

Armenian Architecture in Twelfth-Century Crusader Jerusalem

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The art and architecture of the crusaders in 12th-century Jerusalem have been constantly studied since the beginning of this century.¹ Major issues of investigation have been the geographical origins of various artistic projects, and the meaning of their iconographical programs. In the last two decades the assumption that local Christian art and artists left their impact on the art of the crusaders has been generally accepted.² The existence of Armenian art and architecture in 12th-century Jerusalem has been acknowledged,³ as pilgrim descriptions of the Holy Land in the 12th century already mentioned Armenian monuments. These have not, however, been evaluated as artistic projects, but related to simply as edifices and monasteries belonging to the Armenians, rather than as manifesting specific attitudes and intentions which can be defined as Armenian.

Although modern scholars writing about 12th-century Jerusalem have briefly mentioned the Armenian Cathedral of St. James, the cathedral has never been systematically studied as an individual architectural project. Vincent and Abel noted it as a mixture of Armenian and Romanesque styles,⁴ and T.S.R. Boase in his *Kingdoms and Strongholds of the Crusaders* states: "The Armenian church of St. James in Jerusalem was being built at the time and by 1162 John of Würzburg describes it as completed. Melisend with her Armenian blood and her interest in ecclesiastical affairs must have been involved in this undertaking."⁵

In Jaroslav Folda's recent comprehensive work on crusader art, the 12th-century Armenian Cathedral of St. James has been surveyed, described and its ground plan and some detail presented. However, interpretations of the meaning and function of the edifice, in the context of life in the 12th century Armenian community in Jerusalem have not been made, and the author

repeatedly stated that "the church itself is an Armenian, that is oriental design"⁶ Furthermore, Folda indeed presents Queen Melisend as the most prominent patron of the arts in Jerusalem between 1131-1161, as well as instrumental in getting *inter alia* the masons from the Holy Sepulchre Church to work also for the Armenians. Thus the Cathedral of St. James, the major Armenian project, has remained subject to the traditional idea that because the Holy Sepulchre church was the most prominent architectural project of 12th-century Jerusalem the artists working for the Armenians could have come only from this major project.⁷ Similarly, in another book on crusader art, B. Kühnel (1995)⁸ described the edifice of the Armenian St. James Cathedral as a middle Byzantine work. Furthermore, Folda speaks of the Armenian linkage of Queen Melisend "through her Armenian mother from Melitene Morphia. Thus the rebuilding of the Armenian church must have been of substantial importance to her."⁹ In attributing to Queen Melisend the role of a major patron of various projects in 12th-century Jerusalem, Folda advanced a substantial step in the study of crusader arts. However, although he mentioned Melisend's Armenian origins he did not discuss this as a major issue.

It is my intention to study in context several aspects of the Armenian St. James Cathedral together with additional architectural projects: the tomb monument of Queen Melisend in the church of St. Mary in the valley of Joshaphat and the church of the Archangels in the Armenian compound. I suggest that these projects be considered as an expression of the attitudes and intentions of the Armenian community living in 12th-century Jerusalem; and that Melisend be seen as a patron of Armenian projects, including her own tomb monument, alongside her important role as a patron of the Latin church.

The history of the Armenian community in the Holy Land and in Jerusalem goes back to early Christianity. Armenian traditions relate the existence of the community to the 3rd century, and early Armenian monasticism in the Holy Land has been documented at least from the 4th century.

According to the Armenian tradition the head of St. James the Great was kept in the cathedral, which subsequently became a most holy place of veneration.¹⁰ In addition, several 6th century mosaic pavements with Armenian inscriptions from sepulchral monuments testify to Armenian awareness of their ethnicity, to artistic activity and active patronage. One example is the mosaic pavement with the Armenian inscription "For the memory and salvation of all the Armenians, whose name the Lord knows."¹¹ Other inscriptions refer to "the monastery of the Armenians", etc. The mosaic pavement depicts vine scrolls stemming from an amphora, spread out symmetrically, with each one containing a bird. The great variety of birds are arranged symmetrically in

pairs. A similar theme appears in mosaic flooring of 6th-century Jewish synagogues and Christian churches in Jerusalem and elsewhere in the Holy Land. The birds were often interpreted as images of the believers' souls. However, the use of this theme for a sepulchral chamber with an Armenian inscription is unusual.

The relationship between the Armenian principalities and communities in the East, although beyond the scope of this article, is a major component in the understanding of Armenian culture and art. Constant ties between various Armenian communities and the migration of its various populations from one center to another were a factor throughout the Middle Ages. From the end of the 11th and in the 12th century the relationship between the Armenians and the arriving crusaders became extensive. As Joshua Prawer has demonstrated,¹² the Armenians enjoyed a privileged position among the other local Christian communities. This situation was due (a) to the vast Armenian population in the crusader principalities, mainly in Edessa and Antioch; and (b) to the intermarriage between the Frankish and Armenian royal houses and nobility. Baldwin I, King of Edessa and Jerusalem, married Arda, the daughter of Prince Toros of Edessa, whom he later settled in the Jerusalem convent of St. Anna. The most influential marriage, however, was that of Baldwin II, King of Jerusalem, to Morphia, the daughter of Gabriel, governor of Melitene. Morphia gave birth to four daughters: Melisend, who was to become the most prominent Queen of Jerusalem (1131-1161); Hodriena, Princess of Tripoli; Aalice, Princess of Antioch; and Yveta, who had been a hostage in her childhood and therefore could not marry, but who became the Abbess of St. Anna and later of the monastery of St. Lazar in Bethanie through the very strong support and lavish donations of Queen Melisend, her elder sister.

The impact of Queen Melisend as patron of the arts has been frequently noted. Numerous scholars of the history and art history of the period are in agreement about the following facts:¹³

1. The Queen was a great patron of the arts.
2. Her support of the local Christian communities is mentioned several times in the sources.
3. According to William of Tyre, in 1140 she rebuilt the convent of St. Anna and later the convent of Bethany and endowed it with vast property. Her sister Yveta was installed there as Abbess until the convent in Bethany above the tomb of Lazarus could be completed.
4. She was active in town planning; e.g. her removal in 1151 of a mill adjoining the Tower of David in order to open up the gateway.
5. The Armenian Cathedral was probably built during her time, as John of

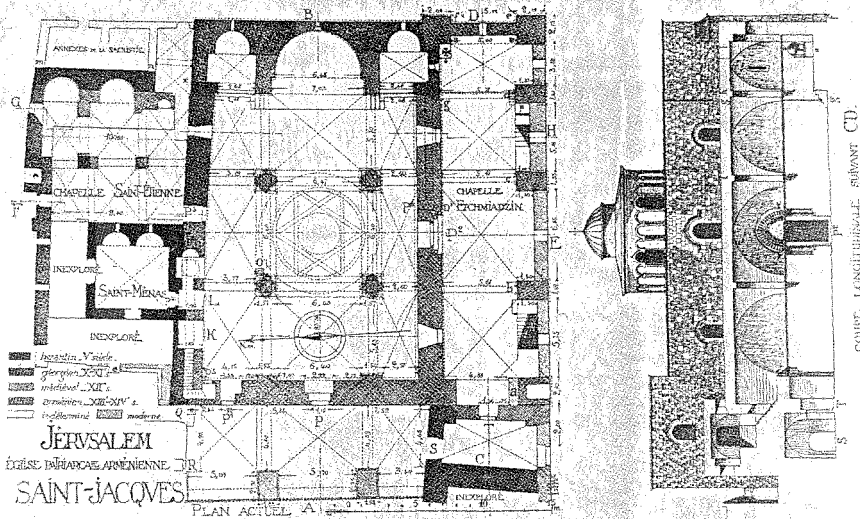


Fig. 1: Ground plan – the Armenian Cathedral of St. James.

Würzburg describes it as completed in 1162.

6. She supported the monastery of St. Mary in the Valley of Josphat where she was buried.
7. The loss of Edessa brought an influx of Armenian and Syrian refugees into Jerusalem. A colophon (in a lectionary in St. Mark's, the 12th-century Syrian church in Jerusalem) is inscribed with a prayer for King Baldwin and his mother Melisend for all they have done for the unhappy survivors.

Several other events in the period of Queen Melisend's reign, however, have not been connected with her directly. Joshua Prawer, despite noting the friendly relationship between the Franks and Armenians, did not connect between the pilgrimage of the Armenian Catholicos Gregory III Bahlavonni (1133-1166) to Jerusalem in 1142 to a synod in the Cenacle (where he was received with pomp and impressed his audience with his vast knowledge and liberal speech) and the reign of Queen Melisend.¹⁴

The fact that Melisend was herself half Armenian has been mentioned in different degrees and ways by various scholars. Questions regarding her specific attitude to the Armenians and other oriental Christian sects have been only partially answered. Often various historical facts were recounted but not connected with Melisend. I believe that Folda took a marked step forward in advocating Melisend as a most prominent patron and in mentioning her Armenian lineage.

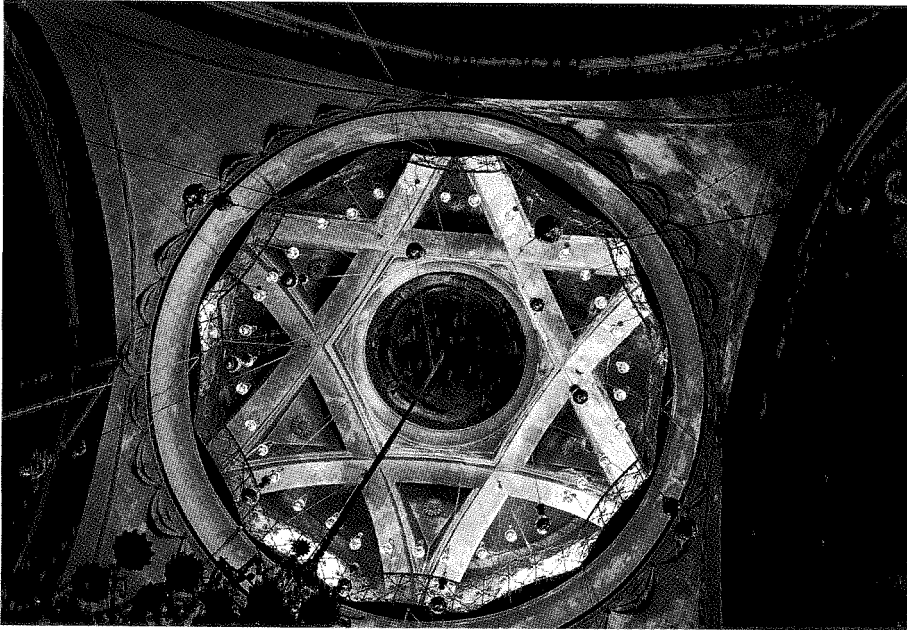


Fig. 2: The Cathedral's dome (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

With these considerations of Melisend and the Armenian community in Jerusalem in mind, I shall examine the Armenian building projects supported by the Queen, to determine whether they do indeed reflect specific Armenian concepts in their meaningful pictorial language.

St. James

The ground plan of the church as well as its architectural elements demonstrate a very close affinity with Byzantine and Armenian architectural traditions of the 11th and 12th centuries; thus differing consciously from the crusader plan of the Holy Sepulchre church. The exo-narthex is Byzantine. But the most prominent element of the church is its dome, which demonstrates a six rib structure on a square base with a decorative schematic garland frieze. The supporting piers are square, with four capitals on each side, suggesting the original existence of half columns, or being part of a specific family of forms, as noted below.

I believe this form of dome is distinctly Armenian. It is decorated with six intersecting ribs which form a star.¹⁵ This form was already known from an earlier time, in the Mosque of Cordova between the 8th and the 10th centuries,¹⁶



Fig. 3: A capital of the dome's supporting pillar (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

and is commonly accepted to have had an impact on Spanish and French Romanesque architecture. The form was considered however as pre-Islamic and perhaps Armenian, and it reappeared in Armenian monastic architecture in the 13th century.

The question remains as to whether the dome of St. James in Jerusalem is a 13th-century alteration as some scholars have argued,¹⁷ or is it indeed a 12th-century creation supported by Melisend and as such serving as a model for 13th-century Armenian architecture. Thus, the form of the dome of St. James could indeed be traditional Armenian although a link is missing in the architecture in Armenia itself¹⁸ before the 12th century.



Fig. 4: The narthex of St. James Cathedral (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

I believe that the dome of St. James Cathedral is Armenian in concept. It differs from the hemisphere dome used by the Byzantines which created a unified space and was a traditional image of the dome of heaven. The Armenian domes, however, although bearing the same meanings, constitute an architectural element born out of an harmonious interplay between elements such as intertwined ribs and squares.

The Armenian dome differs completely from the crusader dome of the Holy Sepulchre church, which is hemispheric and was constructed with specific relation to the dome over the Anastasis.¹⁹ Thus the choice of Armenian forms for the dome of the Armenian cathedral was not coincidental but must have been intentional, as the dome's structure is endowed with the meaning of earthly and heavenly cosmic rule. Furthermore, in the southern narthex of the Armenian church the following decorative elements appear: a goudron frieze around the entrance door; a frieze accompanying the arches and cut on the surface; and "elbow colonnettes". These elements also all appear on the façade and cloister of the Holy Sepulchre church. The origins of these forms are probably in greater Armenia, where they appear from the 6th century. A prominent example is the frieze from the Monastery of Tafer, dated to 885. On the southern façade of the Holy Sepulchre church, however, the goudron frieze is accompanied by a rosette frieze which has a long pictorial tradition in the



Fig. 5: The narthex portal – detail (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

land.²⁰ On the narthex portal of the Cathedral of St. James the goudron frieze is isolated. Furthermore, it is employed around the entrance door between the narthex and the church of the small monastic Armenian Church of the Angels in the Armenian compound. The goudron frieze also appears on the upper window of the church of St. Anna, albeit accompanied there by a palmette frieze in a similar manner to the Holy Sepulchre church. The monastic churches of St. Anna and of the Angels demonstrate great similarities in their usage of architectural elements. However, although they might have had the same patron, the application of their goudron friezes differs distinctly.²¹

The differences between how goudron frieze is used on the Armenian churches (St. James and the Church of the Angels) and on the Latin churches

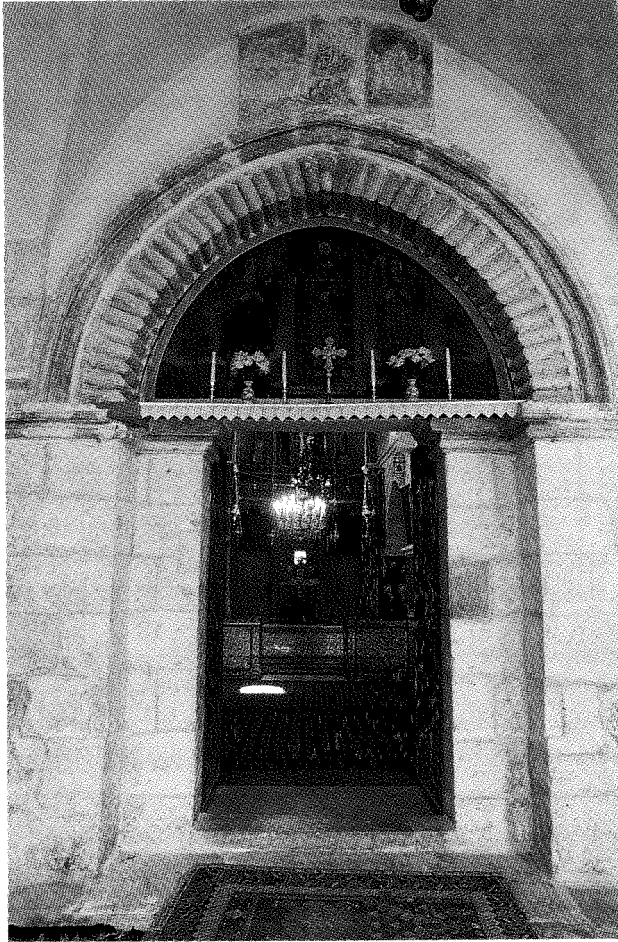


Fig. 6: The portal of the Angels Church (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

point to a difference in meaning. In the Armenian churches the frieze appears isolated, and as the sole decoration of the entrance door. On the two Latin churches, however, the goudron frieze is enframed by additional friezes with motifs of Classical origin. The choice of this design in the Armenian churches was traditional. They used the frieze in the same way that it had been used on the Bab-el-Futuh²² built by Armenian masons in Cairo at the end of the 11th century. The Latins, however, used the frieze as a novelty in their repertory of forms but integrated it into their routine traditional design.

It is unlikely that the choice of the Armenian domes and decoration systems for the major project of the Armenian cathedral could have been pure circumstance, or simply the result of a donation by an anonymous Armenian

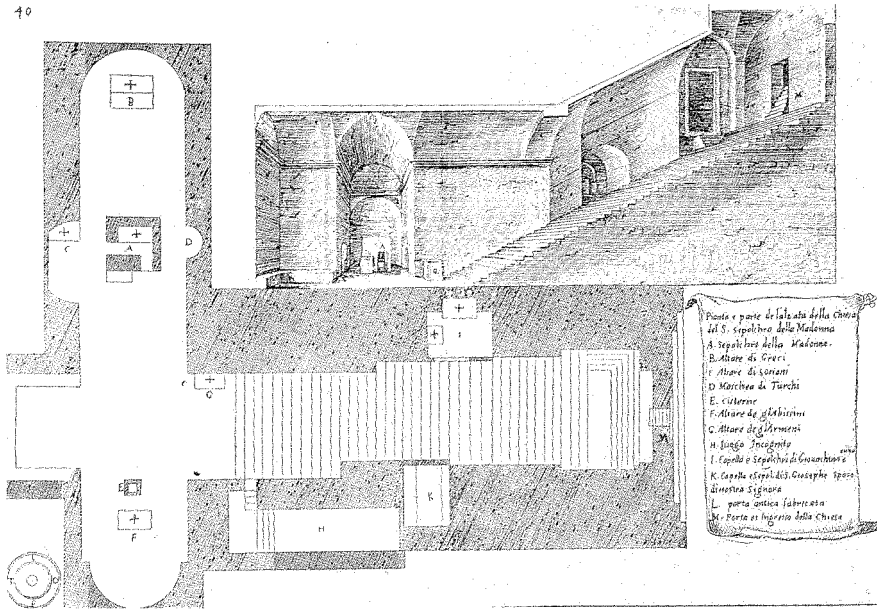


Fig. 7: The Virgin's tomb – plan (designed by Fr. Bernardino Amico, 1596).

patron. It was, rather, probably a joint project born out of the royal support of the Queen and the efforts of high placed Armenian ecclesiastics, and the work of Armenian masons.

The choice of these forms for the major Armenian project in Crusader Jerusalem reveals, I believe, a very high self-awareness by the Armenian community and Queen Melisend herself. Both Queen and community must have been familiar with their own Armenian ethnic heritage and the power of its pictorial language. This visual language was connected to Armenia at large and to the individual Armenian communities, and regarded as a manifestation of Armenian life in Jerusalem. The Queen was concomitantly a patron of projects of the Latin Church and of the Armenian Church, supporting the expansion of the Armenian cathedral by means of Armenian indigenous forms.

Melisend's Tomb

Melisend was buried in the church of the Tomb of the Virgin Mary in the Valley of Joshaphat, much patronized by the royal house.²³ The Queen had supported the church with many gifts during her reign, making the monastery one of the richest in the Kingdom.²⁴

The Church of the Tomb of the Virgin was probably founded in the 4th century. However, it was rebuilt and enlarged in the 12th century under the



Fig. 8: The Church of the Virgin's tomb – descending staircase and entrance arch to Queen Melisend sepulchral chamber (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

crusaders.²⁵ I accept the assumption of Fr. Michael Piccirilo and Albert Prodomo that Queen Melisend contributed to its expansion. The 12th-century stairs descending towards the Virgin's tomb were built as an autonomous monumental element and not merely as functional architecture. The stairs have no parallel in crusader architecture in the Holy Land, and the dramatic descent on the very wide stairs may be compared to the stairs leading up to the Cathedral of Le-Puy. It is known that the Queen's mother, the Armenian Queen Morphia, was already buried there,²⁶ although the exact location of her tomb is not known. William of Tyre describes the location of Melisend's sepulchral chamber precisely: "The first chamber on the right when descending the stairs".²⁷

The royal sepulchral chamber is entered through a large arch decorated with floral *cassettoni* recalling an antique arcosolium. The inner space of the chamber has been planned with meaningful architectural elements. Two niches are situated in the southern and northern walls of the chamber, for the placement of two sarcophagi, suggesting perhaps the fact that Morphia's sarcophagus had in fact already been installed there. The niches are enframed with quasi pediments cut with inner profiles as is routine in Armenian architecture. The chamber's most outstanding element, however, is the domed lantern crowning its center.

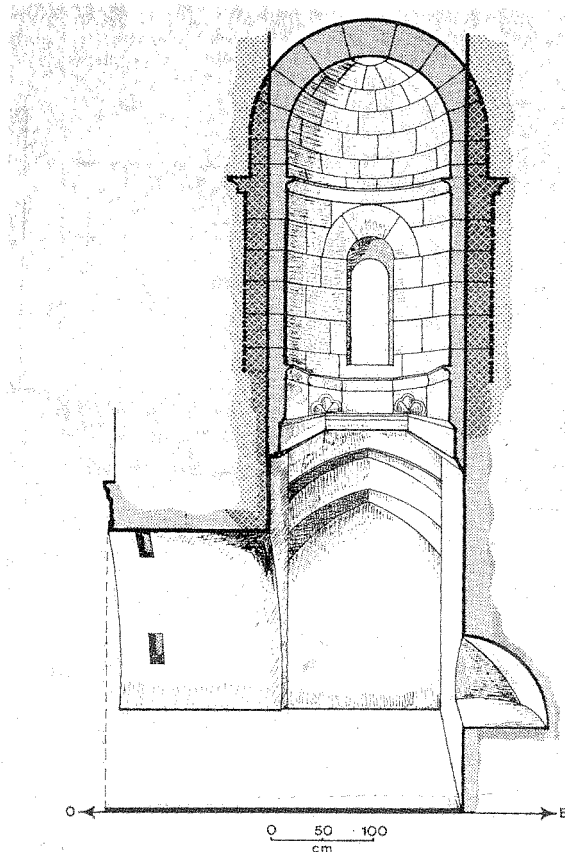


Fig. 9: The Melisend sepulchral chamber – plan (after A. Prodomo).

The dome is built on a square ground plan with octagonal basis on squinches and a round form in its upper part. It is thus a characteristic Armenian dome, like those in the monastery churches of *Haphpat*²⁸ from the end of the 11th century. Consequently this sepulchral chamber demonstrates a declared intention of "being Armenian", by deliberately deviating from the normative crusader art.

The use of a dome for a sepulchral chamber is unique in itself. None of the crusader kings were buried under a dome; nor any contemporaneous western king, as far as I am aware. Thus, the dome symbolizing eternity appears here again to be reflecting a deliberate choice.

Piccirilo, Prodomo and Folda in turn,²⁹ have suggested that the sepulchral dome was derived from the dome of the St. Helen chapel in the Church of the

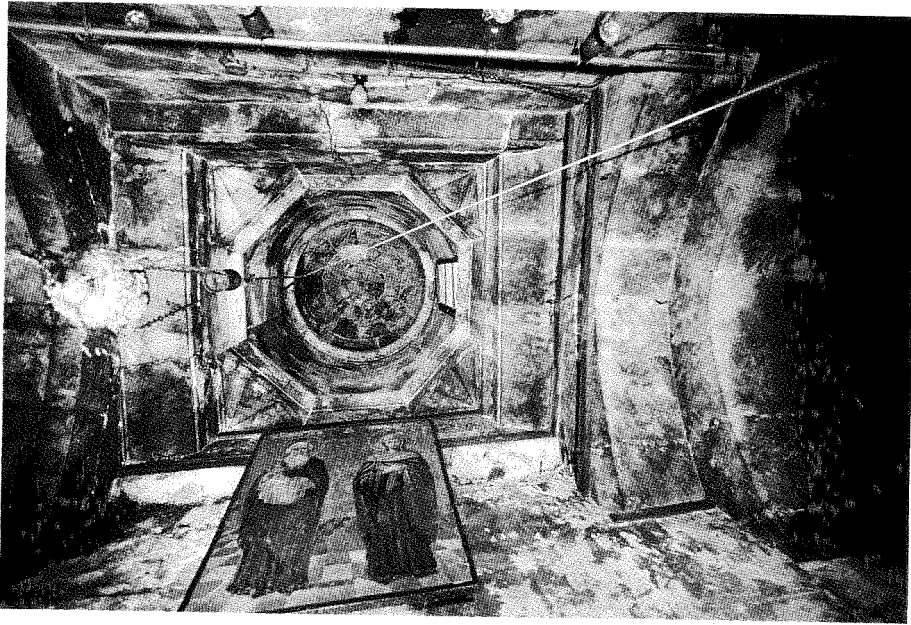


Fig. 10: The chamber's dome (photo: Garo Nalbandian).

Holy Sepulchre. The dome of St. Helen, however, is a regular Byzantine hemispheric one and has no relation to Melisend's tomb. Thus, in the choice of an Armenian dome - recalling the dome crowning the Armenian cathedral, for her own royal tomb, Melisend deliberately associated herself with the Armenian cathedral which was acknowledged as the major monument of the Armenian community, and probably also known as her own project. At the same time, in the choice of the Church of St. Mary in the Valley of Joshaphat for her burial place, her association with the Frankish dynasty was also strongly established.

Although Boase and Folda have shown Melisend to have been a prominent patron of the arts, they have not investigated the specific choice of Armenian forms as an expressive means of ethnic identity.³⁰ I believe that Melisend must also have possessed very strong Armenian attitudes and tastes alongside her royal Western ones. Her Armenian cultural tendencies may be read, for example, from William of Tyre's description of her mourning over her husband King Fulques body at his death: "When the queen was informed of her husband's unexpected death she was pierced to the heart by the sinister disaster. She tore her garments and hair and by her loud shrieks and lamentations gave proof of her intense grief. Tears failed her through continual weeping. Frequent sobs

interrupted her voice as she tried to give expression to her grief. Nor could she do injustice to it, although she care from naught save to satisfy her anguish."³¹

The "Virgilian" description of the Queen's lamentations over Fulques engendered Runciman's statement in his *A History of the Crusade*: "Queen Melisend's vocal grief much as it moved all the court, did not distract her from taking over the kingdom."³²

Further evidence of Melisend's Armenian links, relating to the specific relationship between her and her sisters, was attested to by William of Tyre: "During this time an enmity arising from jealousy sprang up between the Count of Tripoli and his wife, a sister of Queen Melisend. It was in the hope of settling this unpleasantness and at the same time visiting her niece Maria that Queen Melisend had come"³³ "... since she had met but with little success in patching up the matter however, she determined to take her sister back with her. "... when Queen Melisend was sick and old, her sisters did not move from her bed for a year."³⁴

These patterns of behaviour must be considered together with Queen Melisend's deliberate support of her sister Yvetta, her support of the Jacobites and, as Benjamin Kedar has shown, her instrumentality in bringing Armenian dignitaries to Jerusalem. Her architectural projects, as I have tried to demonstrate, reflect her strong Armenian identity and her wish to express it in a deliberate visual language.

NOTES

- 1 Folda 1995: Bibliography therein.
- 2 Kenaan 1973: 165-175, 221-229; Folda 1995: 214-220.
- 3 Hintlian 1976: 18-24.
- 4 Vincent-Abel 1914.
- 5 Boase 1971: 103.
- 6 Folda 1995: 247.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 249.
- 8 Kühnel 1995: 27.
- 9 Folda 1995: 131-133, 246.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 247-249.
- 11 Hintlian 1976: 13-16.
- 12 Praver 1976: 222-235.
- 13 See above, notes 9, 10.
- 14 Praver 1976: 223.
- 15 Thierry 1989: 541, argues that the dome of St. James was altered in the 13th century.
- 16 Barrucand-Bednorz 1992: 76, pl. 78; Watson 1989: vol. I, 9; vol. II, figs. 11-12.
- 17 Thierry 1989: 540-541.

- 18 Thierry 1989: 228, pl. 96.
- 19 Kenaan-Kedar 1986: 109-115.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 225-227. For additional examples of the goudron frieze in Armenia see: *Armenian Architecture*, ed. A. Morance (Paris 1968), figs. 153-154. I would like to thank Sharon Laor-Sirak for calling my attention to these examples.
- 21 The Church of the Archangels has been mentioned by Folda and Kühnel but its architectural decoration has not been described or analyzed. The origins of the architectural forms of St. Anna have not yet been studied systematically. I would like to suggest that its capitals, with their very low carving and schematized late-antique forms should be compared to Armenian capitals. See for example, Thierry 1989, figs. 17, 28, 649.
For the patronage of Melisend in St. Anna see Folda 1995: 133.
- 22 Kenaan-Kedar 1986: 226. See also "The goudron frieze on the campanile of the church of St. Mary's of the admiral in Palermo", in E. Kitzniger, 1990: 52-69.
- 23 Folda *The Art of the Crusaders*, 324-326; B. Bagatti, M. Piccirillo, A. Prodomo, *New Discoveries at the Tomb of Virgin Mary in Gathshemane* (Jerusalem, 1975), 83-93.
- 24 Folda 1995: 131.
- 25 Bagatti-Piccirillo-Prodomo 1975: 84.
- 26 Hamilton 1978: 148.
- 27 William of Tyre: 291.
- 28 Thierry 1989: 534-535, fig. 734. The monastery of Haibat.
- 29 Bagatti-Piccirillo-Prodomo 1975: 90-91; Folda 1995: 131.
- 30 See above notes 5, 6.
- 31 William of Tyre: vol. II, 134-135.
- 32 Runciman 1957, *A History of the Crusades*.
- 33 William of Tyre: vol. II, 214.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 283.

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The Legacy of Aquitaine in 12th-Century Castile and Sicily: Eleanor of Aquitaine and her Daughters as Patrons of the Arts

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Twelfth-century Romanesque art in France has been perceived as the source of inspiration for the development of major trends and regional schools of Romanesque sculpture, architecture and painting in Italy and Spain.¹ The impact of Romanesque sculpture from Normandy and Provence has been traced in Italy and reflections of the pictorial traditions of Auvergne, Languedoc and Burgundy are to be seen along the pilgrimage roads and in the sculptural programs of the cathedral of Santiago de Compostela.² The pilgrimage roads to Santiago de Compostela, together with the spread of the various monastic orders, have traditionally been recognized as the major channels for the transfer and transformation of art forms from one region to another. While royal patronage has also been mentioned as influential in the migration of forms, it has not been regarded as an essential component in these artistic dialogues.³ Thus, on the whole, the major influence in the migration of forms has been considered to have come from within the realm of the church rather than of the court.

I would like to contend, however, that in the second half of the 12th century royal and princely patronage did indeed play a leading and prominent role in the creation of artistic forms. Furthermore, not only did it have an essential impact on the spread of art forms from Aquitaine to Castile and Sicily, but the personal links between the royal patrons also contributed to the modes of pictorial perception. In this article I shall examine the particular royal patronage of three queens: Eleanor, Duchess of Aquitaine (1122-1202), who was Queen of France from 1137-1152 and Queen of England from 1154-1202; and her two daughters: Eleanor, Queen of Castile from 1170-1214; and Jeanne, Queen of Sicily from