 23–24.

17 For a detailed analysis of the Arabic documents, see I. Kratchkovsky, “Le ‘feu beni’ d’après le récit d’al Biruni et d’autres écrivains musulmans du X au XIII siècle,” *Proche Orient Chrétien* 49 (1999), pp. 257–276.

18 This aspect has been discussed in Lidov, “The Holy Fire and Visual Constructs of Jerusalem,” pp. 241–252.



Codex Urbinate Latino 1362, *The Holy Spirit Descends upon Christ's Sepulcher in Jerusalem*, 14th century, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, f. 1v.

moreover, the Holy Fire recreated the sacred space of the “New Jerusalem,” revealing an image of the miracle of the Holy Sepulcher in an earthly city and at the same time confirming the reality of the heavenly kingdom. A detailed description of this practice can be found in the text by the Russian abbot Daniel, who visited the Holy Land in 1106–1107. He says:

And on the third day after the Raising of the Lord I went, after the liturgy, to the keeper of the key of the Lord's tomb and said to him: “I would like to take my lamp back.” He received me kindly and let me enter the tomb alone. I entered the tomb and saw my lamp standing on the holy tomb and still burning with that holy light. And bowing down before the holy tomb and kissing with love and tears the holy place where the pure body of our Lord Jesus Christ lay, I then measured the tomb in length, and breadth and height, for when people are present it is quite impossible to measure it. And having honored the tomb of the Lord as best I could, I gave the keeper of the key a small present and my poor blessing. And he, seeing my love for the Lord's tomb, pushed back for me the slab which is at the head of the holy tomb of the Lord and broke off a small piece of the blessed rock as a relic and forbade me under oath to say anything of this in Jerusalem. And I, having bowed to the tomb of the Lord and to the keeper of the key, took my lamp with the holy oil and left the holy tomb with great joy, enriched by the grace of God and bearing in my

hand the gift of the holy place and the token from the holy tomb of the Lord and went rejoicing as if I were carrying some rich treasure, and I returned to my cell full of joy.¹⁹

The Russian abbot recounts that he had bought a large glass lamp and put it on the Lord's tomb. It was one of three lamps kindled by the Holy Fire. Then he took his lamp back to Russia as a major relic, which was supplemented by two others: the measurements of the tomb and a piece of stone from the Sepulcher. That is to say, he deliberately created a complex of different relics for a special sacred space in his homeland. There is no doubt, however, that the most important among the three relics translated to Russia was the Holy Fire.

As several Arabic accounts suggest, the practice of the translation of the Holy Fire to other cities of the Christian world was quite widespread. Let me quote Ibn-al-Djauzi (before 1256), who lived in Jerusalem and—we can be certain—knew all the details: “They kindle the lanterns and carry this most venerable fire to Akka, Tyre, all the cities of the Franks, and even to Rome, Algeria, Constantinople and other cities.”²⁰ The Arabic writer mentions special lanterns for the Holy Fire in a quantity that must have been considerable. A number of existing metal lamps could have been used for this purpose.²¹ Unfortunately, we have no securely documented lanterns of the Holy Fire, though they undoubtedly existed in the Byzantine East and Latin West. There are many examples from

19 J. Wilkinson, J. Hill, and W. F. Ryan, *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185* (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1988), pp. 168–171.

20 Kratchkovsky, “Le ‘feu beni’,” pp. 257–276.

21 I. Q. Van Regteren Altena, “Hidden Records of the Holy Sepulchre,” in *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. by D. Fraser, H. Hibbard, and M. J. Lewine (London and New York: Phaidon 1969), pp. 17–21. Such lamps of different forms have been known since the early Byzantine era. Their upper part usually has a tower-like shape.

the post-medieval period: Russian pilgrims used such lamps, and some of them survive in old photographs: an early twentieth-century photo, for example, captures a Russian pilgrim holding a lantern with the Holy Fire (Fig. 8). A characteristic peculiarity of these metal lantern-reliquaries, in my view, is the form of the Aedicule (in Greek, *koubouklion*) of the Holy Sepulcher as an indication of the sacred space in which the miracle took place.

A lesser-known silver lantern is kept in the Cathedral of Beaulieu in France.²² It is a Byzantine work, probably, of the eleventh century (there are Greek letters around the cross on the handle that point out the sacred function of the vessel). The object, called a “Lamp-reliquary” in the cathedral’s inventory, was later reused as an ordinary reliquary. There is no definitive proof that the lantern was made for the Holy Fire, but it seems quite possible.

One imagines that the Holy Fire brought from Jerusalem in special lanterns was kept in churches as a most precious relic to be solemnly displayed for public veneration. It seems logical that some precious containers would be made for this kind of relic. I will present a set of well-known and lesser-known art objects that may originally have been conceived as reliquaries for the Holy Fire and were later re-used for other purposes. There are several written sources.

In 1200, Antony of Novgorod, attending a solemn liturgy in the great church of Saint Sophia in Constantinople, witnessed a procession in which “the shining jerusalem” (“*svetozarnyi ierusalim*” in his original Russian) was carried to the main altar.²³ Most probably



8 Unknown author, Russian pilgrim holding a lantern with the Holy Fire, 1912.

he meant the liturgical vessel, referred to in Russia as “jerusalem” or “sion.” These vessels survive in Russian collections in examples of the eleventh to fifteenth centuries.²⁴ Two jerusalems of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, made respectively by a Byzantine and a Russian master, were kept in the cathedral of Saint Sophia of Novgorod. In 1655 a Syrian traveler, Deacon Paul of Aleppo, visiting this church, left a precious testimony: “At the liturgy the deacons carried the silver representation of the Sion church and the church of the Resurrection, and the priests, advancing two by two, carried the liturgical shroud on their heads.”²⁵ The jerusalems looked like models of the Aedicule and the Resurrection rotunda at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The reason for placing jerusalems on altar tables was to emphasize the mystical connection between the altar and the historical place of the burial and resurrection

Anthony the Bishop of Novgorod”), ed. by Ch. Loparev, in *Православный Палестинский сборник (The Orthodox Palestinian Collection)* 17, Issue 3 (St. Petersburg: Ch. Loparev, 1899), pp. 9–11.

24 I. Sterligova, “Jerusalems as Liturgical Vessels in Rus,” in *Jerusalem in Russian Culture*, ed. by A. Batalov and A. Lidov (New York: Aristide D. Caratzas Publisher, 2005), pp. 51–72.

25 Путешествие Антиохийского Патриарха Макария в Россию в половине XVII века, описанное его сыном архидиаконом Павлом Алеппским (*The Travel of the Antioch Patriarch Makarios to Russia in the Seventeenth Century described by his son the Archdeacon Paul of Aleppo*) (Moscow: Univ. Type., 2005), p. 467.



The Holy Land, Reliquary of Saint Anastasios the Persian, 969–970, Domschatzkammer, Aachen.

22 *Les Trésors des Églises de France. Musée des arts décoratifs* (Paris: Caisse Nationale des Monuments Historiques, 1965), cat. no. 390, pl. 84, p. 212. See also J. Durand, “Lanterne de Beaulieu,” in *Byzance. L’art byzantine dans collections publiques françaises*, ed. by M.-C. Bianchini and J. Durand (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), cat. no. 233, pp. 319–320.

23 “Книга Паломник. Сказание мест святых во Цареграде Антония архиепископа Новгородского в 1200 году” (“The Pilgrim’s Book. The Story of the Holy Places in Trargrad (Constantinople) by

of Christ. According to Antony of Novgorod, the moment of transferral of the Jerusalem and the shroud was the culmination of the service, when the church finally became identified with the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Let me recall and very briefly describe some other Byzantine and Latin liturgical objects belonging, in my view, to the same category of “Jerusalems” and “sions,” despite the fact that their original function remains the subject of discussion. The renowned tenth-century Aachen reliquary is one of them (Fig. 9).²⁶ It was commissioned in Antioch by Eustathius Maleinus in 969/970. Made in the form of the Aedicule, it has a dome with many lobes probably reflecting the original architectural detail of the Jerusalem shrine. The inscriptions on the façades, with texts taken from the Psalms, emphasize the idea of Heavenly Jerusalem. Until recently the Aachen Reliquary was interpreted as an Artophorion (a vessel for the presanctified Holy Bread). Yet this interpretation does not explain the open windows in the apse and the drum, which suggest instead an incense burner or lamp. The hypothesis proposing a connection between this model of the Aedicule and the Holy Fire might help to explain its various contradictory characteristics.

Among Romanesque objects, I would like to call attention to the eleventh-century “*Lantern de Begon*,” which originally functioned



10 French master, Reliquary “*Lantern de Begon*,” 11th-century, Abbey Treasury, Conques.

as a silver lamp in the form of a two-story tower with a baldachin-like upper section (Fig. 10).²⁷ It is noteworthy that the “*Lantern de Begon*” (like many other objects of this kind) later became a container of holy relics—an additional argument in favor of the original function of this lamp.

To the category of liturgical “Jerusalems,” in my view, we should also assign the famous silver model from San Marco. With regard to this work, most scholars agree on one point only: its dating to the twelfth century. It has characteristic features of both Byzantine and Romanesque art, and—according to various scholars—this luxury object could have been

made in Constantinople, Venice, or southern Italy. Its function, too, is uncertain: the five-domed model has been interpreted as a lamp, an artophorion, an incense burner, and even a profane perfume brazier. (This final interpretation, which has recently become quite popular, does not seem convincing.) The form of the building reflects the Byzantine iconography of the Heavenly Jerusalem as a city made up of churches,²⁸ and has its closest parallels in some twelfth-century frontispiece miniatures. Several details point to the Holy Sepulcher.

I would like to call attention to certain facts usually absent from discussions of the Venetian object. In the oldest surviving inventory of San Marco, of 1283, the object is called “the silver church” (*ecclesia argenti*), used as the reliquary of the Holy Blood of Christ—the major relic of the Venetian Republic, brought from Constantinople by Enrico Dandolo in 1205. The use of a burner for this purpose seems much less probable than the idea that the relic of the Holy Blood may have replaced another important relic—an extinguished lamp for the Holy Fire, for example. The internal arrangement of the Venetian reliquary supports this hypothesis.

My point is that there exists a group of liturgical objects with uncertain function that in medieval Russia were called “Jerusalems” or “sions.” And, at the same time, I want to stress the absence among known artefacts of reliquaries of the Holy Fire, which must however exist. All the objects just discussed

bear the iconic image of the Aedicule over the Holy Sepulcher and of the Heavenly Jerusalem in general, and clearly relate to the sacred space where the miracle of the Holy Fire took place.

In the context of the present study, it seems significant that the Holy Fire, being of the divine substance, ideally embodied the source of light for all fire lit in Christian churches the world over, which in this way could mystically connect spatial representations of the “New Jerusalem” with their prototypes in Heaven and on Earth. I will argue that it is possible to reconstruct the ritual, spatial, and artistic environment that came into being in conjunction with the Paschal miracle of the Holy Fire. Let me simply point out some examples that certainly deserve much more detailed discussion.

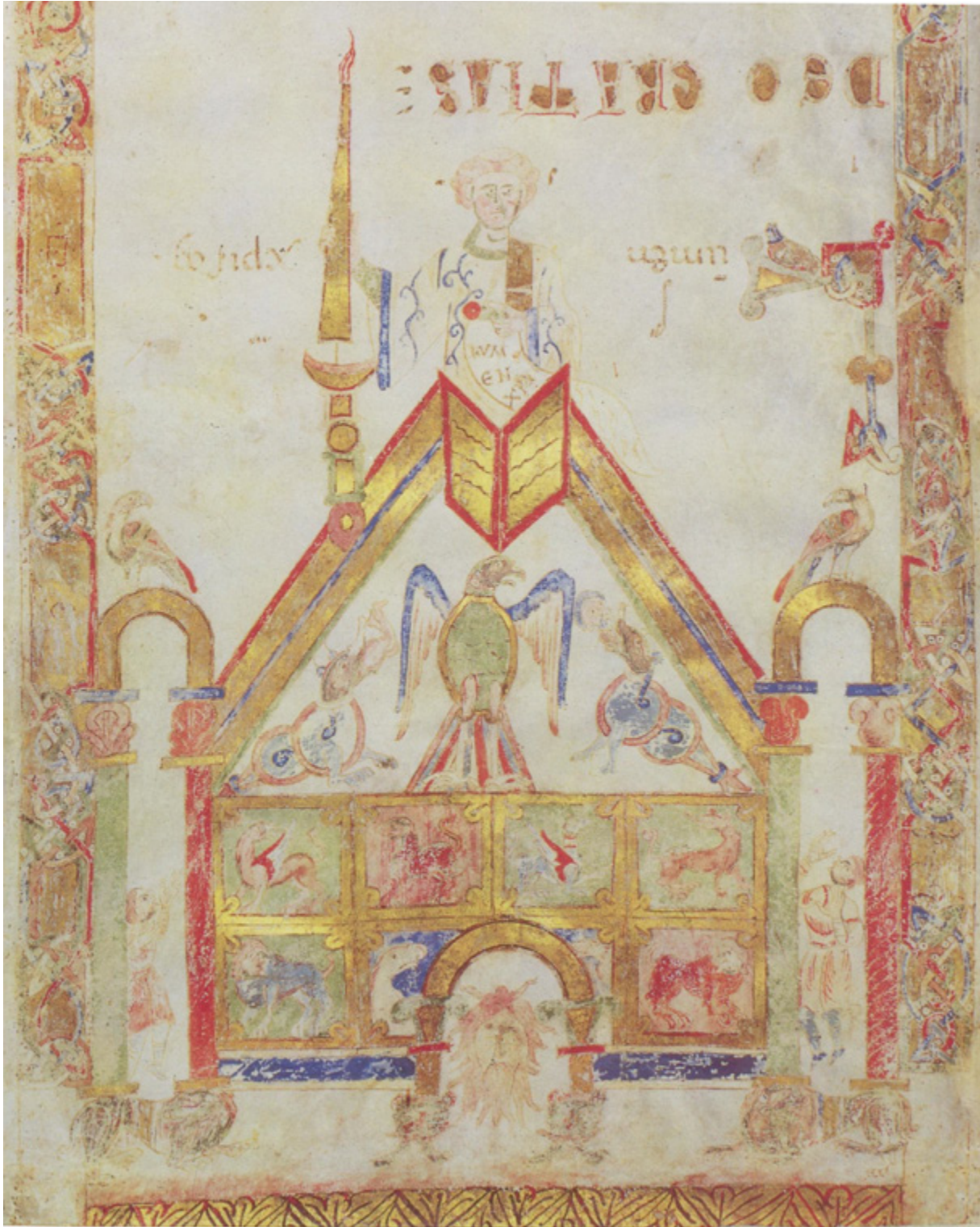
In the West, especially in southern Italy from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, the well-known Exultet ceremony might be reconsidered in this perspective.²⁹ The Easter fire received from the last ray of the sun became the source of light for the entire church environment, playing a principal role in the creation of the image of the church as a New Jerusalem. This Latin Catholic ritual, represented in the Exultet rolls since the eleventh century, was a more practical way of re-enacting the miracle in Jerusalem, one that nonetheless retained the central message of annual renovation and the mystical origin of the fire lit in all Christian churches—unified with their prototype at the Holy Sepulcher through this sacred light (Fig. 11). A permanent visible sign of this link was the monumental candlestick for the Paschal Fire, often made of marble, that stood in front of the Romanesque altars as reminders of the miracle of the Holy

26 A. Grabar, “Le reliquaire byzantin de la cathédrale d’Aix de Chapelle,” in *idem, L’art de la fin de l’antiquité et du Moyen Age* (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), vol. 1, pp. 427–433; W. B. R. Saunders, “The Aachen reliquary of Eustathius Maleinus, 969–970,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 36 (1982), pp. 211–219; R. Ousterhout, “Reliquary of St Anastasios the Persian,” in *The Glory of Byzantium. Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era (843–1261)*, catalogue of the exhibition, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, ed. by H. Evans and W. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), pp. 460–461; H. Klein, “Arthophorion (Reliquary of St. Anastasios the Persian),” in *Treasures of Heaven. Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, catalogue of the exhibition, British Museum, London, 23 June–9 October 2010; Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland, 17 October 2010–16 January 2011; Walters Art Museum, Baltimore, 13 February–15 April 2011, ed. by M. Bagnoli, H. Klein, C. Griffith Mann, and J. Robinson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), cat. no. 55, p. 118.

27 *Les Trésors des Églises de France*, cat. no. 540, pl. 40, pp. 301–304. See also M.-M. Gauthier, *Les Routes de la Foi. Reliques et reliquaires de Jérusalem à Compostelle* (Fribourg: Production Office du Livre, 1983), p. 60.

28 I. Kalavrezou, “Incense Burner in the Shape of a Domed Building,” in *The Glory of Byzantium*, cat. no. 176, pp. 250–251; M. Da Villa Urbani, “Perfume brazier in the form of a domed building,” in *Byzantium 330–1453*, catalogue of the exhibition, Royal Academy of Art, London, 25 October 2008–22 March 2009, ed. by R. Cormack and M. Vassiliki (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), cat. no. 176, p. 423; *Architecture as Icon. Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art*, catalogue of the exhibition, European Centre for Byzantine and Postbyzantine Monuments, Thessaloniki, 6 November 2009–31 January 2010; Princeton University Art Museum, 3–6 June 2010, ed. by S. Curcic and E. Hajitriphonos (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), cat. no. 2, pp. 160–161.

29 *EXULTET. Rotoli liturgici del medioevo meridionale*, catalogue of the exhibition, Abbazia di Montecassino, Cassino, 20 May–31 August 1994, ed. by G. Cavallo and A. D’Aniello (Rome: Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, 1994); T. F. Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).



Fire and its Jerusalemic symbolism.

The miracle of the Holy Fire influenced important phenomena of the Latin medieval funeral culture. A characteristic example is offered by the “lanterns of the dead,” better known by their French name *lanternes des morts*, which were constructed in cemeteries from the eleventh to the fourteenth century, mostly in the territories of modern France, Spain, and Austria (Fig. 12).³⁰ These are pillar-shaped buildings, round or square in plan, with the altar table on the ground level and a room for the fire at the top. The *lanternes des morts* functioned as funeral chapels, indicating by their fire the location of the holy place. Some scholars have already suggested that the origins of this strange construction go back to the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. In my view, however, the connection might be described in more specific terms. The fire over the altar certainly expressed the idea of the Easter light of the Resurrection and the Descent of the Holy Fire upon the major altar of Christianity, that of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem.³¹ The forms of the *lanternes des morts* could go back to the reliquaries of the elongated vertical shape, in which pilgrims used to carry the Holy Fire (for example, the “*Lantern de Begon*”). The eternal inextinguishable fire over the cemetery became a kind of icon of the Resurrection, marking the space of the New Jerusalem—the holy place of salvation of the righteous.

The further evolution of the *lanternes des morts* leads to some interesting observations. They were gradually transformed from separate pillars to tower-like constructions above the cemetery churches, as can be seen in several fourteenth-century miniatures. In my view, these lanterns present one of the main sources of the architectural form, widespread in

Christian culture since the fourteenth century, of lanterns above church domes. The origins of this strange form, which did not have any practical function, remain unclear. However, the open baldachin, spread above the round opening of the dome, harks back to the unique architectural structure of the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher. Recently, the German scholar Jurgen Krueger came to the same conclusion, independently and from another angle: he studied the earliest architectural examples of lanterns over domes, such as that of the Baptistery in Florence (Fig. 13), and suggested their connection with the symbolic structure of the Holy Sepulcher.³²

What is even more interesting is that the Florence Baptistery was originally connected with the miracle of the Holy Fire in Jerusalem.³³ In the first book of Giovanni Villani’s chronicle we read about a special rite at the Baptistery:

On Holy Saturday, when [God] blesses the baptismal water and the fire in the baptismal font, they ordered that this holy fire [*fuoco*

32 J. Krüger, “Dall’opaion alla lanterna. La genesi di un motivo architettonico,” paper delivered at the conference *Il volto oscuro del divino*, Bari-Foggia-Lucera, 20–23 January 2010.

33 G. Villani, *Cronica*, 1, 60: “And they made the baptismal font in the middle of the church where the people and children were baptized, as they still do: and on Holy Saturday, on which [God] blesses the baptismal water and the fire in the baptismal font, they ordered that this holy fire [*fuoco santo*] be distributed around the city in a form as they do in Jerusalem, so that for each family there would be one person who goes there with a small lantern [or torch] to light it. And from this solemnity derives the privilege of the family of the Pazzi of the great lantern, around 170 years ago from 1300, for the reason of one of their ancient ancestors, called Pazzo, strong and great, who carried a lantern larger than any other, and because he was the first who took the holy fire, others then taking it from him” (“E feciono fare le fonti del Battesimo in mezzo del tempio ove si battezzavano le genti e fanciulli, e fanno ancora: e’l giorno di sabato santo che si benedice nelle dette fonti l’acqua del battesiino e fuoco, ordinaro che si spandesse il detto fuoco santo per la città a modo che si faceva in Gerusalemme, che per ciascuna casa v’andasse uno con una facellina ad accendere. E di quella solennità venne la dignità che hanno la casa de’ Pazzi della grande facellina, intorno fa di 170 anni dal 1300 addietro, per uno loro antico nomato Pazzo, forte e grande della persona, che portava la maggiore facellina che niuno altro, ed era il primo che prendea il fuoco santo, e poi gli altri da lui.”) *Cronica di Giovanni e Matteo Villani* (Florence: Coen, 1844–1845), vol. 1, pp. 82–83 (trans. by G. Serafini).

30 M. Plault, *Les Lanternes des morts. Inventaire-histoire et liturgie* (Poitiers: Brissaud, 1990).

31 C. Bougoux, *De l’origine des Lanternes des Morts* (Bordeaux: Bellus éditions, 1989), pp. 12–13.



Chateau-Larcher cemetery, "Lanterne des morts" (Lantern of the Dead), 13th century.

santo] must be distributed around the city in the way they do it at Jerusalem.³⁴

And the same account, written in the first half of the fourteenth century, also suggests one of the sources of our *Scoppio del Carro*, recording that representatives of all Florentine families come to the Baptistry as to the Holy Sepulcher to obtain the *fuoco santo* in small lanterns. Villani stresses, however, that the Pazzi family has the special privilege of a great lamp, because "one of their ancient ancestors, called Pazzo, strong and great, had a larger lantern than the others, because he was the first who took the holy fire, and after him the others did."

Thus, for medieval Florentines the Jerusalemic connotations of the Baptistry as well as the practice of the veneration of the Holy Sepulcher and its miraculous fire were quite common. Yet, since the direct source of the building's structure, with a special lantern over the dome, remains unclear, I want to advance a hypothesis concerning the probable model for the Florence Baptistry. This is the Baptistry of the *Templum Domini* in Jerusalem (known the world over as the Dome of the Rock). Built by the Crusaders in the twelfth century next to their cathedral, it was subject to later modifications during the Mamluk period. The appearance of this small building clearly replicates the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher located nearby. Its original structure, however, was a direct result of the miracle of the Holy Fire. It is noteworthy that the Aedicule with the small oculus covered by an elongated canopy was situated under the large *oculus* of the Anastasis Rotunda. This strange composition was directly connected with the Descent of the Holy Fire, which took the form of an architecturally organized passageway



13 Baptistry, Florence.

from Heaven to the Tomb of Christ, as some medieval representations clearly show.

The importance of the cupola of the Aedicule as "proto-church" constructed over the "proto-altar" is hard to overestimate. As I have argued elsewhere, it was the cupola that pre-destined the appearance of the onion-shaped domes, first in Byzantine iconography and then, subsequently, in Russian Orthodox architectural ensembles.³⁵ It seems, moreover, that other Byzantine and Western architectural phenomena may have the same source of inspiration. Of principal importance are the cupolas of San Marco in Venice, which took their final shape no later than the thirteenth century.³⁶ There we find a familiar structure: an open baldachin stretched above the dome without any practical purpose. Characteristically, the pumpkin shape of the domes might have had the same origin in the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulcher.

35 A. Lidov, "The Canopy over the Holy Sepulcher. On the Origins of the Onion-Shaped Domes," in *Jerusalem in Russian Culture*, ed. by Batalov and Lidov, pp. 171–180.

36 The cupola with the canopy is represented in the thirteenth-century mosaic over the northern entrance of the Basilica of San Marco.

Deliberate references to this Jerusalem model exist in later projects, as well, among which the most famous is Borromini’s exotic cupola for Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza in Rome, whose concept and decoration were connected with the image of the Temple in Jerusalem and Solomon’s vision of the House of Wisdom, as several scholars have suggested.³⁷ The symbolism of the lantern of Sant’Ivo, however, has gone unnoticed.³⁸ A reference to the well-known miracle of the Holy Fire in Jerusalem may explain the motifs of flames and descending fire as well as the transparent onion-shaped cupola over the lantern. Certainly, the idea of the Holy Fire was only one, incorporated into a broader thematic concept concerning the Jerusalem Temple, Divine Wisdom, and the Holy Spirit transforming the world.

In this paper I have attempted to create a mosaic of various phenomena that could be connected with the miracle in Jerusalem. Each of them should be the subject of a separate study, in which a number of other artefacts, testifying to the influence of the Holy Fire, might be discussed. Yet the evidence presented here seems enough for a preliminary conclusion: the miracle of the Holy Fire at the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem constituted a very powerful, though nowadays practically unknown, paradigm of Christian visual culture, exercising its influence on both the iconographic programs and concepts that define particular sacred spaces. In this context, the Florentine rite of the *Scoppio del Carro* appears to be an integral part of a more general picture of the creation and re-creation of New Jerusalems, which, in my view, were pivotal for the entire realm of medieval Christian culture.

37 P. de la Ruffinière du Prey, “Solomonic Symbolism in Borromini’s Church of Sant’Ivo alla Sapienza,” *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 31:3 (1968), pp. 216–232; J. Connors, “Borromini’s S. Ivo alla Sapienza: The Spiral,” *The Burlington Magazine* 138:1123 (1996), pp. 668–682.

38 “This element has an emblematic meaning, the precise nature of which has not yet been rediscovered.” R. Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), p. 139.