

VISUAL CONSTRUCTS OF JERUSALEM



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CULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN
LATE ANTIQUITY AND THE MIDDLE AGES

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VISUAL CONSTRUCTS OF JERUSALEM

Edited by

Bianca Kühnel, Galit Noga-Banai,
and Hanna Vorholt



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THE HOLY FIRE AND VISUAL CONSTRUCTS OF JERUSALEM, EAST AND WEST

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In the present paper I address the phenomenon of the Holy Fire and the hierotopical and art historical aspects of this miracle of the Christian world.¹ According to eastern Orthodox belief, every Great Saturday of Easter the Fire descends upon the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The miracle has been well documented since the ninth century.²

The earliest testimonies are those of the Latin pilgrim Bernard in 865 and the Arabic writer Al-Djahis (d. 869). According to the monk Bernard,

It is worth saying what happens on Holy Saturday, the Vigil of Easter. In the morning the office begins in this church. 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 sepulchre. The patriarch passes

some of this light to the bishops and the rest of the people, and thus each one has light where he is standing.³

Even before the ninth century there is indirect evidence of a special light over the tomb of Christ, which played an important role in the daily evening service called *lychnikon* (Lat. *lucernarium* or *lichnicon*). The late fourth-century pilgrim Egeria relates that the focal point of the commemorative ceremony was the kindling of lights in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre; the fire was taken not from outside but from an inextinguishable lamp hanging in the cave above the tomb of Christ. That fire was the source of light for all other churches in Jerusalem.⁴

As far as the origins of this rite are concerned, some scholars have suggested the Jewish ritual *Kabod Yahweh* (literally 'Glory of God'), recorded in the first and second Old Testament Temple, as a likely primary source.⁵ This was the annual rekindling of the sacred fire on the altar in the courtyard of the Temple by the first ray of the rising sun passing through the outer eastern 'Beautiful Gate' of the Temple on the solar new year. After the gate was closed, the ceremony terminated and the fire upon the altar became the inextinguishable, eternal fire created by a miraculous flame at the dedication of the first Temple by Solomon. As in some other cases, the Christian practice of the Holy Fire could be a reflection and reinterpretation of ancient Jewish tradition.

* This is a revised version of the article "Svyatoi Ogon": Ierotopicheskie i iskusstvovedcheskie aspekty sozdania Novykh Ierusalimov, in *New Jerusalem: Hierotopy and Iconography of Sacred Spaces*, ed. by Alexei Lidov (Moscow: Indrik, 2009), pp. 277–312.

1 There is considerable literature about the miracle. The main publications include Gustav Klameth, *Das Karsamstagsfeuerwunder der heiligen Grabeskirche* (Vienna: Mayer, 1915); Karl Schmaltz, 'Das heilige Feuer in der Grabeskirche im Zusammenhang mit der kirchlichen Liturgie und den antiken Lichtriten', *Palästina-Jahrbuch*, 13 (1917), 53–99; Otto Meinardus, 'The Ceremony of the Holy Fire in the Middle Ages and Today', *Bulletin de la Société d'Archéologie Copte*, 16 (1962), 243–52; Marius Canard, 'La destruction de l'Église de la Resurrection par le calife Hakim et l'histoire de la descente du feu sacré', *Byzantion*, 35.1 (1965), 16–43.

2 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* (Berkeley, CA: St John Chrysostom Press, 1999). For a collection of the major medieval sources from the ninth to the sixteenth century, see Haris Skarlakidis, *Holy Fire: The Miracle of Holy Saturday at the Tomb of Christ; Forty-Five Historical Accounts (9th–16th c.)* (Athens: Elaia 2011).

3 John Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims Before the Crusaders* (Warminster: Aris & Phillips, 2002), p. 266.

4 *Éthérie, Journal de voyage: text latin*, intro. and trans. by Hélène Pètré, Sources chrétiennes, 21 (Paris: Cerf, 1943; John Wilkinson, *Egeria's Travel to the Holy Land* (Jerusalem: Ariel, 1983).

5 Julian Morgenstern, *The Fire Upon the Altar* (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1963), pp. 87–101.



Figure 24.1. Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Urb. lat. 1362, fol. 1^v, details of (left) the miracle of the Holy Fire and (above) the *koubouklion* over the Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem, fourteenth century (?) (photo: from Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* [Stroud: Sutton, 1999], p. 36).

We do not know when the rite of the Holy Fire was established in its final form. Most likely this happened in the ninth century, because testimonies appear quite regularly after that time. It is interesting that the miraculous rite has shown almost no variation over the centuries up to the present time (in the Orthodox Christian world, millions of people are able to watch coverage of this annual miracle in Jerusalem on television). The miracle is venerated by all Orthodox Christian believers as well as by such eastern churches as the Armenians, Copts, and Syrian Jacobites. Yet only Greeks, in the person of their Jerusalem patriarch, have the honour of receiving the miraculous Fire and distributing it to other Christians. Until the thirteenth century the Catholics celebrated the miracle with the other Christian communities, but in 1238 the pope issued a bull in which he accused the Greeks of fraud and mystification, and the Roman rite officially rejected belief in this miracle. This became obvious after the introduction of the Gregorian calendar in the sixteenth century, because the miracle happened at Orthodox Easter only. However, some Catholic groups, especially the Franciscans, the custodians of the Holy Land, continued to believe in and venerate the miracle, which was well known in medieval Europe, for centuries.⁶

We possess a most interesting visual document in a fourteenth-century drawing from the Vatican Library (MS Urbinato latino 1362, fol. 1^v),⁷ which seems to be a clear illustration of Niccolò da Poggibonsi's contemporary testimony (Fig. 24.1). The illustration shows the main structural elements of the rite: the divine fire descends from heaven to the tomb of Christ through the openings in the dome of the Anastasis rotunda and of the aedicule (also called the *koubouklion* in Greek) of the Holy Sepulchre, which had 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, kindles lights in the lamps that hang above the sepulchre.

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 happen only after extended collective penitence, with people moving

6 Fra' Niccolò da Poggibonsi left an eloquent testimony: 'All crying at the top of their voices: *Kyrie eleison, Christe eleison*, and gazing aloft to the windows above to see the holy fire; and this continues for a space of two hours. The lamps within the Holy Sepulchre

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 Sepulchre: and then a great light appeared within the Holy Sepulchre, with a great brilliance, and then he holds himself the happier man who can first get hold of that light': Fra' Niccolò da Poggibonsi, *A Voyage Beyond the Seas, 1346–1350*, trans. by Theophilus Bellorini and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Press, 1993), pp. 23–24.

7 Martin Biddle, *The Tomb of Christ* (Stroud: Sutton, 1999), pp. 36–37.

around the Holy Sepulchre and repeating the main penitential prayer *Kyrie eleison* (God, have mercy). The Greek patriarch of Jerusalem could receive the Holy Fire inside or outside the aedicule, and from the ninth to the fourteenth century the chapel was usually empty at the time of the miracle, its door sealed by Muslim guards. During these centuries the Muslims governing in Jerusalem strictly controlled the ceremony and tried to expose the fraudulent tricks of the Greeks many times without success.⁸ The patriarch passed the Holy Fire to the congregation who came to the rotunda of the Resurrection from all over the world. Sometimes at the moment of the miracle medieval pilgrims witnessed blue flashes, evoking lightning, coming down from the oculus of the Rotunda. As some pilgrims have recorded, the Holy Fire has an extraordinary nature: it shines with unusual colour and does not initially burn when touched.⁹ In a kind of practical outcome, this miraculous Fire became the major source of light for Jerusalem and other Christian cities.¹⁰

It is very significant that the Holy Fire was perceived as a kind of first-class relic that could be preserved and transferred from Jerusalem to any other place. In those places the Holy Fire created the sacred space of a 'New Jerusalem', revealing an image of the miracle of the Holy Sepulchre 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 narrative of the Russian abbot Daniel, who visited the Holy Land from 1106 to 1107. He tells us how he bought a large glass lamp and put it on the tomb of the Lord. It was one of three lamps kindled by the Holy Fire.

And on the third day after the Raising of the Lord [...] 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 most 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 honoured 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 I went rejoicing as if I was carrying some rich treasure.¹¹

Afterward Daniel took his lamp as a major relic to Russia, where it was supplemented by two others. He also supplemented the lamp with a piece of stone from the Holy Sepulchre and a measure of the tomb of Christ itself (probably a piece of cloth or string used for the measurement). In this way, he deliberately created a complex of different relics for a special sacred space in his motherland. Yet, there is no doubt that the Holy Fire was the most important among the three relics that he translated to Russia.

As some Arabic testimonies suggest, the practice of the translation of the Holy Fire to other cities of the Christian world was quite widespread. Thus, for example, Sibṭ ibn al-Jawzī (d. 1256), who lived in Jerusalem and probably knew all the details, wrote: 'They kindle the lanterns and carry this most venerable fire to Akka, Tyre, all cities of Franks, and even to Rome, Algeria, Constantinople, and others.'¹² This Arabic writer records the use of special lanterns for carrying away the Holy Fire, and one assumes that numerous examples must have survived. Indeed, there are a number of metal lamps that may have been used for such purposes, but unfortunately none from the Byzantine East or Latin West are documented specifically as Holy Fire lanterns.¹³ There are, however, many examples from the postmedieval period. Evidence of such lamps used by Russian pilgrims in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries survives in photographs (Fig. 24.2).

8 For a detailed analysis of the Arabic documents, see Игнатий Крачковский, 'Благодатный огонь по рассказу ал-Бируни и других мусульманских писателей X–XIII веков', in *Христианский Восток*, том. 3, вып. 3. Петроград, 1915; Ignaty Kratchkovsky, 'Le "feu béni" d'après le récit d'al Biruni et d'autre écrivains musulmans du X au XIII siècle', *Proche-Orient Chrétien*, 49 (1999), 257–76.

9 Wilkinson, *Jerusalem Pilgrims before the Crusades*.

10 Skarladidis, *Holy Fire*.

11 *Jerusalem Pilgrimage, 1099–1185*, ed. by John Wilkinson with Joyce Hill and William F. Ryan (London: Hakluyt Society, 1988), pp. 166–71 (pp. 170–71); Abbot Daniil, *Itinerario in Terra Santa*, intro., trans. and notes by Marcello Garzaniti (Roma: Città Nuova, 1991).

12 Kratchkovsky, 'Le "feu beni" d'après le récit d'al Biruni'.

13 I. Q. van Regteren Altena, 'Hidden Records of the Holy Sepulchre', in *Essays in the History of Architecture Presented to Rudolf Wittkower*, ed. by Douglas Fraser, Howard Hibbard, and Milton J. Lewine (London: Phaidon, 1969), pp. 17–21. Such lamps, in different forms, are known from early Byzantine times. Their upper part usually has a tower-like shape.



Figure 24.2.
Russian pilgrim with a lamp-
reliquary of the Holy Fire
(photo: unknown author, 1912).

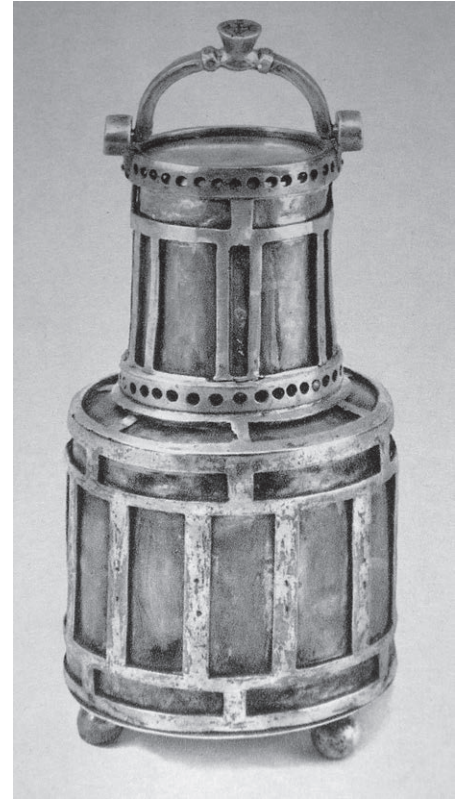


Figure 24.3.
Lantern reliquary, treasury of
Beaulieu cathedral, a possible
pilgrim's lamp for the Holy
Fire, Byzantine, eleventh
century (photo: from *Les
Trésors des églises de France:
Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris,
1965* [Paris: Caisse nationale
des monuments historiques,
1965], no. 390, pl. 84).

A characteristic feature of these metal lantern-reliquaries is, in my view, the form of the aedicule (*kou-bouklion*) of the Holy Sepulchre as an indication of the sacred space where the miracle took place. A less well-known silver lantern is kept in the cathedral of Beaulieu in France (Fig. 24.3).¹⁴ It is probably a Byzantine work of the eleventh century; Greek letters around the cross on the handle signal the sacred function of the vessel. The object is called a 'lamp-reliquary' in the cathedral's inventory, and in France it was reused as a regular reliquary. There is no conclusive proof that the lantern was made for the Holy Fire, but it seems quite possible.

One might assume that the Holy Fire brought from Jerusalem in special lanterns was kept in churches as a precious relic to be displayed solemnly for public veneration. It seems possible, then, that some precious containers would have been made to hold this relic. I discuss next a set of well-known and less-well-known artefacts that may originally have been conceived as reliquaries of the

Holy Fire and later reused for other purposes. There are a few written sources that suggest the existence of such reliquaries. In 1200 Anthony of Novgorod, attending a solemn liturgy in the Great Church of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople, witnessed a procession that carried to the main altar 'the shining Jerusalem' (*svetozarnyi ierusalim* in the original Russian).¹⁵ He probably meant the liturgical vessel called in Russia a 'Jerusalem' or 'Sion'. Examples of these vessels dated between the eleventh and fifteenth century survive in Russian collections.¹⁶ Two 'Jeruselems' from the eleventh and twelfth century, made by a Byzantine and a Russian master (Fig. 24.4), were kept in the cathedral of Saint Sophia in Novgorod. In 1655 the Syrian deacon Paul of Aleppo, visiting this church, left valuable testimony: 'At the liturgy the deacons were carrying the silver representation of the Sion church and the church of the Resurrection, and the priests going in pairs carried the liturgical shroud on

14 *Les Trésors des églises de France: Musée des arts décoratifs, Paris, 1965* (Paris: Caisse nationale des monuments historiques, 1965), no. 390, pl. 84, p. 212; Jannic Durand, "Lanterne" de Beaulieu, in *Byzance: l'art byzantine dans collections publiques françaises; Musée du Louvre, 3 novembre 1992–1^{er} février 1993* (Paris: Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), no. 233, pp. 319–20.

15 Книга Паломник, 'Сказание мест святых во Цареграде Антония архиепископа Новгородского в 1200 году. Под ред. Хрисанфа Лопарева', in *Православный Палестинский сборник*, том XVII, вып. 3. Санкт Петербург, 1899, с. 9–11.

16 Irina Sterligova, 'Jerusalem in Liturgical Vessels in Ancient Russia', in *Jerusalem in Russian Culture*, ed. by Andrei Batalov and Alexei Lidov (New Rochelle, NY: Caratzas, 2005), pp. 51–72.



Figure 24.4.
Novgorod, Art and History Museum,
'Jerusalem' or 'Sion' silver liturgical vessel
formerly in Saint Sophia cathedral, by
a Russian master from Novgorod, early
twelfth century (photo: from Irina
Sterligova, 'Jerusalem in Liturgical
Vessels in Ancient Russia', in *Jerusalem in
Russian Culture*, ed. by Andrei Batalov
and Alexei Lidov [New Rochelle, NY:
Caratzas, 2005], p. 62, fig. 4).

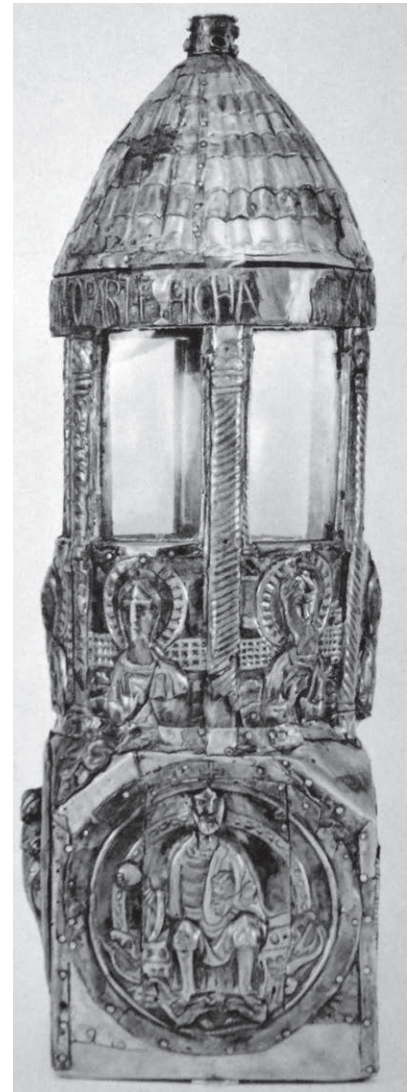


Figure 24.5.
Conques, abbey
treasury, 'Lanterne de
Begon' lamp reliquary,
late eleventh century
(photo: from *Les
Trésors des églises de
France: Musée des arts
décoratifs, Paris, 1965*
[Paris: Caisse nationale
des monuments
historiques, 1965],
no. 540, pl. 40).

their heads'.¹⁷ The 'Jeruselems' looked like models of the aedicule over Christ's tomb and the Anastasis rotunda at the Holy Sepulchre. When established on the altar, the 'Jeruselems' had to emphasize the mystical connection between the altar and the historical place of the burial and Resurrection of Christ. According to Anthony of Novgorod, the culmination of the service came at the moment of transferring the 'Jeruselems' and the shroud, and the church is finally identified with the heavenly Jerusalem. In our context it seems significant that the epithet 'shining or lighting as a sunrise' could point not merely to the beauty of the gilded silver vessel but also to its original function as a container of the divine light, a reliquary of the Holy Fire from Jerusalem.

Let me very briefly describe some other Byzantine and Latin liturgical objects belonging, in my view, to this same category of 'Jeruselems' and 'Sions' (although their original functions remain the subject of debate). The renowned tenth-century Aachen reliquary is one of them.¹⁸ It was commissioned in Antioch by Eustathios

Maleinos in the late tenth century. Made in the form of the tomb aedicule, it has a dome with many lobes, probably reflecting the original architectural form of the Jerusalem shrine. The inscriptions with the texts of Psalms on the façades emphasize the idea of the heavenly Jerusalem. Recently the reliquary has been interpreted

¹⁷ Путешествие Антиохийского Патриарха Макария в Россию в половине XVII века, описанное его сыном архидиаконом Павлом Алеппским (Moscow: Общество сохранения литературного наследия, 2005), p. 467.

¹⁸ André Grabar, 'Le reliquaire byzantin de la cathédrale

d'Aix-la-Chapelle', in Grabar, *L'Art de la fin de l'Antiquité et du Moyen Âge*, 3 vols (Paris: Collège de France, 1968), I, 427–33; William B. R. Saunders, 'The Aachen Reliquary of Eustathios Maleinos, 969–970', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, 36 (1982), 211–19; Robert Ousterhout, 'Reliquary of Saint Anastasios the Persian', in *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843–1261*, ed. by Helen C. Evans and William D. Wixom (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1997), pp. 460–61; Holger Klein, 'Artophorion (Reliquary of St. Anastasios the Persian)', in *Treasures of Heaven: Saints, Relics, and Devotion in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Martina Bagnoli and others (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), no. 55, p. 118.

as an *artophorion*, a vessel for the presanctified bread, but this does not explain the open windows in the apse and the drum that suggest an incense burner or lamp. Connecting this aedicule model with the Holy Fire might explain its contradictory characteristics.

Among Romanesque artefacts I would like to mention the eleventh-century Lanterne de Begon at Conques, which originally functioned as a silver lamp in the form of a two-storey tower with a baldachin-like upper part (Fig. 24.5).¹⁹ It is noteworthy that the Lanterne de Begon later became a container for holy relics, as did many other objects of this kind. This could be an additional argument for the original concept of this lamp.

The famous silver model from San Marco also belongs, in my view, to the category of liturgical 'Jerusalem'.²⁰ Most scholars agree on only one point: that this object dates to the twelfth century. It has features characteristic of both Byzantine and Romanesque art, and it has been suggested that this luxury object could have been made either in Constantinople, Venice, or southern Italy. Its function is also uncertain: the five-dome structure has been interpreted as a lamp, an *artophorion*, an incense burner, or even as a secular perfume brazier. This last interpretation, which has recently become quite popular, is not convincing. The form of the building reflects Byzantine iconography of the heavenly Jerusalem as a city made up of churches, and the closest parallels are in some twelfth-century frontispiece miniatures.²¹ Some

details point to the Holy Sepulchre, and I would like to draw attention to some facts usually missing in discussions: in the oldest surviving inventory of San Marco, dated 1283, the object is called 'the silver church' ('ecclesia argenti'); it was used that year as the reliquary of the Holy Blood of Christ. This was the major relic of the Venetian republic, brought from Constantinople by Enrico Dandolo in 1205.²² That a perfume burner was used for this purpose is much less likely than the idea that the relic of the Holy Blood replaced another great relic—an extinguished lamp that once held the Holy Fire. The internal arrangement of the Venetian reliquary further supports this hypothesis.

While we do not have any direct proof for this scenario, this hypothesis seems more probable than others. However, the group of liturgical objects of uncertain function that in medieval Russia were called 'Jeruselems' or 'Sions' seems of major significance. Moreover, the absence of securely identified reliquaries of the Holy Fire—which must have existed—is also significant. All the artefacts under discussion here bear the iconic evocation of the aedicule over the Holy Sepulchre and of the heavenly Jerusalem in general; they clearly relate to the sacred space in which the miracle of the Holy Fire takes place.

In this context it seems very significant that the Holy Fire, of divine substance, ideally embodied the source of light for all fires lit in Christian churches the world over, and in this way was mystically able to 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. Space permits me to point to only a few examples, which certainly deserve much more detailed discussion.

Between the eleventh and fourteenth century in the West, especially in southern Italy, the well-known Exultet ceremony might be reconsidered in this context.²³ 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 creating the

19 *Les Trésors des églises de France*, no. 540, pl. 40, pp. 301–04; Marie-Madeleine Gauthier, *Les Routes de la foi: reliques et reliquaires de Jérusalem à Compostelle* (Fribourg: Office du Livre, 1983), p. 60.

20 Ioli Kalavrezou, 'Incense Burner in the Shape of a Domed Building', in *The Glory of Byzantium*, ed. by Evans and Wixom, no. 176, pp. 250–51; Maria Da Villa Urbani, 'Perfume Brazier in the Form of a Domed Building', in *Byzantium, 330–1453*, ed. by Robin Cormack and Maria Vassilaki (London: Royal Academy of Arts, 2008), no. 176, p. 423; *Architecture as Icon: Perception and Representation of Architecture in Byzantine Art*, ed. by Slobodan Ćurčić and Evangelia Hadjitryphonos (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Art Museum, 2010), no. 2, pp. 160–61. The only argument for the profane character of the object is the strange iconography of the scenes, represented on the façades of the vessel. However, as recently became clear, even the most unusual image of a naked figure in a basket might be interpreted in a Christian context: Sophia Germanidou, 'Transforming Iconography and Context of a Pagan Theme into Byzantine Art: The Boy in the Basket ("Cupid Stealing Honeycomb")', in *MIMHCIC in Byzantine Art: Classical, Realistic or Imitative? Abstracts of Papers, Cracow, September 5–7, 2012*; <<http://byzantinesymposium.com/abstracts.pdf>>, p. 8 [accessed 5 June 2013].

21 Alexei Lidov, 'Heavenly Jerusalem: The Byzantine Approach', in *The Real and Ideal Jerusalem in Jewish, Christian and*

Islamic Art: Studies in Honor of Bezalel Narkiss on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday, ed. by Bianca Kühnel, *Journal of Jewish Art*, 23/24 (Jerusalem: Center for Jewish Art, 1998), pp. 341–53.

22 Danielle Gaborit-Chopin, 'Lampada o bruciaprofumo a forma di edificio a cupole', in *Il Tesoro di San Marco*, ed. by Renata Cambiaghi (Milan: Olivetti, 1986), p. 245.

23 Thomas Forrest Kelly, *The Exultet in Southern Italy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).



Figure 24.6.
Florence, piazza of Santa Maria del Fiore, 'Lo Scoppio del Carro', the rite of the explosion of the cart on Holy Saturday in front of the cathedral, twentieth-century photo (photo: from Damiano Neri, *Il S. Sepolcro riprodotto in Occidente* [Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971], p. 79, fig. 37).

image of the church as a New Jerusalem. This Roman-rite ritual, depicted in the Exultet rolls since the eleventh century, was a more practical re-enactment of the miracle in Jerusalem that maintained its main message of annual renovation and the mystical origin of the fire lit in all Christian churches. Through this sacred light all churches were unified with their prototype at the Holy Sepulchre. A permanently visible sign of this link was the monumental candlestick for the Paschal fire, often made of marble, which stood in front of Romanesque altars as a reminder of the miracle of the Holy Fire and of Jerusalem.

In the Latin West, rites with direct references to the Jerusalem miracle of the Holy Fire were sometimes represented in urban performances. The most characteristic of them was 'Lo scoppio del carro' in medieval Florence, which took place every Great Saturday at the square of Santa Maria del Fiore near the cathedral (Fig. 24.6).²⁴ A petard in the form of the dove of the Holy Ghost, shot from the high altar, kindled the *carro* made in the form of the aedicule over the Holy Sepulchre. The petard

itself was kindled by 'holy fire' ignited with pieces of stone from the Holy Sepulchre that, according to tradition, had been brought from Jerusalem by the crusader Pazzino Pazzi in c. 1100, together with the Holy Fire in a special lantern.²⁵ The concept of the rite is clear: it was intended to create a spatial image of Florence as a 'New Jerusalem'.

The miracle of the Holy Fire promoted some important phenomena of European medieval funeral culture. An example are the so-called lanterns of the dead, better known by their French name, *lanternes des morts*; these were constructed in cemeteries between the eleventh and fourteenth century, mostly in the territories of modern France, Spain, and Austria (Fig. 24.7).²⁶ They were pillar-shaped buildings, round or square in plan, with the altar table on the ground level and a room for the fire at the

²⁴ Damiano Neri, *Il S. Sepolcro riprodotto in Occidente* (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1971), pp. 74–80. In its present form the ritual took shape not later than the fifteenth century. See the description of the ceremony at <www.duomofirenze.it/feste/pasqua_eng.htm> [accessed 13 June 2013].

²⁵ 'Fuoco benedetto che venne dal sepolchro di Christo, el quale fu portato da Iherusalem dalla nobil famiglia de' Pazzi'; *La vita del Beato Ieronimo Savonarola: scritta da un anonimo del sec. XVI e già attribuita a Fra Pacifico Burlamacci*, ed. by Piero Ginori Conti (Florence: Olschki, 1937), p. 233; Sergio Ravaggi, 'Storia di una leggenda: Pazzo de' Pazzi e le pietre del Santo Sepolcro', in *Toscana e Terrasanta nel Medioevo*, ed. by Franco Cardini (Florence: Alinea, 1982), pp. 299–315.

²⁶ Michel Plault, *Les Lanternes des morts: inventaire, histoire et liturgie* (Poitiers: Brissaud, 1990).



Figure 24.7. Chateau-Larcher cemetery, 'Lanterne des morts' (Lantern of the Dead), thirteenth century (photo: from Michel Plault, *Les Lanternes des morts: inventaire, histoire et liturgie* [Poitiers: Brissaud, 1990], p. 103).

top. The *lanternes des morts* functioned as funerary chapels, indicating by fire the location of a holy place. Some scholars have already suggested that the origins of these strange constructions go back to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.²⁷ In our view, however, the connection can 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 onto the major altar of Christianity at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. The forms of the *lanternes des morts* could go back to the reliquaries of elongated vertical shape in

which pilgrims used to carry the Holy Fire (such as, hypothetically, the Lanterne de Begon, Fig. 24.5). The eternal inextinguishable fire over the cemetery became a kind of icon of the Resurrection, marking the space of a '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 cemetery churches, as can be seen in some fourteenth-century miniatures.²⁸ In our view, these lanterns present one of the main sources for an architectural form that became widespread in European Christian culture beginning in the fourteenth century: lanterns above church domes. The origins of these strange forms, which lacked any practical function, remain unclear. However, the open baldachin over the oculus of the dome harks back to the unique architectural structure of the aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre.

The German scholar Jürgen Krüger recently came to the same conclusion, independently and from another angle: he studied the earliest architectural examples of lanterns over domes, such as the fourteenth-century Baptistery in Florence, and revealed their connection with the symbolic structure of the Holy Sepulchre.²⁹ I wish to propose a probable model for the Florentine Baptistery in the small chapel next to the Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem—a possible baptistery of the crusaders' *Templum Domini*. It may have been built by crusaders in the twelfth century next to their cathedral and then slightly reconstructed later during the Ayyubid period.³⁰ The appearance of this small octagonal building with a lantern over the cupola apparently replicates the aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre located nearby.

28 Plault, *Les Lanternes des morts*, p. 141.

29 Jürgen 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.

30 This opinion is widespread although the monument has not been studied properly: Dan Bahat, *The Illustrated Atlas of Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Carta, 1996), p. 90. Some scholars believe that the building was constructed in the Ayyubid period: see Michael Hamilton Burgoyne, '1187–1260: The Furthest Mosque (al-Masjid al-Aqsa) under Ayyubid Rule', in *Where Heaven and Earth Meet: Jerusalem's Sacred Esplanade*, ed. by Oleg Grabar and Benjamin Z. Kedar (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi; Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009), pp. 151–74 (p. 161). In my opinion, the architectural core of the chapel points to the crusader period; in any case it was constructed in the twelfth century before the inscription of 1200/1 appeared.

27 Christian Bougoux, *De l'origine des lanternes des morts* (Bordeaux: Bellus, 1989), pp. 12–13.



Figure 24.8. Venice, San Marco, baldachin-shaped canopy over the cupola, thirteenth century or earlier (photo: author).

Indeed, the original structure of the tomb aedicule in the Holy Sepulchre could be considered a direct result of the miracle of the Holy Fire. It is noteworthy that the aedicule, with its small oculus covered by an elongated canopy, was situated under the large oculus of the Anastasis rotunda. This strange composition may have been directly connected with the Descent of the Holy Fire, which took the form of an architecturally organized passageway from heaven to the tomb of Christ, as some medieval designs clearly demonstrate (Fig. 24.1).

The meaning of the cupola of the aedicule as the 'proto-church' constructed over the Christian 'proto-altar' is impossible to overestimate. As I have argued elsewhere, it was this cupola that provided the model for the onion-shaped domes that appeared first in Byzantine iconography and subsequently in Russian Orthodox architecture.³¹ Some other phenomena of Byzantine and western architecture may have shared 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 (Fig. 24.8).³² We find a familiar structure here: an open baldachin stretched above the dome without any practical purpose. The pumpkin shape of these domes may have had their origin in the strange cupola of the aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre, which could have served as a symbolic model for this peculiar detail.

Deliberate references to that Jerusalem model exist in some later projects, among them Borromini's famous exotic cupola of Sant'Ivo alla Sapienza in Rome. Some scholars have suggested that its concept and decoration were connected with the image of the Temple in Jerusalem and Solomon's vision of the House of Wisdom.³³ At the same time, the symbolism of the lantern remains unexplored.³⁴ 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. The idea of the Holy Fire may have been incorporated into a general concept revealing ideas about the Jerusalem Temple, Divine Wisdom, and the Holy Ghost transforming the world.

I have attempted to articulate a mosaic of various artistic and architectural works that may be connected with the miracle in Jerusalem; each of them could certainly be the subject of a separate study, and a number of other artefacts that testify to the influence of the Holy Fire could also have been discussed in this context. Yet the evidence offered here seems sufficient for one major conclusion: that the miracle of the Holy Fire at the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem was a very powerful, albeit nowadays practically unknown, paradigm of Christian visual culture that exercised its influence on both iconographic details and concepts underlying certain sacred spaces. Detailed discussion of its crucial role in the imagery of 'New Jerusalem' in East and West may prove to be a new and promising realm of future research.

31 Alexei Lidov, 'The Canopy over the Holy Sepulchre: On the Origins of the Onion-Shaped Domes', in *Jerusalem in Russian Culture*, ed. by Batalov and Lidov, pp. 171–80.

32 The cupola with the canopy was represented in a thirteenth-century mosaic over the northern entrance to San Marco in Venice.

33 Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, 'Solomonic Symbolism in Borromini's Church of S. Ivo alla Sapienza', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, 31.3 (1968), 216–32; Joseph Connors, 'Borromini's S. Ivo alla Sapienza: The Spiral', *Burlington Magazine*, 138 (Oct. 1996), 668–82. See also John Beldon Scott, 'S. Ivo alla Sapienza and Borromini's Symbolic Language', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 41.4 (1982), 294–317 (p. 294).

34 'This element has an emblematic meaning, the precise nature of which has not yet been discovered': Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600–1750*, 2nd rev. edn (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1965), p. 139.



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